

A case study in semantic deconstruction

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"Mine is a long and sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

"It is a long tail, certainly", said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; "but why do you call it sad?" and she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this":

"Fury said to
 a mouse, That
 he met in the
 house, 'Let
 us both go
 to law: I
 will prose-
 cute *you*—
 Come, I'll
 take no de-
 nial: We
 must have
 the trial;
 For really
 this morn-
 ing I've
 nothing
 to do'
 Said the
 mouse to
 the cur,
 'Such a
 trial, dear
 sir, With
 no jury
 or judge
 would
 be wast-
 ing our
 breath.'
 'I'll be
 judge.
 I'll be
 jury,'
 Said
 cun-
 ning
 old
 Fury;
 'I'll
 try
 the
 whole
 cause,
 and
 con-
 demn
 you to
 death"

Lewis Carrol ¹
Alice in Wonderland

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Summary

I discuss a case study of 'semantic deconstruction' – a semantic deviance that occurred in a patient affected by schizophrenia. This consisted in fragmentation of sentences into single words, and of words into letters. Image-driven felt meanings were the outcome of this process of semantic deconstruction whereby sentences and words are broken down in smaller units so that their true meaning may come to light. This process deviates from ordinary semantics and paves the way to an idiosyncratic understanding of the world. I argue that the origin of this phenomenon can be traced back to a disorder of temporality, namely the failure of the constitutive temporal synthesis that may create micro-gaps of experience. This synthesis 'functions' implicitly, and therefore I refer to it with the term 'transcendental time' (TT). TT underlies and constitutes any given phenomenal experience as a uni-

fied flow. The disintegration of time-flow induces a sensitisation to details. One may become absorbed by finer and finer details, to the point that one may feel separately the physiognomies of each and every word. This implies that persons who undergo the disintegration of TT may start to notice islands of unrelated and self-referential language experience. The disintegration of TT thus implies a fragmentation of language and thought experience that is accompanied by a pictorialisation/materialisation of these fragments. These splinters of language, no longer embedded in the flowing continuity of experience, appear as images or (quasi)-physical objects floating in an objective space.

Key words

Itemisation • Language • Salience • Schizophrenia • Semantic deconstruction • Temporality

Semantic deconstruction

MAMMA for me meant that from the beginning we are the two of us (M), then we are alone (A), then we are together for a long time (MM), but at the end we are alone again (A).

Some time ago, I listened to this sentence during a clinical interview.

When I was mad – this person went on explaining – and I heard someone speaking, or even when I myself was thinking, sometimes one word stood out of the sentence. I could nearly see them as pictures in front of me. That word became as something material, nearly a thing for me, or an image in front of me. Then I stopped listening or thinking, and letter after letter I wanted to see if the string of letters corresponded the original meaning. That was the case with 'MAMMA'. The first 'M' has two cusps, and this meant 'two'. That's the way we are born. 'A' has only one, and for this means 'oneness' or 'aloneness'. And indeed when you are a baby sometimes you're left alone. 'MM' looked like a Gothic cathedral with all those cusps. This meant to me that for a long time you are the two of us, un-separated. The last 'A' meant to me the destiny of being forlorn and the need to stand up for that.

To my knowledge, the phenomenon here described is not included in speech and language disorders. It does not seem to share common features with more common abnormalities such as *speech disorders* (e.g., pressure of speech, logorrhoea, poverty of speech, mutism, echolalia etc.), or with the group of *aphasias* (e.g., Broca's or Wernicke's aphasias), or so-called *non-aphasic misnaming* (e.g., calling a 'wheelchair' a 'chaise longue', where the word choice seems motivated by the desire to reduce the emotional impact of things, people and places connected with the person's suffering).

At face value, we can find some analogy with formal thought disorders, and especially with so-called *semantic deviance* that can be found in people with schizophrenia. As reported by Cutting², persons with schizophrenia are

more influenced than normal persons by phonetic and semantic elements. For instance, they show an 'inappropriate noting of phonological features of words in discourse'². This means that they can be more attracted by the phonemes that make up the word in its entirety than by the standard meaning of the word itself in ordinary language. The meaning that the word has for them can depart from its use in ordinary language and correspond to the string of sounds or phonemes of which it is made. Yet, in our case study the 'inappropriate noting' is not about *phonological*, rather about *graphic* features, i.e., relating to the visual aspects of the word or of the letters that compose it. In both cases, there is a shift away from the standard meaning of a given word – that is, from the way that word is used and understood in ordinary pragmatic contexts. In both cases, there is the search for the meaning of that word by means of an idiosyncratic deconstruction of its sub-semantic components – that is, phonemes and letters.

The nature of this shift of attention is nicely encapsulated in this sentence by Cutting²:

In essence, the most parsimonious account of their semantic deviance is that they shift away from using language which refers to anything outside the language system itself. In this way, they are a living example of the position of Derrida and Lacan on language as a closed self-referential system.

To refer to this kind of semantic deviance, we can speak of *semantic deconstruction* since the word is split up into its components – components (like letters and phonemes) that in the ordinary use of language do not have a semantic value. Indeed, both the graphic deconstruction operated by my patient, and the phonemic one reported by Chaika are examples of the 'self-referential' search for the meaning of a word *within* the language system itself, that is, within the properties of the word as a written (graphic) or oral (phonetic) 'system'. Or, as

also noted by Freud ²: *We eventually come to realize that is the predominance of what has to do with words over what has to do with things.*

It should also be noted that this deconstruction is operated via the *decontextualisation* of the word. Indeed, there is a double decontextualisation in our case study: the first consists in the fact that a sentence is decontextualised (*one word stood out of the sentence. That word became as something material, nearly a thing for me, or an image in front of me*). The second consists in the fact that each letter within the decontextualised word is itself decontextualised from the word itself (*letter after letter I wanted to see if the string of letters corresponded the original meaning*). Moreover, this deviance from ordinary contexts of meanings is grasped by Cutting ²:

In schizophrenia it is the pragmatic level which bears the brunt assault, the semantic level is next affected, the syntactic level hardly at all, the phonemic level not at all (...). Any deviance of the semantic and syntactical level derives either from this autonomous self-referential overdrive, or from what Lecours and Vanier-Clément (1976) referred to as 'unusual word choices... testifying the lexical wealth... adapted to the speaker's ideation (in other words, not adapted to the listener).

In other words, what seems to be first affected in the language competence of persons with schizophrenia is not their 'lack of words' or their capacity to 'grasp the proper meaning' of a word, but their intention to use language in a way that is appropriate to circumstances.

The basic properties of the phenomenon of semantic deconstruction

Although semantic deconstruction is not a common clinical phenomenon (or perhaps exactly for that reason), I have the feeling that it could be of some (or perhaps great) psychopathological importance. My hypothesis is that this deviance from the ordinary meaning of words is governed by one (or more) ordering principle(s), by rules that not only make this phenomenon understandably meaningful, but also explain its genesis. In this paper, my intent is to discern this ordering principle. To do so, I will proceed as follows:

- an in-depth analyses of the case study (the person's narrative about semantic deconstruction) aimed at rescuing its basic properties;
- an analysis of the more general existential context within which this person's semantic deconstruction takes place, aimed at identifying some common properties shared by this language anomaly and other anomalies in his life-world;
- an analysis of the overall 'cultural' (e.g., philosophical, linguistic etc.) background that may help to shed light

on this phenomenon and look for its basic properties. Let's start with some further remarks about the patient's own description. We can discern three basic properties in our case study. I will call them *itemisation*, *materialisation* and *pictorialisation*.

Itemisation

When this person hears someone speaking (or when he himself is thinking), there is a kind of breakdown of the scene as it can be ordinarily experienced.

(1) The sentence is separated from the speaker (or from the thinker), (2) words are separated from the whole sentence, (3) letters are separated from the entirety of the word they belong to. We can also reasonably assume that (4) the speaker (or thinker) is separated from the context in which he makes his utterance (or thinks).

The outcome of all this is that the letters may turn out to be the patient's unique focus of attention. In a previous article, we ³ use the terms *deconstruction* to address (2) and (3) and *decontextualisation* to address (1) and (4) of the above paragraph. All these phenomena seem to respond to the general rule that we call *itemisation*.

Itemisation is defined as the breakdown of a *Gestalt* that reduces the ensemble of an experience to a list of *itemised*, that is, separated, details. Each detail hangs next to the other, as if they were a collection of unrelated items. *Itemisation* is part of what generates the feeling of unreality.

Pictorialisation

When this person hears someone speaking (or when he himself is thinking) sentences (or thoughts) become visible images. *I could nearly see them as pictures in front of me.* Words appear in the realm of images, rather than in the realm of sounds, or in the immaterial realm of meanings. This happens when one word is stripped from the sentence it belongs to, and when a letter is stripped from the word it belongs to. *Pictorialisation* goes together with *itemisation*. The sensorial domain within which words and letters materialise is the visual domain. *'MM' looked like a Gothic cathedral with all those cusps.* In this case, *pictorialisation* is indistinguishable from *materialisation*.

Materialisation

When this person hears someone speaking (or when he himself is thinking), sentences (or thoughts) become concrete, thing-like entities. *That word became as something material, nearly a thing for me.* Words appear in the realm of things (rather than in the realm of sounds, or in the immaterial realm of meanings). This happens when one word is stripped from the sentence it belongs to, and when a letter is stripped from the word it belongs to. *Materialisation* goes together with *itemisation*.

As we will see in detail, pictorialisation and materialisation testify to the blurring of the boundaries between ontological domains that usually are experienced as separate – that is, the domain of signs, images and things^{4,5}.

The life-world of semantic deconstruction

I can provide only a few detailed narratives from this person about his ‘existential context’ or life-world. Yet the elements that I collected are very rich, since he has an outstanding linguistic competence and developed a profound insight into his previous condition. These narratives were gathered when a prolonged acute episode (lasting for several months) ended, and he was eager to tell me about his anomalous experiences and discuss their meaning with me.

Itemisation/salience

When I was speaking, or doing something, details popped up and distracted me. For instance, the pen on your table, or your watch, or even smaller ones like the edge of that frame, or the fall of a leaf. They had no special meaning. Or, better, some had some meaning, but only occasionally. I had to make an effort to integrate these details into my talk. Obviously, the outcome was quite incomprehensible for those who were listening (he smiles).

Again, itemisation comes to the fore. In this narrative, he describes the itemisation of lived space and of the things contained in it. There are two features that seem to be of great importance.

First, itemisation is not equal to salience in this case. Only occasionally the detail that is stripped from the context has to him a special reference or meaning (*They had no special meaning. Or, better, some had some meaning, but only occasionally*). It is debatable whether in general itemisation is the condition of possibility for salience, or vice versa. That is, if aberrant salience is to be seen as a consequence of the phenomenon of loss of *Gestalt*, or if the other way round: some details become prominent because of what they mean to the experiencing person. In the first case, we could assume that what is primary is a breakdown of perception, namely of space perception, and what is secondary is the post hoc attribution of a special meaning to the detail that comes in the foreground. In the second case, we could suppose that the primary phenomenon is semantic (rather than perceptive) in nature.

I will not delve too deeply into this description, but only note that to this person itemisation is principally a cause of distress. The scene, fragmented into disconnected details, has no unitary significance: it simply makes no sense to him. He must exert great effort to ‘normalise’ this with language (*I had to make the effort to integrate these details into my talk*). This is the second feature that seems

important: language is used to domesticate unfamiliar experiences. Yet the outcome of this use of language is a further experience of decontextualisation, namely of social decontextualisation (*Obviously, the outcome was quite incomprehensible for those who were listening*). His effort to domesticate aberrant experiences results in language becoming opaque, unable to communicate meaning.

Words as defences against the flood of events

I shored words to defend myself against the flood of events. I was flooded by so many things – so many things happened around me. I was the centre of this crossfire. I made these events into objects in order to have control over them.

In this narrative, he gives some further details about the experience of itemisation.

The plethora of details is also an excess of events. This means that details were not simply snapshots that stood one next to the other without affecting him. Rather, these details *happened to him* (*I was the centre of this crossfire*). He could not but pay attention to them. The well-known phenomenon of centrality is here accompanied by a sharp distinction between two regimes of ‘facts’ that populate his life-world: objects and events. Details are on the side of events. Objects are simply there, events happen (*things happened around me*). He explains that his drive for finding words was a necessity to defend himself from the flood of events. Words could change these events into mere objects – that is, static entities that can be better controlled (*I made these events into objects in order to have control over them*). Words have this ‘magic power’:

By the means of symbols – writes Straus 6 – we break through the sensory horizon. Words, likewise, do not verbalize things or situations which we already had before in the same way. They first make it possible to separate the perennial structure of things from their accidental aspects and to deal with the totality which we perceive in particular perspectives only. Through their names things become graspable.

Metamorphosis of experience/Lack of words

I built words that did not exist because my experiences needed something that went beyond [ordinary language]. A poet is someone who lacks words. New words were needed. Something akin to images, or music.

Here his narrative clearly indicates that the *primum movens* or *trouble générateur* is not a semantic deficit *per se* – that is, a cognitive deficit like alogia. The problem here is *not* that he lacks words in general, or words to express what happens under ordinary circumstances. What he lacks are words to express the uncanny transformation of his experiences. What affects him is a discrepancy between language capacity and experience generated by a

profound metamorphosis of experience (*my experiences needed something that went beyond*). Itemisation and the flood of events of which he is the centre are major features of this metamorphosis.

Put into this context, the phenomenon of semantic deconstruction seems to share the same preconditions as neologism: new words, and a new use of language, are needed to re-equilibrate the disproportion between language and experience (*New words were needed*). Instead of inventing new words (neologism), he deconstructs old ones creating a lexicon in which words are *akin to images, or music*.

The background of semantic deconstruction in culture: Mimologism

I have assumed that the phenomenon of semantic deconstruction is governed by one (or more) ordering principle(s), by some rules that make this phenomenon meaningful and understandable in its genesis. In an essay entitled *Mimologiques*, Gérard Genette⁷ explores the principles of what I call here semantic deconstruction, from Plato to Leibniz to the present time. I will not go into details, but merely illustrate the question that guides his inquiry:

Between a word and the thing it indicates is there a conventional and arbitrary relation, or else the word imitates the thing it addresses?

Mimologism is the term Genette uses to name the mimetic relation between words (and especially names) and things. Mimologism presupposes that an ordinary word can be broken down into smaller units and that in this way its true meaning will come to light.

The question about the supposed mimetic relation between words and things may sound obsolete and futile. Nonetheless it is exactly this archaic question that re-emerges in our case study. We all know that 'the word 'dog' does not bite' – as the experts and common sense seem to assure⁷. Yet someone else might propose that '[t]he word that indicates *rain* should wet. The word that indicates *smoke* should flatter' (Greenaway, *The Pillow Book*). And, last but not least, with the greatest authority the Bible reports that '[w]ith the word of Yahweh the heaven was created' (Sal, 33, 6).

Genette explains that there are two main types of mimologisms – and correspondingly there are two kinds of practices that lead to the 'natural' meaning of a word by means of its deconstruction.

The first kind of mimologism is called *mimophonism*. At its core is the assumption that the sounds of the voice reproduce the meanings of the words. For instance, 'str' indicates force or effort, as in the words 'strong', 'strength', 'strike', 'stroke', 'string', 'stride' etc.⁷.

The second is *mimographism*. As language not only ma-

terialises in sounds, but also in written signs, mimesis can occur not only phonetically but also graphically, as the imitation of the meaning of a word by the sensible form of writing. Mimographism, in its own turn, includes *phono-mimographism* and *ideo-mimographism*. Phono-mimographism focuses on the form of the phonatory apparatus during the utterance of a given phoneme and its equivalence with the graphic form of the corresponding letter. For instance, 'o' is pronounced with a round mouth⁷. Phono-mimographism means that each letter imitates a given phenomenon. For instance, 'o' symbolises the infinite circle of time and space; 'i' with its point that represents the sun represents verticality, thus fire, as well as the Self as the figure of a man in his primitive state of innocence⁷. Ideo-mimographism is the logic behind the case study presented in this paper. It is also the logic that, according to some experts, subtends hieroglyphic writing. I have discussed this issue extensively in a paper on the Kabbalah⁴, pointing out some analogies between schizophrenic consciousness and this form of Jewish mysticism. In this tradition, the fragmenting methods of the Kabbalist, applied to the *Torah*, result in a radical transformation of the text by means of a deconstruction and reconfiguration of sub-narrative units. This leads to the predominance of the material, the graphic, the sensible, the thing-like and the palpable aspects of language. The becoming 'palpable' of words and letters in the experience of Kabbalists draws on the underlying connection between words and things.

A similar 'logic' can be found in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus* – suggesting the title for this paper. *Cratylus'* argument goes as follows: since names are similar to things, and are not simply conventional signs, then when someone knows the name, he also knows the thing it refers to. Vocal mimicry imitates the essence of each thing via the sound of each letter or syllable that composes the word. For instance, 'r' means movement, 'i' lightness, 'ph' aspiration or agitation etc. A word is *mimema phoné*, that is, it can mimic a thing through sounds. Socrates must display all his critical skills, including irony to challenge this doctrine and turn *Cratylus'* certainty into a doubt. He must demonstrate that things and images are not the same ('Don't you realize how images are far away from having the same properties as the objects they represent?') before he can argue that names and things are not the same too ('Don't you think that a name is something else than the thing it names?'). Apparently, *Cratylus* agrees when Socrates ironically suggests that 'not from names, but from things themselves we must begin if we want to look for and apprehend things'. The phrase *Cratylus effect* is intended to represent the position of the patient presented here and his deconstructive attitude towards language, one which aims to rescue the natural and original meaning of the words.

Again, one may view questions about mimologism as use-

less conjectures of an out-dated debate. Yet there is at least one reason that they are extremely important, especially in psychopathology: these theories parallel some of the perplexities that obsess people with schizophrenia. Among these perplexities are those about the baffling relations between body and soul, stemming from a sense of oneself as a disembodied spirit and/or deanimated body (in this context, the correspondence between the configuration and movement of the phonatory apparatus and the meaning of a word can be quite reassuring since it points to the unity of body and soul). Also, as a consequence of their experience of disconnection from the social milieu, the search for a 'natural language' can be seen as an antidote to this disconnection and intersubjective dis-attunement. The baffling metamorphoses of their world and self-experiences suggest another origin of this search for novel forms of expressions. A final factor that appears to contribute to the development of mimologism is the sense of perplexity about the puzzling relation between language and representation one side, and reality on the other, and the ensuing speculations about the reality of reality, the role of common sense and ordinary language in hiding 'true' reality and in constructing a 'pseudo-reality', the need to establish a 'new' language to talk about a 'new' reality etc. These inquiries appear to promote the search for a primordial language, that is, a language that is closer to things themselves. A language that shortens the distance between words and phenomena as they are given. A language that is born from the impression that phenomena leave on the soul – 'the accord between the sounds and the effect the marvel of things produce on the soul' ⁷.

Itemisation: the common property shared by abnormal language and experience

There is a clear analogy between the itemisation of language and of the life-world.

The breakdown of sentences into words, and of words into letters, parallels the breakdown of lived situations into fragments of the life-world. This disintegration of the life-world wounds the person with its splinters, forcing him to defend himself. The person builds a shield of words to protect himself. These words are not used in their ordinary meaning, but undergo a deconstruction that apparently makes them more suitable for protection. The question here is the following: is there a common *logic* beyond this analogy? In Peter Handke's ⁸ short novel *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, a story about the construction worker Joseph Bloch who one day for no apparent reason thinks that he is fired and then sets out on a bizarre and devastating journey, we find a detailed description of a phenomenon that may help clarify this issue. Central to the experience of the world as depleted and fractured is the breakdown of spatial *Gestalt*, as it is captured, for instance, in this

episode in Bloch's odyssey: "[h]e sat down on the bed: just now that chair had been to his right, and now it was to his left. Was the picture reversed? He looked at it from left to right, then from right to left. He repeated the look from left to right; this look seemed to him like reading. He saw a "wardrobe," "then" "a" "wastebasket," "then" "a" "drape" (p. 124 [117]). This is a clear example of itemisation of lived space, and of the life-world in general.

A phenomenon analogous to itemisation is described by Erwin Straus ^{6,9} and Victor von Gebattel ¹⁰ in their essays about the world of the obsessive. They argue that obsessives collide with the powers of dis-formation (*Entstaltung*) ¹⁰. They are threatened and disgusted by physiognomy of decay, whose central characteristic is the separation of parts or details from the integrity of the whole, or the *aneidos* – literally the un-form:

Curls on a head look lovely and attractive, but the same hair found in the soup is disgusting; perhaps we should like to cut one of these curls as a souvenir, but we should be disgusted to collect the hair left in a comb. Saliva spit out is disgusting, an expression of our contempt, but on fresh lips and tongue the saliva is not disgusting. Separation from the integrity of the living organism indicates a transition to death; it signifies decay, the process of decomposition, then again the dead ⁹.

Straus' and v. Gebattel's concept of 'separation from integrity', describing the physiognomy of the obsessive 'counterworld', has at least one point in common with itemization: in both there is a breakdown of the overall *Gestalt* of experience. Things fall apart in both cases. Yet, whereas disgust is the central emotion for the obsessive, perplexity – a paralysing mixture of anguish, hope, despair and suspicion – is the emotion that accompanies the experience of itemisation. In the world of the obsessive, separation from integrity indicates death, whereas in the world of the perplexed itemisation indicates the strange, unfamiliar and uncanny. Reality is suspended between meaninglessness and the imminent revelation of a new meaningfulness. Everything feels ominous; reality has undergone some inexplicable and ineffable change. The world is pervaded by a kind of latent meaningfulness: it has lost its habitual familiarity, and has not yet acquired a new kind of significance. Going back to Handke's description, there are three features that are most relevant to us here.

1) The scene, fragmented into disconnected details, has no unitary significance: it simply makes no sense. The scene is fractured into snapshots apparently unrelated to each other. Each snapshot hangs next to the other, as if they were a collection of photographs lacking a three-dimensional arrangement. Itemisation is part of what generates the feeling of unreality. Since meaningfulness requires the unification of details, the whole scene appears insignificant and motivationally flat.

2) The fragmentation of lived space is paralleled by a fragmentation of language. Language too is itemised. Each individual word stands isolated from the ones that precede and follow it. They seem to float in an empty space, unrelated to each other. Can this phenomenon be assimilated to what we earlier described as the *materialisation* of words?

3) What is most relevant for us is that in what follows *words are substituted by images*. The word 'chair' is substituted by a hieroglyph for chair, and the same happens for 'table', 'wastebasket' etc. The itemisation of lived space is paralleled by an itemisation of language, whereby a sentence is fragmented into single words. And, at a later step, each word becomes an image – what we called *pictorialisation* – blurring the distinction between things (the flesh-and-blood table), signs (the word 'table') and images (the representation of a table).

The question is: Given that the changes in *experience* and in *language* share a common ordering principle – namely, itemisation – may these two orders of abnormalities be regarded as manifesting a common underlying disturbance?

Itemisation and disordered temporality

In this paragraph I will discuss the following hypothesis: *At the heart of the phenomenon of itemisation there is a disorder of temporalisation.*

Temporality is a long-standing theme of phenomenological psychopathology and of phenomenological philosophy, as temporality constitutes the bedrock of any experience. We must distinguish two levels of analysis of temporality: the phenomenal and the trans-phenomenal one. On the first level we find the abnormalities of time experience described above. We refer to this feature of temporality with the term 'phenomenal' or 'lived' time. The second level 'functions' implicitly and is un-experienced. We refer to it with the term 'transcendental time' (TT). TT underlies and constitutes any given phenomenal experience; it is for this reason we speak of 'transcendental' temporality.

TT has a threefold intentional structure: primal impressions are articulated with the retention of the just-elapsed and the protention or anticipation of the just-about-to-occur. The feeling we have of ourselves as unitary subjects of experience remaining permanent through time is due to the integrity of TT. If we have the feeling of our mental life as a streaming self-awareness, this is a consequence of the continuity of TT as the innermost structure of our acts of perception. Thanks to the unified, pre-reflexive (that is, implicit and tacit) operation of primal impression, protention and retention underlying our experience of the present, our consciousness is internally related to itself and self-affecting. Consciousness (and self-consciousness) and temporality are equiprimordial and co-determined, and phenomenologically co-given in the constitutive flux of consciousness.

The integrity of TT is the condition of possibility of the identity through time of an object of perception as well as of the person who perceives it. Our experience of the permanence in time of a given object whose aspects cannot exist simultaneously but only appear across time (e.g., a melody, or a tridimensional object seen from different perspectives) would be impossible if our consciousness were only aware of what is given in a punctual 'now'. We can perceive something as a unitary and identical object because our consciousness is not caught in the 'now', but the now-moment has a 'width' that extends toward the recollection of past and the expectation of the future. Conscious experience at any moment stretches from the here-and-now backwards to the past and towards the future. This function provides consciousness of the temporal horizon of the present object. This pre-reflective temporal structure of our experience based on TT was already noticed by Husserl who called this implicit function of the mind 'passive synthesis'. No succession or duration, no temporal-flux or spatiotemporal-perspective, no perception of anything with temporal extension, no coherence of experience in general, is possible without the temporal synthesis of primal presentational, retentional and protentional intentions¹¹. If our perception restricted to what happens right now, we would merely experience isolated, unrelated, punctual conscious states¹².

Based on the temporal structure provided and constituted by TT, we experience lived time as fast or slow, continuous or discontinuous, future- or past-directed etc. The characteristics of time experience (i.e., phenomenal time) are simply one of the phenomenal consequences of the integrity or of the disruption of the TT.

Our case study does not give us any information about the way this person experiences time. Nevertheless, we know that persons with schizophrenia are affected by abnormal time experiences. At the phenomenal level, these include four subcategories¹³:

Disruption of time flow: Patients live time as fragmented. Past, present and future are experienced as disarticulated. The intentional unification of consciousness is disrupted. The present moment has no reference to either past or future. The external world appears as a series of snapshots. Typical sentence: 'World like a series of photographs'.

Déjà vu/vécu: Patients experience places, people and situations as already seen and the news as already heard. This abnormal time experience entails a disarticulation of time structure as the past is no more distinguishable from the present moment. The already-happened prevails. Typical sentence: 'When I heard news I felt I had heard it before'.

Premonitions about oneself: Patients feel that something is going to happen to them or that they are going to do something. This abnormal time experience entails a disarticulation of time structure as the immediate future intrudes into

the present moment. The about-to-happen prevails. Typical sentence: 'I felt something good was going happen to me'. *Premonitions about the external world*: Patients feel that something is going to happen in the external world. As in the previous subcategory, this abnormal time experience entails a disarticulation of time structure as the immediate future intrudes into the present moment. The about-to-happen prevails. Typical sentence: 'Something is going on, as if some drama unfolding'.

We can derive from this study that the general structure of temporality in persons with schizophrenia is characterised by a *disarticulation* of the threefold intentional structure of TT (primal impressions articulated with the retention of the just-elapsed and the anticipation of the just-about-to-occur). The disarticulation of TT implies severe abnormalities in world-, self- and body-experience. As we observed in the previous paragraphs, one phenomenon characteristic of schizophrenia is a breakdown of spatial *Gestalt* resulting in an itemisation of the surrounding world: the whole scene is no longer perceived as a meaningful ensemble, and we observe the appearance of fragmented details unrelated to each other and to ourselves. The itemisation of lived space can be seen as the consequence of the disruption or itemisation of TT. In the domain of lived space, we do not experience partial views or mere isolated snapshots, or two-dimensional figures or representations, because each item of our perception is constantly integrated into a time-flow which connects the present moment's 'adumbration' with retention (what we already know or have just perceived of that, or a similar, object) and protention (what we expect or imagine it to be). If this time-flow breaks down, the itemisation of space experience occurs. The fragmentation of TT entails the disintegration of spatial perspectives, making things appear as unreal and without any relevance to the person, that is, without practical meaning (a house, for example, is there for people to inhabit, a mere scenario is not). Also, to the patient with schizophrenia the surrounding world loses its perspectival character: the perceptual distinction between foreground and background vanishes, while things appear as smooth, ungraspable objects, or as mere geometric shapes.

As with the itemisation of space, things will appear as mere objects (unrelated to one's body) and events merely as a collection of snapshots or representations (quasi-indiscernible from mental images). The integrity of TT is needed in order to perceive something as concrete, three-dimensional 'utensils' (something to be used), not merely as a 'stage trapping', or a representation of a real thing. We can suppose that the itemisation of TT has similar effects on one's experience of language. William James¹⁴ was one of the first to notice that time awareness determines one's perception of spoken language:

In hashish-intoxication there is a curious decrease in the apparent time-perspective. We utter a sentence, and ere the end is reached the beginning seems already to date from indefinitely long ago (vol. 1, p. 639).

The disintegration of time-flow and time-perspective induces a sensitisation to details. One may become absorbed by finer and finer details, to the point that one may feel 'separately' the 'physiognomies of each and every word'¹⁵. Lived temporality in these states is characterised by the 'elongation of felt duration' (p. 251), but the underpinning temporal pattern in these states is the itemisation of TT. This makes possible 'the phenomenon of an extending sense of duration within the expanding moment' (p. 252). Each moment is felt as timeless and eternal. During these expanded now's, more details become available within shorter and shorter time periods. In these states (which Hunt names 'presentational'), 'expressive patterns can appear as such in ultrarapid expressions of incipient felt meanings' (p. 251). These expressive patterns include 'brief flashes of concretely depictive content' as well as 'the various gradated luminosity of mystical experience' (p. 251).

All this seems to provide a coherent link between the itemization of TT and the pictorialisation and materialization of words and letters described in our case study. The pathogenic trajectory goes as follows:

Disarticulation of TT => (disruption of phenomenal time flowing) => itemisation of language experience => pictorialisation/materialisation of words/letters

This phenomenon was already described by Henry Ey¹⁶ in the realm of thought. Yet he did not explicitly extend his ideas in the realm of language experience, and did not explain its connection with abnormal temporality and its shared properties with the life-world in which it is embedded. Ey spoke of the transformation of "the 'moral' space of someone's pure subjective intentionality into monstrous 'physical' forms"¹⁶. This means that the space in which thought takes place (the 'moral' space) undergoes a transformation into a physical space. Within this concrete space, thoughts take on the material form of thing-like objects ("monstrous 'physical' forms"). Thinking takes on 'the density and the texture that are exactly the features of those objects in the physical world [...]. The thought becomes the object'¹⁶. A similar argument was developed by Fuchs¹⁷ who explained that 'unforeseen fragments of thoughts "may 'appear in consciousness as erratic blocks"'. The disintegration of TT implies materialisation of thought experience through the intermediate step of the fragmentation of time-flow.

Conclusions

My analysis is in many ways preliminary. Being idiographic, it lacks sufficient empirical support. Being phe-

nomenological in nature, it needs to be bridged to neurobiological data. Nevertheless, I will try to draw from it some tentative conclusions.

The object of this study is a kind of semantic deviance that I named 'semantic deconstruction'. Image-driven felt meanings are the outcome of this process whereby sentences and words are broken down in smaller, normally sub-semantic units so that their true meaning may come to light. This process deviates from ordinary semantics and paves the way to an idiosyncratic understanding of the world. Also of importance, semantic deconstruction is paralleled by an analogous fragmentation or itemisation of self- and world-experience. This psychopathological phenomenon shares common properties with comparable phenomena to be found in mystical practices like Kabbalah, or in philosophical theories like the one endorsed by Cratylus in the homonymous Platonic dialogue¹⁸.

A failure of the constitutive temporal synthesis, namely transcendental temporality (TT), creating micro-gaps of experience, is supposed to be the origin of this phenomenon. This implies that persons who undergo the disintegration of TT may start to notice islands of unrelated and self-referential language experience. The disintegration of TT thus implies a fragmentation of language and thought experience that is accompanied by a pictorialisation/materialisation of these fragments. These splinters of language – including single words or letters – no longer embedded in the continuity of flow/pulsation of experience, appear as being images or (quasi)-physical objects floating in an objective space. Image-driven felt meanings are the outcome of this process of semantic deconstruction, whereby sentences and words are broken down into smaller units so that their true meaning may come to light. This process deviates from ordinary semantics and paves the way to an idiosyncratic understanding of the world. In conclusion, the relationship between the fragmentation of language and of experience is not one of mere analogy. Also, although semantic deconstruction is apparently driven by the need to find a new semantics to express the deep metamorphosis of self- and world experience, semantic deconstruction does not merely mimic the itemisation of the life-world. In our case study, semantic deconstruction is described by the patient as a quasi-voluntary phenomenon. Yet its condition of possibility is situated at the involuntary level of the disintegration of the constitutive structure of all lived experience – the unifying, transcendental, unexperienced synthesis of primal impression, protention and retention. Language and experience disintegration are phenomenologically co-given as both undergo the same destiny of itemisation, driven by a profound disintegration of TT.

Conflict of interests
None.

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