

Voices of reason, voices of insanity

How to study effects of ‘grand narratives’
on experiences of hearing voices.

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Consulting room

P so do: do: you thi:nk what I'm telling you >even when I was working in (place) < I as:ked my supervisor (..) b'cos she was dealing with the psychiatry people an ... do th do they exist that there are people that are cau:sing this: (.) eh sickness (..) b'cos I'm fully confide fully satisfied now it's not the medica:tion that makes me: with all the symptoms (..) it's the (.) those people that I'm (.) that (.) are after me that I I

Dr ye:h mhm

P feel si:ck an everything (.) I blame the:m

Dr yeh (...) well what do you think I think? ((*smiling*)) (.)

P mhm? (..)

Dr well I th I thi:nk you hav:e an ill::ness: that's:: fairly well under control at the mom:ent

(Transcript simplified; P = patient; Dr = psychiatrist)

Source: McCabe, R., Leudar, I. and Antaki, C. (2004). Do people with schizophrenia display theory of mind deficits in clinical interactions? *Psychological Medicine*, **34**, 401-412.

Voices as 'hallucinations'

'A man ... who has the inward conviction of a presently perceived sensation at a moment when no external object capable of arousing this sensation is within the field of his senses, is in a state of hallucination. He is a visionary.'
(Esquirol 1838, transl. T. James 1995, p. 70).

'The activity of the brain is so intense, that the visionary or the hallucinator gives a body and substance to images reproduced by memory, without the senses intervening.' (Esquirol. 1838, transl. T. James 1995, p. 84-85)

Source: James, T. (1995). *Dream, Creativity and Madness in Nineteen-Century France*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Voice-talk

- **Voices are a variety of inner speech and to be analysed as talk.**
 - **Voices tend to regulate and evaluate voice hearer 's activities.**
 - **Voices tend to be focused on the voice hearer rather than directed into the world.**
 - **Voices are not impulses but tend to provide reasons for doing or not doing things.**
- **Different aspects of language can be disassociated in voices.**
 - **Voice hearer reports that a voice threatened her, and the words used, but not the gender, age, loudness or speed.**
 - **Voice hearer reports a male voice but cannot say anything else about it.**

Sources: Leudar, I., Thomas, P., McNally, D. and Glinski, A. (1997). What voices can do with words: Pragmatics of verbal hallucinations. *Psychological Medicine*, 27, 885-898; Leudar, I. and Thomas, P. (2000). Voice-talk. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge (pp. 175-206)

Voice-talk in settings

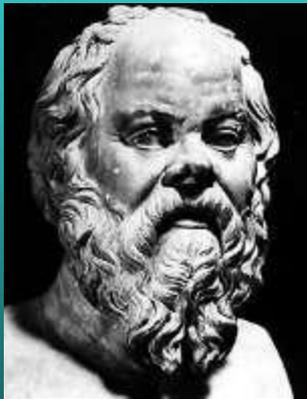
- **The meaning of voice experiences is not exhausted by their linguistic/pragmatic analysis.**
- **The voices are experienced in settings which extend from the concrete *here-and-now* to broader social, historical, religious and cultural contexts.**
- **Settings are not available in advance but are created for specific experiences.**

Grand narratives and their use

- **There are grand narratives as to what voices might be and why only some people hear them**
 - **These narratives can be specific to particular cultures and points in history**
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- ? **What are such grand narratives?**
 - ? **How do they become influential in situated experiences of specific people?**
 - ? **Do the historical and local changes in grand narratives affect experiential properties of voices?**

Grand Narratives 1 – The case of Socrates (469-399)

'Socrates ... happened to be making the ascent toward the Symbolon and the house of Andocides, putting some question to Euthyphron the while and sounding him out playfully. Suddenly he stopped short and fell silent, lost a good time in thought; at last he turned back, taking the way through the street of cabinet makers, and called out to the friends who had already gone onward to return, saying that his sign has come to him.' (Plutarch, OSS: 580d-e)



Source: Leudar, I and Thomas, P. (2000). The Sign of Socrates. In *Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity*. London: Routledge. (pp.).

Grand Narratives 2 – Theresa of Avilla (1515-1582)

“One thing only there is about the book that may reasonably cause any hesitation till it shall be very carefully examined: it contains many visions and revelations, the matters always to be afraid of, especially in women, who are very ready to believe of them that they come from God and to look at them as proofs of sanctity, though sanctity does not lie in them.”



Sources: Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*, 1911, p. xxvii; Leudar, I. (2001). *Voices in History. Outlines. Critical Social Studies*, 3, 5-18.

Grand Narratives 3 – John Bunyan (1628-1688)

‘But the same day, as I was in the midst of a game of Cat, and having struck one blow from the hole; just as I was about to strike it second time, a voice did suddenly dart from Heaven into my Soul, which said *‘Wilt though leave thy sins, and go to Heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to Hell? At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore leaving my cat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and it was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down at me, as being hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these, and other my ungodly practices’*



Sources: §22, John Bunyan, 1666, *Grace Abounding to the greatest of sinners*; Leudar, I. and Sharrock, W. (2002). The cases of John Bunyan. Part 1: Taine and Royce; Part 2: James and Janet. *History and Psychiatry*, 13, 4, 401-417 & 13, 3, 247-265 respectively.

Grand Narratives – Summary

Socrates: divine rational - superstition
 divine Illiadic - divine rational

Teresa of Avila: divine / diabolical – deception

John Bunyan: divine / diabolical

Consulting room: ???

Wittgenstein on telling one's intentions

Why do I want to tell him about an intention too, as well as telling him what I did. ... because I want to tell him something about myself, which goes beyond what happened at the time. I reveal to him something of myself when I tell him what I was going to do.-not, however, on grounds of self-observation, but by the way of a response (it might be also called an intuition).

(Philosophical Investigations, §659)

Elizabeth Anscombe on ‘actions under descriptions’

1. ‘Are we to say that the man who (intentionally) moves his arm, operates the pump, replenishes water supply, poisons the inhabitants, is performing *four* actions?’ (Anscombe, 1957, §26)
2. ‘We cannot say that since at some time he poisoned them, there *must* be actions which we can label ‘poisoning them’, and in which we can find what it was to poison them. For in the acts of pumping poisoned water nothing in particular is necessarily going on that might not equally well have been going on if the acts had been pumping non-poisonous water. Even if you imagine that pictures of inhabitants lying dead occur in the man’s head, and please him – such pictures could also occur in the head of a man who was *not* poisoning them, and *need* not occur in this man. The difference appears to be one of circumstances, not of anything that is going on *then*. (ibid, §24, the last emphasis ours)
3. ‘For moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water-supply; and in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household. (ibid, §26)
4. ‘So there is one action with four descriptions, each dependent on wider circumstances, and each related to the next as description of means to an end.’ (ibid, §26)

Implication for examining experiences of particular voices hearers.

- **Examine linguistic/pragmatic aspects of voice talk.**
- **Examine the settings of the experience in voice hearers' accounts.**
- **Examine how grand narratives figure in settings of voices and what they afford to the voice hearer.**
- **Examine whether the changes in settings and voice talk go hand in hand.**

Case VM – Hearing one’s name called

I was drifting off to sleep when I heard the voice of my mother; she was calling my name. Her voice sounded like she was calling me from another room (but I knew that this it wasn’t because although only half awake I knew that she lives far away in another town, and that I was on my own in my flat). There was not a great urgency about this voice, but it seemed like she wanted me to do something though.

This voice called me twice, and then I heard a chorus of whispering voices around my ears; these voices I did not recognise and they did not say any words I recognised, they were just rasping and whispering very rapidly “sssp pss sssp”. It sounded a bit like a noise someone might make to attract an animal like a cat “here puss puss puss”. I knew that these weren’t people present in the room with me and during this experience I knew that these were voices in my head. Although it felt a little bit frightening I knew what they were and so I felt as if I could let myself “drift” further into this and try to make out their form. ...

The experience reminded me of when I heard voices sometimes as a child, again usually in a half-waking state; I would hear a man and a woman calling my name but the difference was I didn’t know them, and I also felt frightened by this thing that just came on me. I would feel overwhelmed and engulfed in the same way as when I on occasions suddenly didn’t recognise this thing that looked at me in the mirror – this thing that didn’t feel like me and looked terrifying. These whispering voices this time round sounded like the same man and woman that had called my name before.

Case BK – Continuity experiences

They are physical touches around my lips, and streams of the air which are coming out of my mouth and nose, accompanied by an auditory expression. It is happening to me mostly when I am asleep, it wakes me up, and it finishes when I am awake. So it is not a dream. It even happened several times in waking state.

I normally sleep on the settee in the living room which I have to unfold every evening. So I said to myself that I would sleep in the bedroom on grandpa's bed. There however, I experienced such hostile attacks that I do not sleep there anymore. First I was woken by a sharp movement crossing my top lip. And as I was falling asleep, I was woken up several times by aggressive physical touches around my mouths. From that time, I don't go in there. It was like in Hitchcock's stories and if I had not experienced it myself I would not have believed it. Grandpa had a hostile relationship towards me for a long time and I have a feeling that he is continuing this way even after his death, because I can't explain it in any other way. ...

I first went to the parish vicar, and that helped a lot – the horrific auditory expressions that accompanied it - something like incomprehensible wheezing [death rattle] – disappeared. I booked an appointment in three weeks with a psychologist, I can't cope. It is beyond my will, beyond my power. I was always able to resolve everything in my life, but my reason ends here.

Case DPS – Supernatural voices

I believe I may say that at that time and at that time *only*, I saw God's omnipotence in its complete purity. During the night—and as far as I can remember in one *single* night—the lower God (Ariman) appeared. The radiant picture of his rays became visible to my inner eye (compare footnote 61), while I was lying in bed not sleeping but awake—that is to say he was reflected on my inner nervous system. Simultaneously I heard his voice; but it was not a soft whisper—as the talk of the voices always was before and after that time—it resounded in a mighty bass as if directly in front of my bedroom windows. The impression was so intense, so that anybody not hardened to terrifying miraculous impressions as I was, would have been shaken to the core. Also *what* was spoken did not sound friendly by any means: everything seemed calculated to instil fright and terror into me and the word “wretch” was frequently heard—an expression quite common in the basic language to denote a human being destined to be destroyed by God and to feel God's power and wrath. Yet everything that was spoken was *genuine*, not phrases learnt by rote as they later were, but the immediate expression of a true feeling.

For this reason my impression was not one of alarm and fear, but largely one of admiration for the magnificent and the sublime; the effect on my nerves was therefore beneficial despite the insults contained in some of the *words*; when the “tested” souls which had for a time kept shyly in the background dared to appear again, I could not but express my feelings repeatedly in words such as “Oh how pure!”—towards the majesty of the divine rays—and “Oh how vulgar!”—towards the tested souls. Further the divine rays read my thoughts correctly, without falsifying them, as has been done without exception since; they even gave them verbal expression in a rhythm corresponding to the natural movement of human nerves, so that despite all the frightening side effects, the total impression I received was a calming one and eventually I fell asleep.

Summary of Cases

- **VM**
 - **Here-and-now**
 - **Biographical past**
 - **Personal future**
- **BK**
 - **Here-and-now**
 - **Biographical past**
 - **Religious/spiritual**
 - **Medical**
- **DPS**
 - **Here and now**
 - **Supernatural**

Conclusion

