

## Paolo Maccagno

### ‘Essi temevano la gioia eccessiva’: Reverie and the practice of the limit

**Amanda Ravetz (AR):** Paolo Maccagno is an anthropologist, Feldenkrais practitioner and PhD student here at Aberdeen.

**Paolo Maccagno (PM):** Thank you first of all to Amanda, to ask me to participate in this symposium which gave me the chance to go back to a book that I read some time ago, from an Italian psychoanalyst whose name is Elvio Facinelli and who wrote “La mente estatica” “The Ecstatic Mind”, and where the words that you see here are, there’s a line about these words. “Essi temevano la gioia eccessiva” “They fear the excessive joy.”

So I go back to this line at the end of my short presentation and what I’m going to say is something that it’s an ongoing conversation in particular with Anne Douglas, who I’m inviting to participate and maybe to say something during my presentation.

So I read this book again and I’m really, well I was really interested and fascinated by how Facinelli talks about ecstasy and he talks about ecstasy also in relation to reverie, that’s why I read it again. I was fascinated about how the book is written because I really feel and this is something that I shared with Amanda already, that we are all I think, at least here, very fascinated by this notion and sometimes when we start to talk or at least describe this thing, then we fall, we have the risk at least to use a code that is not really homogenous with what we are experiencing and that instead, in that book, I really felt that it was almost a talking *from* reverie.

Unfortunately, it’s not possible for me to share with you all the beauty that I felt in it but I’ll give you just a little glimpse. So these are lines that in his book, *La mente estatica* (The Ecstatic Mind), Elvio Fachinelli in talking about Bataille says: “In him, it is declared sovereign, the will to lose oneself, to reach a silent part of himself, to make night staying with a patience of a mother in the suspended silence of a child’s sleep.”

I felt them very beautiful and so Fachinelli suggests that Bataille with the image of the mother suspended to her child’s sleep, evokes in a surprising way what later psychoanalyst Bion will call *reverie*. He also points out how the ecstatic emerges in liminal experiences.

Since I’m let’s say working, living on this notion of limit somehow, which I met a few years ago, so I’m talking from a very personal experience, so some 10 years ago I started running, so running marathons and when I started, there’s something not, well you go in this world and probably you just meet some fashion in, it’s a world now that running, everyone is running so I wanted to run as well but it’s not only that, because immediately I had in mind, “I want to run a marathon”. And when I started to know people running marathons, I immediately felt that that was really fascinating to me.

Why? Because there was, immediately I’ve been told about this phenomenon which is in the language of people who run marathons, which is called the wall of the marathon runner, so what’s this wall? Must be a limit. So normally it occurs around the 35th kilometre, so even if you are full of energy, you can arrive there and something can happen, you can pass through it or you can really collapse, you don’t know and this is exactly the other thing that I was really fascinated because of course, immediately I said, “Wow, I’m fascinated that there’s something that is creating this wall, it’s a sort of frontier”.

On the other hand, I was immediately, I felt a tendency myself of asking myself and the others, “Okay, but how can you do that? How can you pass over?” and the answer generally was, you can’t control it, you don’t know so this again, this thing

that I didn't know was all again fascinating me even more.

So then I started running marathons, I wrote also something about running marathons from an anthropological point of view and I wanted to share with you, a short text that gives a sort of anecdote, a note from a runner after having run a marathon and let's say having passed well, the wall of the marathon. And I will then underline a few things.

It says:

And now the register changes...

The disturbance created by thoughts and emotions disappears. A cleaner and free feeling comes forward. My heart slows down, it calms down. The breath becomes deeper, abandons anxiety and allows my body to relax and flow. I touch the ground with my foot and I like it unexpectedly. I feel the movement of running passing through myself, I let it pass, I do not add anything. I am struck by beauty, I feel it ... light in me, it permeates me, it elevates me, inspires me, moves me. It releases tensions, fears, gives me strength. I choose it. It was always there, possible, simple, it was enough to listen. There is no space for time. I run, I forget who I am. Goals, times, 39-40-41 km, it does not matter ... I'm over. Cleanliness, sharpness. It is beauty of the movement, I am that beauty. The aesthetics guide me. Every gesture adapts perfectly to the movement, embodies it. I wake up consciously, I feel, I perceive everything. A slowed down sequence, the silence behind things, and a rhythm that goes from me to the landscape and vice versa. I coordinate with this rhythm, I adapt to it, it is the rhythm of running, mine and of the landscape, everything becomes dance. The speed is perfect, simply perfect. I feel body, I am body, there is nothing else. I coincide with the action I am doing, I am that action. I do not think about anything, I am.

So I think probably there are many things in common with the state of reverie, probably, for sure it's something that is very transformative personally, so what I thought then is that I would have liked to share this kind of state with what I have been doing since then, so I'm starting to and that's why I share really with Amanda, this idea of projects of recovery, so just to mention one, I tried to, I did projects in prison where I took the practice of marathon running inside prison and I worked through marathon running with prisoners.

And I think that, I would suggest here with this audience, this idea of really going in that direction, in the direction of projects of recovery instead of as I mentioned before, when I arrived at marathon running, the question I was posing to myself is how to overcome the wall and this is the question I was asking to all my colleagues, people who are running and there was no precise answer and I think that it's sort of, it's not totally a waste of energy but I would prefer to say that it's better to invest more in this transformative and healing part of the potentiality of this state.

So now, I want to, we heard Rachel talking about being on the orbit, on this line, this is a drawing, Anne Douglas did it, on a project that we did together and I think it talks about this [inaudible 00:03:06] of states and when I was preparing a little bit this workshop, I was reading something that really, the lines that pre introduced the reading were really nice and they want to read them again here, they are from Myna Trustrom Hosier and I love them, Myna suggests that, stay close to what might be called the state of reverie in that the astrologic narrative, progression to a resolution and in particular, she suggested Lyn Hejinian (2016), *The Unfollowing*.

So *The Unfollowing*, this is a collection of sonnets where each line is a non-sequitur, "I wanted each line to be as difficult to accept on the basis of the previous and subsequent line as death is for we who are alive", I think this is really the case of you know, being fascinated, contemplating the possibility of reverie.

So the suggestion is not totally to forget that the question how we can really create the conditions, so I'm not against this, I'm probably suggesting another path that is not a method, that is oriented to a goal but more a discipline, as a marathon runner, it is a discipline but he never knows if he will really be able to overcome the wall.

So the notion of discipline, I think is quite interesting that I would like to share with you, the notion of discipline entails at the same time, a rigour and open-endedness, it can be a path for research which did not anticipate and plan for certain outcomes, but offers initial questions and a path to follow them along.

According to John Cage in his lecture on nothing, "A discipline, once accepted, can welcome in return some rare moments of ecstasy as a revelation", so I think this is quite important. Do I have one minute more or not?

**AR:** Not really.

**PM:** Not really, okay, let's finish then. It's fine. I would tell you about, okay, thank you.