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Phenomenological psychopathology of time: the work of Erwin W. Straus
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The article covers Erwin W. Straus’ (1891-1975) life-long struggle with the problem of time and temporal experience in the context of psychopathology. Beside Straus’ published scholarship, including his papers dealing exclusively with the subject of time, the sources utilized in this essay comprise several of Straus’ unpublished manuscripts on temporality (all from the Erwin W. Straus Archive, Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, USA), with primary focus on the 1952 manuscript *Temporal Horizons*. In the first part of the article, the author introduces what he considers to be the central tension of the whole of Straus' work on the issue of time, namely, tension stemming from a dualistic account of time, with its personal (experienced) and impersonal (clock time) dimensions. Interpretative developments of this tension are followed chronologically from Straus’ early German works up to his late English scholarship while his own way of overcoming it (termed here the unified view of time) is presented. In the second part of the article, the author focuses on the psychopathological consequences of the unified view as seen by Straus: a clear-cut boundary between a normal and a psychotic experience of time is supposed to lie in breaking the bond between the personal and the impersonal orders of time, leading to a fundamental estrangement. This view, it is claimed, is already present in a nutshell in Straus’ earliest work, and becomes elaborated upon later on. In conclusion, both the merits and the weaknesses of Straus' account of temporality are presented. A major advantage is that Straus abstains from a dualistic conception of time and reappraises the often disvalued clock time. A fundamental drawback is that Straus does not venture to explore the pathological varieties of temporal experience and fails to specify the acknowledged differences between, on the one hand, psychotic elements in depressive and compulsive disorders, and on the other hand, such elements in schizophrenic disturbances.
Phenomenological psychopathology of time: the work of Erwin W. Straus

Introduction

In this paper, I will focus upon Erwin W. Straus' (1891-1975) life-long struggle with the problem of time and temporal experience in the context of psychopathology. While it has been rightly claimed that the main theme around which Straus' work had centered was the lived movement – a subject encompassing such topics as upright posture, the horizon of meaning or awareness (Eng, 1976) – I will maintain that the subject of lived time was at least of equal importance. As a matter of fact, in the field of philosophical reflections on time in psychiatry, and especially, anthropological temporal preconditions of clinical psychopathology, Straus was no less than an innovator.

A native of Germany, Straus studied medicine in Berlin and Munich, and begun his scientific carrier by defending his medical doctorate in 1919, and became a psychiatrist under Karl Bonhoeffer and a neurologist under Richard Cassirer. Later, alongside luminaries including Ludwig Binswanger, Viktor Emil von Gebsattel and Jürg Zutt, he established the first and leading phenomenological psychiatry journal in Europe – Der Nervenarzt. As Zutt wrote in the early 1960’s, Straus was ahead of his time and the significance of his distinctive thinking for central problems of clinical psychiatry will be appreciated only in the future (Zutt, 1961). This view, I believe, pertains mostly to the problems of temporality.

I will start by introducing what I consider to be central tension of the whole of Straus' work on the issue of time. I will then follow the interpretative developments of this tension chronologically, starting with his early papers and major books, while covering his unpublished manuscripts as well. Even if the subject of time was present in many of Straus’ writings, there were several papers that deal with it exclusively that would be of a special attention, with the focus on his manuscript Temporal Horizons written in 1952. In the final section of this essay, I

1 For a detailed account of Straus’ life see the translator’s preface to Man, Time and World (Straus, 1982) as well as (Bossong, 1990; Spiegelberg, 1972).
2 There are many parallels between Binswanger’s, von Gebsattel’s, and also Eugene Minkowski’s respective reflections on temporal experience in mental disorders, even if expressed in different terminologies. These similarities have been already attributed to the nature of the subject and commented upon (Passie, 1995), hence, they would not constitute the subject of attention.
3 All unpublished papers discussed below are listed neither in Straus’ official bibliography (Spicker, 1977a) nor in Thornsten Passie’s table on chronology of Straus’ works on time (Passie, 1995, p. 203).
will present both the merits and the weaknesses of Straus' account of the psychopathology of time that summarizes his life-long struggle with the aforementioned tension.

**The dualism tension**

Straus' pioneering work in an anthropological and phenomenological approach to psychiatry was focused upon disclosing normal human experience, which he considered a necessary, epistemological precondition for assessing what is pathological. Accordingly, he believed that an outline of ordinary experience is the first step towards describing its pathological modifications.

The tension can already be noticed in his early papers, but it becomes fully present in his later ones, and it is from the perspective of these that it will be presented here\(^4\). It is the tension between two seemingly mutually exclusive accounts of (normal) time. Straus was using different – often, though not always interchangeable – idioms to name the two accounts. Hence, on the one hand, there is the *personal, immanent or existential* time, and, on the other hand, the *world, clock, calendar, public, objective or homogenous* time. These two accounts only vaguely mirror the distinction between what the analytical tradition (following McTaggart) calls the A-series and the B-series time and the phenomenological tradition characterizes as immanent and clock time (Turetzky, 1998). Straus' own way out the tension was what I propose to call the unified view of time – i.e. a view that overcomes the dualism of the two accounts while preserving the distinctive aspects of both. It is also the view that enabled Straus to conceptualize a genuine psychotic experience in temporal terms. Some hints toward such a unified view can be inferred already from Straus' early work in the 1920's and 1930's, but it was fully developed only through 1950's and 1960's, alongside his shift in emphasis toward the existential importance of the previously underestimated clock time. We may thus claim that the changes in nomenclature that Straus was using at a particular stage of his life imply shifts in emphasis on different aspects of the traditional dichotomy.

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\(^4\) Straus was interested in temporality almost since the beginning of his career – he introduced his historical and temporal mode of thinking concerning the biological world in general in his habilitation work on the problem of individuality that appeared in 1926 (Straus, 1926). Already then he was familiar with St. Augustine’s concept of time – one of utter importance for his later work and analyzed closely in the 1952 essay *Temporal Horizons*. 


German experience: the personal time

In 1928 Straus published what can still be considered his most influential paper on the subject, *Das Zeiterleben in der endogenen Depression und in der psychopatischen Verstimmung* (Straus, 1928). It this piece, he introduces a crucial distinction between “personal time” that is immanent to every individual human experience (*Ich-Zeit*) and “world time” (*Welt-Zeit*) that transcends it. Straus considered the world time experience transitive (*Erlebnistranseunter*), meaning homogenic, social and shared, yet not simply given in an objective sense but – in a way – constructed. Whereas experienced transitive time simply passes, the personal time immanent to inner life story – the *innere Lebensgeschichte*, a concept that Straus borrowed from Ludwig Binswanger – may be actually growing or declining.

It is important to note that Straus – unlike many philosophers – did not consider personal time a merely mental phenomenon, but rather a biologically grounded one – for him personal time belongs to what has been called the “biological ontological” condition of experience (Moss, 1981). Additionally, he claimed that the connection between biological function and the life story is established through immanent temporal experience that unites biology with personal history. Therefore, only through the life story can time make sense as either growing or declining.

Straus’ early insights on time, personal becoming and life story have found their full elaboration in his book *Geschenis und Erlebnis* (*Event and Experience*) published in German two years after his essay on depression (Straus, 1978a, 1982). In that book he asserts that the problem of lived time is the central problem of theoretical psychology, and that we are often lead astray from this insight and confine ourselves to its limiting, physicalist notion. Straus criticizes all psychological theories, including psychoanalysis, that in his view assume a notion of time underlying a physicalist model of cause and effect (or stimulus and reaction). He also claims that this very same model is presupposed by psychophysiology and psychosomatics, where the external environment works as a classical stimulus for linear, causal-effective time. Overall, in

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5 He continued to refer to it and to read it, as his two personal library copies, underlined and annotated by himself prove.
6 In that matter he was following the distinction made by Richard Hönigswald, a neo-Kantian philosopher, presented in his book *Die Grundlagen der Denkpsychologie*, published in 1925.
7 With respect to the process of vital becoming in terms of growth and decline, it is important to hold in mind that Straus does not simply mean natural as distinct from mental processes. These are not merely organic and determining. As Straus explains in his last paper in time, the latter are sensitized through personal experience and being lived (Straus, 1967).
his early theory of human time Straus defends an individual’s responsibility for his own destiny and presents a view of a human being as capable of escaping the natural causality and tragic fatalism of the past (Moss, 1981).

Straus’ major book presenting the summary of his views on the anthropological foundations of psychology and entitled *Vom Sinn der Sinne* was published five years later (Straus, 1978b). The book as a whole was concerned with man’s being in the world, with his pre-reflective attunement with the world and with sensing in its own, pre-cognitive right. Unlike Martin Heidegger’s concept of Dasein’s *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1928), Straus’ concept was all about the most concrete, embodied and animal way of being (Straus, 1966, p. 258). Like Heidegger’s, his idea was a devastating, life-world based phenomenological critique of Cartesian, objective psychology, based upon principles of a mechanistic (linear and causal-effective) account of time, i.e. one considering a human being as a thing among the things in the world, moving in space and in objective time.

As a matter of fact, what goes here under the label of objective psychology is science itself. Straus’ major concern is that the scientific worldview excludes any qualitative aspects of lived experience. Temporarily, when one considers experience merely in an objectified time, one looses the dimension of the future that is immanent to it. Straus acknowledges that objective psychology may actually deal with the dimensions of the past and of the present – both wholly absent from the pure, mechanistic notion of time, consisting merely of a continuum of earlier and later moments – but he claims it presents the dimension of the past as merely the past time of having experienced, and the dimension of the present as merely a point-like now, supposedly corresponding to physiological processes taking place within a body. In both cases, this is not time as it is being actually lived.

Even if it may seem that *Vom Sinn der Sinne* defends personal time against its mechanistic reduction, the tension between two kinds of time is already, implicitly present. Straus’ opinion on the importance of measured, clock time, which he developed in details later on, appears already in its first German edition (Straus, 1935). Clock time, Straus states, is in fact so close to normal, human experience, that “he, who condemns objective space and objective

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9 From that perspective, experiences are subjectless effects of external stimuli, mediated by the brain and projected backwards upon the outside world. The notion of temporality underlying this view is mechanistic in a sense that it is concerned merely with the causal-effective, earlier and later relations. Time is understood as a movement in space, including the internal space of an organism, and hence the brain as well.
time condemns himself” (Straus, 1963a, p. 359). The phenomenal or the personal now – being more than the point-like now of objective psychology – is always coordinated with clock time, even if it does not itself belong to it.

**American experience: the clock turn**

In 1938, like so many Jewish intellectuals of his generation, Straus begun a forced emigration to the United States, initially as a professor of psychology at Black-Mountain College in North Carolina (1938-1944), and then as a research fellow at John Hopkins University (1944-1946). Finally, he became Director of Research and Education at Veterans Administration Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky (1946-1961) as well as Lecturer at the University of Kentucky (1946-1956). He traveled back to Germany several times but remained in Lexington, where he died in 1975.

In 1946 Straus presented a paper to the Section on Neurology and Psychiatry at the Southern Medical Association’s Annual Meeting in Miami in 1946, which appeared one year later as *Disorders of Personal Time in Depressive States* (Straus, 1947). In this short but dense piece, he not only emphasized some of his earlier insights on time experience, but also clarified and somewhat modified his earlier views.

Instead of the earlier dichotomy of immanent and transitive time, Straus now spoke of personal and homogenous or cosmic time. Personal time is articulated by values contextualized within one’s life history, whereas homogenous time is simply quantifiable. Personal time contains three dimension of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, whereas homogenous time consists of merely earlier and later relations. The relations between the dimensions of the former are unstable and the relations between the dimensions of the latter stable. In other words, within personal time events constantly change their temporal qualities while within the homogenous time events remain in their temporal place.

Intriguingly, Straus’ novel temporality views parallel his growing into the American, post-WWII culture, with its rigorous social temporality based upon the clock. We see a movement towards objective measures of time – particularly calendars – from an earlier emphasis on subjective experience. By no means has Straus contradicted here his earlier insights. Rather, he explores and presents in greater details their previously undeveloped counterpart.
Thus, the theme of orientation and disorientation in clock time becomes the main theme of his 1950’s and 1960's work on temporality.

Straus’ first, unpublished paper from this period, *Remembering and Forgetting. Clock Time*, can be dated to late 1940’s and early 1950’s\(^{10}\). The opposition between the two types of time is phrased here in terms of the *immediate* and the *objective* time (Straus, n.d.-a). The latter concept now represents the former idea of a transitive time denoting clock and calendar time in the sense of a shared, conceptual temporal framework.

At this period Straus also worked on a paradigmatic manuscript entitled *Temporal horizons*. Its extraordinary importance lies in his most elaborate presentation of argument on the falseness of any dichotomy between immediate and objective time.

**Temporal horizons**

With the goal of understanding the problem of disorientation in time in mental illness, Straus begins his manuscript with an analysis of normal, temporal experience. He begins with classical texts of Augustine’s *Confessions* and Aristotle’s *Physics*, and moves to a critical comparison of Henri Bergson’s dualistic view of time and Sigmund Freud’s dualistic view of consciousness. These are however merely preliminary remarks for the principal part of the manuscript, in which Straus’ thesis on the unity of any traditional dichotomy of time is presented. In this latter part, Straus describes clock and calendar as human conceptual achievements and illustrates his thesis by a close analysis of the concept of “today”.

Regarding the historical-philosophical part of his essay, St. Augustine’s analysis serves as an introduction that outlines the mysteries and paradoxes of time comprehension. Alongside Aristotle’s view, the conception of Augustine is presented as an anticipation of Bergson’s influential ideas from his *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* on the duality of duration of consciousness and homogenous time – yet, with an essential difference. It is not merely that the framework of reflections is different – with Augustine’s being clearly Christian and theological – but that the metaphysics underlying this framework differs as well. Even though Augustine distinguishes two kinds of time: immediate time and its objective construction, he does not see them as opposing one another, which is clearly the view that Straus

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\(^{10}\) A talk under this title was given by Straus at least two times: at a Boston Psychiatric Society meeting in October 1949 and at a Neurological Society gathering in Frankfurt a/Main in June 1953.
himself will prefer. There is no antithesis of immanent and objective time, an antithesis that is so conspicuous in Bergson’s work, since the latter is claimed to be based upon the former. Straus goes as far as to assert that Bergson’s approach, which depreciates objective time in a most uncompromising way, is in fact incongruent with an enlightened culture of reason. An analogical reproach concerns Freud’s view on the duality of consciousness – which Straus describes as strikingly similar to Bergson’s – with Freud’s unconsciousness supposedly representing what Bergson meant by the deep ego, and consciousness indicating what Bergson described as the superficial ego.

Straus argues that both views are equally metaphysical in the sense that they both assume a dichotomous structure, with one side being valued and the other unjustly depreciated. This is precisely where Augustine’s – and Straus’ own view – are supposed to differ, namely, in overcoming such a dichotomy and presenting a unified view.

The first step in achieving such a unified view involves re-appreciating objective time, by which Straus means time as constructed by our clocks and calendars. His clear point is that even though objective measures of time are guided by conventions, time itself is more than a convention. Put differently, there are various constructs that I would term formal “languages of time” being used to comprehend it, but they do not change the fundamental fact of there being time at all. In a similar vein, cultural relativity regarding temporal demands differing societies is overthrown by the argument that even if such “languages of time” and their respective powers differ between cultures, the basic human capacity to tell time does not. Time telling is both trivial and universal, and is present already in a pre-scientific comprehension of the world. Simply put, construction of objective time is a universal human capacity.

The second step leading towards a unified view is to present the inseparableness of immediate and objective time. Straus takes this step by taking advantage of the concept of “today”, by far the most interesting of his ideas on time, nowhere commented more extensively upon than it the Temporal horizons manuscript. Precisely through his concept of “today” he attempts to prove that the dichotomy of – as he presents this distinction in Bergsonian terms – duration and homogenous time – is false. The manner in which the double meaning of the concept of “today” is presented in this essay is also his most balanced one in comparison with later texts, as none of the extremes of this dichotomy has priority.
“Today” belongs to immanent time because it is always someone’s today. The concept designates the pre-logical experience of presence and – just like the narrower concept of “now” – has meaning only in a relationship to a speaking subject. “Today” is also undetermined and non-concrete – it does not indicate any precise day in the flow of days. At the same time, “today” is always some today and in this sense a determinant of objective time. It also has a symbolic character that – unlike the narrower concept of “now” – is relatively independent of any subject and indicates a certain, extended conceptual whole. In this sense it is determined and concrete.

What Straus wants to show is that – as a matter of fact – all the distinctions used above are artificial and do not bring us to the core of the phenomenon in question. He seems to claim that in reality there is just one time that is either personally or objectively apprehended. Simultaneously, both “times” are “subjective” in the sense that even clock time has an intesubjective dimension, it is shared and immanent to (normal) experience. Yet, as I will show, this view is not fully consistent with Straus’ later published works, since, as we shall see, the balance between the two sides does not always remain in such a clear equilibrium as is presented here.

On the 3rd of May 1956, during the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, Straus participated in a discussion on time sense for short intervals in depressed and schizophrenic patients (Straus, 1956a). Then, he expressed his doubts that experimental time estimation tasks could reach the core of the problem of temporal experience. In his view qualitative experiences of personal time would influence any estimations in an indeterminate way. In July of the same year Straus gave a paper for the University of Kentucky Philosophy Club and spoke about the ontological difference between what he metaphorically called „a timeless order of time”, its schematic comprehension, and the temporal extension of the mind. The latter, the personal now or the impression of a sequence, which he also metaphorically called „the watershed between past and future”, is the condition of possibility of schematic comprehension (Straus, 1956c). The theme of the calendar was also explored in Straus’ undated notes under the title The Calendar as a System of Signs (Straus, n.d.-b).

Later on in the same year Straus wrote a paper entitled Orientation in Time, which exists in several manuscript versions dating from August to September 1956 (Straus, 1956b). In this piece, also representing his new shift of interests, Straus considers clocks and calendars as providing a conceptual order for an intersubjective orientation in what he now calls a public
time. Public time is conceived as a cultural artifact providing a frame of the whole, which is never given in direct experience, but enables the situating of directly given particulars.

**The tension within a unity: Straus’ final papers**

Both manuscripts – i.e. *Temporal Horizons* and *Orientation in Time* – though never published, contain themes and reflections taken advantage of later in Straus’ last papers published in his lifetime on the subject of time. Though Straus maintained interest in the subject of time experience, presenting papers at conferences and giving talks, only three more explicit manuscripts on the subject appeared in the 1960’s.

The first of these – *Über Störungen der Zeiterleben bei seelischen Erkrankungen* – was presented in June 1960 at the 78th Meeting of Southwest German Neurologists and Psychiatrists in Baden Baden, and published in 1963 (Straus, 1963b). In this short piece Straus considers temporal orientation as a social act involving what is now a public time, by which he means the time of the calendar, and criticizes its traditional devaluation in philosophical reflections. The temporal norm is presented in the form of a hermeneutic circle between now moments and the temporal whole, mediated by the concept of “today”. “Today” is a basic type of a whole – one that must be comprehended in order to position particular moments of the day. The social act of temporal orientation requires combining one’s “today” with others’ public time – its opposite is an abnormal social isolation.

In *Über Störungen der Zeiterleben*, “today” appears as closer to what Straus had previously called personal time than in the *Temporal horizons* manuscript. A sufferer from amnesia, who is able to comprehend “today” as his own, personal, may be still lost in social time and therefore alienated. On the other hand, in a paper roughly from the same time – originally published in 1961 and entitled *Norm and Pathology of I-World Relations* (Straus, 1966) – Straus uses the concept of “today” more in the sense of clock time – an objectified extension of the personal time – than in the sense of lived presence. It is supposed to represent a non-present whole, i.e. a whole never given in direct experience, conceptual and symbolic in nature, one that is a condition of possibility of orienting oneself in time and a psychological norm. Similarity, in the 1964 *Chronognosy and Chronopathy* paper, the concept of “today” is understood as a scheme never given in direct experience, and – unlike the “now” – providing a conceptual comprehension of the whole, analogical to the hand of a clock doing a full, 24 hours cycle
The immediate aspect of “today” is not commented upon, but it is made obvious that both now and today are meaningless when detached from the vantage point of a particular speaker. Today becomes concretized through the larger scheme of calendar time that constitutes a despotic, superpersonal order with which we are must all comply by subordinating our lived moments to the power of the social temporal logos – the chronology. Such a subordination is also posited as temporarily healthy as far as impairment of the ability to abstract is meant to lead to a temporal disorientation.

As we can undoubtedly see, even if the concept of today has qualities pertaining both to the immediate (personal) and the clock (public) time, it can be used with an emphasis being put on either of these meanings. Today is a symbolic, calendar-like concept that does not make sense without the presence of a speaker. However, being able to comprehend today in the sense of an extended conceptual whole is apparently not enough for orientation in time, for it must be paired with subordinating such an extension to a larger, public time order.

Ultimately however, immanent and clock time are not simply equally important. As a matter of fact, Straus subordinates homogenous to personal time long before his turn toward the clock. In his first American paper on depression he states that not only is there a crucial distinction between the perception of time understood as a series of impressions (as studied by all kinds of experimental scientists) and the experience of time in the phenomenological sense, but also that such a series of impressions is necessarily based upon the experience of time (Straus, 1947).

This view is most extensively discussed in the already mentioned Chronognosy and Chronopathy paper, which was presented at the first of five Lexington conferences on pure and applied phenomenology in 1963 and published one year later (Straus, 1964). It is certainly not only the longest, but also the most comprehensive of all of Straus’ papers on time, providing a sort of summary of his lifelong reflections on temporality.

Straus intends to describe the psychological preconditions of any possibility of the process of measurement of a series of impressions, i.e. clock time. Yet, what he actually defines are certainly not only simple psychological preconditions (such as sensory experience), but also transcendental conditions of possibility (given Straus’ own reservations towards transcendental way of reasoning in the Kantian tradition (Spicker, 1977b), it might be safer to speak of lived-bodily conditions – to be sure, no less universal ones). As Straus maintains, even the simplest act
of measuring time brings together two series of events – one of which is determined and scaled (e.g. stop watch hand or movement of the sun on the sky) and the second which is not (e.g. cooking a stew or running a race) – in such a way that the simultaneity of both series is established through the actuality of a spectator’s position. This is so because only the spectator is capable of visualizing both series in retrospect, thus going against the normal flow of time towards the future. Accordingly, not only an abstract transformation of sensory experience takes place – with conceptual measurements imposing beginnings and ends and transcending the realm of what is directly present – but such a transformation is conditioned by a prior temporal extension of the spectator’s mind. The same view is presented in Straus’ last published paper on time – An Existential Approach to Time from 1967 (Straus, 1967). Altogether, the hierarchic structure of temporality as a whole is presented in these last two papers in the following manner.

The phenomenon of time – flowing continuously and characterized by stable earlier and later relationships – is real. Somewhat superimposed upon its original flow is the “superpersonal order” of clock time, which contains not only earlier and later moments, but also schemata organizing them into bigger wholes, i.e. measurements of time. There are two basic types of such schemata – circular ones (such as hours and months) and linear ones (such as years). In chronometry, one considers the superpersonal order in a pure way – every hour is like the other. In contradistinction, in chronology every part of the superpersonal order has a unique position stemming from the fact that it is related to the personal order. As the 1967 paper makes explicit, whereas the categories of earlier and later belong intrinsically to clock and calendar time, the categories of beginning and end do not. The latter “are not pure temporal terms” – they are co-determined by the subject and cannot be formalized mathematically as such. In other words, in order to make sense, beginnings and ends – analogically to the concepts of now and today – require an active subject that is capable of perceiving the coherence of elements comprising a given process that begins and ends for them. They require a personal order of time with its dimensions of past, present and future. Hence, again, the personal perspective is a condition for possibility of establishing the relationship between earlier and later, which already enables pure chronometry, i.e. a symbolic extension of personal time and its measurement, and obviously a full-fledged chronology as well.

The epistemological hierarchy between the two orders is clear: there would be no superpersonal without a personal order, while at the same time personal order derives it position
from the clock and the calendar distinctions. In a normal, daily life situation, the two orders are synchronized to the extent of not being distinguishable. In his last written paper on time entitled *Time and Addiction*, Straus again emphasizes his point on the norm of the temporal experience in general – the norm that is supposed to lurk behind pathological modifications entailed by drugs\(^{11}\). It now consists in human pre-reflective understanding of the concepts of "now" and "today", which have no meaning when appropriated merely abstractly and detached from the presence of the speaker and the listener – endorsing the view just presented above in his published work.

**Time and psychopathology**

Straus’ unified view is not an absolute and it does not represent every possible human experience. Its clinical importance will become clear once we will have a look at Straus’ major assertions concerning the essential features of temporal disturbances in mental disorders. As far as psychopathology is concerned, Straus claimed that it is not unusual for many people to feel disoriented in time, and that the difference between normal and abnormal orientation is one of a degree (Straus, 1956b). Nevertheless, there is a clear-cut boundary between a normal and a psychotic experience of time. The core of the latter is supposed to consist of breaking the invisible bond between the personal and the superpersonal order of time – a split between the two sides of the unity of the regular temporal experience phenomenon, leading to a fundamental estrangement.

As I will try to show, this view was already present in a nutshell in Straus’ earliest work on time disturbances is depressive and compulsive disorders, while it became elaborated upon later. While showing the developing variations on Straus’ core thought, I will claim that his conception suffers from a fundamental drawback: precisely by trying to grasp the phenomenal essence of the psychotic temporal estrangement, Straus fails to specify the acknowledged differences between, on the one hand, psychotic elements in depressive and compulsive disorders, and such elements in schizophrenic disturbances on the other (Fuchs, 2005, 2013, 2015; Kupke, 2009).

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\(^{11}\) The manuscript is six pages long and exists in two, unfinished and unpublished versions. It was certainly conceived after 1968 (and possibly even after 1971). The manuscript certifies to Straus’ continuous effort to understand time as well as to his late interests into the impact of marihuana and hashish upon temporal experience, thus in a way reviving his very first scientific interests in addictions (Straus, 1919).
In his first paper on depression (Straus, 1928), recognizing the importance of lived time for psychiatry, Straus introduces a criterion enabling him to distinguish normal human becoming from what he considers its unhealthy modification. As was already noticed, both are based upon biological potential being experienced temporarily, either as a progressive development or as a regressive inhibition. In a healthy, normal situation, the future is supposed to be lived as undetermined, open and full of possibilities for action. In such a situation, Straus claims, there is a balance and a “harmony” between what he calls immanent and transitive time. An implication for understanding pathological states is that when this balance is lost in favor of the past, we are dealing with depressive states, and when it is lost in favor of the future, with euphoric states. In the extreme case of what he calls an endogenic (i.e. somatically grounded) depression, a total inhibition of vital becoming takes place. In such a case the future becomes fully closed and lived as being determined by the past. Such a distorted temporal experience leads to depressive delusions, in which the content of one’s life story is interpreted in such a manner, that everything has already happened and determines in a negative way any possibility of there being anything new. A sense of determinacy becomes overwhelming.

This view provides Straus with cognitive and diagnostic criterion enabling him to distinguish endogenic depression from psychogenic disorders such as hypochondria. The criterion is whether lived time is developing at all or whether it is reduced to a „temporal vacuum”. Within the group of psychogenic disorders, unpleasant experiences are viewed as reactions to what happens or may happen in the outside world. When it comes to endogenic disorders, a vital inhibition is claimed to stem from the very insides of an organic becoming. Therefore, whereas in all kinds of anxieties time is being lived as passing – with future being experienced as dangerous, threatening and unsafe, yet still existing – in the definitely more

12 This view remains in accordance with Straus’s overall hermeneutic conception of the temporal structure of a human existence as presented in his 1930 book on trauma. As indicated above, in this book Straus criticizes and attempts to overthrow the ontological foundations of empirical psychology through his own “historiological” approach. Sudden and shocking experiences, he claims, cannot be understood by their intensity as such – i.e. in terms of the naked stimuli – but only through the structure of meaning of lived experience that mediates them.

13 Straus’ second important point concerns the balance between the past and the future. He argues that in a healthy situation, the continuity of inner life story is preserved, despite the fact that past issues often remain unresolved – what has passed is the past, and this should not determine the future. Thus, in a healthy situation, time is subjectively lived in an undetermined way – it is experienced as undetermined.
extreme condition of endogenic depression one is devoid of any emotional state – either negative or positive – and sees his/her fate as already determined\textsuperscript{14}.

An almost identical conception was presented in Straus’ \textit{Disorders of Personal Time}, where he asserts that in a depressive delusional state the past is experienced as unpardonable guilt, the present as irreparable ruin, and the future as inevitable catastrophe\textsuperscript{15}. But his most important idea – again, only briefly mentioned – concerns the possibility of a discordance between personal and objective time, which can be experienced as unreality or the vanishing of time. It is supposed to be a situation of being in direct opposition to any attunement with the world and coordination of the now with clock time that he describes in his 1935 book, \textit{Vom Sinn der Sinne}, in non-pathological terms.

The same core conception pertains to Straus’ ideas on compulsive behaviors. In his 1928 paper he interprets the latter as attempts to move time that is slowed down – as a symptom of the prior transformation and inhibition of lived temporality. He argues that in extreme cases the lived future of the compulsive is fully closed and becomes a mere repetition of the past. Ten years later, in a paper entitled \textit{Ein Beitrag zur Pathologie der Zwangserscheinungen} (Straus, 1938), Straus approaches the same problem of compulsive symptoms it terms of an altered physiognomy of the basic structure of everyday life-world\textsuperscript{16}. He argues that the destruction of the sympathetic relationship between man and the world results in a deformation of time, with past and future appearing interchangeable\textsuperscript{17}. In contradistinction to a normal person who is sympathetic with the world in a sense of belonging to it – living in the provisional, trusting the future and letting things be – the compulsive cannot accept its imperfections. Due to his primary problem with future orientation – the same that was the most important in Straus’ earlier analyses of depression and trauma – he loses time as a continuum. The future appears dangerous and cannot be trusted, leading one to retreat to predictable and comforting repetitions.

The core theme of obsession as a disturbance of sympathetic relation to the world becomes explored in greater detail in Straus’ 1948 book \textit{On Obsession} – the first that he

\textsuperscript{14} A fundamental, temporal condition of the possibility of any emotional state requires a sense of immanently growing temporality, with the dimension of the future being open enough to enable any sort of emotional attachment. When there is no lived future, one cannot experience either anxiety or any excitement about it.

\textsuperscript{15} In addition, he states now – somewhat in contradiction – that in such a state the personal “now” loses its position of in-between, so that the continuity of time breaks, a distance appears, and one loses both past and future.

\textsuperscript{16} It was later translated and published in English as \textit{The Pathology of Compulsion} (Straus, 1966).

\textsuperscript{17} Yet, when it comes to the unified view, he presents objective time not as social and shared, but as impersonal and incommensurable with historical time (to which the compulsive symptoms are supposed to belong).
published while in the United States (Straus, 1948). When it comes to time, Straus repeats his earlier thesis that the world of the compulsive has to do with abnormal, perfectionist expectations regarding the future. Where in daily life one leaves some room for the unknown, the obsessive expects full certainty, which leads him to troubles in dealing with the unpredictable. Trying to bring everything under control, he loses any continuity of life and experiences a sequence of present moments instead. His fears are present within the immediate future while his further future horizon of expectations seems closed.

The claim on the relevance of the relationship between the personal and the superpersonal order of time is explored in greatest detail in a manuscript entitled *Psychotic disorders of space and time* written in June 1946. This is a fifty eight pages long set of reflections oscillating around a clinical study of a psychotic patient from Henry Phipps Clinic, where Straus was conducting research on compulsive behaviors. In these reflections, Straus shows how the decomposition of the unified experience leads to depersonalization and a loss of the common world by the patient. This is explicitly presented here as a break between the personal now and world time (whereas the concept of “today” – as we have already seen, being of critical importance later on – does not yet appear). Straus frames the issue in terms of the changes in the primary structure of the I-world relations that are affected in psychosis both spatially and temporarily – a continuous theme he will also explore in his later piece *Norm and Pathology of I-World relations* (Straus, 1966). When it comes to any explanation of the bottom line of what is happening, Straus continues to hold his early thesis of a basic pathological process of disordered vital becoming that supposedly enables understanding a variety of depressive symptoms.

Another clinical case of the same phenomenon is presented in an interview from 1952 forming the last part of Straus’ *Temporal horizons* manuscript. The case is supposedly representative of many instances of disintegration of time and illustrates the point that it is not the impairment of the ability to abstract from the personal time that characterizes psychotic

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18 Why this paper was never published remains unclear. One explanation might be that Straus never published patients’ case studies – and both *Psychotic disorders of space and time* and later *Temporal Horizons* are thematized around clinical cases. Another is that many of the threads from this manuscript can be found in some of his other works: the theme of future orientedness of human experience was already explored earlier, the thoughts on physiognomy appeared in his book on obsession, some theoretical thoughts on time in his later *Chronognosy and Chronopathy* paper, and the patient’s depressive psychotic experiences were quite probably used in the *Disorders of Personal Time in Depressive States*. 

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experience (as this ability is still conceptually possible), but damage of the invisible connection between the personal and the objective time. The interviewed patient experiences his own presence and is simultaneously capable of all sorts of calendar-like calculations, concerning both past and future. Yet, the two do not come together and his self does not somehow fit into those objectifying temporal schemes. In other words, the patient is unable to execute today as his own, even if he is able to understand it abstractly. The break of this bond illustrates the boundary phenomenon of a loss of reality, which thus appears as an effect of co-existence and co-relation of the two aspects of time, whereas their separation allegedly gives an effect of unreality and alienation.

Unfinished project

A lack of precise distinctions that can enable us to differentiate between the varieties of abnormal time experiences in different mental disorders is characteristic of Straus’ early and middle papers. On the other hand, his late papers, being precise in their descriptions of normal time experience, disappoint mostly by not incorporating the subject matter of psychopathology to a sufficient extent. It seems as if, despite his own intentions, Straus moved away from psychopathology of time later in his life.

In the 1963 piece that was supposed to be concerned with temporal disorientation in amnesia, Straus gave the norms more attention than the pathologies (Straus, 1963b). His conclusion regarding the latter was confined to the claim that when “today” and public time are fractured, social isolation follows. The same theme of the impossibility of transgressing the lived moment, the lived now, through any conceptual order of time – i.e. establishing the temporal part-whole relationship – as characteristic of a mentally ill person – is also discussed in his work from roughly the same time (Straus, Natanson, & Ey, 1969, published originally in German in 1963), nonetheless nothing more than we have already heard of the subject is said.

The most disappointing fact is that Straus’ Chronognosy and chronopathy doesn’t actually deal with the phenomenon of chronopathy – officially due to a “lack of time” – but again focuses on the preconditions of normal temporal functioning. Straus’ conclusion – limited to the statement that an inability to abstract from the lived presence through the schemes of the calendar leads to temporal disorientation – is simply left without any further elaboration.
Analogue disappointment concerns Straus’ last article on temporality from 1967. In January 1966 Straus took part in a conference at the New York Academy of Sciences entitled “Interdisciplinary perspectives of time”. He intended to limit his theoretical considerations and to speak about pathologies of personal time in cases of misery, voyeurism and senile amnesia, but it seems like he did not fulfill this promise (at least not in the published version). The final paper that appeared in the Annals of New York Academy of Sciences is concerned much more with anthropology than with psychopathology, as is indeed most of his work on time (Straus, 1965).19

There are unquestionable merits of Straus’ reflections on temporality in the context of psychopathology. The major one is that Straus not only takes creative advantage of the phenomenological concept of lived temporality, but also abstains from any dualistic conception of time. As several of his American papers after the postulated clock turn make clear, the often disvalued clock and calendar time receives from Straus a fresh reappraisal as a necessary counterpart of any lived experience. Abstraction from lived presence – even as simple as saying “today” – requires a conceptual scheme of a clock and a calendar (sufficiently as rudimentary as movement of the sun on the horizon), and such an abstraction is a constant counterpart to normally lived time. In other words, in order to have lived past and future beyond a simple retention and protention, i.e. to have an existential past and future, with the sense of one’s self being temporarily extended, one needs some sort of objective measure of time.

The chief limitation of Straus’ position, however, is that he does not venture to explore the pathological varieties of temporal experience, restraining his view of psychotic experience of time to the idea of break between personal and impersonal orders. This cannot but leave the reader with a sense of unfulfillment. If the connection between world time and existential time – as the instances of desynchronization suggest (Fuchs, 2001, 2013, 2015) – is one of degree, then how precisely does it get fully broken? The case of depersonalization, as described in Temporal horizons interview, clearly goes beyond a melancholic desynchronization, in which the world time passes too quickly for an ill person to catch up with it. On the other hand, when a depressed or a manic patient, even in the state of psychosis, is able to follow certain rules of clock time and, for example, remember his meeting with the doctor and to come on time, is the bond already

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19 The paper reappeared unrevised in the German translation by Viktor Emil von Gebsattel one year later (Straus, 1968). Its psychopathological part, mostly repeating the already known theses, is devoted to an analysis of an old case study of von Gebsattel’s patient suffering with chronophobia, originally published in 1928 (Gebsattel, 1954).
broken or merely loosened? If one knows what time and date it is at a given moment as well as comprehends the calendar time of yesterday and tomorrow while, at the same time, one is unable to experience tomorrow in an existential sense – as *his or her tomorrow* – then what exactly is the connection in question? It is as if language and experience, i.e. temporal schemes of a clock and a calendar, and experience of time passing fell apart – existential future is lost but clock future is there, and similarly, existential past is lost but one is able to orient oneself in abstract time in his social surroundings. If this is Straus’ ultimate point then it would certainly profit from a more elaborate description of details – especially the differences between a deformation and a breakdown of the normal connection. Again, if I might be able to get for a meeting tomorrow at an exact hour but still not be able to plan my own personal future in the present, then where exactly is this bond lost? In this respect, Straus is particularly unsuccessful in specifying the differences between psychotic elements in depressive and compulsive disorders, and such elements in schizophrenic disturbances, which he does not comment upon at all. Secondly, he fails to indicate the differences between a situation in which clock time and lived presence are taken apart, but the ability to abstract and know the time stays intact, from a presumably worse condition in which clock time is fully lost. As a matter of fact, Straus’ himself does not seem to be content with his claims. Rather, he remains unsure and not does publish all of his research on this subject. It must take others to fully develop his argument into a comprehensive phenomenological psychopathology of time.
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Erwin W. Straus’ Temporal Horizons – Editor’s Introduction

Two manuscripts under the same title – Temporal Horizons – written by Erwin W. Straus exist (both at the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at Duquesne University, USA, ref. FF 137). The shorter of them was written during a single day – the 10th of July 1952. It is two pages long and concerns the concept of “today” – a concept by which Straus hoped to overcome the traditional dichotomy of personal and clock time. The longer manuscript presented here is thirty three pages long and it includes a version of the shorter manuscript, abbreviated by Straus himself. In addition to an extensive philosophical discussion with St. Augustine, Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, Straus presents and elaborates on his idea of a unified view of time, comprising both the personal and the impersonal dimensions.

The longer manuscript also contains an interview with a psychotic patient, which is supposed to exemplify Straus’ view that when the invisible connection between personal and objective, impersonal or clock time is lost, one losses also a sense of reality.

The interview was taken on July 24th 1952 at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, where Straus was a director at that time. As a full transcript of the interview (not included into the longer manuscript) indicates, it was conducted at Observation Ward 16B by Erwin Straus and his collaborator, Richard Marion Griffith (1921-1969), a research psychologist. The full transcript is sixteen typed pages long; the shortened one presented below is four and a half typed pages long and it is underlined, presumably by Straus himself, within the longer one.

The interviewed patient was a graduate student and part time instructor at the University of Kentucky, who managed to take his life one year later at the age of 26 by poisoning himself (“The Kentucky Kernel”, July 31, 1953, p. 4). It may be therefore inferred that the longer manuscript must have been written sometime between July 10th 1952 and July 31st 1953, for the fact of the suicide of his patient would have surely had impact upon Straus’ interpretation and would have probably been at least mentioned.
Day after day, in hundreds of psychiatric case histories, reference is made to time. A short passage noting orientation or disorientation in time is a matter of routine, on a par with the recordings or pulse, temperature, and blood pressure. Such entries reflect our expectation. We take it for granted that a normal person is capable of forming a concept of time and therefore should know the time; in other words, we expect everybody to be familiar with clock and calendar, to know hour and day, month and year. Most patients live up to our expectations. Those who fail – those who, as we say, are disoriented in time – constitute a minority. Even in this small group the deficiency is characterized by an ignorance of details rather than by a complete lack of temporal concepts in general. A Korsakoff patient who misplaces the actual date somewhere in the scheme of the calendar still has preserved the knowledge of the order of time; an octogenarian who claims to be no more than fifty years old still knows of age and its measurement; a schizophrenic who assures us that he is a billion years old – perhaps he wants to say that his existence is no longer submerged in the flux of time – still refers to the duration of lengths of time, divided and counted by years. Someone who serves as the subject of an experiment exploring the effects of hashish or mescaline may grossly overrate the length of a given period of time; still he has not lost the understanding of the measurement of time as such.

The conceptual scheme of chronology proves very resistive even when the capacity to determine the chronicle has failed. Passing through three levels, the process of deterioration affects knowledge of details first; it is a movement directed from the most specific to the most generic. The point where the questions “When?” and “How long?” have lost any meaning is reached in asymptotic curves only.

The rule – well established through observation of many cases of brain injury (Goldstein, 1942) – that abstract attitudes are impaired appears to be contradicted by the

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1 © Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, USA. Obvious spelling errors and punctuations were corrected, repetitions were omitted, and the footnotes were also added in cases they were missing – editor’s note.
behavior of patients disoriented in time, since they are not bound by concrete situations and are less impaired in their attitude toward the abstract then in their capacity for making it concrete. How can we explain this discrepancy? Perhaps the rule of impairment of abstract attitudes permits exceptions, or perhaps it needs further elaboration. Perhaps our terminology is too crude; we should avoid talking about the concept of time. But there is still another possibility. Perhaps time is a “category” of its own, not on the same level with other categories; the experience of time is basic, the foundation of many other experiences. It may be that disorientation of time reveals the peculiar character of the experiencing of time as such. Pathology, then, as it so often does, would point to a problem of much wider scope. Before we can understand the deficiencies of the experience of time we must have insight into the normal accomplishments that have suffered impairment.

Unfortunately, in psychiatry we are usually satisfied with noting, observing and describing disorientation in time; we appreciate it as a symptom. Long experience has taught us to accent it as a sign of some organic disorder of the brain. Pleased with its tested reliability, we are not inclined to give much thought to the presuppositions on which this part of our semiology rests. In our expectation that everybody will be familiar with clock and calendar we simply carry over – unchallenged – an everyday life experience into the psychiatric examination room, and we do it for very good practical reasons.

Indeed, without clock and calendar, without the possibility of measuring time and of placing the actual moment in a given scheme, our Western civilization would collapse immediately. Whoever wants to move around in its orbit as an active member – be it with a minimum of independence, initiative, and responsibility – must be able to understand clock and calendar and to follow their exacting demands. The church bell is no longer sufficient; the watch has become an indispensable tool. He who owns none must find out by other means “what time it is”. Without such information he would be lost in an environment where everything runs on schedules and by time tables. Our civilization obliges all its members to be familiar with clock and calendar, or, to reverse this relationship, because everyone is able to comply with this demand, a civilization like ours can come into existence. To be sure, there are cultures where time is articulated in a less precise order and measured with much less accuracy. But we have no doubt that someone transplanted to our shores from a primitive island would soon join the ranks.

To conceive time, to understand clock and calendar, is no prerogative of any race. It is the most common human capacity. Therefore nobody receives special credit for the acquisition of such knowledge. In the practice of life we show little respect for
accomplishments that are shared by everyone and therefore confer no distinction on anybody. We could be more trivial than the question “What time is it?”, and the answer given to this question after consulting the watch? The prompt performance prevents us from recognizing the enigma concealed in such simple actions. The first task, therefore, is to discover the problems hidden in these seemingly commonplace manifestations.

In fact the need not be discovered, rediscovery suffices:

We speak as to time and time, times and times, – “How long is the time since he said this?” “How long the time since I saw that?” and, “This syllable has double the time of that single short syllable.” These words we speak, and these we hear; and we are understood, and we understand. They are most manifest and most usual, and the same things again lie hid too deeply, and the discovery of them is new (Augustine, 1943, p. 293).

For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who even in thought can comprehend it, even to the pronouncing of a word concerning it? But what in speaking do we refer to more familiarly and knowingly than time? (Augustine, 1943, p.285)

There are certain occasions – birth and death, the blessings of fortune and vicissitudes of fate – when we begin to wonder about time and eternity, transistorizes and duration. On ordinary occasions, however, we do not like to stop and to ponder about habitual actions which we perform easily and, it seems, understand sufficiently well. There are many things about which we can converse with other and understand each other without understanding the nature of things themselves, “…there are buy few things which we speak properly, many things improperly; but what we may wish to say is understood.” (Augustine, 1943, p. 291)

Expressions of amazement about the interpenetration of knowing and not knowing pervade Augustine’s analysis of time. The famous formulation, so often quoted, “What, then, is time? If no one asks of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not,” is only one variation of a theme which constantly presses his inquiry forward, dividing as well as linking its parts (Augustine, 1943, p. 285).

Augustine was not the only one, nor the first one, to discover the paradoxes of time. His meditations, however, are distinguished by a truly classical style. His essay on time, limited to a small number of problems, is constructed as a perfect whole. It speaks for itself; it needs no commentary. It is a monument, which has lasted through the ages. In the soliloquies of his autobiography Augustine does not present his thoughts so much as his thinking, through which he awakens and incites the reader. In a dramatic development argument is taken up after argument, one solution tried after another – and each one rejected – until in a climactic
ending a final answer is reached: “In thee, O my mind, I measure times” (Augustine, 1943, p. 300)².

Three theses are discussed by Augustine: the theological enigma – the relation of time and eternity; the ontological question – “What is time?”; and the scientific problem – “How do we measure time?” As in Augustine’s view time has been created with the world, time springs from eternity to which it returns. The presentation of the “secular” problems of time is therefore encompassed by a discussion of the relation of time and eternity.

The question “What is time?” is unanswerable, Augustine shows, if the word “is” in that question is interpreted in terms of being, of essence; for time “is” not.

I say with confidence, that I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time. Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not, and the future is not as yet? But should the present be always present, and should is not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present – if it be time – only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be – namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be? (Augustine, 1943, p. 285-6).

We are inclined to think in categories of substance, but confronted with the phenomenon of time those concepts prove utterly inadequate. The continuum of time does not consist of small particles, of timeless instants. If the categories of substance are not sufficient, one may try to replace them by functional concepts: time is related to change, to motion. Yet Augustine gives many reasons why time is not identical with “the motion of a body”: “I have heard from a learned man that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars constituted time, and I assented not” (Augustine, 1943, p. 293). And yet we measure times; we perceive intervals and count units of time.

That I measure time, I know. But I measure not the future, for it is not yet; nor do I measure the present, because it is extended by no space; nor do I measure the past, because it no longer is. What, therefore, do I measure? (p. 298) (…) But do I thus measure, O my God, and know not what I measure? (p. 297) (…) Or is it, perchance, that I know not in what wise I may express what I know? (p. 296) (…) I measure the motion of a body by time; and the time itself do I not measure? (p. 297).

² The translation is not exact. It omits the word “mea” in the Latin text: In te, anime meus, tempora mea metior. True, a literal translation of the last words, “I measure my times,” sounds awkward and may be misleading. Nevertheless, the words “tempora mea” are intimately related to Augustine’s psychological interpretation of time.
In measuring we compare, but what is it, then, that we can compare in measuring time?

Do we by a shorter time measure a longer, as by the space of a cubit the space of a crossbeam? For thus, indeed, we seem by the space of a short syllable to measure the space of a long syllable, and to say that is double. (…) But neither thus is any certain measure of time obtained (p. 297). (…) And yet we measure times; still not those which as yet are not, nor those which no longer are, nor those which are protracted by some delay, nor those which have no limits. We, therefore, measure neither future times, nor past, nor present, nor those passing by; and yet we do measure times (p. 299).

The fact of measuring time, far from answering the original question, “What is time”?, leads to the discovery of unforeseen problems and new difficulties.

By common sense, then, I measure a long by a short syllable, and I find that it has twice as much. But when one sounds after another, if the former be short, the latter long, how shall I hold the short one, and how measuring shall I apply it to the long, so that I may find out that this has twice as much, when indeed the long does not begin to sound unless the short leaves off sounding? (…) What, then, is it that I can measure? Where is the short syllable by which I measure? Where is the long one which I measure? Both have sounded, have flown, have passed away, and are no longer; and still I measure, and I confidently answer (so far as is trusted to a practiced sense), that as to space of time this syllable is single, that double. Nor could I do this, unless because they have passed, and are ended. Therefore do I not measure themselves, which now are not, but something in my memory, which remains fixed (p. 299-300).

At this point the meditation culminates in: “In thee, O my mind, I measure times.” The mind “expects, and considers, and remembers, that that which it expects, through that which it considers, may pass into that which it remembers” (p. 301). It is not correct to speak about three times, past, present, and future,

but perchance it might be fitly said, “There are three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.” For these three do somehow exist in the soul (…) present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation (p. 291). (…) The impression which things as they pass by make on thee [my mind], and which, when they have past by, remains, that I measure as time present, not those things which have passed by, that the impression should be made. (…) Either, then, these are times, or I do not measure times (p. 300).

In listening to Augustine’s meditations it was our paramount, although not our only, interest to follow his operation of unearthing the hidden problems of time. The chronologist,
unlike the archaeologist, does not have to hire men to uncover the past. All is in the open. His
task is to rescue the obvious from oblivion, a job of salvaging that never comes to an end.

As often as the enigmas of time have been discovered, so often they have been
forgotten. No wonder that in the history of ideas the same problems frequently reappear.
Those who are inclined to construct history as a steady progress from modest, simple
beginnings to the perfection and fullness of insight of our day may like to praise Augustine as
one who anticipated the psychological problems of time, who noticed the difference between
the measuring of time and time measured, and already came close to the distinction of
immanent, immediately experienced time and the objective construction of time, the physical
time – the time of clocks and calendar. This interpretation would give to Augustine’s analysis
more credit than it deserves and less than is its due. It would give more because seven
centuries before Augustine, Aristotle in writing about the subject of time had pointed to the
difference between the experiencing of time and the notion of time, to the relation of time and
numbers, and the paradoxical character of past and future, their being no longer and not yet
(Aristotle, 1957, 218a-224a). Aristotle, who begins his analysis with a few casual remarks
about the paralogisms of time – well known, he says, to earlier thinkers – takes up in the last
chapter a discussion of the relation of time and soul. One sees that most of the problems that
tormented Augustine are within the realm of Aristotle’s discussion, but within the framework
of Christian cosmology the phenomenon of time appears in a new perspective. Augustine has
to be studied in his own right; his role in neither that of a follower of Aristotle nor that of a
forerunner of contemporary thinkers.

With the emphasis laid on the interpretation of times – the present of the present, the
present of the past, the present of the future – Augustine seems to anticipate the development
of modern thought, especially Bergson’s idea of duration, which at the turn of the century
gave new impetus to the study of the problems of time and left its mark on psychology and
psychopathology. There certainly are similarities between Augustine’s and Bergson’s concept
of duration; the divergences, however, are just as remarkable and even more essential and
revealing than the similarities. In Augustine’s view, duration enables man to measure time.
There is no conflict between objective time and the immediate experiences of time, the
interpenetration of times. Augustine is far removed from depreciating measurable time to the
greater glory of immediately experienced time, a tendency which grew so strong with Bergson
and many who followed his example.

In reading an English translation of Augustine one must not forget that the word
“mind” has for the contemporary reader a meaning that differs widely from the Augustinian
concept of “anima” and “animus”, for which it stands. “Animus”, the soul or the mind, although created, is immortal and therefore more closely related to eternity than the soul or mind about which, if at all, a modern psychologist speaks. Augustine’s psychology must not be severed from his theology.

Any change of metaphysical climate has profound effects. It cannot but influence all the answers given to the question: “What is man” – the psychiatric ones included, as will soon be seen.

Bergson separates duration from “time assimilated to space” and brings the two into sharp antithesis (Bergson, 1888). He extolls the immediateness, fullness, and concreteness of psychological time and decries the abstract mechanized time measured by clock and calendar. Homogeneous time is described in harsh terms. It is lambasted as a “bastard concept”, owing to the intrusion of the idea of space into the domain of pure consciousness (*conscience pure*). Through the influence of social life, or practical needs, we have become accustomed, according to Bergson, to substituting homogenous, measurable time for true duration; in doing this we substitute a symbol for the original; the language of common sense, the “brutal word”³, prevents us from recognizing the immediate date of consciousness; discursive thinking estranges us from the deep reality of our existence. For Bergson a superficial Ego, its surface in contact with the outer world, usurps the place of the deep authentic Ego.

The following table illustrates the antithesis of objective time and duration:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract, symbolic, conceived time</td>
<td>Concrete, true (real), experienced (durée vécue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogenous</td>
<td>Heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immobile, spatialized</td>
<td>Movable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Non-differentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive symbol of true duration</td>
<td>Qualitative-manifold without relation to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ “The word with well fired contours, the „brutal word” which stores everything which is stable, common, and therefore impersonal in the ideas of mankind, erases or at least covers up the delicate and transient in our individual consciousness” (Bergson, 1888, p. 100) – Straus’ translation.

⁴ From (Gent, 1930, p. 312), with some modifications.
Its moments are serialized side by side, time appears pulverized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superficial Ego</th>
<th>Deep Ego</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>Inner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogenous</td>
<td>Heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead, immovable</td>
<td>Living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parasitic, artificial</td>
<td>Fundamental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The antithesis of duration and objective time reflects and has its complement in the antithesis of the deep and the superficial Egos. Their characteristic differences are shown on the next diagram:

TABLE II
(Gent, 1930, p. 316)

In these diagrams the columns to the left are stigmatized as inferior. Compared with the deep Ego, the superficial Ego appears to be an apostate who betrays the good and righteous cause. Objective time is treated as an artifact: the relation between duration and objective time reassembles that between the pulse which beats against the radius and the watch strapped around the wrist. There is the true life – the *élan vital*, and here a dead and deadening mechanism. Searching through the history of ideas for comparable arrangements, one may go all the way back to the Pythagorean tables or Good and Evil. But while the Pythagorean principles of good and evil are opposites, equal in status, origin and power, the deep and the superficial Ego, duration and objective time are not adversaries of equal rank. The defect of objective time is a deficiency of reality. Objective time, a mere artifact produced by discursive thinking, is the manifestation of psychological function suffering from a kind of metaphysical anemia. The superficial Ego is a parasite on a metaphysical level. Bergson’s
doctrine of time presupposes degrees of reality: it is wrapped in a philosophy of culture – or, more precisely – in a misological metaphysics of culture.

The metaphysical premise brings psychoanalysis – and through it contemporary psychiatry – and Bergsonism into close relationship. Bergson’s consciousness with its immediate date corresponds to Freud’s unconsciousness, Bergson’s Ego to Freud’s consciousness. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by mere differences in terminology! It is easy to see that there is no difference in matter if one keeps in mind the fact that the immediate data of consciousness are inaccessible to, or not directly accessible to, the superficial Ego which maintains contact with the environment.

Let us distinguish then two forms of multiplicity, two very different appreciation of duration, two aspects of conscious life. Below the homogenous duration, that extensive symbol of true duration, an attentive psychology will discover a duration the heterogeneous movements of which interpenetrate each other; below the numerical multiplicity of conscious states it will find qualitative multiplicity; below the Ego, with well-defined states, an Ego where succession implies fusion and organization. However, we are usually satisfied with the first, that is to say: with the shadow of the Ego projected into homogenous space. Consciousness, tormented by an insatiable desire to distinguish, substitutes the symbol for reality – or perceives reality only through the symbol. Since the Ego, refracted in this way and thereby subdivided, lends itself infinitely better to the demands of social life in general and of language in particular, consciousness prefers it and gradually loses sight of the fundamental Ego. To recover this Ego, as an unchanged consciousness would perceive it, a vigorous effort of analysis is necessary (Bergson, 1888, p. 96-97).

In his later works, Bergson ascribes the power of leading us back into the immediate life of consciousness to intuition. The Essay praises the dream as one of the manifestations of the deep Ego in its original purity.

In order to prevent the Ego from perceiving homogenous time, it suffices to deprive it of this superficial layer of psychical facts which it uses as a regulator. The dream puts us exactly in this condition for sleep, in slowing down the play of the organic functions, modifies first of all the surface communication between the Ego and the external objects. Then we no longer measure duration, but feel it. From quantity, it is turned back to the condition of quality. Mathematical appreciation of time elapsed no longer occurs; it concedes its place to a confused instinct capable, as are all instincts, of permitting gross mistakes and sometimes also of proceeding with extraordinary surety (Bergson, 1888, p. 96-97).

Someone not familiar with the text from which this passage has been quoted may wonder whether the original was written in French or in German, in 1888 by Bergson or in 1900 by Freud. Indeed, there are many spots where one can comfortably ferry across from
Freud to Bergson and from Bergson to Freud. In a sentence-completion test, the last sentence quoted above – “Mathematical appreciation of time elapsed no longer occurs; it concedes its place to a confused instinct” – could well be terminated, from this point on, by adding: the secondary process yields to the primary one.

To abrogate the distinction between secondary and primary processes we could quote from Freud’s New Introductory Lecture: “The relation to time, too, which is so hard to describe is communicated to the Ego by the perceptual system; indeed it can hardly be doubted that the mode in which this system works is the source of the idea of time” (Freud, 1933, p. 106f). In contrast to the Ego, there is in the Id “nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and (a thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time” (Freud, 1933, p. 104). Freud, although he never made time a central theme of his research, recognized its central position.

Both thinkers, Freud and Bergson, agree in their interpretation of human existence both posit an aggregate of two psychical systems. The two parts, different in substance and ancestry, have been forced into a mésalliance. Language, “the brutal word”, science and technics – the homo sapiens and homo faber – have invaded and corrupted the sphere of vital being, something unpolluted by ratio. The bias of such metaphysical rating can but interfere with any attempt to comprehend the achievement attained in the creation of systems of objective time, with invention of clock and calendar. We have to part with the metaphysics of a superficial and a deep Ego, we have to abandon the anatomy of the mental personality, in the light of which man appears as a centaur composed of an Ego and an Id.

How can one expect to understand the psychological meaning of objective time if he begins with its condemnation? The judgment should follow the trial. It is more appropriate to defer the appraisal of objective time and to attempt first an accurate analysis of its psychological content and meaning. Whether primary or secondary, deep or superficial, good or evil, the comprehension of objective time, the creation of clock and calendar, is a specifically human accomplishment and therefore a manifestation of man’s potentialities in general, notwithstanding the facts that clocks had to be invented, that each individual has to learn their arrangement and signification, and that there are not one but many calendars.

In needs little sagacity to detect the effect of convention in most human creation, be they in in law, language, or chronology. We could order our days into vigilia instead of hours; there is no ultimate reason why we should not divide the hour into 50 or 100 minutes. Yet the argumentation of historicism misses the point. Objective time ordered by conventional
agreements is in itself not conventional. Before we begin to articulate time, to divide the continuum and unite the parts into such units as hours, days, and months, we have already been aware of objective time itself.

It is easy to realize how calendar in its various forms, such as the Jewish, Christian, Mohammedan, Greek, Roman and Chinese was shaped by religious, political and historical conditions. There is an element of arbitrariness on our reckoning of time, limited and controlled – but not completely controlled – by astronomical observations. The power of tradition is strong enough to counteract strictly scientific procedures. Russia, under the Czars, refused to accept the Gregorian reform of the calendar, until by 1918 the date was 13 days behind the Western Calendar. Other countries had shown less, but still comparable, reluctance to adopt a plan initiated by the Vatican. England and its American colonies did not hurry to jump on the bandwagon of the New Style; they delayed the transition for almost two hundred years, from 1582 to 1752. The Jacobins felt differently; as true sons or fathers of the Revolution, they saw in their own deeds the beginning of a new era. Eager to change the historical foundations of the calendar, the declared the year 1792 A.D. to be Year No. I of the Republic, and, in spite of their admiration for Roman virtues, took the pains to invent new names for the months. The innovation did not last long. Napoleon, as Consul, turned back to the traditional calendar and restored the familiar Latin names of months; with the result that the ninth month in the circle of the year is called September (literally the seventh), the tenth month October (literally the eight), and so on.\(^5\)

There is no doubt that the calendar as a scheme has a long history; so has the clock as a tool; calendars and clocks however, do not produce objective time, they are applied to it. The inventions of the sun dial, the pendulum clock, the spring watch, all deal with the measurement of time. While they follow each other in history, they are directed to something unhistorical, just as the conventional schemes of the calendar are related to something unconventional. The historical constructions are erected on foundations which in themselves are not arbitrary or conventional.

Man learns only that which he is capable learning. He learns to walk, to talk, to write, but he does not learn to fly under his own power. We can learn the specific arrangement of a watch because we are able to comprehend objective time. Such comprehension precedes the

\(^5\) The misnomers, anachronisms in a double sense, are due to the Julian calendar reform in 46 B.C. To bring the reckoning of the year up to astronomical data, two months were added at the beginning of the year. The formerly fifth and sixth months, Quintilicus and Sextilicus, were renamed, in honor of Julius Caesar and his nephew, Julius and Augustus. Yet the old names of September, October, etc., were continued in spite of their changed position in the whole of the series.
sophisticated procedures commonly used in western civilization. That millions of people have
not shared and do not share in such knowledge is no argument against the psychology of clock
and calendar, just as illiteracy does not nullify the psychological meaning of writing and
reading. It does not matter how many actually realize their capacities; we are not so much
concerned with what men do as with the problem of what man can do.

Long before the scientist and the engineer appeared on the scene man had conceived of
time as measurable. There is a prescientific comprehension of objective time: days are
counted, the succession and return of seasons noticed, revolutions of the moon observed –
time is in some way related to astronomical cosmic events, although not fully neutralized in a
manner permitting accurate measurement. The concept of the homogeneity of time is a late
accomplishment, delayed by the power of the physiognomic characteristics of day and night,
summer and winter, sacred and profane days. The refinement of the conceptual and technical
instrumentarium brings to perfection potentialities which, constitutive of human existence, are
realized everywhere – if only in a rudimentary form – and expressed in everyday-life
language, through the verb with its tenses, through the Now and When, though the earlier and
the later, and through the distinctions of today, tomorrow, and yesterday. These simple words,
so familiar through daily usage, are fraught with meaning, almost defying complete
description and sharp definition. With these words, or, to be more accurate, through the
experience expressed by them, the ground in laid for all later elaboration of objective time.
We shall, therefore, turn our attention first to the phenomenon and experience named *Today*.

The one who says Today and those who listen to him know very well what is meant by
this word. A pre-scientific term, it is understandable to everybody; or could it be, as
Augustine said, that all of us understand and yet do not fully know what is meant? Should we
infer, therefore, that the word Today expresses a pre-logical or a pre-theoretical experience?
In that case it should be assigned to the right column on Bergson’s table, to the concrete
immediate experience of time. But is it not also an extensive symbol? It is inaccessible to
mathematical treatment, yet is it completely without relation to number? It is hard to decide
whether it is dependent or independent. It seems that on this level the antithesis between the
time of immediate experience and objective time, a distinction so clear and sharp at first
glance, dissipates before our eyes.

Grammar registers the word Today as an adverb of time. This is a correct but
incomplete label, for Today is a personal expression; it is my, your, his, our, Today. The
temporal determination Today makes sense only in direct relation to the speaker, to his
activity of talking at that vary moment, to his state of becoming.
Today signifies “this day”, and signifies it is the first as “this, my day.” Like any other demonstrative pronoun or adjective, Today implies a gesture of pointing, whose direction is determined not only by the point aimed at but also by the actual situation of the person who does the pointing. It is determined by the “terminus a quo,” the where-from, as well as by the “terminus ad quem,” the where-to. The place, the thing, singled out in pointing, is comprehensive only through reference, turned back, to the Here and Now of the speaker. Today refers to a moment in a phase of my personal existence. Every word implicitly refers to a speaker but not every word demands the presence of the speaker. Today is such a word; it is a word of the spoken language. Detached from the immediate presence of speaker and listeners the word loses any precise meaning. In script, or print, it remains ambiguous unless finally determined by reference to a given time or to some circumstance to localize Today in the order of the calendar. Without such additional evidence, Today would mean any day, not the one, this one, pointed out by the speaker. The actual presence of the speaker and listeners indispensable for the unequivocal determination of the meaning of Today is a fundamental pre-logical experience, not derivable from any other. The actuality of sensory experience has no foundation outside itself: there is experience of time because experiencing is temporal.

The reference to my own existence is only one of the two elements necessary for the determination of Today; the other one is the reference to the world in its temporal aspects, to a certain period of cosmic events, to the extension of time between dawn and sunset or between this morning and the next one. The word Today expresses a double, a mutual relation; it determines my state of becoming as a moment within the orbit of the world and articulates the cosmic events through reference to a phase of my existence. This relation, although reciprocal, is not symmetrical. In this relation the world is the encompassing whole to which I belong as a part with other parts. Today is not a pure measurement of time; it does not signify merely temporal extension, or a temporal unit; it means this world-day common to all of us. The meaning of the word Today, then, rests on two pillars, linking, like a bridge, my existence with that of the world. Nevertheless, in the superficial understanding of everyday-life conversation we focus our attention on one side only: on temporal aspects of the world pointed out through the word Today. In this respect the word Today behaves like any other word; it participates in the basic tendency of language to reach beyond the confinement of private existence. The importance of the presence of the speaker – self-evident and thereby hidden through the very act of speaking – is first revealed by a special effort of reflection. Only under unusual conditions, as under the impact of disease, will it be felt spontaneously.
In states of depersonalization some patients realize, to their greatest distress, a temporal discordance. Time disintegrates; world time and personal time separate: “Time ceased to exist,” one patient stated, “There is no time”, another, “All is timeless, unchanged, hopeless”, a third, “Absolute rigidity surrounds me” (Straus, 1947). Patients in these not frequent, but typical, cases assure us that the experience, described in these seemingly absurd terms, is most dreadful and tormenting. They insist that far from presenting any secondary explanation they try to describe directly an immediate experience with the characteristics, the power, and the reality of sensory experience from which they cannot escape. Nevertheless, it is so different from all familiar experiences that language proves rather incongruous; since it does not offer a suitable vocabulary, the patients have recourse to paradoxical formulations. When confronted with the obvious contradictions contained in their statements, these patients are frequently able to elaborate what they intend to say both for themselves and for us. They tell us that they still realize the change from day to night, from “rain” to “shine”; they still know that there is time, but they are no longer able to make this knowledge an actual part of their existence. They are incapable of feeling the flux of time, of entering into the current of events.

The following quotations from an interview with a twenty-five-year old patient illustrate well the experience of disintegration of time. This patient, a highly intelligent university student with an excellent scholastic record, was recently admitted to the hospital after an attempt at suicide. He was willing, even eager, to enter into a discussion. The interview with him brought to light a great variety of manifestations of depersonalization. From a long recording only passages related to the disintegration of time have been selected.
Interview

Erwin W. Straus: I have been told that you have some unusual experience with time, is that so?

Patient: It is true. I can’t get time straightened out. I don’t know, it is not a continuous sort of thing. (…) Well, it seems to me that there is no such thing as a yesterday or a tomorrow or a future. I can’t seem to think like a cyclical process (…). Time to me is like climbing stairs – literally – and that you reach a certain point and then you fall down.

S: Where, then, is your present? Where is this moment of our conversation?

P: I don’t know; it doesn’t seem to make any impression. I will know that it happened and then it will vanish; it won’t be significant in any sense at all. (…)

S: At this moment of your being here, has it not the usual character of Now?

P: No, because physically – I suppose that physically I am here, but I don’t have a feeling that this is Today and that there will be a Tomorrow. At this time I quit progressing; it is as though when I think of time I revolve around. There is no such thing as there being a beginning or an end. It is a continuous sort of thing – round and round. (…)

S: You said there is no Yesterday?

P: I mean as being one distinct day as, for example, what will happen today will sometime seem it came before yesterday, for example. (…)

S: Is there any experience of having gone through that before?

P: Yes, I have the feeling even now that I am back in the Army.

S: Although you know you are not?

P: I know that I am not. This is the silly thing about it. I know what this is the Veterans Administration Hospital and I know that it is in Lexington, Kentucky, and I know that I live 12 miles from here, but at times I don’t have any feeling of this being any particular place, of being any particular time, or that this is Lexington, Kentucky. I don’t know – what it is like. (…)

S: You have the feeling of being in the army. Where was it?

P: It is as though it were at Ft. McClelland where I took basic training.

S: Where is that?

P: Alabama.

S: Is that here now?

P: Sometimes it is. Sometime is feels like it is. I can see things that make me think that it is, and I have to stop and think. When I stop and think, then I get all confused – as though I am
nothing more that a series of words or something. There is a great discontinuity between my
mind and my body. (…) 
S: Does the body appear as yours?
P: No. No, I don’t even recognize it. I know, factually, I know that it is my body; it is as
though the body takes care of itself but the mind takes care of itself and neither will have
anything to do with the other. (…) 
S: Do you feel hunger sometimes?
P: No, not particularly; I just eat because I know that you are supposed to. Somehow I can’t
get it in my head that this whole thing is me. It seems that I have been dissociated in some
way with anything that resemble this – this whatever it is. Since about six years ago I don’t
feel like anything. It is as though I wander around, in and out, never anything significant
about it at all. 
S: Now what does Today mean to you? If I say today or we say today, is it different in its
meaning?
P: It just doesn’t have any meaning – time. Six years ago I stopped living almost, it is as
though, and now this is just playing around. It is something you have to do. It just goes on, I
don’t know why it goes on. I don’t’ even feel like it is happening. 
S: Does motion of things appear different?
P: Yes. 
S: When you see someone moving around here on the grounds, playing ball, or going over
there to eat?
P: I can’t get it into my head that there are such things and people. They appear to be like
cardboard cutouts. (…) 
S: When you see a truck or a car moving around here, is it also different from what it was?
P: Yes. 
S: How is that?
P: I don’t know. Motion doesn’t seem to have any significance. I know that my hand is
moving but there is no such thing as its actually moving from one place to another and that it
happens because I am making it. I don’t know what it is like. 
S: When we look at things we see them in a perspective, some appear at a greater distance
than others. 
P: I can tell you something that is farther away than something else, 
S: But?
P: But there is no depth it seems.
S: Are they all equally remote?

P: No, one object is farther away, I can tell that, than another. But I don’t know; I can’t seem to feel that it has any depth. When I pick that up, it has dimensions, three. When I look at, it is as though the things just melt into one another. There is no distinct standing up or being distinct from this thing. (…)

S: Could the word emptiness apply to all that?

P: It is as if there were a terrific void there. (…)

S: Your own words have not the character of being actually spoken at this present moment?

P: I can hear a voice, I know that, but whose it is I don’t know. I don’t seem to have anything. I have nothing.

S: If I should cut you, would you feel that?

P: I have often wondered about that. Would it bleed? Would something actually exist? It is as though I know, actually, but I guess I would bleed. I suppose it would hurt, but the thing which would hurt wouldn’t be me. It would just be my hand which would be hurt, because I seem to be rolled up somewhere, apart from all this, just looking on somewhere. Actually, I don’t know what “I” means, what it is that makes me a person. It just seems to have nothing to do with me, whatsoever. It is just sitting around waiting until the foolishness stops and then to come back. It is as though it is intact; the things which is me is intact somewhere. But it has nothing to do with what is going on now; it hasn’t for about six years (sigh). I haven’t seen myself in that time.

S: Why do you put the beginning at that time? What happened six years ago?

P: Because that is when all this stuff started, whatever it was. (…)

S: Did you then have the same experience about time as you have now?

P: No. This thing of time has only come into my feelings in the last, oh, month or so. Before that I didn’t actually experience – I don’t’ know what I did. I know that I have been to college, but do you know I think I don’t realize it; I have to make myself know it; I don’t know it… I can tell you things that I did there, but it is not as though it happened to me. (…)

S: Do you ponder about that all day long?

P: Yes, I wonder “Where am I”? Not just my body, not just my body. I mean the thing that is me. What is it? Can you see it? Can you touch it? I know you can’t. I can’t feel it. What is it that makes you know that you are you? How do you know that? Because something in you fells it?

S: Now, does the word “Here” mean anything?
P: Here? (...) Yes, I know that I am sitting right here, that this body is sitting here – but I don’t exist in time. The thing that is me goes back and forth, around, and in and out. It is trying desperately to get the whole mess straightened out, I know that, but until it is straightened out it won’t have anything to do with what is actually here. I seem to be disgusted with the whole business. But the thing that is me doesn’t actually live, I feel it is just waiting around. That is why I have to wait. I don’t know. It seems my body is just back somewhere, hasn’t crossed that gap yet, hasn’t caught up with my mind and that is why I am waiting now, until I get it straightened out, until it can meet my body. (...)

Richard M. Griffith: Have you had the feeling that the thing that is not you may be something else?
P: Oh, yes. That is why I – this body isn’t mine.
R. Whose is it?
P: I don’t know.

The interview with our patient does not represent an accidental accumulation of incoherent psychotic experience: one can collect similar, even identical, descriptions of the disintegration of time, space, depth, motion, of being-and-acting as oneself, from other patients. In each case the context of experiences is somehow preserved; the fragments are still coherent, since one central theme of distortion pervades the manifold of bewildering manifestation in their totality. The patterns of disintegration are prescribed by the norm. Out of the ruins we can reconstitute the original structure – sometimes with a deepened understanding of the original plan.

Depersonalization, as we have seen, may render a patient incapable of executing Today. Pathology thus confirms our interpretation. Today is an expression of the simultaneity of my own existence and becoming with the gyration of the world. This simultaneity is characteristic for all sensory experience. Today is but one of many manifestations of this comprehensive temporal relation, which for the sake of brevity I shall call the simultaneity of sensory experience.

Every discussion of temporal experience inevitably leads to a point where an analysis of one particular phenomenon demands the expansion of the basis discussion. A digression, considering briefly some problems of such general character, cannot be spared here. All sensory modalities participate in the simultaneity of sensory experiencing. In touching I am touched. An utterance like, “Oh, this is hot”, may be understood as a statement about the thing contacted or about the person touched, or about both. In hearing, I am moved by and moving
with the rhythm of the music. In seeing, the thing seen appears as “self-present”; I find myself confronted with the visible things. In seeing, I am not looking through a peeping-hole of consciousness into the “outside world”; I find myself, in my corporeality, on the same plane with the visible things; one and the same “Now” embraces the things and myself. Self-presence is not an attribute of visible things per se, it is revealed as a temporal relation – their meeting with me as a seeing being. My sight discovers their localization within the visible horizon, it also discovers their localization in relation to me; my Here is determined in relation to things Over There. In seeing, I find myself in contact with the world, directed to things as the objects of my observation; ob-jects, that will say, thrown into the way of my seeing (German Gegen-stand). Things seen are experienced as simultaneous with the act of seeing.

Bibliography:


