Object fragmentation and loss of depth in psychosis: a phenomenological approach

Among the many possible alterations of self and world experience befalling a person during the onset of psychosis, this presentation shall focus on two: the experiences of object fragmentation and loss of depth perception. While rightfully listed separately in the phenomenological interviewing tools, these experiences emerge as interrelated across a number of first-person accounts. The loss of depth perception can be conceptualized through Merleau-Ponty's and Steinbock's notion of primordial rather than objectified depth. In such reading, the loss of depth leaves the subject with absolutized and isolated "facts", a non-porous, flat, discontinuous, and generally "fragmented" world.

In the experience of object fragmentation, habitual object-unities disperse, leaving "free-floating" experiential fragments. The condition of absolute openness, though, is not one a person can comfortably inhabit. Fragments are then reorganized into novel unities, which may be said to qualify as Husserlian immanent objects. According to Husserl, the lack of incompleteness renders some immanent objects the "satisfactory" ability to be "appropriated in their absoluteness". However, first-person accounts reveal that, in such cases, the lack of incompleteness often leaves subjects with a prominent sense of grief. Questions arise: can we speak productively of a connection between fragmentation and the loss of depth? How can seemingly mutual depthlessness be understood through a different conceptualization of "lack"?