

The echo of the world: The castaway, the Garabandal apparitions, and the crisis of presence

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Funding information

Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats, Grant/Award Number: ICREA Academia Award 2020; Fulbright Association, Grant/Award Number: FMECD-ST-2016

Abstract

In the early 1990s, while I was conducting an ethnographic study in a psychosocial rehabilitation center in Barcelona for people suffering from psychosis, a patient and informant gave me four letters that he had supposedly sent to various recipients. Only recently did I discover that these letters, which warned of terrible catastrophes, were related to the Marian apparitions of Garabandal in the 1960s in Spain, and that their recipients had all been involved in this amazing event. This discovery led me to attempt an ethnographic reparation, and to reconsider the letters as a way of inhabiting the world. With this objective and drawing on Ernesto de Martino's concept of "crisis of presence," I propose to understand the informant's experience as an extreme example of the porosity of presence. I conclude that the letters can be understood as the affected person's struggle for being in a human history. [*crisis of presence, Garabandal apparitions, reflexivity, schizophrenia*]

Resumen

A principios de los años noventa, mientras realizaba un estudio etnográfico en un centro de rehabilitación psicosocial de Barcelona para personas con psicosis, un paciente e informante me entregó cuatro cartas que supuestamente había enviado a varios destinatarios. Sólo recientemente descubrí que estas cartas, que advertían de terribles catástrofes, estaban relacionadas con las apariciones marianas de Garabandal en la década de 1960 en España y que todos sus destinatarios habían estado involucrados en este sorprendente acontecimiento. Este descubrimiento me llevó a intentar una reparación etnográfica y a reconsiderar las cartas como una forma de habitar el mundo. Con este objetivo, y basándome en el concepto de "crisis de la presencia" de Ernesto de Martino, en este artículo propongo entender la experiencia del informante como un ejemplo extremo de la porosidad de la presencia. Concluyo que las cartas pueden entenderse como la lucha del afectado por permanecer en una historia humana. [*crisis de la presencia, apariciones de Garabandal, reflexividad, esquizofrenia*]

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Resum

A principis dels anys noranta, mentre realitzava un estudi etnogràfic en un centre de rehabilitació psicosocial de Barcelona per a persones amb psicosis, un pacient i informant em va lliurar quatre cartes que suposadament havia enviat a diversos destinataris. Només recentment vaig descobrir que aquestes cartes, que advertien de terribles catàstrofes, estaven relacionades amb les aparicions marianes de Garabandal en la dècada de 1960 a Espanya, i que tots els seus destinataris havien estat involucrats en aquest esdeveniment. Aquest descobriment em va portar a intentar una reparació etnogràfica i a reconsiderar les cartes com una manera d'habitar el món. Amb aquest objectiu, i basant-me en el concepte de "crisi de la presència" d'Ernesto de Martino, en aquest article proposo entendre l'experiència de l'informant com un exemple extrem de la porositat de la presència. Concloco que les cartes poden entendre's com la lluita de l'afectat per romandre en una història humana. [*crisi de la presència, aparicions de Garabandal, reflexivitat, esquizofrènia*]

Résumé

Au début des années 1990, au cours d'une étude ethnographique menée dans un centre de réhabilitation psychosociale de Barcelone pour personnes souffrant de psychose, un patient et informateur m'a confié quatre lettres qu'il était censé avoir envoyées à différents destinataires. Ce n'est que récemment que j'ai découvert que ces lettres, qui annonçaient de terribles catastrophes, étaient liées aux apparitions mariales de Garabandal dans les années 1960 en Espagne, et que leurs destinataires avaient participé à cet événement étonnant. Cette découverte m'a conduit à tenter une réparation ethnographique, et à reconsidérer les lettres comme une manière d'habiter le monde. À cette fin, et en m'appuyant sur le concept de "crise de la présence" d'Ernesto de Martino, je propose de comprendre l'expérience du patient comme un exemple extrême de la porosité de la présence. Je conclus que les lettres peuvent être comprises comme la lutte pour rester dans une histoire humaine. [*crise de la présence, apparitions de Garabandal, réflexivité, schizophrénie*]

INTRODUCTION: A MESSAGE WITHOUT A BOTTLE

One afternoon in 1991, in a psychosocial rehabilitation center for people affected by schizophrenia and other severe mental disorders in Barcelona where I was conducting an ethnographic study,¹ Silvio, a patient, handed me a crumpled, coffee-stained piece of paper containing some letters he claimed to have written to various recipients. The four letters, written in ballpoint pen in all caps, and of varying lengths, were cataloged under the headings CNP-300/A, CNP-300/B, CNP-300/C, and CNP-300/D and arranged on a single sheet bearing the logo of a local brand of milk (see Figure 1). Below is a translation of these letters into English:

Barcelona, 25 September 1991

CNP-300/A/TO JOE LOMANGINO

ENDS ARE APPROACHING GREATER FUTURE, IN WHICH THE HEALING OF THE SICK WILL TAKE PLACE, WHO WITH FAITH, WILL BE HEALED AS ANNOUNCED.

YOUR OFFER TO REMAIN BLIND FOR THE GOOD OF ALL HUMANITY IS LAUDABLE, IS COMMENDABLE, BUT ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION I HAVE IT WILL BE POSTPONED UNTIL 98 OR 99, THE PEOPLE WITH THE PROMISES OF THE ANTICHRIST WILL RETURN TO THE PRESENT CORRUPTION. SO IT IS NECESSARY GIVEN THE URGENCY OF EVENTS, EARTHQUAKES IN SAN DIEGO AND ESPECIALLY THAT IN SANTA BARBARA, TO EVACUATE THIS CITY, SINCE, FEW DAYS OR HOURS, THE BIG BANG WILL FOLLOW,

+
 BARCELONA 25 SEPTIEMBRE 1991
 A JOE LOMANGINO
 SE ACERCA FINALES MAYO VENIDERO,
 EN QUE TENDRA LUGAR LA CURACION
 DE LOS ENFERMOS, QUE CON FE, CU-
 RRAN SEGUN SE ANUNCIO.
 SU OFERTA DE SEGUIR CIEGO PARA
 EL BIEN DE LA HUMANIDAD, ES LOA-
 BLE, ES MERITORIA, PERO CON LOS
 DATOS QUE TENGO, SE DEMORARA HASTA
 EL 98 O 99, QUE LA GENTE CON LAS
PROMESAS DEL ANTICRISTO, VOLVERA
A LA CORRUPCION ACTUAL. ASI
 Q' ES NECESARIO ANTE LA PREMU-
 RA DE LOS ACONTECIMIENTOS, SEISMOS
 DE SAN DIEGO Y SOBRETUDO EL DE
 SANTA BARBARA, EVACUAR ESTA CIU-
 DAD, PUES, POCOS DIAS O HORAS, SE-
 GUIRA EL BIG BANG, HUNDIENDOSE,
 TRAS 30 MINUTOS, EN EL PACIFICO.
 SUS SEÑAS, ME LAS PROPORCIONO
 NUESTRO COMUN AMIGO P. BENAC, QUE
 CONOZCO HACE TIEMPO. ES EL BIG BANG.
 FINALIZO, ROGANDOLE PERSUADA
 A ALICE FAYE, Y SOBRE TODO EVA-
 CUEN LOS ANGELES LORETTA YOUNG
 AMIGA SUYA; GLENN Y PETER FORD,
 TAMBIEN LA DANESA. LAS SEÑAS DE
 ESTOS, SE LAS PUEDE PROPORCIONAR EL
 OBISPO DE ESA FRANCISCO GARMENDIA.
 EL TELEFONO QUE TENIA, CUAN-
 DO LE LLAME ERA 212-589-9867.
 LAS SEÑAS DE RAMON ANDREU
 ERAN 213-383-8206.
 AL LADO VERA MIS MISIVAS A
 GARMENDIA Y RAMON ANDREU.
 FINALIZO, CON UN FUERTE ABRAZO.
 POSTDATA:
 ADJUNTE EN LA
 SUYA DE CON-
 TESTACION, LAS
 SEÑAS POSTAL, Y LAS DE GARMENDIA
DE RAMON ANDREU Y GRACIAS.

ATO
 CNP-300/A
 CNP-300/B
 A SANCHEZ VENTURA.
 QUERIDO AMIGO: EXISTE UN SEÑA-
 LADO NEXIALISMO, ENTRE LAS PRISAS
 QUE TUVISTEIS EN GUADALAJARA TUS AMI-
 GOS Y TU MISMO, CON LAS PRISAS DE
 DEJAR TODO, QUE DEBEIS DE TENER
 TODOS, CON EL SEISMO DE STA. BARBARA.
 UN ABRAZO DE
 CNP-300/C
 A RAMON ANDREU. S.I.
 QUERIDO AMIGO; POR LAS PRECE-
 DENTES CNP. PONGO EL TEL. DE GARMEN-
 DIA Y DE LOMANGINO 515-384 9022.
 LE RECUERDO ME REGALO UNA ESTAY-
 PA DE SU HERMANO LUIS.
 DESDE EL CIELO, SU MADRE RECIBIRA
 CON AGRADO SU INTERES
 AL OBISPO GARMENDIA
 RUEGO A SU ILUSTRISIMA SU INTERES,
 ES UNA INFAMIA, QUE EL 666 FI-
 GURE CON LETRAS DE 20 METROS EN
 SU TEJADO, SUPERANDO LAS CRUCES SE
 TOU NEW YORK, DESDE ROCKEFELLER CEN-
TRE. RUEGO SU INTERES EN CONTACTAR
 CON LOS DESTINATARIOS DE 300/A,
 300/B Y 300/C.
 QUEDA POCO TIEMPO Y ENTRE
 OTRAS COSAS, HAY QUE AVISAR URGEN-
 TEMENTE; LAUREN BACALL, JACINTA DE
 GARABANDAL Y SU ESPOSO MARINE-USA
 Y A DORIS DAY.
 BESO SU PASTORAL ANILLO.

FIGURE 1 The original signature and initials of the sender have been deleted for confidentiality. Silvio is a pseudonym. Photograph of four letters written by Silvio in Spanish and addressed respectively to Joey Lomangino, Francisco Sánchez-Ventura, Ramón Andreu, and Bishop Garmendia. The four letters were originally on the same piece of paper.

SINKING, AFTER 30 MINUTES, INTO THE PACIFIC, YOUR ADDRESS WAS GIVEN TO ME BY OUR MUTUAL FRIEND P. BENAC, WHO I HAVE KNOWN FOR SOME TIME. IT IS THE BIG BANG.

I END BY ASKING YOU TO PERSUADE ALICE FAYE, AND ABOVE ALL TO EVACUATE FROM LOS ANGELES LORETTA YOUNG, YOUR FRIEND; GLENN AND PETER FORD. AND ALSO THE DANISH WOMAN. THE BISHOP OF THIS FRANCISCO GARMENDIA CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH THEIR ADDRESSES. THE TELEPHONE NUMBER HE HAD WHEN I CALLED HIM WAS 212-589-9867. THE NUMBERS OF RAMÓN ANDREU WERE 213-383--8206. TO ONE SIDE YOU WILL SEE MY MISSIVES TO GARMENDIA AND RAMÓN ANDREU. I CLOSE WITH A WARM EMBRACE.

POST SCRIPT: IN YOUR RESPONSE SEND THE POSTAL ADDRESSES OF RAMÓN ANDREU AND GARMENDIA. THANK YOU.

CNP-300/B/TO SANCHEZ-VENTURA

DEAR FRIEND, THERE IS A MARKED NEXIALISM, IN THE HASTE YOUR FRIENDS AND YOURSELF MADE IN GUADALAJARA. IN THE HASTE TO LEAVE EVERYTHING THAT YOU MUST ALL MAKE, WITH THE EARTHQUAKE OF STA. BARBARA. A WARM EMBRACE FROM [legible signature with his name].

CNP-300/C/TO RAMÓN ANDREU. S.I.²

DEAR FRIEND; IN THE PREVIOUS CNP I WRITE THE TEL. OF GARMENDIA AND OF LOMANGINO 516-385-9022. I REMIND YOU THAT YOU GAVE ME A PRINT OF YOUR BROTHER LUIS. FROM HEAVEN, YOUR MOTHER WILL BE PLEASED TO RECEIVE YOUR INTEREST. [Signed with initials].

CNP-300/D/TO BISHOP GARMENDIA

I BEG YOUR GRACE'S INTEREST. IT IS AN OUTRAGE, THAT 666 APPEARS IN 20-METER HIGH FIGURES ON YOUR ROOF, HIGHER THAN THE CROSSES OF ALL NEW YORK. FROM ROCKEFELLER CENTER I BEG YOUR INTEREST IN MAKING CONTACT WITH THE RECIPIENTS 300/A, 300/B AND 300/C.

LITTLE TIME REMAINS AND AMONG OTHER THINGS, LAUREN BACALL, JACINTA OF GARABANDAL AND HER HUSBAND MARINE-USA AND DORIS DAY MUST BE WARNED URGENTLY. I KISS YOUR PASTORAL RING. [legible signature with his name].

Recently, while going through my fieldwork papers, I once again came across the writings, which left me just as surprised as they had the first time I saw them. I still think of Silvio's letters as messages from a shipwreck survivor—messages without a bottle “delivered to the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything,” which Michel Foucault (1972, 22) describes in his writings on the ship of fools (*stultifera navis*). Today, I continue to wonder about the meaning of these letters, a true example of the existential crisis characteristic of the psychotic states that have been addressed in a remarkable anthropological literature,³ but about which we still know so little.

The diversity of unknowns continues to confirm my own ignorance about psychosis and its typical manifestations, like delusion, which in its most florid forms presents itself as a blow to our taken-for-granted system of conventions. As Schwartz et al. (2005) point out, in psychotic experience the basic components that allow for an awareness of the world are lost and the affected person must try to reconstitute them. The customary automatism of mental life is weakened in such a way that many of the conventions that are ordinarily taken for granted cannot continue to be so, and those affected must actively reexamine the ontological foundations of things. The result is a discourse and behavior that challenges not so much reason, as traditionally invoked, but the more day-to-day arena of common sense. Hence the combination of strangeness and anguish that the reading of Silvio's letters produces in us.

However, over time, this anguish abates and numbs our capacity for surprise. In other words, the easiest way for us to respond to our anguish is to interpret Silvio's letters as sickly, deauthorized messages and to turn their author into the subject of a monologue in which therapists, relatives, and occasionally ethnographers, like this writer, eventually find what they were looking for: unreasonableness, otherness, strangeness, or, through the clinical lens, diagnostic categories as notions of truth. This is a kind of truth that, we might say, borrowing from Goffman's (2017) concept of total institution, often ends up generating an idea of the “total patient” or the reduction of the affected person to a diagnostic category (Correa-Urquiza 2013; Martínez-Hernández et al. 2020). People like Silvio are the castaways drifting to any social island that will give them a mooring and not dehumanize them and turn them into a simple diagnostic category. They are affected by what Terradas (1992) defines as anti-biography: the silence, the emptiness, and the chaos that a civilization has projected onto a person, making them conventionally insignificant. But why can't these messages have a bottle in which to plow the oceans, even if it is only accepting Silvio's (neuro)diversity on the social scene? I have no clear answer to that question, but I suspect that a more sensitive phenomenological approach revealing Silvio's letters not as sickly narratives but as accounts of a way of inhabiting the world could be a modest bottle for this kind of message. That is the main objective of this text. But why now, thirty years later?

I must admit that only recently did I realize my prejudice in anticipating the complete illogicality of Silvio's letters when, out of sheer curiosity, I searched the internet for the names of the recipients and, one by one, they appeared as a mosaic of intertwined lives. A whole cultural context had escaped my ethnographic gaze, which was more focused on anticipating the unreasonableness than on Silvio's lifeworld. Thus, this text is also an act of belated reparation for my ethnographic ineptitude. It is about retrospective reflexivity and about what we can do with those narratives of our informants that we could not adequately understand and to which we responded with an objectification that dehumanized them. If Lispector (2020, 11) says, “I write as if I were going to save someone's life. Probably my own life,” here I write both to offer a bottle for Silvio's messages and to “save” myself as an ethnographer.

A LIFELESS READING

I met Silvio a few months before he gave me the letters, in the spring of 1991. Like the other users of the psychosocial rehabilitation center, Silvio's life was spent under the logic of the total patient, usually complemented by the associated phenomenon of total therapy, since every activity in the center was conceived or designed with a therapeutic objective. The problem was that if every action had to be therapeutic, the person could never shed their condition as patient. Everything was organized at the center to relentlessly remind them of their status as persons diagnosed with

a severe mental disorder. I remember Silvio as a corpulent man, with handicaps derived from the sequelae of a previous suicide attempt, assembling felt-tip pens in what looked like an improvised production line. For the work, he received a small stipend—not much, since it was already understood that the purpose of the activity was the omnipresent therapy. That was the morning routine. In the afternoons, there were discussions about shopping at the supermarket, the price of things, life at home, relationships with parents and caregivers. The rehabilitation center was a backyard of broken lives, or a “parking lot for madmen,” as Javier, another patient, used to say. I remember Silvio participating in those talks, self-absorbed, a victim of the tedium, and dragging out his words little by little, probably as a result of the medication.

Some of the patients at the center were eager to narrate their experience; others had long since retreated into self-absorption. Silvio belonged to the latter group. He was sparing with words and often laconic, and due to this difficulty in communicating with him, he was not one of my main informants. Interviewing him meant facing long silences that eventually ended with an unexpected answer, a nonanswer, which was in the end an answer, his answer, but which I did not know how to take in or handle. For that reason, I have few notes from our meetings. When I asked him about the content of the letters, Silvio's most frequent response was to repeat the warnings automatically, like someone dictating a letter to an assistant, a behavior he probably observed in his father or in someone else—who knows?—but that in any case was in tune with the bureaucratic cataloging of the missives under headings such as CNP-300/A, CNP-300/B, CNP-300/C, and CNP-300/D. I was never able to find out what these headings referred to. After the automatism, he most often fell into silence, calmer.

But I do know some things about Silvio. I know that he made three suicide attempts, one of which almost ended his life when he threw himself onto the subway tracks from a platform-access bridge. The report of that event indicates that he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia some years earlier and that he explained his suicide attempt was due to a terrifying experience of auditory hallucinations that commanded him to end his life. I also know that he came from a well-to-do family in Barcelona and that he had had an apparently sheltered childhood in which he lacked for nothing. Silvio repeatedly said that his family was “very Catholic” and that his father had been an economist who advised the Minister of Industry and had received awards from the municipal government of Barcelona. Reviewing this information almost thirty years later, I have confirmed that data. His father often wrote columns in the 1950s in *La Vanguardia*, a well-known Catalan newspaper, and appeared in the news of the time as an interlocutor of Franco's government authorities when they visited Barcelona. His father's name also appears to be related to a curious group that held meetings on ufology and esotericism and that in the 1970s published a magazine on the occult sciences that had a wide circulation for two decades.

In the various conversations I had about Silvio with the professionals at the center, his life and his letters were overshadowed by other apparently more important information about his disorder. Comments such as “He is a very delusional patient who has frequent periods of mutism,” “Since the medication was increased, he is calmer,” and “His ‘foreclosure’ [forclusion] does not allow him to sustain a bond with anyone else” were typical of the daily management of mental suffering, whether they were held from behavioral and biomedical perspectives or from the Lacanian psychoanalysis that was so favored at the time. Similar information was distilled from the clinical report, which I was able to access without restriction, for that was how limited the data-protection law was at the time, or at least in its application to the castaways of psychosis. But what exactly was the content of Silvio's delusion? Why was he mute? Could he not maintain a bond with anyone else? Could the problem perhaps be that we were not interested in his lifeworld because deep down what interested us was the code of the disorder, the language of the unconscious, the structure of psychosis, and so many other objectifications? In fact, I too was trapped in the refuge of objectification. My initial attention to his letters was like that of the botanist who has discovered a new specimen. I could use them to test my structuralist hypothesis about language in psychosis, with its unrestrained paradigmatic axis forcing false metaphors, since they were prisoners of their literality (Martínez-Hernández 1998). In this way, I both soothed and channeled my anguish about not knowing what these letters meant—letters that are not really letters because, as far as I know, they were never sent. So what exactly are they, then?

In the analysis I conducted thirty years ago, I concluded that Silvio's letters were an example of the unusual implausibility that articulates delusional discourse, an implausibility that does not follow the conventional forms of constructing either reality or fiction. By applying a model based on both Ricoeur's (1969) conflict of interpretations and Eco's (2016) limits of interpretation, I proposed three unsuccessful readings of the letters, which I summarize below.

First reading. The implausibility of these letters does not seem to correspond to a cultural production of fantasy—myths or legends, for instance—that also includes an anthology of characters, beings, and events that populate the earth. Unlike these fabulous cultural creations that acquire the status of shared reality, such as centaurs or unicorns, Silvio's text is quite idiosyncratic in that it mixes cultural fragments and real characters based on a subjective logic that eventually shatters both what is regulated and the regulation itself. It does not therefore seem to be a logic of the concrete as defined by Lévi-Strauss (2002, 2014) for mythological thought, or a bricoleur of the spirit whose symbolic fixes and remedies can acquire a certain condition of shared social reality, but rather a solitary bricoleur who, with great suffering and almost no rest, composes, decomposes, and recomposes an arrangement of symbols, signs, and segments of cultural stories.

Second reading. Neither does the implausibility perceived in these letters seem to correspond to the type of representational strategies that are essentially hidden codes referring to something without naming it (Eco 2016). For example, imagine for a moment that when Silvio speaks of evacuating Loretta Young, Glenn and Peter Ford, and the Danish woman from Santa Barbara, he is referring to a group of clandestine political activists in Barcelona who must leave the city to avoid being caught by the police, for which the earthquake of Santa Barbara is a coded term. By the same token, we could speculate that the earthquake that had already happened in San Diego might mean that a police raid had also taken place previously in Barcelona. “Bishop Garmendia” might refer to the coordinator or link between this supposed political organization and the people who



FIGURE 2 Beginning of the rocky path that pilgrims take to reach Los Pinos. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Photograph of La Calleja in San Sebastián de Garabandal (Cantabria-Spain) with the indication for pilgrims to access Los Pinos and the hermitage of Nuestra Señora del Carmen.

must urgently be warned because “little time remains,” codenames of activists in the same network. Indeed, we might consider an interpretation of the text as a deciphering. But there is an underlying problem that precludes this interpretation, or at least makes it somewhat unfeasible: Silvio is not a political activist, nor are the police looking for him, nor is he in contact with a network of people with aliases like Lomangino or Obispo Garmendia. In short, the context lets us down.

Third reading. An alternative to the hypotheses of the cultural fable and the coded message is that Silvio’s text is simply a narrative creation. His mystery could be a literary representation created for entertainment. The most incomprehensible passages might even be interpreted as the result of some narrative artifice devised by the author, in the same line as works of literature like Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, which not only exude fiction but also inaccessibility. However, there are some obstacles to this work-of-fiction hypothesis. One of the basic tenets of this theory is not met: Silvio says the text corresponds to a reality from his own experience, not a fictional narrative. All the cited events and characters form part of his existence and his certainties. He affirms and insists on the authenticity of what is written in these letters, and it does not occur to him that they could be interpreted as metaphors, coded messages, or fictionalized stories. Their literal meaning is the right meaning, and he often hit the walls and shouted at any expression of disbelief.

The three readings led more to definitions of what Silvio’s letters are not than what they really are. Probably the only interpretation that bears scrutiny is that of the solitary bricoleur, which I will return to later. But in general, they hardly make explicit the paradox that Silvio’s experience, though intensely felt and lived by him, is implausible to others. The delusional discourse is quite opaque to interpretation, and, as Jenkins (2015) points out, it is likely that the psychotic experience may be as incomprehensible among the unaffected as among those affected. However, by limiting myself to the formal dimension of language, I was helping to shrink the existential content of Silvio’s experience and thus emphasize the idea of a radical Otherness. My first approach to his letters was a lifeless reading; it was also a worldless reading.

AN INTERTWINED WORLD

I barely managed to incorporate the world, his world, into my previous readings, a world that seemed to be crumbling and that urged him to warn of such a catastrophe to unknown recipients I made no effort to identify. It was not until almost thirty years later that I realized that all their lives were interwoven by an amazing event that began on June 18, 1961, in the small village of San Sebastián de Garabandal, better known simply as Garabandal, in the northern Spanish region of Cantabria. There, at 8:30 p.m. that Sunday, four girls between the ages of eleven and twelve, Conchita González, Jacinta González, María Dolores (Mari Loli) Mazón, and María Cruz González—the second one named in Silvio’s letters—were “picking”



FIGURE 3 The visionary girls of Garabandal had their first supernatural encounter in this place, specifically with an angel that they later identified as St. Michael. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue] Motif commemorating the first apparition in La Calleja, San Sebastián de Garabandal. The date of the apparition is included: June 18, 1961.

(stealing) apples from the schoolmaster's tree on the outskirts of town. Later they went to a rocky lane called La Calleja between the town and a promontory known as Los Pinos (the pine trees). As they munched on the apples, they heard an explosion that sounded like thunder, even though the sky was cloudless (García de la Riva 2016, 29; González and Daley 1983; Saavedra 2017, 33). Then Conchita went into ecstasy, her eyes fixed on the sky. When the other girls, frightened by this unexpected state, were about to go home to inform their mothers, they too went into a trance. In front of them an angel had appeared that the girls later identified as Saint Michael the Archangel. This first appearance was brief but did not go unnoticed by the neighbors of this mountain village of only 300 inhabitants (García de la Riva, 2016).⁴

The angel continued to appear and spoke to the girls for the first time on July 1 of the same year (Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). Smiling, he told them, "I have come to announce to you a visit by the Virgin, under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, who will appear to you tomorrow, Sunday." By then the news had spread quickly among the towns around Garabandal, so that on July 2, 1961, a crowd of thousands flocked to the usual place of the apparitions at 6 p.m. They witnessed how the girls fell to their knees on the rocky ground and looked up entranced, with smiles on their lips. The girls reported how a bright light first appeared, followed by the Virgin flanked by two angels. They spoke to the Virgin about their daily lives in the village. Conchita, who from the beginning stood out as the leader of the visionary girls, said it was like talking to her mother after she had been away for a while (González 1963). On July 4, the Virgin revealed a message to the girls but warned them not to make it public until October 18 (Fundación Hogar de la Madre 2018).

By the end of July 1961, the apparitions were occurring at least once every day and lasted from ten minutes to several hours. In August, there were changes in their body postures and in their somatic modes of attention (see Csordas 1993) to the (in)visible presences: they knelt down, bent their heads backward forcefully to touch the ground in a clean blow, or they fell one on top of the other, forming capricious figures (Saint Michael's Garabandal Center 2003; Serré and Caux 2001). They also began to march ecstatically in and around the village, during which time they kept their eyes fixed on the sky but without tripping.⁵



FIGURE 4 In Los Pinos, Conchita had the revelation of the Warning and the Great Miracle that would coincide with a great event in the Catholic Church. It is currently a place of pilgrimage for believers in the Marian apparitions of Garabandal. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Picture of Los Pinos, located on a promontory where most of the Garabandal events took place.



FIGURE 5 The picture shows one of the most important places of pilgrimage for believers in the Marian apparitions of Garabandal. It is usually a crowded place with believers from all over the world, although not as much as Fatima or Lourdes. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Picture of a modern representation of the Virgin at Los Pinos in San Sebastián de Garabandal.

It was common practice during the apparitions to offer religious objects, such as rosaries, reliquaries, medals, crucifixes, and wedding rings, to the Virgin for her to kiss and bless. People would deliver such objects to the house of one of the girls the day before, and during the ecstasy, the girls offered them to the Virgin for her blessing. According to reports from some participants, the girls then returned the object to its owner, never once making a mistake. Some of the owners cried, while others fainted (Puncernau 1974). It is estimated that more than 1,000 objects were blessed during the almost four years of the apparitions (Garabandal Journal 2018).

Ramón (and Luis) Andreu

Among the many clergymen (more than 1,000) who came to Garabandal to learn firsthand about the events, the visit of Luis Andreu is worth mentioning. He was one of six siblings, four of whom were Jesuits, like him, including Ramón Andreu (1997), who was present at the apparitions, along with his brother Luis, and to whom Silvio addressed one of his letters. On their first visit, Fathers Luis and Ramón had been skeptical about the nature of the apparitions; however, on August 8, the former made another visit to the town while the latter was in Valladolid. That day, after nightfall, Luis was among the crowd that watched the girls in their ecstasy. Suddenly his face was transfigured, and then he shouted “miracle” four times: he had witnessed with the girls the apparition of the Virgin. Later that night, on his return trip, he said, “I’m full of happiness. . . . The girls have given us an example of how to treat the Virgin. For me there can be no doubt. Why would Our Lady have chosen us? Today is the happiest day of my life.” He then coughed, bowed his head, and passed away at the age of thirty-six (Andreu 1997; Sant Michael’s Garabandal Center 2003).

For his part, Ramón was the author of one of the reports commissioned by the diocese of Santander on the apparitions and became one of the defenders of their supernatural condition. The girls reported to him that they had entered into dialogue with the spirit of his brother Luis. Ramón had observed the visionary girls reciting the Hail Mary in perfect classical Greek while in ecstasy, so he asked them to recite it again in that language when they were in their ordinary state as well. The girls laughed and said that they did not know Greek, and that it had been the spirit of Father Luis who had recited this prayer to them word for word while they were in ecstasy (Garabandal Journal 2018).

I now understand that this is the context in which we must place Silvio’s letter to Ramón Andreu, which evokes the priest giving him a prayer card of his brother Luis, who may well be considered the fifth visionary of Garabandal. However, written in his singular and fragmented syntax, the letter makes no mention of the connection established between Ramón Andreu and Jacinta de Garabandal when their lives intersected in Los Angeles: the former was transferred from Central America to Los Angeles in 1971, where he remained for the rest of his life; the latter moved there after her marriage to Jeffrey Moynihan, the “U.S. Marine” also mentioned in the letters. The writing ends with a mysterious “FROM HEAVEN, YOUR MOTHER WILL BE PLEASED TO RECEIVE YOUR INTEREST,” probably urging Ramón Andreu to pay attention to his warnings, just as he did with those of the girls.

Joey Lomangino

As the girls had announced, on October 18, 1961, at Los Pinos, they read aloud the message of the Virgin:

We must make many sacrifices, perform much penance, and visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently. But, first, we must lead good lives. If we do not, a chastisement will befall us. The cup is already filling up and, if we do not change, a very great chastisement will come upon us.

During 1962, the girls had regular visions. In one of them, they asked the Virgin to bring about a miracle to convince the crowds, to which she responded that one day when Conchita received communion from the angel, the host would materialize and be visible in her mouth. Conchita replied that this would be a little miracle (*milagru* in Cantabrian dialect), since she considered that the host she usually received from the angel was always material and therefore visible. Thus, and after giving the fortnight’s notice, on July 18, 1962—a holiday during the Franco regime marking the “Military Uprising,” the coup d’état against the legitimate government of the Second Spanish Republic—hundreds of people came to witness the miracle. Many of those present left the place in frustration after a long wait, but before 1 a.m. on July 19, Conchita came out of her house in ecstasy. She turned the corner and fell to her knees in the street. She stuck out her tongue and witnesses close by her claimed her mouth was empty. Suddenly, a bright white host materialized on the girl’s tongue. Alejandro Damians immortalized the scene with his camera (Figures 6 and 7).⁶

By January 1963, Mari Loli, Jacinta, and Mari Cruz no longer had visions. Conchita continued to experience them, but less frequently. In that same year, Conchita announced that after Pope John XXIII there would be only three more popes and then the end of time would come, although not the end of the world. It was also the year in which another of Silvio’s letter recipients arrived in Garabandal.

Born in New York, Joey Lomangino had lost his sight and smell in an accident in 1947, when he was sixteen. In 1961, and on his doctor’s recommendation to take a vacation in Europe, he went to visit his uncle in southern Italy. Once in Europe, and following the advice of Padre Pio, an Italian Franciscan Capuchin with sores (stigmata) on his feet and hands who was considered a living saint, Lomangino made the first of several visits to



FIGURE 6 The plaque commemorates the moment when Conchita González received communion from the Angel. Witnesses claim that the host materialized on her tongue. Alejandro Damians, from Barcelona, immortalized the scene with his camera (see note 6). (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]
 Plaque commemorating the *milagru* (little miracle). The text states: “In front of this house took place the visible communion given by the Angel to Conchita Gonzalez on Sunday, July 18, 1962.”

Garabandal and met the young seers (González and Daley 1983; Lomangino 1996). After his return to New York, Lomangino received a letter from Conchita written on March 19, 1964:

St. Joseph's Day, 1964. Dear Joey, Today in a locution in the Pines, Our Lady told me to tell you that the voice you heard was hers. That you will receive new eyes on the day of the great miracle. She also told me that the charity home you will found in New York will give great glory to God. Conchita González. (González and Daley 1983; Lomangino 1996)

Silvio's letter to Lomangino also mentions that he will recover his sight, although the author prophesizes that it will take until 1998 or 1999, mimicking Conchita's authority as a seer without actually quoting her. In this letter, Silvio unexpectedly combines a syntax typical of business letters and warnings about healings and earthquakes that will affect various Californian cities, including Los Angeles. He begs Lomangino to persuade various Hollywood celebrities to get to safety. Among them is Loretta Young, to whom Silvio attributes a friendly relationship with Lomangino. I have found no record of this relationship, but Silvio may have obtained (not necessarily fabricated) this information from his constant exposure to Catholic activities during the Franco regime. Loretta Young and Joey Lomangino were fervent supporters of the Family Rosary Crusade, a worldwide campaign founded by Patrick Peyton, an Irish American priest. The Family Rosary Crusade received funding and support from the CIA in Latin America as an instrument in the war against communism and organized rosary rallies around the world, including in Silvio's Barcelona, which in 1965 brought together nearly 800,000 faithful in simultaneous prayer.

Until his death on June 18, 2014, Lomangino enthusiastically promoted the Garabandal apparitions, and in 1968 he founded the organization The Workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel with the purpose of spreading the message to the whole world. In fact, Lomangino was one of the main exegetes of the Garabandal apparitions. For example, in 2009, a few years before his death, he tried to bring some order to the girls' messages, especially to clarify the confusion generated in the public by the difference between the Warning and the Great Miracle that Conchita would announce in 1965.

In January 1965, Conchita had gone into ecstasy for two hours at Los Pinos, during which the Virgin revealed a Warning like the one Silvio announced in his letters: a special phenomenon would occur in heaven and would be felt by everyone on earth, regardless of religion or social status. No one would escape it. At some point everything would be suspended, and everyone would see the evil they had done and the good they had failed to do. It would be very painful. The Warning would serve as a purification to correct the conscience of the world and prepare it for the Great Miracle, which would occur on a Thursday at 8:30 p.m. between March 8 and April or May 16, but never on the 7th or 17th, in Los Pinos. In



FIGURE 7 The text was controversial, as it mentioned that many clergy were on the road to perdition. It probably reflects the conflict within the Catholic Church between the defenders and detractors of the Second Vatican Council. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Commemorative plaque of the second message of the Garabandal apparitions. The text states: “As my Message of the 18th of October has not been complied with, and as it has not been made known to the world, I am telling you that this is the last one. Previously, the Cup was filling; now, it is brimming over. Many Cardinals, Bishops and priests are following the road to perdition, and with them they are taking many more souls. Ever less importance is being given to the Holy Eucharist. We should turn the wrath of God away from us by our own efforts. If you ask His forgiveness with a sincere heart. He will pardon you. I, your Mother, through the intercession of St. Michael the Archangel, wish to tell you that you should make amends. You are now being given the last warnings. I love you very much, and I do not want your condemnation. Ask Us sincerely and We shall grant your plea . . . Reflect on the Passion of Jesus.”

fact, Conchita claimed to know the date and vowed to announce it to the world eight days in advance. According to her testimony,⁷ it would coincide with a great event in the Catholic Church. Everyone in the village would see it. The sick would be cured. Sinners would be converted, and unbelievers would believe. As a result of the Great Miracle, Russia would be converted. Then a supernatural sign would remain until the end of time.

Bishop Garmendia

On November 13, 1965, the Virgin appeared to Conchita and said to her, “This will be the last time you see me here” (García de la Riva 2016). The following years marked a period of confusion for the young seers. Conchita and the other girls began to doubt the veracity of the visions, which, according to them, had already been anticipated by the Virgin. The girls were faced with an avalanche of people anxious to hear their testimonies. They were treated like living saints, and the crowds came to touch them, to question them, to ask for their intercession for various causes. This situation of social asphyxiation led the young women to seek new horizons.

Through Maria Saraco, another eyewitness and promoter of the Garabandal phenomenon in the United States, Mari Loli went to Massachusetts in 1972. The same year, Conchita settled in New York with the support of Dr. Jerónimo Domínguez, a Spanish physician and Catholic activist who ran for mayor of New York City in 1981 as a candidate of the Right to Life Party, and also Bishop Garmendia, another of the recipients of Silvio’s letters. In fact, Francisco Garmendia Ayestarán was assigned in 1975 to the Archdiocese of New York and later, in 1977, named its bishop. He served as pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Church in the Bronx and continued to serve as an auxiliary bishop until his resignation in 2001. He passed away in 2005, and according to the *Bronx Times* of June 29, 2011 (Signorelli 2011), the corner of Fairmount Place and Crotona Parkway was officially renamed Bishop Francisco Garmendia Place.

As we know, Silvio’s letter to Garmendia warns again of the imminent Santa Barbara earthquake and insists on the need to evacuate Lauren Bacall, Jacinta de Garabandal, and her husband, a US marine, as well as Doris Day. The parallel between the crumbling world Silvio describes and his own self is not hard to discern; hence his strenuous attempt to mediate a world of lives interconnected by the Garabandal apparitions. Despite

his dulled automatism, he would write and then insistently repeat the warning, piecing the world back together with scraps from here and there, as when he tells Garmendia of his indignation at the existence of a huge “666” in the “Rockefeller Center” that is taller than all the crosses in New York. Silvio was probably referring to 660 Fifth Avenue (formerly 666 Fifth Avenue), built in 1957 and located in Midtown Manhattan. The building was designed with a “666” address emblazoned on top, which was removed in 2002. I do not know if Silvio was aware of it, but whatever the case, at that time the diabolical 666 represented the threat of an impending catastrophe looming over his lifeworld.

Francisco Sánchez-Ventura

The four visionaries rebuilt their lives far from Garabandal, although they continue to visit the village some summers. Mari Cruz is the only one who remained in Spain, in Avilés. In 1984, she gave a statement to the newspaper *El País* in which she said, “I never saw the Virgin in Los Pinos or any heavenly personage. I believe that if Conchita had not been with us that afternoon of June 18 at the teacher’s farm, the story would not have been told” (Gijón 1984). According to Mari Cruz, Conchita incited the others and convinced them that she had seen an angel. Under great societal pressure, the girls prolonged the apparitions for three years: “We were harassed into seeing the angel and then the Virgin, and those fanatics did not stop until they had a written message, as had always happened in other apparitions, like those in Lourdes or in Fatima.” She later retracted these statements in a letter interview conducted by Mother Maria de las Nieves García in which she reaffirmed the veracity of the apparitions (González and García 2005).

Whether the girls’ trances, or those of most of them, were true or fake, or whether they were a kind of *folie à quatre* (or *à cinq*, if we include Luis Andreu), the social recognition of their veracity was considerable in the context of a Francoist Spain whose leaders understood Catholicism as a propaganda tool in the war against pro-democracy groups—then in exile or underground, and deliberately demonized as the “red devil.” Some elements of this apparition story, such as the coincidence of the date of the *milagru* (July 18) with the Military Uprising and the prophecy that Russia would be converted, suggest that the girls were the embodied image of a reactionary political and moral world. I do not know if the girls were explicitly guided to say what they said, but in any case, it was not necessary. They had embodied a model of the Catholic woman devoted to the regime.

But the story is nuanced. From the beginning of the visions, the official position of the Catholic Church was ambiguous, probably as a result of the tensions between the advocates of the Second Vatican Council and the conservative sector against this reform, associated then, as now, with Garabandalism. Conchita was called to Rome twice for questioning by the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and received the pope’s blessing. The two reports into the events reached the verdict that the supernaturality of the facts was not established (*no constat de supernaturalitate*). Nevertheless, various believers deemed the story to be wholly authentic. These included the previously mentioned Ramón Andreu, Joey Lomangino, and Bishop Garmendia, but also many others, such as the French mystic Marta Robin; Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who was godmother to Conchita’s third daughter; and the above-mentioned Padre Pio. This position was also held by Father Benac, a Jesuit missionary in India, who interviewed Jacinta in Los Angeles and who is also referred to in Silvio’s letters, as well as the last of the recipients of his letters, Francisco Sánchez-Ventura, unmentioned thus far.

Sánchez-Ventura was a lawyer, a professor of economics, and an activist against the Second Vatican Council. In the letter Silvio addresses to him, he speaks hermetically of a marked “nexialism,” a term that, I hypothesize, may refer to the idea Alfred Elton van Vogt (2008) coined in his science fiction novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* to define antispecialization science, or the science of “applied whole-ism.” It is likely that Silvio would have read the book or heard this word at home. I can say little about that. What I do know is that Sánchez-Ventura was one of the main popularizers of the Garabandal events, about which he wrote several books, among them *The Apparitions Are Not a Myth: Garabandal* (Sánchez-Ventura 2000) (Figure 8).

THE ECHO OF THE WORLD

When I met Silvio in the 1990s, I was completely ignorant of the Garabandal apparitions, even though my maternal family is also from northern Spain. Like many of my generation who were born in exile during the Franco regime, such stories were to be avoided, something I simply did not empathize with, due to the connivance of the Catholic Church with fascism in Spain. Moreover, in the 1990s, Google had yet to appear. Only recently did I realize this oversight in my reading of Silvio’s letters and my prejudice in anticipating the complete illogicality of his writings. Fascinated by the discovery of this world of apparitions, young seers, prophecies, and singular characters, in the summer of 2019 I went to Garabandal with my wife, a psychiatrist and the author of the photographs in this article, in order to start an ethnographic investigation. Ironically, Garabandal had been “revealed” to me as a new research topic. But that is another story. The pertinent question here is why Silvio could not inhabit the world as another character of the Garabandal phenomenon when his missives included the prophecy of a disaster that reproduced this fascinating story of apparitions.

Unlike the girls, Silvio was never able to rebuild his life, nor inhabit a social place that would allow him to alleviate his condition as a mental patient. It is curious how someone can see a unicorn or an angel and defend its existence outside fable, yet not end up on the ship of fools as a result,



FIGURE 8 Francisco Sánchez-Ventura was one of the advocates of the veracity of the apparitions of Garabandal and author of the book *The Apparitions Are Not a Myth: Garabandal*. (Photograph by Leticia Medeiros-Ferreira) [This figure appears in color in the online issue] Plaque in memory of Miguel Ángel González-Gay Domenech (photo above left), founder of the Cenacles of Prayer of Padre Pio in Spain. In the lower right photo, he appears with Francisco Sánchez-Ventura. The text reads: "The cenacles of the Padre Pio prayer groups remember our founder in Spain and pray to God for his soul. Miguel, you brought us to the Virgin Mary, and the Virgin Mary to Jesus. 02-11-1928 We love you 05-11-2007. Miguel Ángel González-Gay Domenech organized ascents to Garabandal [Garabandal] since 1968. Photograph with Don Francisco Sánchez-Ventura."

as long as the experience is accepted or shared. In my first readings of Silvio's letters, I concluded that the delusion was established in a curious conjunction between the implausible and the biographical, since Silvio experienced the seemingly impossible as real. However, the same can be said of the Garabandal visionaries. For years, the Garabandal girls had visions of the Virgin who, according to their accounts, even played hide and seek with them. Four girls playing hide and seek with the Virgin might seem just as implausible as the scene of Alice Faye, Loretta Young, and Glenn Ford evacuating Los Angeles at Silvio's bidding. However, the girls of Garabandal had the institutional backing of their community and of some sectors of the Catholic Church—probably because it was strategic for them in the time of the Second Vatican Council and the Cold War—and their voices did not lead to their deauthorization and abandonment to the crossroads of madness. The four girls were able to overcome the disbelief of some of their compatriots and beyond. Their agency was not obliterated, as Silvio's was. They were—and still are—the voice of a world.

In my view, there is a phenomenological concept that can shed light on certain differences between the case of the visionary girls and Silvio's experience. I refer to the concept of "crisis of presence" (*crisi della presenza*) coined by Ernesto De Martino, a figure in Italian anthropology and a pioneer of phenomenological and existential anthropology (De Martino 1959, 2000, 2002, 2004). In short, the crisis of presence is the possibility of nonbeing that is represented in the loss of the capacity for action on the objective world, in such a way that the self is acted on by the world (*essere-agito-da*) more than acting on its own, thus losing its agency. The crisis of presence depicts the fragility facing a world that assaults and collapses the being, showing an indeterminateness between presence and the world, a blurring of their boundaries (De Martino 2004, 103–4). For De Martino, one of its expressions is the case of *latah*, a culture-bound syndrome and a dissociative state characterized by echolalia and echopraxia. In these cases, we are not witnessing a representation of the world but a world invading the presence in such a way that the subject does not represent the whisper of the wind shaking the leaves of a tree but rather *are* the whisper of the wind itself shaking the leaves (De Martino 2004, 136–37). The crisis of presence is the threat of losing the distinction between subject and object, between thought and action, between representation and judgment. It is the cry of one who is teetering on the edge of the abyss (Ferrari 2014, 101); it is the anguish of not being (*esserci*) in a human history (De Martino 2000).

Clearly, the crisis of presence does not show the same phenomenology in both cases. The ecstasies of the visionary girls were always partial abandonments that showed a way back to their usual agency and to the differentiation between self and world, a world that it is important to remember is made up of human and nonhuman or extra-human subjectivities (i.e., the Virgin, St. Michael, the spirit of Luis Andreu). The presence of the girls is porous to the world but is the result of a pact that includes both dissolution and continuity so that, as De Martino (2004, 151) would say, "the being-in-the-world leaves the conflict as one in several, or several in one," which is also to recognize an intersubjective plot enabling the

conflict and its resolution, a community of meanings and affections that are enacted in the ecstatic body, as when the girls offer objects of the faithful to the Virgin for her blessing and then return them to their surprised, touched owners. Because of this social and affective reception, the girls had the capacity to suspend the world, and, in this sense, they were full of agency. In De Martino's words, they led a process of dehistoricization (*deistorificazione*) (De Martino 2000, 37; Saunders 1993), where to dehistoricize is to stop the world in the face of the crisis of presence by offering a fictitious, but at the same time convincing, world as a refuge. Following De Martino (1995), we can say that through dehistoricization, the girls entered a meta-historical plane (the mythical-ritual complex) and found in it the way in which others resolved their crises. In fact, they had at their disposal a whole tradition of Marian apparitions, such as those of Fatima and Lourdes. Interestingly, the Fatima apparitions were widespread in Spain between 1945 and 1954 and gave rise to new apparitions, especially by children, throughout the country (Christian 1996).

For his part, Silvio showed a presence in crisis that was acted by the world, since he was not only thinking about the risk of an ending world but seemed to feel, experience, and embody that risk in such a way that his presence became extremely porous to the touch of the world. In Silvio's letters, it is very difficult to distinguish between his presence and the world. At least for me, it was never clear whether the catastrophes he announced were of the world or of his existential state. For example, what is at risk when he writes "IT'S THE BIG BANG," a universe or an imploding self? Curiously, Silvio spoke to me of warnings, of characters associated with Garabandal that I was unaware of, and of impending disasters, but never of the girls' visions. It is as if Silvio's visions had taken the place of the girls' visions, or, perhaps, as if after a long experience of auditory hallucinations invading his presence, the world was already himself, as his existence was already a simple echo of the world. However, I think that this last existential state of echoing the world was more a risk that Silvio was forced to cope with than an already consummated dissolution. He was on the edge and struggling to at least remain there. I now try to explain this.

The world creates resonances in Silvio's existence, as in any existence, but in his case the boundaries between self and world are exceptionally blurred. Parnas, Bovet, and Zahavi (2002) would say that in these conditions the *I*, the *we*, and the *world* belong together. A coherent hypothesis to explain the psychotic experience is that the automatic mental life that characterizes daily activity is affected, and the person must constantly reconstruct the *I*, the *we*, and the *world*. Hence the profound ontological perplexity that appears in these conditions and which places those affected at risk of simply being an echo of the world. As Schwartz et al. (2005, 107) point out from an interesting phenomenological and neuroscientific informed point of view, because "the automatic synthetic processes that normally constitute the common-sense lifeworld are weakened in schizophrenic mental life, the space, time, and causality of the lifeworld undergo de-structuring." Thus, Silvio encounters a world in constant unbuilding and must continually reexamine the ontological foundations of things, people, and himself. His letters can be understood as a desperate struggle to safeguard his presence at risk, though as only a solitary bricoleur can do, with bits and pieces that end up forming a kind of collage in which images of a collective past, such as the Garabandal apparitions, echo into a subjective experience and project themselves into an imagined future determined by catastrophes but also by a possible salvation "IN WHICH THE HEALING OF THE SICK WILL TAKE PLACE."

Good (1994, 126) has made penetrating use of Schutz's phenomenological definition of commonsense reality to show how in people with chronic pain there is an alienation from common time and inner and outer time seem out of synch. Silvio's experience undoubtedly shares this alienation, but we know that in his case there is something more profound. As Rahimi (2015, 167) points out, affected people such as Silvio fall short "of that final 'capacity' of putting together fragments of meaning using the blueprints of collectively endorsed common sense." This shortcoming affects the solitary bricoleur's ability to locate himself in a shared temporality. Silvio's automatism in repeating the warnings of his letters can be understood as a collapse of the attention required to inhabit a present time in favor of a past (memory) that returns and a future that is anticipated. That is why the alienation in this case is not only in relation to a common time perspective but seems to act on the very capacity of the self to become present in the immediate now.

However, I do not think that Silvio's presence has dissolved in the world such that it is totally lost in it but rather that he is investing all his efforts in reconstructing the ontological bases of existence in order to avoid the dissolution that would turn him into a simple echo. Interestingly, in his study of schizophrenia in Turkey, Rahimi (2015) uses the analogy of the city desolated by an earthquake to understand psychosis. In that city there remain some structures that act as points of semiotic reference (*points de capiton*, or "quilting point," in Lacanian psychoanalysis) from which those affected attempt to orient their chaotic experience. These basic points are not different from those used by unaffected persons and are "simple concepts, typically learned early, and almost without an exception signifiers associated with great amounts of power, such as God and his prophets or the Devil and his associates . . . and so on" (Rahimi 2015, 203). In Silvio's experience, the motifs associated with the Garabandal apparitions are the remaining structures for reconstructing the world and, perhaps more fundamentally, his presence in it. Silvio's letters probably express that ultimate point of anchorage that seeks to avoid the dissolution of his presence. We can consider that Silvio is not skilled in reconstructing the "pre-earthquake city," but his will is there; it remains in reiteration and automatism, in his attempt to have voice and agency in the world of the Garabandal apparitions. At this point, De Martino's notion of presence particularly makes sense to talk about Silvio's experience because it includes a will to be (*esserci*) in a human world.⁸ Although Silvio faces a profound ontological perplexity, he shows a painful determination to be (*esserci*) in a human history.

But his determination falls into a social vacuum that intensifies the ultimate risk of Silvio's presence: becoming an echo. He did not meet with a receptive community; rather, he provoked an "immunitary" social rejection, à la Esposito (2002). Given this context, and unlike the crisis of presence among the visionary girls, there was no collective way out of the conflict, nor partial surrender, nor the capacity to dehistoricize the world in order to recompose both the world and the presence in it. His collapse of the limits between the presence and the world was increased by the absence of a warp of intersubjectivities. His voice was not socially recognized as the voice of a world or as a painful struggle for being in a human history but was

recognized as a sick and distorted echo that mattered to no one. His voice was only received as a sick narrative, in which the disease spoke, not him. In fact, internally Silvio was confronting a world in constant unbuilding and externally a dehumanizing incomprehension of his struggle, including my incomprehension.

We can understand Silvio's experience as the presence trying to be in a human history in one of its most precarious states. Nevertheless, De Martino (2002, 161) considers that the so-called worlds of psychotic people are a systematic denial of all possible worlds because they are, he argues, the temptation to recede onto the level of nature, where presence does not have a place. I think he is wrong, just as I was wrong to see in Silvio's letters only sick narratives and lifeless tropes. De Martino is wrong not to observe in the psychotic experience also a will to be in a world in the face of the risk of dissolution. Furthermore, that negative argument reinforces the idea that psychosis annihilates every trace of humanity, when it is also a possibility of the existential becoming (*divenire*). People who suffer from Silvio's condition observe and experience a side of reality that is unknown to us, but that does not make their experiences any less human. Silvio's delusional experience is not the systematic denial of all possible worlds, but the presence in its extreme positivity.

Within Silvio's experience lies a continuous struggle. Acknowledging it socially can help to understand his letters not as simple deauthorized messages but as a testimony of the struggle of the solitary bricoleur in the face of an experience in which everything collapses and becomes indistinct, in which the ultimate risk is the dissolution of presence. The acknowledgment of his struggle is probably not enough, I know. But I would like to think that, in the very act of acknowledging, we are also giving a social place to his voice and thus enabling a certain refuge for the existence of people affected by these conditions. That is probably what they expect from us. Thirty years ago, I was not able to see that.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article is dedicated to Silvio and his struggle to remain in a human history. I was able to write this text thanks to my stay as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar (2017) in the Department of Anthropology at UC San Diego, where I presented a preliminary version of this paper in the Psychological and Medical Anthropology Seminar Series. I am grateful to Thomas Csordas and Janis Jenkins for their advice, comments, criticisms, and suggestions for an earlier version of this paper. I also wish to thank Susanne Ådahl, Nofit Itzhak and Fernando Vidal, as well as the editor-in-chief of *American Anthropologist* and the anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments. Any errors and omissions are entirely mine. This text has received financial support from Institut Català de la Recerca i Estudis Avançats (ICREA) under the ICREA Academia Award.

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NOTES

- ¹ This fieldwork took place between 1990 and 1993 in various mental health services in the city of Barcelona. "Silvio" is a pseudonym.
- ² SI or SJ are abbreviations for Societatis Iesu or Societatis Jesu (member of the Society of Jesus).
- ³ The literature on anthropology and schizophrenia is extensive, and its review is beyond the scope of this article. I have dealt extensively with this literature in other texts (Martínez-Hernández 1998, 2000). By way of example, see seminal works by Corin (1990), Estroff (1985), Jenkins (2015), Jenkins and Carpenter-Song (2008), Rhodes (1984), and Van Dongen (2004), as well as work on schizophrenia and subjectivity (Jenkins and Barrett 2004), on the prognosis of schizophrenia (Good et al. 2010), and the reflective work of Kleinman (1988).
- ⁴ Anthropological literature on the Garabandal apparitions is scarce. See the works of Christian (1973, 1989), Sjöström (2010), and Roscales Sánchez (1999). From a religious and theological perspective, see Roman-Bocabeille (1988), García de Pesquera (2004), Juliani y Morencos (1999), García (1980), and García de la Riva (2016).
- ⁵ Some pictures and videos of the girls can be seen at these links: <https://www.garabandal.it/en/multimedia/photo-album/category/31-the-girls> and <https://www.garabandal.it/en/multimedia/video>.
- ⁶ The photos of the *milagru* can be seen at this link: <https://www.garabandal.it/en/multimedia/photo-album/category/29-communions>.
- ⁷ The second message, read by Conchita herself, can be seen in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=74&v=z3g7XcgkKEw.
- ⁸ According to De Martino, presence is the *esserci*, a kind of Heideggerian *Dasein*, but with some nuances: it is not the being thrown into the world, but a duty for being-in-the-world, a kind of determination that he would later call the ethos of transcendence (*ethos del trascendimento*) (De Martino 2000, 2002). For De Martino, "presence" is "becoming" (*divenire*) instead of simply "being" (Berardini and Marraffa 2016; Bergé 2001; Ferrari 2014; Signorelli 2015).

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How to cite this article: Martínez-Hernández, Ángel. 2022. "The echo of the world: The castaway, the Garabandal apparitions, and the crisis of presence." *American Anthropologist* 124: 734–750. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13771>