

PSYCHOTIC PERCEPTIONS

REALITY NOT BEING WHERE YOU THINK YOU ARE



NEIL STAMPER

Necessities

Psychotic Perceptions has 4000 words approximately.

The perception of me on the front cover was captured by a fellow patient, Becky.

This book is dedicated to my family, whose suffering has been greater than mine.

Any and all comments are welcomed:

neil@wordpower.org.uk

First published 2 October 2009 as an ebook available from:

<http://www.wordpower.org.uk>

© Neil Stamper 2009

Experience

I was diagnosed bipolar in 1981, at the age of 29. Since then, apart from a spell of 13 years on the level, I have made more visits to hospital than I care to remember. These visits were usually compulsory, under a section, after my manic behaviour had exceeded the bounds of my family's tolerance. Unlike many fellow sufferers, I have never truly enjoyed being high, as I know that the elevated mood will inevitably be followed by a lengthy depression. Still – a small silver lining – perhaps this book will almost let others share my experiences, and occasional insights.

Synopsis

This small book is an attempt to capture the experience of psychosis – or madness. A highly personal account, it is aimed at three groups:

- fellow psychotics and bipolars – you are not alone
- carers – an insight into the psychotic mind
- professionals – if you gain one thing from this book, I count that as success.

Contents

Reasons for writing

Acting

Action and reaction

Aerials

Ambiguity

Belief systems

Binary infinity

Chain and stepping stones

Circles

Cleanliness is next to godliness

Clichés

Clock

Connections

Copycatting

Details

Devilish work for idle hands

Dreaming

Fairy gold

Good turns

Heightened perceptions

Invisible influences

Just round the corner

Lewis

Like father, like son

Messages

Mirrors

Odds and ends

One with nature

People have powers

Pets

Recall

Secrets of the peat

Significance of colour

Significance of numbers

Silicon essentials

Sleep and television

Steps

Suspension of belief

Tests

Wars

Watches

Words

Work and play

The end

Reasons for writing

There are three reasons why I have written this book:

- to preserve my own memories
- to give insight to others - professionals, carers and bipolar manic-depressives
- to explore the relationships between psychotic and normal thought.

Acting

Actors present us with a different reality. We know that they are actors acting, yet we believe they are the characters they portray.

When psychotic, I have frequently believed that ordinary people are actually actors portraying characters. On one occasion, sectioned and collected by ambulance, I was convinced that one of the crew was not really an ambulanceman but a different person that I knew.

Action and reaction

Our every move is triggered by something. See someone else yawn and you yawn. These actions and reactions can build into infinite chains.

Chaos theory has said that the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas.

The interpersonal causation of action is deliberately used by some – eg conjurors, conmen – to their own advantage. Can knowledge of this power be an element of craft (eg in Freemasonry) used to manipulate others?

So what is the relationship between personal power and knowledge of these interpersonal effects?

Aerials

The air around us is an invisible soup of radio waves – from broadcasts, mobile phones, wi-fi networks and so on. To receive these signals, some form of aerial is needed.

- While high, I believed that the trellis on the gable end of the house was an aerial that received signals that controlled me.
- Stornoway airport has two rotating radar transmitters – one controls the males on the island and the other controls the females.
- Cars - a visible aerial indicates that the driver is being controlled by signals received via the radio.
- TV and phone masts - controlling people - similar to wrist watches.

Ambiguity

A source of many perceptions, we are surrounded by ambiguity. Any short piece of English language will usually be open to more than one interpretation. Natural language, unlike mathematics, is ambiguous. But reality is also ambiguous. The same circumstances are open to more than one interpretation.

In psychosis, perhaps those differences of interpretation chain off to give a detachment from commonly accepted reality.

This is part of there being many realities rather than just the one truth.

Similarly, witnesses of the same event will give differing descriptions, though there was only one event. So where is the truth in this? Does none of the witnesses have the truth – or have they all a truth? Was the “actual” event the truth? How can it be if no one can describe it?

Here are two clichés or thought-provoking questions.

- A tree falls in a forest when there is no person within earshot: does it make a noise?
- What is the sound of one hand clapping?

Belief systems

Has the lack of a belief system or faith made me more vulnerable to mania and depression?

Even if not, has that lack inhibited my recovery from mania or depression?

A hospital chaplain once said to me: “If you don’t have a belief system, why do you get up in the morning?” And when depressed, I do spend a lot more time in bed, mostly sleeping.

So what do I believe? I agree with Richard Dawkins that the purpose of human life is to pass on DNA to offspring. Thus my life still had a purpose when I first became ill at the age of 29 – before having any children. Certainly, I often feel that there is now (having had three sons) no purpose to my life. If that is the case, then my death is no problem and I should continue the slow-motion suicide of smoking cigarettes.

Although, now that I have stopped smoking, maybe the true masters of the universe are viruses, who merely use humans and other living organisms as vehicles for the replication of viral genetic codes.

Binary infinity

Life is made up of choices. All can be broken down into do or not do. In other words, we have an infinity of binary choices.

In this respect, our carbon-based life form is similar to the silicon-based system of digital computers, the operations of which can all be defined in terms of zeroes and ones.

Chain and stepping stones

Just like an ordinary computer, we can only do one thing at a time. Multitasking is an illusion where one task is carried out during gaps in another.

This chain or sequence is normally carried out largely on “autopilot”, where one task leads to another and we don’t have to think: “What should I do next?” We travel unhindered from one stepping stone to the next.

In depression, that autopilot is much less effective – actions are spasmodic, requiring much greater than the normal amount of conscious thought – and do not automatically spark off the next action. In other words, even if I can reach the first stepping stone, all the others are out of reach.

In mania, the most obvious effect is rapid chaining, often in an “abnormal” way. Psychiatrists call this the “flight of ideas”. Mania becomes really disabling when the chain branches frequently. We can only do one thing at a time, so life becomes strewn with unfollowed branches. Though manic thought feels faster, a lot of it wastes time by generating branches that become dead ends.

Circles

All human actions seem to be circular and futile.

Is this related to cycles in nature, such as the carbon cycle?

Probably not . . .

Cleanliness is next to godliness

What is the origin of this expression? Although often thought to be biblical, this saying comes from a sermon by John Wesley (1703-1791), referring to neatness of dress: “Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness”. In the published sermon, the words are in inverted commas, implying an existing saying. The sentiment is certainly an old one, probably ancient Hebrew, but the familiar wording dates from Wesley.

When people are mentally ill, they often neglect personal hygiene – yet may believe that they are God, Jesus or a prophet.

This seems to be a reverse connection.

Clichés

We are told, at school and elsewhere, not to use clichés. Instead, we are urged to use our own fresh, new words.

But the soap operas on television, which teach us how to live, also teach us to use clichés. After all, clichés are a shorthand, distilled wisdom from down the ages. A cliché will reduce the thinking effort required by you – and by your listener.

Clock

What an awful sound is the ticking of a clock. Each tick that I hear has gone forever and will never come back. Each tick heard marks the doing of nothing – the wasting of time.

Connections

Everything is connected to everything else. It's one of Barry Commoner's basic laws of ecology. But most of the time nobody knows most of the connections. It's just a matter of finding those connections. I should be better at doing this because I have a greater insight - through being manic. Endless time can be spent in drawing elaborate diagrams (akin to mindmaps) that show these connections.

Copycatting

Much of our behaviour and speech is learned by copying that of others. Perhaps a “failure” in that process results in “mental illness”.

Increasingly, now, people learn these things from what they see and hear on television, especially in soap operas.

An uncharitable interpretation could be that most people act like sheep for most of the time. And, again, that process breaks down in “mental illness”. Whilst in hospitals, I lost count of the number of times I was said to be acting inappropriately – ie not like a sheep.

Details

Mediaeval masons are said to have carved the backs of gargoyles as carefully as they carved the fronts. Although unseen by the human eye, the backs would be seen by God.

There is also a saying: “The Devil is in the detail.”

So how do these two things relate? How should I know? I’m only the writer (though I’m more used to being the editor and improving the detail of writing by others).

Also, as Alexander Pope said: “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” So should we accept more readily that we are imperfect, instead of always striving for perfection?

Devilish work for idle hands

This one has slipped my grasp before I sat down to write.

But maybe it was something like this. Buddhism tells us that desire leads to suffering. Thus – have no desires, have no suffering.

However, as soon as you are idle (if you are well) others will ask that you act – or notions of things that need doing float to the top of your head.

So is depression's lethargy some kind of natural rest cure? If it is, should it be treated with medication? Although . . . I can't say I've ever enjoyed being depressed. So many contradictions – and I don't have the answers.

Dreaming

Not all of us experience psychosis – but everybody dreams.

The processes must have similarities. They share the absence, or distortion, of conscious control mechanisms.

Fairy gold

No matter how much gold and treasures you accumulate in the land of the fairies, none will come with you when you return to normality.

At times, when more than one thing goes well for me, it seems there will always be a price to pay for that benefit. The cliché is swings and roundabouts – what you gain on the swings you lose on the roundabouts.

I thought I had seen a connection between the paragraphs above, but now I've lost it.

Good turns

Someone does you a good turn. You do someone different a good turn. It always seems to be asymmetric, never one good turn by one person, who in return receives a good turn from the original beneficiary.

So “one good turn deserves another” – but don’t expect a direct exchange. Maybe the process operates by the accumulation of karma, the Hindu-Buddhist concept of destiny.

Heightened perceptions

An alternative name for mania is “being high”. I frequently noticed that my appreciation of music, sounds and visual scenes seemed to be increased. In particular, my own sweat seemed to smell more strongly. Truth - while neglecting everyday concerns, perhaps there is more brainpower left to deal with sensory input. The aroma effect might be glandular. It has been claimed that the increased sex drive in mania is hormonally based rather than the simple lifting of inhibitions.

Invisible influences

The Edinburgh hotel was taken over by some Chinese people. It must be the Triads.

The roadworkers outside my friend's house were keeping an eye on him, because he had been a social agitator in South Africa.

I visited the same friend as he lay dying in a hospice. I went only because I had an idea that I was inheriting something from him. The reality was that he had contributed to my ideas when I was much younger.

The magician can force a card on you. The system can punish you by giving you faulty goods - not an accident - deliberate. The system can reward you by giving you a lottery prize of money. It is a gamble in reality, but in my reality, money is being dealt out.

Evil - groups of people carry out vicious crimes, such as gratuitously causing car crashes. Their activities remain completely unknown to all other members of the population. Truth - by definition, we never hear about successful criminals - only the failures appear in courts.

Control - very subtle movements and signals by others control you. Some people control, others are controlled. In truth, the effects of non-verbal language have been greatly underestimated.

Just round the corner

Frequently, I feel as if I am on the verge of great understanding. But the light always flickers and dies – before I can reach it.

Lewis

The whole of the island of Lewis is a driving training ground. It is competitive. Only some of the people actively compete.

I came to Lewis because of my ecology. The sea was getting too full of algae.

The ferry is not a boat. It is like a geographical tardis.

The island of Lewis is actually off the coast of Japan. Reality not being where you think you are.

Underneath the sea is a race of mutants. Their activities relate to the algal growth.

In every tub of Priadel (lithium mood stabiliser) there are 1 or 2 LSD - they make you ill - the purpose - to keep psychiatrists in business.

Like father, like son

The older I become, the more similarities I see between myself and my father. I also see more similarities between myself and my sons.

So – in a way – this is time travel. The father lives and dies over a relatively short period. But the traits stay alive – passed down from grandfather to father to son.

Messages

Car and other vehicle number plates give secret messages that only a few people can decode. Truth - a common kid's game on a long journey is to make messages out of the combination of letters and numbers in a vehicle's number plate. Example - I had a car with the registration OPD. Unbeknownst to others, this actually stood for "Official Police Department".

Radio and television programmes contain concealed messages aimed directly at me. Truth - if we didn't want to receive the visual and auditory messages from radio and tv we wouldn't listen or watch. This particular psychotic perception is recognised by the psychiatric trade and given the less-than-clear title of "ideas of reference".

Symbols, such as the swastika, are of great significance, predating written language. They can be distinguished in far more places than is immediately obvious. Truth - significant probably, but universally concealed unlikely.

The noises a car makes as it passes over patches in the road surface convey secret messages. Truth - we're always trying to decode sensory inputs, but not usually in such an extreme manner.

By operating electrical equipment in a car, you can convey secret messages to other car users whose radios are not suppressed, eg one buzz for "Yes", two buzzes for "No". But I never seemed to get any replies. Truth - groups often share secret ways of communicating, eg parents may discuss sensitive matters in French when children are present.

Inanimate noises, such as doors rattling in a draught (as the doors in the psychiatric unit in Stornoway always have done) can, through their rhythm, convey messages. Staff block these messages by padding doors with wads of paper.

Mirrors

Every time two people meet and interact, they act as mirrors to each other. The body language of one will provoke the same body language in the other.

If you are aware this is happening, it takes you some way towards seeing yourself as others see you – rather than the misleading picture you gain by looking into a physical mirror.

Odds and ends

On being returned from protective custody in a police station to the hospital from which I had absconded, I was transported in a wonderful car, which had been built by uniting the best parts of various other cars of different makes. Truth - it was just an ordinary car, but if they were holding me prisoner, they would need to use special equipment.

One with nature

I picked up a mouse and it piddled on my hand. At one with nature, I started crying. Truth - the mouse was frightened and urinated.

The number of times a crow cawed was a secret message to me. Odd numbers were good and I should go ahead with what I was considering. Even numbers were bad and I should do something else. Truth - about as sensible as telling fortunes from the tealeaves left in a cup.

People have powers

Some people were witches and wizards but would never reveal themselves as such.

Some people are clones. You can tell because you see them in two places when it could not be physically possible.

Some people are androids, eg silvery, shiny-faced people in front seats of a car seen on the A74.

Some people are mutants, eg sea-people living in sea off Lewis.

Some individuals are embodiments of good and wisdom, some are embodiments of evil - examples are man at cliff near Queensferry and man at Midlothian crossroads.

Freemasons are there. The pattern on the lino had masonic significance and your feet stick to the floor. The reality - my feet were dirty and sweaty, manics don't wash.

Travellers are real people. Reality might be their freedom.

Pets

Sometimes, it seems as if I am being kept as a pet by superior beings. My relationship with them has all the aspects that must be experienced by my dog or cat.

The inferior depends on the superior for food and shelter. The inferior does not understand the reasons for the activities of the superior.

Recall

Five minutes ago, I knew what was to go on this page – and it was not “recall”.

I seem to have near total recall but with absolutely no power to switch on that recall. So memories of the deepest irrelevance float up to the top, while sought-for memories disappear.

Secrets of the peat

Many places in Lewis have peat banks that were, and sometimes still are, worked for fuel. However, most people do not realise that the patterns of the moorland cuttings spell out secret messages that are read by aliens in ufos.

It must be a few years since I read *Chariots of the Gods?* by Erich Von Daniken and Michael Heron. One of the ideas in the book is that giant patterns on the ground, which cannot be seen as such from the ground, are actually intended to be seen from above. I think that idea has been incorporated in my manic awareness.

Significance of colour

Because blue was bad, being the colour for police - who could pick you up and take you to the hospital - I burnt a perfectly good blue-coloured down sleeping bag. Truth - yes, colours have social significance and blue is associated with police (eg the blue lamp). But burning an old friend is just plain crazy.

Significance of numbers

Odd is good

Even is bad

5 is really good – “rich man” (tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man)

Silicon essentials

Exobiology speculates that life-forms elsewhere may be silicon based rather than, as on Earth, carbon based.

But humans are already becoming heavily silicon-based. Devices such as computers and mobile phones, which are based on silicon chips, have become increasingly essential over recent years.

Without my computer, I lose much of my memory and most of my ability to find information via the internet. Without my mobile, I am unable to communicate effectively.

Sleep and television

Does watching television serve a similar function for the brain as dreaming?

Is it like daydreaming?

After all, why is watching television so popular? Why has it gone from nothing a few decades back to at least several hours a day for the average UK resident?

Steps

Every computer program, in any language, consists of only three elements:

- a sequence or chain
- a fork
- a loop.

More fundamentally, the atom of progress is the step.

Maybe a human life is similar, stepping through the three elements.

When depressed, the energy of initiation is lacking. Another way to view this might be found in the saying: “A journey of 1000 miles begins with but a single step.”

When less depressed, stepping falters and halts from one step to the next – as if some malevolent force had moved the stepping stones further apart, and out of reach.

Suspension of belief

We suspend our belief in normality to immerse ourselves in fiction, a play or a film.

A similar suspension is necessary to participate in everyday life.

This now, about 18 months after writing, makes no sense to me.

Tests

It seems sometimes as if life is a test of ability to survive. In the same way, journeys (which are often used in literature as a metaphor for life) are a test of ability to get from origin to destination.

Wars

I was hospitalised at the time of wars, to keep me out of the way, eg Brookwood Falklands, Western Isles Bosnia.

Watches

People are controlled by the quartz crystal in their watches, receiving signals as in crystal radio.

The reality - since the industrial revolution people have been controlled by time - clocks and watches. Every day we look at our watches to ensure we fulfil our social obligations.

We are controlled via the watch by social signals.

Words

Place names - Tuke 2 Ward = took 2 (lithium)

Kilmany - Kill many = secret meaning, drive carefully or you could become one of the victims.

Rhyming - not sure about this one. When manic, conversational replies are frequently based on rhyming with words in the statement or question received. This is recognised by the psychiatric trade as a characteristic of mania.

A bit like rhyming and “everything connected”, endless strings can be made by daisy-chaining the multiple meanings of words, eg:

Find sockets (I had lost my toolkit)

electric sockets (mains outlets)

electric messages (radio and tv powered by electricity)

do the messages (Scottish for “do the shopping”, or “get the groceries”)

Again, this activity can consume vast amounts of time and adds to the feeling that there is so much to do and so little time to do it in. Truth - we rely on an ability to make connections as part of thinking (eg lateral thinking). We all waste time on pointless activity - and most people feel pushed for time, even if not always.

Work and play

So work is something you do in exchange for money. It may be pleasurable- it may not.

When you're not well, you cannot work. You lose the financial reward but, more importantly, you lose the appreciation of others that is an essential contributor to your self-esteem.

The end

As a reader, you can go no further in this book.

As a bipolar, I am likely to have more experiences and thus more perceptions. For example:

- the end can be what you want it to be
- the end can't be the end
- the end – this is the title
- reality is being where you think you are.