

A Psychotic Experience

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It's been roughly one month since I had a suicide attempt. Since then I've been trying to hold things together while living on my own. But my reality is crumbling to pieces all around me. I can hardly eat. I have food in my little single room occupancy, but the bed bugs I can't defeat are making me nauseous. I can't sleep normally either. I stay up all night and sleep during the day. I missed the opportunity to go surfing with my brother because of this sleep cycle; I was dead tired when he showed up at my place at 9 in the morning and had to reschedule.

It's 4 in the morning and I'm trying to eat, but I can't in my single room occupancy. So, I go to McDonald's some 8 blocks away. I can tell that my mind is not right, but I really have no clue what's happening. There's one other patron in the McDonalds at this witching hour, a homeless man. As I'm eating, he begins to taunt me, "Loser working three jobs just to get by." Usually, I'm calm, but for some reason, this enrages me. I want to punch his face in. I'm very agitated in my current mental state. But, I muster the effort to remain calm at least on the outside and I don't engage him.

Back at my single room occupancy, I'm watching a movie, a comedy. One of the characters cracks a joke, "What a genius!" For some reason I take this comment personally, it seems the TV is talking to me directly. I change the channel to 60 min and Barack Obama is being interviewed. At one point in the interview, Obama says, taunting, "Is that all you got!" I again take this personally, saying out loud to the TV, "Is that all *you* got?" This was the beginning of what would last several months in my experience; the TV would continue to taunt me and communicate to me personally as far as I thought.

My single room occupancy is located in the heart of downtown, and while I'm up all night it is loud—there are many ambient noises. At some point, my senses become hyperaware of the ambient noises. Braking cars,

revving engines, helicopters, etc. The braking of cars starts to communicate to me that I'm making an error in my thinking while, on the other hand, revving engines, and helicopters validate my thinking in the moment.

I begin to suspect that my cellphone is tapped by the U.S. government and that I'm being surveilled through the camera in my laptop. A narrative builds in my mind that the government is conspiring to ruin me, perhaps, to send me to the hospital indefinitely. But all this going on in my mind at once is beginning to take its toll on me. I am trying desperately to hold my own, but I start to realize that I must reach out for help. So, I call my Dad and tell him I'm starting to feel suicidal again. He picks me up in downtown to take me to the hospital.

In the emergency room, there are no TVs and, although there are ambient noises, they are not of the sort that triggers me. I simply recite the magic words, "I am a danger to myself," and I am admitted to a psychiatric hospital. But even at this mental health hospital, Aurora, I am still not fully aware of what is happening to me. For months, I have been weaning myself off of my medications for various reasons—side effects I didn't like, the sincere belief that the medications were not working, and a growing suspicion I had of the pharmaceutical industry. So, instead of discussing my psychotic symptoms (which I, by and large, had not identified as such, such that I didn't know there was anything to discuss) I just brought up my insomnia and the warped sleep schedule I had developed as well as my transitory suicidal ideations. For these two problems, I agreed to take Trazadone, and nothing else.

In the hospital, I continued to think the government was somehow after me. Indeed, I began to suspect that the other patients in the hospital were spies, planted there to influence me and to spy on me. It seemed to me like a game, where the conversations we had were not sincere, but were intended to gather reasons from me as to why

I needed to remain hospitalized. I played along with this apparent game and felt I had the upper hand when a social worker approached me to tell me that I was being discharged to a crisis house. I had won, I was getting out of the hospital!.

But at the crisis house, my psychotic symptoms continued. I was lying on my bed trying to read a book when the ambient noises began again to communicate to me positive and negative signals. The cars seemed to be telling me what to think. And, for this to be possible, someone would have to be reading my mind while also choreographing the cars on the street to move in accordance with my thoughts. Finally, this struck me as too much, definitely unusual. So, I began to realize that I needed an antipsychotic medication. In order to get this, I called the police's Psychiatric Emergency Response Team to once again check me into a psychiatric hospital.

In the hospital, I did receive an antipsychotic, but the delusions did not go away for months. I continued to feel that the other patients were government spies, the TV continued to talk to me, and I began to feel manic, that I was all powerful. I thought I could control the weather, and I thought all that I was saying and doing was being broadcast on the world wide web and, what's more, that thousands of people were watching me. In the midst of all these delusions, I began to think I had to quickly get out of the hospital. So, I took the issue of my release all the way to San Diego Superior Court, against the recommendation of my psychiatrist who was aware that I was psychotic. In court, I fired my public defender and chose to represent myself, all while I was delusional and suspicious of the government. I lost. But, a paramedic who took me to court asked if I could represent him if he ever got into trouble.