

The Postmodern World, Schizophrenia-Wise

Bogdan C.S. PÎRVU*¹,**Ioan Florin DIACONU**²**Otilia EVA**³**Vlad ICHIM**⁴**Raluca STĂNESCU**⁵**Şerban TURLIUC**⁶

¹ MD, PhD, Clinical Psychiatry, Mavromati Emergency Hospital Botoşani, bgdn_parvu@yahoo.com

² PhD, Associate Professor of Piano, George Enescu National University of Arts Iaşi, ioan.diaconu@yahoo.com

³ MD, PhD, Otorhinolaryngology, St Parascheva Clinical Hospital of Infectious Diseases Iaşi, evaotilia@ymail.com

⁴ PhD, Associate Professor of Medical Sociology, Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iaşi, ichim_vlad_2004@yahoo.com

⁵ MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Biochemistry, Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iaşi, ralustan2001@yahoo.com

⁶ MD, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry, Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iaşi, serban_turliuc@yahoo.com

Abstract: We will go along the presumption that the schizoid/schizophrenic dimension is a constitutional element of the postmodern world. We will further explore especially the speed-induced schizoid/schizophrenic trait, starting in existentialism and beat, and coming into its own in science-fiction or rather in Philip K. Dick's fiction, and also in pop culture or rather in Andy Warhol's boarding philosophy of life. We will finally get right into the core of the schizoid/schizophrenic idiom, which turns out to be roughly similar to the postmodern discourse.

Keywords: postmodernism, schizophrenia-spectrum, Philip K. Dick, existentialism, beat, pop.

How to cite: Pîrvu, B. C.S., Diaconu, I.-F., Eva, O., Ichim, V., Stănescu, R. & Turliuc, Ş. (2023). The postmodern world, schizophrenia-wise. BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience, 14(4), 324-332. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/14.4/508>

Introduction

The artistic personality will stop at nothing when in search for inspiration and will-power – turning to drugs of choice being part of the picture, with differences though: speed for writers, crack for musicians, weed for poets, etc. As for speed:

Graham Greene used to take one pill (along with his morning coffee) for 22 years on end, oftentimes renewing the dose at midday so as to get 2,000 words rather than his usual stint of 500 words a day. (Sinyard, 2003, pp. 34-41)

Ayn Rand took it for some 30 years on a daily basis, with upper doses so as to finish one chapter a week. (Burns, 2009, p. 178)

Jean-Paul Sartre took a speed-based cocktail regularly, hardly forgetting about mescaline when a special understanding of matters philosophical was needed. (Brown, 1982)

Norman Mailer took a mixture of seconal- and morphine-enriched speed several times a day for the better half of his writing career. (McNeill, 1979)

Jack Kerouac actually fed on speed when getting to write *On the Road* in early April 1951, so that by April 9 he had written 34,000 words, by April 20, 86,000, on April 27 having it all on one roll of paper typed as a single-spaced, 40-metre long paragraph. (Charters, 1991, pp.7-19)

Philip K. Dick, whose writing routine in conjunction with his speed-taking habits being our special focus, had been taking it ever since his childhood for his asthma, and in the mid-'60s had 7.5 mg doses per day, thus being able to write the first draft of a novel in about six weeks, plus another six weeks for proofreading. (Sutin, 2006, pp. 158-159, 174-175)

Speed-cocktailed angoisse

Existentialism is actually a recoil from rationalism, not exactly to the effect that reason is of no consequence, but rather in the sense that there are limits to reason; we'd better acknowledge them as they are, because anguish, despair and doubt could hardly get into rational categories. Nothingness, as well; that void, "formless and inconceivable," that the individual will find if only he were leaving all knowledge and memory aside while focusing on it full time; he will see it, in the process, as "a force, a ground, a reality" – "in a certain sense, the reality." Hence the individual's despair, because he will "see through" the limits of his anthropocentric vision: man ceases to be the central figure in the world, he is seen as an accident, a newcomer where

existence is contingent by all means; on a par with trees and stones, or even lower, he is a nonessential by-product, just feebly clinging to existence. Existentialism might redeem him, we might add, on the basis of Jean-Paul Sartre's history of drugs, with the help of a psychostimulant like amphetamine, or a hallucinogen-like mescaline. (Brown, 1982)

In any event, man must needs define himself in the face of nothingness and absurdity, even if this process has a nightmarish quality about it, with a skeptical conclusion reading that "life begins on the other side of despair," with an obligatory stage differentiating between essence and existence, the essence inviting us to recognize that a stone is described by its heaviness, smoothness and colour, the existence obliging us to see the fact that it is; the essence is volatile, slippery and barely trustworthy, the existence on the other hand is disgusting, fearsome, detestable and ultimately meaningless. Hence the impasse, the *nausea*. (Sartre, 2000)

Speed-driven behaviour

The beat personality sees life as some sort of Russian roulette. All hung up on his *danse macabre*, and driven all along by his dormant wish-to-die, Neal Cassady cuts off the gas while starting down, throwing in the clutch, negotiating "every hairpin turn," passing cars "without a sound, on pure momentum," and doing "everything in the books without the benefit of accelerator"; and, further on, he comes up on "lines of cars like the Angel of Terror," almost ramming them along while looking up for an opening, teasing their bumpers, easing and pushing and craning around "to see the curve," his '49 Hudson leaping to his touch and passing "while always by a hair" he makes it back to his side as other lines file by "in the opposite direction." (Kerouac, 1957)

The beat personality sees life as an intoxication of the senses, actually his speed-blown senses. All hung-up on the tremendous openness of life in the big city, and driven all along by the energy of a benny addict, the only people for him are "the mad ones," the ones who are "mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time," the ones who "never yawn or say a commonplace thing," but burn, burn, burn "like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars": backing a car "forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze" and stopping "at the wall," jumping out, racing among "fenders," leaping "into another car," circling it "fifty miles an hour in a narrow space," backing "swiftly into a tight spot," humping, snapping the car with so much energy that one sees it bounce "as he flies out," then clearing to "the ticket shack," sprinting "like a track star," handing a ticket, leaping into "a newly arrived car before the

owner's half out," leaping "literally under him as he steps out," starting "the car with the door flapping and roaring" off to the next available spot, "arc, pop in, brake, out, run"; working like that "without pause eight hours a night, evening rush hours and after theatre-rush-hours." (Kerouac, 1957)

The beat personality sees life as some crazy woman hunting, while carried along by his speed-impelled sex-drive. All hung-up on the wide choice of female fauna in the big city, and driven all along by the strong belief that "he ain't a man 'less he's a jumping man," for him sex is "the one and only holy and important thing in life." For some time now, indeed, he's been making love to "two girls at the same time," balling his wife in this hotel room, banging his girlfriend in the hotel across the street and, before rushing back, having some quality time with an old boyfriend or simply getting lost in a hotel room downtown, groaning and slamming like mad for twelve full hours, into a curvy chick, her legs wrapped around him all the while. In medical terms, he is experiencing several hypomanic episodes, accompanied by "euphoria, alertness and a sense of well-being" which, taken altogether, are lowering "anxiety and social inhibitions" while increasing "energy and self-esteem." His mood, in the meantime, is "cheerful, enthusiastic and expansive," the cheerfulness having "an infectious quality about it" and, one might add, a strongly egocentric touch, with "little insight" into his partner's feelings. In other words, his self-centered focus is extreme. (Kerouac, 1957)

While writing *On the Road* Jack Kerouac was already deep into beat subculture, with its outstanding markers: dark glasses, berets, goatees, bebop jazz and drug use (Rasmussen, 2008, p. 94). His drug of choice was benzedrine, which helped fuel his creativity to such an extent that this testament of the beat movement supposedly came out of a three-week burst of writing (Charters, 1973, p. 365). The first half of his career was then spent to get it published, the rest of his life was spent to live it down, with binge drinking or drinking to no end, until his biological demise and, to be sure, his cognitive deterioration were complete (Miles, 1998, p. 79). We will follow closely all of this dysphoric fall, all the while attended by his loving, often smothering, mother, and her herd of cats – right from his stardom in his native town's football team (Lowell, Mass) and his undergraduate days at Columbia University (New York, NY), when a hip fracture ended his football career in the first year of college, and his bizarre behaviour drove him out of the Navy, a few months after getting started (Dittman, 2004, p. 56). He went back to his home town and entered into some sort of pattern, that of the Prodigal Son, which he preserved all throughout his life: going far away; returning home to his mother; starting heated debates with his mother,

always upset that her boy was hanging out with “sleazy people,” “filthy homosexuals” and “disgusting drunkards”; leaving home untimely; returning home penitently, basically to his mother, whom he took along, together with her cats, every time he moved to a new place. (Nicosia, 1994, p. 592)

The beat personality sees his speed-prompted speech as some kind of compulsive confession. All hung up on “he same ol’ thing: gurls, gurls, gurls,” and driven all along by his urgent need to socialize, he often seems “to be doing everything at the same time”: shaking his head, “up and down, sideways; jerky, vigorous hands; quick walking, sitting, crossing the legs, uncrossing, getting up, rubbing the hands, rubbing his fly, hitching his pants, looking up and saying ‘Am,’ and sudden slitting of the eyes to see everywhere”; and all the time “talking, talking,” for instance about “the inscriptions carved on toilet walls in the East and in the West,” which are “entirely different,” in the East people making “cracks and corny jokes and obvious references, scatological bits of data and drawings”, in the West people just writing their names, “real solemn,” the reason being “the enormous loneliness that differs just a shade and cut hair” as one moves “across the Mississippi.” (Kerouac, 1957)

Speed-pushed cognition

The artistic personality, if on speed, is headed for a psychosis that is roughly similar to schizophrenia, or rather to Philip K. Dick’s “schizophrenic existence” whose “distinguishing factor” is “the element of time.” The schizophrenic is “having it all now,” “the whole can” of film descending on him “all at once,” whereas the “normal” people watch it progress “frame by frame.” Causality is thus no issue for him; instead, the “acausal connective principle” that is basically called “synchronicity” is operating in all of the situations. Like a person under speed, the schizophrenic is “engulfed in an endless now,” never writing and mailing letters because never expecting answers, never going anywhere because never figuring a destination (Williams, 1986, p. 119). His “progress in life” is a retreat from reality and responsibility, his *idios kosmos* (the personal world or rather the fantasy world) never to thrust out into the *koinos kosmos* (the shared world); his Dasein, finally, is a never ending *hic et nunc*, in his “tomb world” all has happened and is happening, but nothing will ever happen, the deterministically-disconnected yesterdays and todays being reunited in a catatonic existence beyond time, with no future ever possible. (Dick, 1995, pp. 175-182)

Speed-induced mood

The schizoid personality and the android personality are strikingly similar in Philip K. Dick's vision, in the sense that there is "a continual paucity of feeling" in the two of them (Dick, 2010). With their "mechanical reflex quality," they both "think rather than feel" their way through life; unable as they are to generate "any signals of their own," they receive them from others. They have reified themselves entirely, "along with everyone around them," their souls are dead or never lived whereas their minds, "unable to make exceptions," provide the same response "over and over again." To put it differently, androidization requires predictability and, further back, obedience: "allowing oneself to become a means, or to be pounded down, manipulated, made into a means without one's knowledge or consent." The android, like the schizoid by all means, must perform "on cue," by the rules of the "orthogonal time" rotating "something like the primitive cycling time," within which "each year is regarded as the same year," "each new crop the same crop." (Dick, 1995, pp. 183-210)

Speed-impelled perception

The paranoid personality receives, "as sense data," "the marginal, repressed, unspoken hostile thoughts and feelings of those around them"; and, further on, that "at least in the case of some paranoids," there is this possibility that the "delusions" are "not delusions at all," but, on the contrary, "accurate perceptions" of an area of reality "which most people cannot reach." (Dick, 1995, pp. 11-17) Hallucinations, then – "whether induced by psychosis, hypnosis, drugs, toxins, etc." – may be "merely quantitatively different" from what people see, "not qualitatively so." (Dick, 1995, pp. 167-174) In Philip K. Dick's words, "too much is emanating from the neurological apparatus of the organism, over and beyond the structural, organizing necessity." The percept system "in a sense is overperceiving," the cognitive processes, "in particular the judging, reflecting frontal lobe," cannot encompass what it has been given, and thus "the world begins to become mysterious." "No-name entities or aspects" begin to appear and, since the person does not know what they are – "that is, what they're called or what they mean" – he cannot communicate with other persons about them (Dick, 1995, pp. 211-232). This "breakdown of verbal communication" is "the fatal index that somewhere along the line the person is experiencing reality in a way too altered to fit into his or her own prior worldview and too radical to allow empathic linkage with other persons." (Kyle, 2016, p. 21) The problem actually seems to be that rather than "seeing

what isn't there" the organism is seeing what is there – but no one else does, hence "no semantic sign exists to depict the entity," and therefore "the organism cannot continue an emphatic relationship" with the members of his society. And this "breakdown of empathy" is double; they can't emphasize his "world," and he can't theirs. (Dick, 1999)

Speed-flavoured packrats

Andy Warhol's "bioportrait" is meant to come complete with his medical data and also with his artistic accomplishments, the latter being seen as reverberations of the former. His steady Obetrol consumption will always be there, ever-looming – and so will his smothering mother with her herd of cats, and so will his hoarding disorder (getting into a "pack-rat" syndrome), his paraphilias (voyeurism and shoe fetishism) and his specific phobias: fear of fire, fear of flying, fear of sleep at night, fear of hospitals (Bourdon, 1987). This mama's boy (whose three near-nervous breakdowns were solely derived from family matters: his father's death, his mother's Christmas crisis, his mother's death), with an obsessive compulsion for shopping sprees grew up to be a most innovative pop artist striking several novel chords along at least two coordinates: his commercial strategy and his multitude-focused philosophy, counter-running to the aesthetic motto: "small is beautiful," and insisting instead on the superiority of multitude: "one is less valuable than many." (Bockris, 2003, pp. 135-253)

Conclusions

Once activated by involuntary stereotypes (Esquirol, 1838), unmotivated idiosyncrasies (Pinel, 1975), incomprehensible paraphasias (Morel, 1976), and also by occult neologisms or excentric mannerisms (Griesinger, 1867), the Knight's Move, frequently accompanied by pressured speech, detours the already clang and loose associations to a schizoid verbosity feeding its progress by irregular flights of ideas, with all the drivelling and wooliness over there, with all the circumstantial and tangential blocks, with all the concentration, approximation and overloading, with all of the stammering *vorbereiten*, irrational and *non-sequitur*, always getting into *ganserism* (Bleuler, 1911). This description of a schizophrenic speech and, jointly so, the language of such disorders as delusion (Jaspers, 1997), catatonia (Kahlbaum, 1874) and paranoia (Kraepelin, 1902), and, slightly off-road, artistic trends like French surrealism and Romanian Dada, are all meant to get into, or rather provide, some understanding of the speech we find when dealing with speed psychosis, a major postmodern distress.

Acknowledgements: all of the six authors contributed equally to this research, in the various stages of the writing process.

References

- Bleuler, E. (1911). *Dementia Praecox; or the Group of Schizophrenias*. International Universities Press.
- Bockris, V. (2003). *Warhol. The Biography*. DaCapo Press.
- Bourdon, D. (1987). Andy Warhol, 1928-1987. *Art in America* 75(5).
- Brown, F. (1982). The last days of Jean-Paul Sartre. *The New Criterion*, Sep.
- Burns, J. (2009). *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*. Oxford University Press.
- Charters, A. (1973). *Kerouac*. Straight Arrow Books.
- Charters, A. (1991). *Introduction to On The Road*. Penguin.
- Dick, P. K. (1999). *A Scanner Darkly*. Orion.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). Drugs, hallucinations, and the quest for reality. *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, 167-174. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). *Man, android, and machine. The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, 211-232. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). *Schizophrenia and the book of changes. The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, 175-182. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). *Self-portrait. The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, 11-17. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). *The android and the human. The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, 183-210. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (1995). *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*. Sutin, L. (ed.), Vintage Books.
- Dick, P. K. (2010). *Do androids dream of electric sheep?* Orion.
- Dittman, M. J. (2004). *Jack Kerouac: A biography*. Greenwood Press.
- Esquirol, É. (1838). *Des maladies mentales considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et médico-légal* (Vol. 1). Tircher.
- Griesinger, W. (1867). *Mental pathology and therapeutics*. The New Sydenham Society.
- Jaspers, K. (1997). *General psychopathology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kahlbaum, K. L. (1874). *Die katatonie oder das spannungssirresein*. Hirschwald.
- Kerouac, J. (1957). *On the road*. Penguin.
- Kraepelin, E. (1902). *Clinical psychiatry*. MacMillan.
- Kyle, A. (2016). *The divine madness of Philip K. Dick*. Oxford University Press.

- Miles, B. (1998). Jack Kerouac: *King of the beats: A portrait from Henry Holt*. Virgin Publishing.
- McNeill, L. (1979). *Interview with Norman Mailer*. High Times, Sep.
- Morel, B. A. (1976). *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine*. Classics in Psychiatry.
- Nicosia, G. (1994). *Memory babe*. University of California Press.
- Pinel, Ph. (1975). *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale*. Clin Comar Byl.
- Rasmussen, N. (2008). *On speed. The many lives of amphetamine*. New York University Press.
- Sartre, J. P. (2000). *Nausea*. Penguin.
- Sinyard, N. (2003). *Graham Greene. A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sutin, L. (2006). *Divine invasions*. Harmony Books.
- Williams, P. (1986). *Only apparently real: The world of Philip K. Dick*. Arbor House.