**Minkowski, Time and Non-Normative Mental States**

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| **Disintegration of the Notion of Time (332-337)** |
| * **[Depression so severe that it can entail psychosis.]**   ***Displacement in relation to [life]*:**   * + **Since my attack began, I have always been persuaded that my sickness has to do with time. I feel displaced in relation to life. I feel time flee, but I don’t have the sensation of following the movement; I have the sensation of turning in the opposite direction than the earth. I lack a reference to time […] I have the sensation that time passes very fast, faster than it does for others, too fast, and it is atrocious.**   + **[…] / I feel the desire to act, but this produces an opposite reaction to that of normal people; the phenomenon of stopping surges up and causes a complete discouragement. […] I have the sensation of a negative void. (anguish; fear)**   ***Incapacity of assimilating [following, even perceiving] movement*:**   * + **I am incapable of assimilating movement. […] When someone does something beside me, I am completely disoriented because I am incapable of following the movement. […] I see a tree but I cannot see an automobile at all. […] Silence and rest alone give me little contact with the environment. (violent suffering; distress)**   ***Splitting of time and absence of …organization of successive facts in time*:**   * + **I live in instantaneousness. I don’t have the feeling of continuity any more. I have the sensation of a void before me, of a void in the immediate future. At every new instant that I live, I have the feeling that I have just fallen from the sky. […] When I finish something, I have the feeling that it is the last thing that I will do.**   ***Incapacity of participating ‘contemporaneously’ with events*:**   * + **Someone has put me in the hospital but I remain a stranger to this event, as if I / were unconscious. I have the sensation of a void in relation to the whole time of my illness. I feel time flowing, but I have no notion of how much time has passed. […] I remain as if everything had stopped, as if nothing had evolved, nothing had moved, since the onset of my illness.**     ***Absence of the notion of progression in time, normally connected to the reiteration of similar facts, and the grasp of repeated acts***  ***Disorders of the function of presentification. Deficiency in relating the lived present, past, and future. Absence of perspective on the past, and influence of memories***  ***Grip of time; fatality. Feeling of being too late. Images of regrets.*** |
| **Group 1** |
| **Magnus in *The Accidental* (40-43)**  Hologram Boy was the form captain. He made the speech in Assembly on Remembrance Day for the dead soldiers in the world wars. It was Hologram Boy’s job to lay the wreath, lead the squeaking prayers, lest we forget. But Hologram Boy was all forgetfulness. He was lucky. Hologram Boy’s brain was all blank light. There will be no forgetting now. There will be no forgetting ever again. The remembering is like the darkening. The darkening is now happening more. It is like the way having the flu made light go dark. It is almost exactly like when he had flu in December 1999 January 2000. The old series about the Germans down below in the submarine was on tv every night, the pressure, whether or not they’d survive being that low. The first time it happened was two days after he knew she’d done it. He was standing, just standing, by a bus stop by a tree. The tree had a sticking-out branch. Above the tree, round the branch, the sky got darker. Then everything got darker. But nothing had changed. The sky was blue. There were no clouds. There was no change in the air. It just carried on, getting darker. It went away after he slept. Then it came back again the next week in the café. Then it went away. Then it came back, darker. There is no warning. It is like when you are at a cinema waiting for the lights to go down. Something inside your brain knows that at any moment the lights will dim. So sometimes you feel them go dim when they haven’t done anything, haven’t changed at all. It keeps happening to him. It is caused by causal effects. He has caused it. He has changed the way the world is. They played about with her head until they were happy. They shifted it about on the neck. Then they delivered it. Then she killed herself.  Forty people in the upper sixth probably saw that picture. Twenty-six people in the lower sixth probably saw it. Magnus can’t calculate how many other people possibly saw it, or can still see it. There was a lecture about it at Assembly, after. Milton said the people who sent it should come forward. It would come to light, he said. When it did it would be worse for them then if they didn’t come forward now. But it can’t be traced. There is no way the email can be traced back to them. Anton found a zipcode from somewhere in the States. He got it out of the back of the magazine. The message was sent from ‘Michael Jackson’. When Magnus checked his mail that Tuesday night that’s the name that came up. He had laughed. He had thought it was well cool, to be part of it. He was in the common room when Jake Strothers first came in with the photo. Jake Strothers stole it from the school office. Jake Strothers had been sent to deliver a note but when he got there the office was empty. The filing cabinet was wide open. Jake Strothers looked in it. He found the photo on her file. She was in the lower sixth. She was near the front of the Ms. Jake Strothers came into the common room, showed it to Anton. Anton had the magazine in his locker. He fetched it out, folded the photo on to it. Jake Strothers went crazy. Don’t for fuck sake you’re bending it. Jake Strothers had wanted to go out with her. That’s why he stole it. He didn’t want a phone photo. He wanted a photo taken unsneakily. Then Jake Strothers actually looked at the composite Anton made by folding it. They both laughed. He asked them what they were laughing at. They wouldn’t tell him or show him. They knew he hadn’t ever done it yet. They could sense it like it was written on his forehead. Anton said: I’m not responsible for what happens to homosexuals. Magnus said he wasn’t. Anton said: I believe you, honest. But I’m not responsible either for what happens to innocents who see things they’re not ready for yet. Anton was right about that. Hologram Boy was so fucking pure. Hologram Boy noted his own stiffs like interesting science experiments. At this point he was still Hologram Boy. At this point Hologram Boy was still under the illusion that he was Magnus Smart. It was still an ordinary Tuesday. Magnus Smart knew something they didn’t know. A child could do it for fuck sake. Anton, Jake Strothers, hadn’t a clue. They were computer illiterates. Magnus Smart told them there was something he could really show them. It was after school hours. There was hardly anybody about. They walked along the corridor past the cleaners. They went down the main stairs. The school was empty, hollow, big as a whale. They walked through it like they were inside its ribs. But now Magnus is bigger, more bloated than the school. He knows more than the whole school does. They pushed the door open. What is it you see when you see a photo of someone? There was an article in the paper. It said: the tragedy of the loss of Catherine Masson who went to Deans. A happy generous well-loved person a polite bright girl a good friend whose friends would all miss her a keen member of the Lapidary Society. The photo in the paper was the school photo. It was the same one. Magnus knows more than she knew. Magnus knows more than her family knows, even now. All the people who got the email, all the people who read the paper, Magnus knows more than them all. Anton knows. Jake Strothers knows. Nobody will know Magnus is anything to do with them. They are known as bad. He is known as good. They met at the side gate as if by chance they were just walking along at the same pace going home from school. Anton was looking at the ground as he walked. He said nobody was to know, nobody was to say. They all agreed, they nodded without saying anything, no one would know. But Magnus knows. He is all swollen up with knowing.  He did it.  They did it.  Then she did it.  She killed herself  Magnus shakes his head hard inside the duvet. He says the words to himself again. She. Killed. Herself. Nothing. Words are pointless. They mean nothing. They don’t do anything. He pulls the duvet off his head. He is still in this room. They are on holiday in Norfolk. Is it dark yet? Doesn’t matter.  **Think about any connections between the characterizations of time by those in ‘major depressive states’ (see above and in the document) and Magnus’s experience of it here.**  **Psychiatrist Giovanni Stanghellini and colleagues have described major depression in terms similar to Minkowski (and influenced by his work). How do their remarks compare to Magnus:**   * **What characterizes […] major depression, rather than a fragmentation of temporal experience, is its loosening. This paves the way to abnormal association of retention [memory] with protention [anticipation of the future], whose outcome are guilt delusions (the patient accuses himself of some wrong he has done in the past and cannot be redeemed in the present or future). (Stanghellini et al, ‘Psychopathology and Lived Time’, 52)**   **Think about the passage from *The Accidental* in relation to the characterization of the past as (always) negative in the Translator’s Introduction (Metzel introducing Minkowski’s ideas):**   * We always experience the past in terms of a painful emotion. We can make use of our past experiences productively in activity, but whenever we live in the past as present, it is a painful experience; we experience either remorse or regret.   **And in relation to knowledge:**   * The past is closer to knowledge than life. |
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| **Group 2** |
| ***Mrs Dalloway* ( 74-77; 101)**  Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness. But what was the scientific explanation (for one must be scientific above all things)? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men? It was the heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution. Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock.  […]  But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still; he begged (he was talking to himself again--it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.  He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks--all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.  "It is time," said Rezia.  The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself--  "For God's sake don't come!" Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.  But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole--  "But I am so unhappy, Septimus," said Rezia trying to make him sit down.  The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation--  "The time, Septimus," Rezia repeated. "What is the time?"  He was talking, he was starting, this man must notice him. He was looking at them.  "I will tell you the time," said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck--the quarter to twelve.  […]  So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; […] He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world. (101)  **Think about any connections between the characterizations of time in those in ‘major depressive states’ (with psychotic elements), see above and in the Minkowski document, and Septimus’s experience of it here.**  **Psychiatrist Giovanni Stanghellini and colleagues have built on Minkowski’s work to discuss schizophrenia in relation to time perception:**   * **Depression: the crisis of life-drive that projects into the future leaves the person dominated by the past;** * **Schizophrenia: temporality may lose all organization and meaning. (46)** * **What characterizes […] major depression, rather than a fragmentation of temporal experience, is its loosening. This paves the way to abnormal association of retention [memory] with protention [anticipation of the future], whose outcome are guilt delusions (the patient accuses himself of some wrong he has done in the past and cannot be redeemed in the present or future). (52)**   **How does Septimus’s experience compare to these descriptions? Can we write new ones for his experience?**  **Can you think of portraits of “guilt delusions” – the dominance of the present or future by abnormal ‘retention’ of the past – in any other works you know not on the module? Any representations or descriptions of time losing ‘organization and meaning’ e.g. in psychotic experience? For other reasons?** |
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| **The ‘senile person’ (374-379)**  [in the hospital only a few days]  When did you leave your apartment?  Two years ago.  Where did you go then?  Why, here, where I am.    ….this will not go on very long. I’m going home in a day or two. […] (374)  But you didn’t see [your son] this morning.  Oh, then it was last night. (375) [etc.]  The fundamental notion of “me-here-now” is intact and appears to be active. This is what allows our patient, in the absence of any remembrance and as a consequence of any precise knowledge, to say when asked where she is, “Why, here, where I am,” or again, in indicating by a glance the room… to say “I am here”, or, finally, “Here, where I am living now.” To the “here-now” is subordinated an “over-there-before-or-after”, a notion to which all that is not “here-now” is completely subordinated.  …*a marked tendency to constantly situate oneself in time.*  …responses … abound in expressions of a temporal order, such as *formerly, since, always, in two or three days, right now, five minutes ago, many times, yesterday…*  …very often adds indications of a temporal order to responses that do not require it at all. When we ask here where she is, she answers, “I have been here ever since I have had so many troubles”, or, again, “I am here *in the meantime*”. The patient with whom she shares her room is her maid “for the moment”. When she is asked about her health she tells us: “I have been all right since this morning”… (377)  / The notion of time, insofar as it is empty of precise mnesic [memory] images, must impose itself on the mind and attempt to fill up this void at all cost. Seniles […] always invent in a certain way. They always invent in time and thus express the existence of a factor which is particularly capable of evoking and maintaining the notion of the past and of time in general completely independently of memory in the usual sense of the word. (378) /  …general paretics [those with including those who had ‘paralytic dementia’, a neurodegenerative condition caused by syphilis and environmental pollution, among other things] …have recourse to expressions such as *in a little while, right away, previously,* and *soon*, and I emphasized the primordial place that the notion of *immediate succession* occupies in their mental life. …their psyche is conquered by the elementary dynamism which, turned above all toward the *future*, is expression in the initial phases of the disease by the delusions of grandeur… dynamism at an advanced state of the disease, at the core of such responses as “I wait for events and I do things”…  In spite of the same predominance having to do with time in the mental life of demented seniles, things do not occur in exactly the same way with them. Here the *past* exercises its grip more than anything else. The frequence of the fabulations is in itself a sufficient proof. Certainly the future is not entirely excluded from the patient’s talk. But when we look more closely we see that it is entirely subordinated to the past. (379)  **What is this patient’s relationship to past, present and future? How might, as Minkowski writes later, the present moment "lose its usual tonality" here, as time unfolds "beyond its natural limits"?** |
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| **Introduction** |
| **Group 1** |
| * **The experience of time is always affective experience. […] we live the immediate future in terms of expectation. The mediate future is experienced in terms of hope, the remote future in terms of prayer.**   What do you think Metzel, introducing Minkowski, means by this?  What distinguishes expectation, hope and ‘prayer’ (reading the last metaphorically – or not)?  **Emily Dickinson:**  “Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul And sings the tune without the words And never stops at all.  And sweetest in the Gale – is heard –  And sore must be the storm –  That could abash the little Bird  That kept so many warm –  I’ve heard it in the chilliest land –  And on the strangest Sea –  Yet – never – in Extremity  It asked a crumb – of me.  Think about these states in terms of emotion. What is the emotional landscape of Dickinson’s poem, do you think/ feel? Can you think of any other literary instances of expectation, hope and/or ‘prayer’ for the remote future? |
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| **Group 2** |
| * **We always experience the past in terms of a painful emotion. We can make use of our past experiences productively in activity, but whenever we live in the past as present, it is a painful experience; we experience either remorse or regret.**   Is this true?  **Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending***:  “And no, it wasn't shame I now felt, or guilt, but something rarer in my life and stronger than both: remorse. A feeling which is more complicated, curdled, and primeval. Whose chief characteristic is that nothing can be done about it: too much time has passed, too much damage has been done, for amends to be made.”  What other, more positive feelings about the past might we feel and are they ever entirely positive?  What distinctive portraits of remorse, guilt, regret, and/or nostalgia have you come across in literature, and what function have they served in relation to the story or the message of the piece? |
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| **Group 3** |
| * **The future is the most important modality of time. The past is closer to knowledge than life. We can represent the past, however; even if we attempt to predict the future or anticipate what we will do in the future, it eludes any attempt to exhaust it in terms of prophecy or prediction.**   What might it mean for the past to be ‘closer to knowledge than life’? Have you come across any fictions of the future or futurity that have expressed this idea of inexhaustibility – or, conversely, tried to suggest a finite or circumscribed or exhausted future? |