



Thinking Too Much

The Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

Thomas Fuchs



„I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness - a real thorough-going illness. For man's everyday needs, it would have been quite enough to have the ordinary human consciousness, that is, half or a quarter of the amount which falls to the lot of a cultivated man of our unhappy nineteenth century.“

F. M. Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground (1864)



„Consciousness is the latest development of the organic, and hence also its most unfinished and unrobust feature. Consciousness gives rise to countless mistakes that lead an animal or human being to perish sooner than necessary ... If the preserving alliance of the instincts were not so much more powerful, if it did not serve on the whole as a regulator, humanity would have to perish with open eyes ... of its consciousness “.

F. Nietzsche, The Gay Science (1882)



Reflection and Inhibition

Hesitation

Doubt, ambivalence

Exaggerated self-control, loss of spontaneity,
hyperreflexivity

Self-alienation



Occasions for Reflection: Disturbances

Resistance

Surprise, irritation

Disappointment, failure



Mental illnesses as disturbances of the enactment of life

Self-observation, turning back of thought

Hyperreflexivity

Self-alienation, depersonalization



Overview

I. Reflection and Embodiment

II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

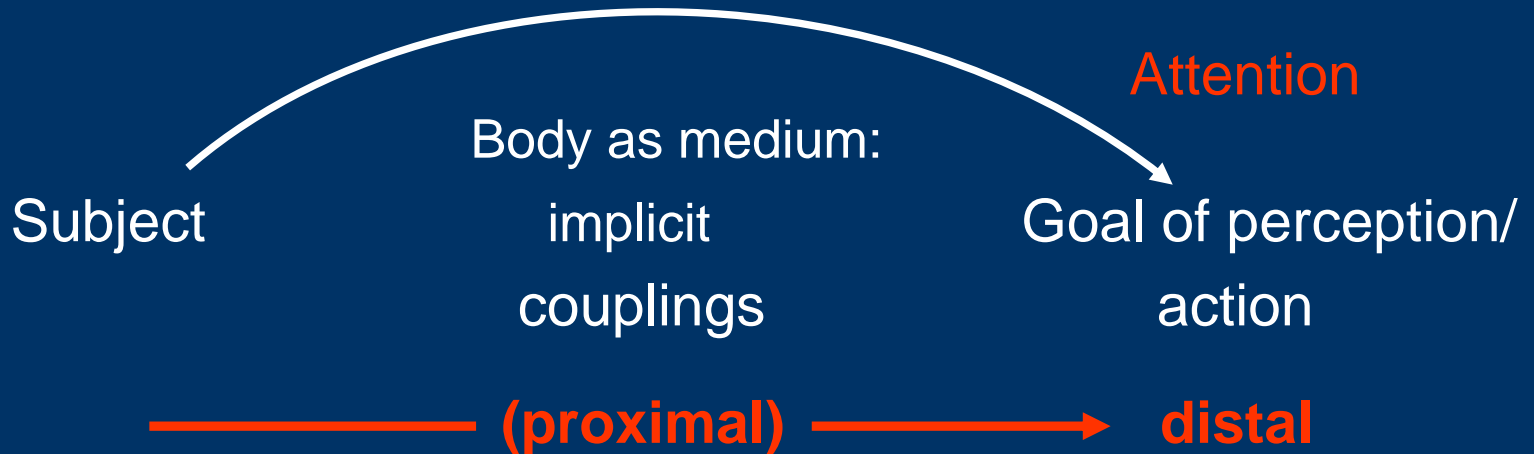


I. Reflection and Embodiment

Ambiguity between subject-body (*Leib*) and object-body (*Körper*), or between being-body and having-a-body



Implicit Structure of Embodiment



Polanyi: tacit knowing / know-how

Hegel: “mediated immediacy”



Implicit Structure of Embodiment

Disturbances of the body's mediation

Conscious awareness can establish new routines, which are taken up into habitual or body memory.

„It is a general principle in psychology that consciousness deserts all processes where it can no longer be of use.“

(William James 1890)



Decomposing Effect of Reflective Consciousness

„Explication of the Implicit“

Backward turn of attention from the distal to the proximal, from meaning to the carrier of meaning, may lead to a disintegration of habitual enactions



Self-Withdrawal of Pre-reflective Embodiment

- spatial self-withdrawal
- temporal self-withdrawal



II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

(1) Insomnia



II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

(2) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder



(2) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

A 21-year-old, perfectionist patient, always top pupil and best in the class, began a career as a bookkeeper after his final exam. He soon noticed, however, that his writing was not always legible. When his boss made him aware of this, he tried to improve it and sacrificed all his time to learning to write well. He tried to copy letters from his friend's handwriting but soon did not know which letters to use anymore or how he should write.



(2) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Since he was now completely concentrated on his handwriting, he could no longer write in front of other people, felt observed by them, and finally had to give up his job.

In the clinic, it was possible to cure the disorder within three weeks with the guideline of the paradoxical intention: “I’ll scrawl something for that person, I am only writing to scrawl, only to get stuck 30 times.”

(Viktor Frankl 1958)



II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

(3) Hypochondria



II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

(4) Body Dysmorphic Disorder



II. Psychopathology of Hyperreflexivity

(5) Schizophrenia



(5) Schizophrenia

Loss of basic familiarity with the world and with others

„Disembodiment“

Disintegration of bodily habits and action

Pathological explication



Schizophrenia

”He is no longer able to read because he becomes attached to a word, a letter, and does not attend to the meaning of the sentence. He examines whether all the ‘i’s have dots over them, whether there are accents where needed, whether all the letters have the same form.”

(Minkowski 1927)



Schizophrenia

„If I do something like going for a drink of water, I've to go over each detail—find cup, walk over, turn tap, fill cup, turn tap off, drink it.“ (Chapman 1966)

„At times, I could do nothing without thinking about it. I could not perform any movement without having to think how I would do it. . . . Sometimes I would think about words and wonder why 'chair' now means 'chair,' for example, or such things.“

(de Haan & Fuchs 2009)



Schizophrenia

„I am like a robot which someone else can use, but not me. I know what has to be done but cannot do it.“

(Chapman 1966)



Loss of basic bodily self-awareness

(“minimal self”, Zahavi 2000, Parnas & Sass 2003)

„I constantly have to ask myself who I actually am. I watch myself closely, like how am I doing now and where are the ‘parts’ . . . I think about that so much that I cannot do anything else. It is not easy when you change from day to day. As if you were a totally different person all of a sudden.“

(de Haan u. Fuchs 2009)



Loss of pre-reflexive sense of self

„If a thought passed quickly through his brain, he was forced to direct back his attention and scrutinize his mind in order to know exactly what he had been thinking. In one word, he is preoccupied by the continuity of his thinking. He fears that he may stop thinking for a while, that there might have been ‘a time when my imagination had been arrested.’ . . . He wakes up one night and asks himself: ‘Am I thinking? Since there is nothing that can prove that I am thinking, I cannot know whether I exist’.“ (Hesnard 1904)



Schizophrenie

„I become aware of my eye watching an object.“

(Stanghellini 2004)

“I saw everything I did like a film camera.” (Sass 1992)

„For me it was as if my eyes were cameras, and my brain was still in my body, but somehow as if my head were enormous, the size of a universe, and I was in the far back and the cameras were at the very front. So extremely far away from the cameras.“

(de Haan & Fuchs 2009)



Schizophrenie

„I could no longer think the way I wanted to. It was as if one could no longer think oneself, as if one were prevented from thinking oneself. As if the ideas came from outside. . . . I began to wonder am I still that person or am I an exchanged person“.

(Klosterkötter 1992)



Schizophrenia: Summary

Disembodiment

Explication of the implicit

Hyperreflexivity

Alienation and reification of perceptions, movements or thoughts



Conclusion

- Hyperreflexivity
- Pathological explication
- Mutual reinforcement

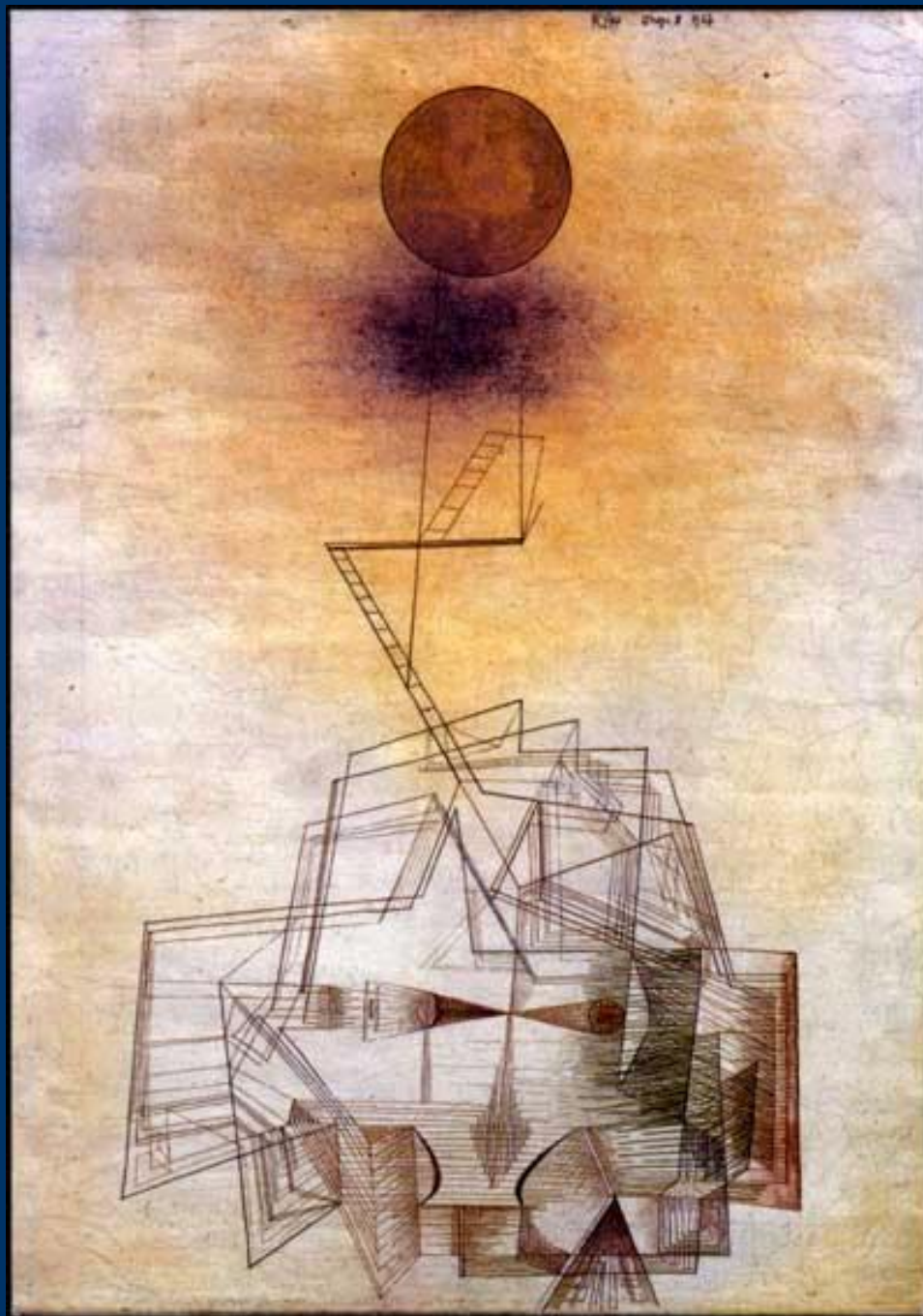
Foundation: reflective self-relation,
„eccentric position“ of the human being
(Helmuth Plessner 1927)

„Being body“ and „having a body“



Conclusion

Therapeutic Options



Paul Klee:
Limits of Reason
(1927)



Thank you very much for your attention!
