

Dysphoria: a Desperate Vitality

G. Stanghellini¹

¹DiSPUTer, G d'Annunzio University, Chieti, Italy

'Dysphoria' is often used as the most generic word for any kind of negative emotion. It can be better defined as an unmotivated and quasi-ineffable constellation of feelings that convey a nebula of vague sensations and impulses, an uncomfortable feeling characterized by being sorrowful and indignant. The intentional structure that characterizes much of human emotional experience is absent in dysphoria. Emotions are fluxes of intentionality that innervate the flesh and connect it to the world. Dysphoria is an emotional state saturated with a brimming constellation of feelings without any explicit object or target, a state of tension that may lead to spontaneously vigorous outbursts as well as to pale stagnation or emotional depletion. Dysphoria is empty intentionality devoid of the moderating power of language and representation which fragments the person's representations of herself and of others and inducing painful experiences of incoherence and inner emptiness, threatening feeling of uncertainty and inauthenticity in interpersonal relationships, and excruciating sense of insignificance, futility and inanity of life. Dysphoric persons experience their own self as dim and fuzzy, and feel deprived of a defined identity and unable to be steadily involved in a given life project or social role. But it also entails a sense of vitality, although an aimless and explosive one – a *desperate vitality*. Dysphoria is felt as a disordered, overwhelming flux which is at the same time a disorganizing and compelling source of vitality. Dysphoria is felt as creative and destructive - a vigour that brings life as well as annihilation: a violent spasm that takes control of the body and a power that expresses vitality in touch with the source of all sensations.