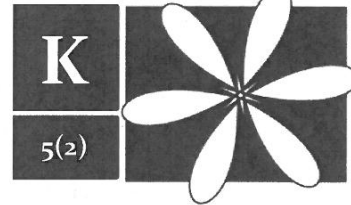


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Doing Time: A Sideways Glance at the Pauses and Hesitations in Jacques Lacan's Essay on Logical Time

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The Essential Dimensions of Psychoanalysis

While attending a dinner party, a guest approaches Lacan with a riddle, which he asks the psychoanalyst to solve. This riddle, or puzzle, involves three prisoners and a prison warden who offers to set one of them free. The particular scenario intrigues Lacan and becomes the basis for his essay *Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism* (hereafter, referred to as the logical time essay), which was published in 1945. Lacan begins the essay by introducing and setting out the rules of the game that the prisoners are presented with:

A prison warden summons three choice prisoners and announces to them the following: For reasons I need not make known to you now, I must free one of you. In order to decide which, I will entrust the outcome to a test that you will, I hope, agree to undergo. There are three of you present. I have here five disks differing only in colour: three white and two black. Without letting you know which I will have chosen, I will fasten one of them to each of you between the shoulders, outside, that is, your direct visual field [...] You will then be left at your leisure to consider your companions and their respective disks, without being allowed, of course, to communicate among yourselves the results of your inspection [...] The first to be able to deduce his own colour will be the one to benefit from the discharging measure at my disposal. But his conclusion must be founded upon logical and not simply probabilistic grounds [...] As

soon as one of you is ready to formulate such a conclusion he will pass through this door so that he may be judged individually on the basis of his response. (Lacan, 2007: 161)

In 1953, eight years after the publication of his logical time essay, and in reference to it, Lacan speaks of the need to formalise psychoanalytic theory, describing 'the essential dimensions of its experience, [as] intersubjective logic and the temporality of the subject' (Lacan, 2007: 239). However, despite this unequivocal statement, clear references to time and temporality are relatively rare in Lacan's work. Indeed, John Forrester (1990) notes the lack of a clearly defined and coherent thesis of time within Lacan's oeuvre, with Adrian Johnston suggesting that 'Lacan consistently marginalises the significance of time/temporality' (Johnston, 2005: 24).

Lacan does this, Johnston suggests, not because he is unaware of the importance of time in psychoanalytic theory, but because he is deeply torn or ambivalent about it. Indeed, having spent many years developing and expanding his own theory of time, Lacan is unable to reconcile this to Freud's statement that the unconscious is timeless (Freud, 2005). This tension, or antagonism, between Lacan's desire to remain faithful to Freud and his own burgeoning ideas accounts for the marginalisation of, and lack of a solid thesis on, the subject of time in Lacan's work.

Having said this, however, Johnston gives an excellent summary of the varied, though infrequent, ways in which Lacan presents the notion of temporality throughout his career. He identifies three main points, or moments, in Lacan's oeuvre where there is a concentrated contemplation of temporality. The first of these is the logical time essay of 1945. The second, he suggests, comes when Lacan, in his Seminar of 1964, begins to develop the notion of *tuché*, or chance encounter. The third only fully arrives in Lacan's final Seminar proper, his twenty-sixth, on *Topology and Time*, even though he begins to introduce topological structures much earlier than this (Johnston, 2005).

In this essay I concentrate on the earliest of these, Lacan's essay on logical time. I pay special attention to the role Lacan gives to the pauses in his articulation of the puzzle; he variously refers to these as pauses, hesitations, scansions, instants, suspended motions, moments, interruptions and temporal modulations. In doing so I integrate other Lacanian concepts and ideas, weaving a path between Lacan's earlier and later temporal theories. As the essay develops I use the pause as a way of thinking about and connecting Lacan's various forays into a theory of time.

Within the pause, I suggest, there is a kind of timelessness, this timelessness in a sense defining the pause as a pause, a stopping of time. In this way, I propose the notion of the pause as a way out of the antagonism arising between a Freudian timelessness and Lacan's notions of temporality. Before getting to grips with the pauses as they occur within the logical time essay, I first present the solution that Lacan offers to the prisoner puzzle.

Lacan's Solution to the Prisoners' Puzzle

Before considering the solution, recall the warden's announcement to the prisoners: there are five discs, three white ones and two black. Out of this collection he places a white disc on each of the prisoners' backs, the two black discs not being used. The three prisoners are, therefore, presented with the following situation: they each see before them two white discs but do not know the colour of their own disc. How does Lacan suggest the prisoners can come to a decision about their own disc? Firstly, it must be noted that Lacan suggests that there is something special about the solution to the puzzle in that it incorporates a temporal dimension. The temporality of the puzzle is evoked through several pauses, or temporal scansions, that are, according to Lacan, intrinsic to the solution. Indeed, he states that the situation contains the rigour of a logical process *only* if one integrates the value of these temporal scansions (Lacan, 2007).

In order to arrive at a solution, then, Lacan suggests that we focus our attention solely on one of the prisoners, whom he denotes as prisoner A, though A could in fact be any of the three prisoners. At the outset, prisoner A pauses – this is the first of the two pauses – to look around and reflect on what he sees before him. After seeing that both of his competitors have a white disc and that they also pause momentarily, A comes to the conclusion that he must have a white disc on his back.

In order to come to this conclusion, A first supposes that he has a black disc (why he might do so will be considered later). Having started out by considering A and this initial supposition, Lacan now suggests that we shift our focus onto B, or rather what A is thinking that B is thinking. For if A has a black disc, then what would B see? B would see a black and a white disc in front of him. Now if B were to suppose that he also has a black disc, then he knows that C would see two black discs and would head for the door, there being only two black discs possible. Since this does not happen (C hesitates a moment), B knows that he cannot be black and must therefore be white. In other words, if A were black then either B or C would have made a move; since neither of them moves, A knows that his initial guess must be incorrect.

In this way, A projects a thought process onto B in an attempt to grasp not only what B is thinking but also what B is thinking C is thinking. A thus says to himself, "If I were black and B were black, then C would see two blacks and would leave immediately". Since C does not leave immediately, he now thinks to himself, "if I were black and B saw C hesitate for a moment, B would know that C does not see two blacks, in which case he would know that he cannot be black and so would leave for the door". Since this does not happen either, A concludes that he cannot be black, for in this case either B or C would have come to a conclusion and would have moved off to declare it to the warden.

As he comes to the conclusion that his disc is white, A makes a step towards the door. As he does so, both B and C also start off, having gone through the same thought process and come to the same conclusion. Seeing the other two begin to move, A hesitates and pauses for a moment, unsure about his decision. Why does he hesitate? Well, recall that A has based his

conclusion on the fact that both B and C paused at the outset; his reasons for heading toward the door were thus based on B and C remaining stationary. In other words, when they cease to be stationary his reasoning loses its basis. A second pause then occurs. During this second pause A realises that B and C have also paused and for the same reason that he has; he thus realises that they are both in the same situation as he is. Knowing that his two opponents will also be concluding as he has, he rushes towards the door to explain the answer of which he is now absolutely certain: "I have a white disc".

Intersubjectivity and The Role of the Signifier in the Solution

Given the number of discs used (three) in relation to the number of black and white discs available (three white, two black), Lacan highlights three possible combinations of discs: two black and one white; one black and two white; or three white. Now, if prisoner A saw that his two opponents both had black discs on their back, he would know straight away that his disc is white. The solution to the puzzle, for A at least, would be a simple case of looking around and making a decision; Lacan calls this *the instant of the glance* and speculates that in this case A would be in a purely impersonal position given by the phrase, 'being opposite two blacks, one knows one is white' (Lacan, 2007: 167). In other words, A would not need to rely on anything other than the evidence of his own eyes and his understanding of the situation to come to a conclusion about the colour of his disc.

Having ruled out this possibility, however, A still has much work to do in order to arrive at a solution. There is, therefore, for A and, indeed, the other prisoners also, a further development. This impersonal subjective position gives way to a positional, intersubjective line of reasoning, which Lacan formulates as: 'were I a black, the two whites that I see would waste no time realising that they are whites' (Lacan, 2007: 168). The reasons that A has for thinking this are given above but what is important to note is that here prisoner A puts words in the mouths of, or thoughts in the minds of, his opponents. Lacan thus suggests that at this moment each prisoner is defined by nothing other than his position of reciprocity in relation to the others.

It is in this reciprocal, intersubjective relationship that the pauses come into play as signifiers by way of the interruption that they provide. Indeed, as shown above, it is only because B and C hesitate for a moment that A is able to conclude that he has a white disc. The logical puzzle thus seems to present nothing more than a concrete example of the way in which signifiers¹ function. However, though this may have been one of Lacan's initial goals for the essay, over time he extended his interpretation of the solution, approaching the problem from a slightly different

¹ Throughout his career, Lacan uses terminology borrowed from the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. A signifier, for Lacan, is a word or sentence and signifies only in relation to other signifiers.

angle. This slightly altered interpretation is covered in the second half of my essay. Before this, however, I give an initial reading of Lacan's solution.

From Z to X: A (Non)-Sequence of Events

In the logical puzzle, a sequence of events occurs: the warden gathers the three prisoners together, explains the situation to them and leaves them to their own devices. The prisoners then proceed through the outlined machinations and head to the door with their answers. These events chronologically follow each other, with a seemingly simple cause and effect relationship. However, Lacan calls into question the notion of a linear causality in the logical puzzle when he suggests that the apparently sequential moments do not constitute a sequence or chain of events that can be laid out chronologically. Indeed, he states that

to discern in the temporal modulation the very function by which each of these moments, in its passage to the next, is resorbed² therein, the last moment which absorbs them alone remaining, would be to reconstruct their real succession and truly understand their genesis in the logical movement. (Lacan, 2007: 167)

What is proposed is, then, a particular form of an "if x then y, if y then z" logical sequence. Given this formulation, if one starts with x, the series progresses through y to z. However, if one concentrates on the occurrence of y one sees that it already includes within it the occurrence of x, this having taken place in order to bring about y. Further, if one concentrates on z, one finds that it contains within it both x and y. Thus, while there seems to be a sequence or order of events from x to z, Lacan attempts to complicate this by having us concentrate only on the final outcome, in other words on z, on A's concluding moment and his move towards the door.

Focusing on this final occurrence then allows a different succession to become clear. This succession, as I shall describe in detail later, is not from the first moment to the last but from the last to the first, in other words from z to x. However, for z to have occurred, x and y must have come prior to it, not following. Thus Lacan describes the essay as presenting a logical aporia, in that it is both the case that events run from x to z *and also* that x and y are posited only after the occurrence of z. Lacan gives the term 'temporal modulation' to this seeming contradiction whereby z is posited as occurring both before and after x and y. It is this temporal modulation that is the heart of the logical time essay and, as I describe below, at the heart of Lacan's thesis on the temporality of the signifier.

Anticipated Certainty and Retroactive Understanding

² Note the word 'resorbed' – carrying the same meaning as reabsorbed – appears in Fink's translation.

Lacan states that the assertion made by prisoner A regarding the colour of his disc 'anticipates its own certainty owing to the temporal tension with which it is subjectively charged' (Lacan, 2007: 171). This assertion emerges from a line of reasoning that, as described above, involves A projecting thoughts onto his opponents. This line of reasoning is, however, cut short; A does not make a conclusion in the sense of coming to the logical end of his line of reasoning, but instead concludes that he must act even though his reasoning is not complete.

Recall, that B's and C's pausing propels A, who has realised that B and C are also sure of their colour and are about to depart, forward towards the exit. For if the others' pause were to cease, the whole basis for A's certainty would be removed. A's haste, therefore, cuts off his line of reasoning; though he is not sure of his act, he is sure that he must act. Despite cutting the reasoning short, Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth (2004) posit that it would be wrong to regard A's haste as a total break with the line of reasoning. Instead they suggest that it is an *interruption* to it, one that is both a part of the line of reasoning as well as that which suspends it. This then allows for a line of reasoning to begin again, albeit in a different form and from a different point.

According to Lacan, the two pauses outlined above form part of the logical process, with logic here referring to the logic of the signifier. However, in the rush to the exit another form of pause arises, one that is not, however, highlighted by Lacan: the pause in A's line of reasoning. It is here that the pause can best be understood as a pause between two instances – in this case A's reasoning process before and after he makes his move towards the exit. This is one understanding of the pause that Lacan's essay evokes, that of the pause between signifying moments, the pause between signifiers. For, if the pause is considered as a *pause between*, then the real emphasis of the pause is to highlight that which is to come.

What occurs prior to the break in reasoning is an anticipation of the certainty of the conclusion; in his haste A *assumes* that he understands his reasons for concluding. This anticipation is combined with a retroactive understanding that occurs after the break in reasoning, after A has made his dash for the exit and begins to explain his answer to the warden. In this way, Lacan posits that A only fully realises the reasons for having concluded that he is white after this conclusion has been made. Indeed, Lacan holds that it is only following the moment of concluding that the second pause – the moment where A doubts the conclusion that he is white – is understood *as* a pause, a pause signifying that the others are about to conclude. Likewise, from the position of the second pause, the first – the initial glance around – is understood *as* a pause signifying a moment of hesitation or doubt about how to decide. In this way, a non-sequential series of events takes place, as described above.

Having said this, however, a difficulty arises given the teleological nature of Lacan's reading of the prisoner scenario. Indeed, Alain Badiou (2009) suggests that though Lacan uses his essay to indicate a non-teleological temporality, he cannot escape the fact that the scenario proceeds through an argument and ends with the prisoners announcing the 'correct' decision to the

warden. Adrian Johnston's response to this critique is to note that psychoanalytic interpretation necessarily presents events in a linear order even though what is interpreted does not follow this order (Johnston, 2005). I therefore believe it is reasonable to describe the unfolding of a story in such a linear manner while at the same time highlighting a particular non-linearity within it.

Haste's Reason: Not-So-Logical Subjects

Bruce Fink notes that in order to come to any conclusion, A must first suppose himself to be black. For if he starts out from the premise that he is white, he cannot make any deductions based on the hesitations of his opponents. Indeed, it is only by virtue of the fact that there are only two black discs possible that starting from the premise that he is black allows A to come to a conclusion (Fink, 1996). However, Lacan skirts around the issue of why A would necessarily begin with an assumption that his disc is black.

In his exposition of the logical time essay, Fink proposes that there is something that Lacan has left out of his solution, something that he is not telling us. He suggests that A initially recognises himself in an Imaginary relationship of competition with the two others and is filled with anxiety, putting himself in the position of the others. Johnston also notes that Lacan's essay contains a dimension of paranoia, stating that 'the Symbolic order of the disc game places the prisoners in a competition in which the time for understanding is a paranoid mechanism of substituting oneself for the other' (Johnston, 2005: 29).

From the anxiety produced by the situation there arises, Fink argues, a paranoid thought process in A's mind along the lines of "if the others are white, then I must be different, I must be black". However, having begun by thinking himself to be different from his opponents, A then goes on to suppose not only that they follow the same thought process but also that they are at the same stage in their thought process as he is. On the basis of this assumption, A then reasons that B and C will come to the conclusion about their position at exactly the same moment as he will; the timing of their movements and pauses is proof enough for him to be convinced of this.

At a certain point, however, A realises the mistake in his reasoning. When this happens, A recognises that B and C may not have been thinking along the same lines as he has been and is caught by a sudden panic, believing that B and C are ahead of him. In other words, having first equated his time of reasoning with B's and C's, he then dis-equates them. However, he follows his first mistake with another; rather than thinking through the situation, A imagines that B and C have a head start on him. A is then full of panic and rushes towards the exit, jumping the gun in order to make up the time he feels separates him from the others.

Given this jumping of the gun, it is clear why A has not garnered the reason for concluding in the lead up to his final motion towards the door; he cannot have done so because in his blind panic he has missed a logical step. This skipping of the logical beat is an essential part of the conclusion to the puzzle, for without making this anticipatory move the prisoners would be caught

in a loop, forever wondering what the others may or may not be thinking. Indeed, as Lacan (1991) himself surmises, a line of reasoning such as "he thinks that I think that he thinks ..." could potentially continue ad infinitum. However, the anxiety that arises from the second logical error avoids this scenario and leads the prisoners to jump ahead of their reasoning, which in turn leads to the precipitation of the conclusion.

This conclusion, then, begins with A's Imaginary identification with B and C, the temporal tension thus being 'in some sense a leftover, a carry-over or spill-over from the prisoners' Imaginary-level rivalry' (Fink, 1996: 377). The temporal tension is a Symbolic tension that arises, then, from an initial Imaginary tension. It is for this reason that Adrian Johnston describes the essay as providing 'a model of the Imaginary-Symbolic connection' (Johnston, 2005: 29).

I'll Be Your Mirror

In his essay on the mirror phase³, presented initially in 1936 but rewritten in 1949 prior to its publication, Lacan suggests that a human's ego begins to be formed when the individual, usually held up by one of its parents, sees its reflection in a mirror. Though this essay, at least in its original presentation, pertains mainly to the order of the Imaginary, Fink (1996) argues that it contains the seeds for much of Lacan's later work concerning the Symbolic and the Real. In addition to this, it also contains the seeds of Lacan's complex thesis of time. Indeed, as I shall describe, it contains the same elements of anticipation and retroaction that occur in the logical time essay.

Jane Gallop (1985), among others, has noted the difficulty in thinking the chronology of the mirror phase; if it exists as a turning point, is posited as the origin of the ego, then what came before it? The individual's perception of others is that they inhabit unified bodies, whose parts are all connected and which they seem to be in control of. In viewing itself in a mirror the individual perceives itself as an other – this sense of alienation is key to the process – that also has a unified body. What came before the mirror stage, therefore, would appear to be a fragmented body, 'a body-in-pieces' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 251). However, as Gallop notes, this body-in-pieces only appears *after* the mirror phase, being retroactively instated as prior to it in order to *represent* what came before.

Moreover, in the mirror phase the individual anticipates a future mastery over its body, this anticipation providing a sense of jubilation to the individual that relies upon others to provide and care for it. This sense of jubilation is brought about by the anticipation of control and mastery and is, according to Gallop, part of a temporal dialectic in which the individual appears, to itself and

³ Here I use the term 'phase' as opposed to 'stage' as suggested by Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) to avoid it being understood as a stage in a developmental process, which would undermine the bidirectional temporality that I evoke.

others, *already* to be what it will become only *later*. In this way, the unified body comes both prior to and following the body-in-pieces, in the same way that A's line of reasoning both leads up to his conclusion and is only given following this conclusion.

In the mirror phase there is, according to Gallop, both anticipation and retroaction, with the individual anticipating what it will become and then using this anticipated model for assessing what went before. Furthermore, it is the connection between the anticipation and retroaction, their intrication, that provides the specific difficulty of understanding the temporality of the mirror phase. Here, she suggests that the retroaction, though it must logically come after anticipation, in fact also precedes it. It is thus the case that 'the retroaction is based on the anticipation' (Gallop, 1985: 81) and also that 'the retroaction precedes and makes possible the anticipation' (Gallop, 1985: 82). This is what leads her to state that

if [...] it seems particularly difficult to determine which comes first – anticipation or retroaction – perhaps it is because the intrication of the two, which seems to accompany the mirror stage on every level, renders radically difficult the question of what comes first. (Gallop, 1985: 82)

In this quotation we can see that anticipation cannot be understood as a simple projection into the future; nor can retroaction be understood as a simple revision of the meaning of prior events. What we are presented with is profoundly more complex than that, since the ideal of control is founded upon a past that never was, or did not become so until later. Further, the function of retroaction is also not a simple revision of the past but a revision that was anticipated, a revision that, in a sense, already was. This is how I propose that we understand the connection between the anticipation and retroaction: the retroaction itself is anticipated. In other words, any retroactive meaning is not given as a new meaning *ex nihilo*, but one that was there already, anticipated prior to it being posited.

Towards the Future Anterior

In relation to the anticipated future and the retroactively posited past, discussed above, Lacan uses the French imperfect tense, stating that

the signifier brings forth the subject from a being that cannot yet speak, but at the cost of freezing him. The ready-to-speak that *was to be* there – in both senses of the French imperfect "*il y avait*," placing the ready-to-speak an instant before (it was there but is no longer), but also an instant after (a few moments more and it would have been there because it could have been there) – disappears, no longer being anything but a signifier. (Lacan, 2007: 713)

What is interesting in the above quote is Lacan's use of the words before and after in describing the phrase 'was to be there'. The ready-to-speak, the 'pre-subject' if you will, was ready

to come to be, was imminent and could have been if not for the signifier taking its place. Not only was it ready to be there, Lacan states that though it is no longer, it *was* there previously; this 'pre-subject' has arrived too early and has been annihilated. In addition, it will be there, in a moment's time, albeit too late. In other words, though the moments before and after this operation of freezing are both implied, there does not seem to be a time in which the subject-ready-to-be becomes a subject. In this way the subject's possibility for being is caught in-between the before and after.

Although I have referred to a 'pre-subject' here and implied a time after the subject – a time of the 'after-subject' perhaps – Lacan uses the term 'subject' to refer to both of these forms as well as the moment in which the subject is frozen. The term 'subject', for Lacan, thus carries within it these multiple meanings or interpretations and I will use the term in a similar way as I continue the essay.

Another example of Lacan's use of the imperfect tense is his sentence *deux secondes plus tard, la bombe éclatait*, which appears in his Seminar of 1961-62 (Lacan, 1997) and which Bruce Fink translates as 'two seconds later, the bomb would have gone off' (Fink, 1997: 49). Fink suggests that the sentence, 'the bomb was to go off two seconds later' gives a similar sense of ambiguity as that intended by Lacan, there being an implied 'but' or 'and' to follow. The ambiguity that Lacan claims he is presenting is the ambiguity of the time in-between the statement and the explosion; he suggests that with the statement it is not possible to tell whether the bomb did go off or not.

In addition to the imperfect tense, Lacan also makes use of the future anterior tense, sometimes referred to as the future perfect. One such example is given in The Rome Discourse – presented at a conference in 1953 – where Lacan states that the subject's history

is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming. (Lacan, 2007: 247)

What is presented by Lacan is not a simple past as a present-that-was, nor a past as a past-that-is-present-within-me, but a past that is in the process of becoming, a past that in the future will have been. What this means for the past is that it can only be given in relation to a future yet to come, rather than being given in the present situation. However, as can be seen from the preceding quote, there is more at stake here than simply realising a past in relation to the future. It is also not a simple case of the revision of the past in the future. Indeed, it would seem that this very past is somehow a *function* of the future, a future that is still open.

Having attended, during the 1930s, Alexandre Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Lacan would have been familiar with Hegel's account of time and history. Indeed, though time is usually considered as moving from the past to the future, by means of the present, for Hegel it is characterised by the primacy of the future. The trajectory is thus Future→Past→Present

(→Future), in other words from the future to the present by way of the past (Kojève, 1969). There is here, as in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a sense that the future creates the past, or rather that the future gives meaning to the past, as well as vice versa.

Lacan begins using the future anterior tense as early as his Seminar of 1953-54 and continues to use this form throughout his career. With repeated use of this tense Lacan highlights the temporal ambiguity at stake in relation to the subject, giving a vivid sense that the appearance of the subject is imminent – though it never takes place – as well as a sense that it has in fact already been. Indeed, if the subject, in the future, will have been it means that it is not now, even though it will be. Here, again, there is a question as to quite whether the subject, at any given moment, *is*, in the sense of being present.

Indeed, with the future anterior nothing seems certain; there is a past, a past that will be, and there is a future that is to come, in which the past will have been. In other words, it seems as if the subject is caught between a before and an after, with no moment in which it *is*. Thus the subject is caught between anticipation and retroaction, between expectation and release. As I have shown above, this twofold temporality in fact appears very early in Lacan's work, in relation to the formation of the ego in the mirror phase.

The Temporality of the Signifier

Colette Soler (1996) states that the temporality of the subject is that of the signifier, in other words of language. The temporality of language, for Lacan, is, as Johnston describes, 'a bidirectional temporality involving a constant, oscillating tension' (Johnston, 2005: 53) between the anticipation of meaning while the sentence advances and a retroactive understanding when it comes to an end. Thus, the temporal forms that are evident in the logical time essay and the mirror phase also operate, according to Lacan, at the level of the sentence. Indeed, Lacan's thesis regarding the bidirectional temporality of the signifier is, in fact, the basis for the complex temporality of both of these early essays.

In relation to the speaking of a sentence, Lacan states that 'the signifier [...] always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when the latter is interrupted before the significant term' (Lacan, 2007: 419). Though Lacan seems to suggest that meaning occurs no matter whether a sentence comes to an end or not, within the signifying chain there is always slippage, which though continual is arrested at certain points. At these points, which Lacan terms *point de capiton*, or "button ties"⁴, the sliding of signification halts, albeit only for a moment, and the previous signifiers are retroactively given meaning. Here, the diachronic function of the button tie is found, Lacan suggests, at the level of

⁴ The button tie being that which halts the slippage between two layers of fabric, for example on a couch or sofa.

the sentence, where both anticipation and retroaction are at work, anticipation of the meaning as the sentence progresses and retroactive understanding once the full stop is reached.

However, these retroactive and anticipated meanings are not fixed and must be constantly revised as new words are enunciated. With the notion of button tie Lacan hopes to allow for multiplicity and possibility without, however, forgoing meaning; it is a difficult line he is attempting to tread.

Punctuation

As I have already discussed, Lacan highlights the role that punctuation plays in the formation of sentences. He also theorises that what pertains to the ending of sentences can be considered in relation to the ending of analytic sessions. In this way, 'the end of the session cannot but be experienced by the subject as a punctuation of his progress' (Lacan, 2007: 258). This then provides Lacan with the theoretical basis for his use of variable-length sessions, during which he attempts to end the session at the point most pertinent to the issue at hand.

Recall that at the end of the sentence, once the full stop is reached, a form of retroactive meaning is produced. In relation to this, Lacan states that 'punctuation, once inserted, establishes meaning; changing the punctuation renews or upsets it; and incorrect punctuation distorts it' (Lacan, 2007: 258). Further to this, he suggests that the patient brings with them their own punctuations, discourses that revolve around certain meanings that have become fixed or solidified over time. The analyst therefore has the role of giving new punctuations to the discourse of the patient.

Though Lacan rarely presents any of his case studies formally, he does give a brief anecdote relating to his use of variable-length sessions in a particular situation. In the short anecdote Lacan suggests that he was able to produce results with a patient, a patient who liked to fill up the sessions with talk of Dostoyevsky, in a much shorter time frame than would otherwise have been possible. He is not specific, however, as to whether sessions were shortened or lengthened to allow this to take place (Lacan, 2007). Indeed, to do so would be to legitimise either short or long sessions and thus fixate on a time frame equally arbitrary as the normal session length of fifty minutes. Furthermore, Lacan notes that shortening a session will, in a sense, lengthen the amount of time available for the unconscious to carry on its work. Shortening an individual session thus lengthens the total time available for the psychoanalytic work to take place, the time available then being the length of time in between the sessions rather than simply the time of each session.

What is proposed is a process of interpretation and re-interpretation, with new material coming to light and being given new punctuations, punctuations that will retroactively free the patient's discourse, and hence their subjectivity also, from its previous rigidity. The aim of the analyst's punctuation is, therefore, to produce a shift in these fixed meanings and hence the precipitation towards a conclusion. The purpose of the punctuation, the full stop as pause, is thus

to change that which has passed in order to change that which is to come. Here again we see that there is a focus on what is to come following the pause, as described above in relation to the logical puzzle.

However, beyond this sense of structuration and emphasis, Forrester notes that 'a further sense of punctuation [...] is that of 'time between': the pause for breath, the stopping and starting, hesitating and hastening, the precipitousness and dwelling upon' (Forrester, 1990: 173). Though this sense of stopping and starting, of time between, seems to imply the time before and after the pause, here Forrester notes a resonance between this notion of pause and Derrida's *différance*. Indeed, he reasons: 'is not the intermingling of spacing, of time, of delay and deferral, which Derrida's *différance* crystallises [...] one major source of the intuition that Derrida's thought is so profoundly at one with analysis?' (Forrester, 1990: 354).

It is this sense of deferral, of the pause considered as a pause in and of itself, a pause extended and stretched out, that I develop in the next part of my essay. I thus provide a second reading of the logical time essay, one that uses ideas from later in Lacan's career to readdress the prisoner problem. It is to this alternative reading that I now turn my attention. Before I do so, however, I point out that this alternative interpretation, though it concentrates on his later work, was an interpretation that was, perhaps, intended by Lacan from the outset.

Instantaneity

While the pause is one of the temporal tropes present in the logical time puzzle, the *instant* is another. I connect this notion of the instant with that of the pause in order to overcome the antagonisms outlined at the beginning of this essay. In the logical time essay, Lacan indicates the temporality of the instant by referring to the instant of the glance, that being all it takes for the prisoners to take in the scene. Following this instant, A makes a decision as to the colour of his disc. This decision is, however, a decision that he must abandon '*as soon as he comes to it*, for at the very moment at which he is stirred into action by his conclusion, he sees the others setting off with him' (Lacan, 2007: 164). This decision, then, only lasts a moment; A is convinced of the answer, knows that his disc is white, but as soon as he reasons thus, the conviction falls away.

This instantaneous undermining of the logical reasoning, though it takes up no time (as measured by the clock), is fundamental to the logic of the puzzle; something occurs in that instant that enables A to further his reasoning. It is, therefore, not simply a zero point, a point of no consequence. It is perhaps a moment of singularity, a point that cannot be well defined but which seems to contain some possibility⁵.

⁵ Dividing a number by zero could be considered a mathematical example of such a singularity.

A's reversal of his conclusion is a logical necessity, the very reason for that conclusion having been removed when B and C also move off. In the same way that his conviction disappears in a flash, A's putting of this conviction into doubt also lasts an instant. Indeed, as A's opponents move off towards the door and pause, this movement and pause, 'immediately [indicates] to him [...] that he is certainly not black' (Lacan, 2007: 172).

What we see, therefore, is that these two important events – A's decision about the colour of his disc and his putting this decision into question – have come and gone immediately, in an instant. However, while these instantaneous moments appear to take up no time (as measured by a clock), something seems to take place within them, something fundamental to the logical process.

The Subject as an Instant Sustained

The instant is also a notion that can be linked to the subject itself, in its genesis in the signifying process. Indeed, the subject, as presented by Lacan, is an instant, with the signifier '[petrifying] the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, so to speak, as subject' (Lacan, 1998: 207). The subject, then, appears and is petrified, frozen, by the signifier that takes its place, this happening in the very instant in which the subject appears as subject. Indeed, as discussed above, Lacan uses the word 'subject' to denote this very process of appearance and disappearance.

While there can in no sense be a subject before the signifier, what about following this instant? Lacan's use of the word petrify here is very neat, for the 'subject' in some sense remains, though not as a subject as such; the subject is not killed outright by the signifier, but remains on hold, paused. Indeed, Lacan postulates that through its alienation the subject *exists* even though it has no *being*, thereby posing it as an ontological question mark. Lacan uses this term 'subject' to denote not the subject as such but this subject-on-hold, this subject-that-is-not-yet-quite-a-subject.

Alain Badiou (2009) equates the subject of alienation to the null set in mathematics. A set is a collection of elements that is in itself something other than that which it contains. The null set is a set that is empty, a set with no elements. It is not nothing, therefore, but rather a set that contains nothing. In this way, the null set transforms nothingness into something by marking or representing it. Thus, while the subject may appear to be simply nothing, it is not nothing but is an empty place, a placeholder for the signifier⁶.

However, this view of the subject seems to be at odds with Lacan's own teaching, for he states that 'before he disappears as a subject beneath the signifier he becomes, due to the simple fact that it addresses him, he is absolutely nothing' (Lacan, 2007: 708). However, a little further

⁶ For more on the topology of the subject, see below.

Lacan posits that 'this nothing is sustained by his advent, now produced by the appeal made in the Other to the second signifier' (Lacan, 2007: 708).

Lacan is unequivocal in stating that the subject is 'absolutely nothing', for he means to highlight the fact that the subject, as subject, has disappeared behind the signifier. The subject's instantaneous appearance and disappearance takes place, then, as a cut in between two signifiers and the nothing that is the subject is sustained through an appeal, in the Other⁷, to the signifier that is to come. However, while this signifier is still to come, it has in a sense already arrived, its arrival having been anticipated, as described above. Thus the second signifier does not arrive (having already occurred in its anticipation), leaving the subject forever adrift.

Here then is the sense in which the subject can be considered as a null set. It is a not-quite nothing located in a time frame with zero temporality. As Lacan states, the subject 'is only there in the intervals' (Lacan, 1989: 20.5.59 5), as 'a suspended moment [...] a pause' (Lacan, 1989: 10.06.59 9). The subject, then, can be considered as a sustained nothing; a pause; a form of waiting akin to that which the prisoners are forced to endure, firstly by way of their prison terms, then as they wait for some indication of their colour from their opponents in the game.

The Unfolding of a Stoppage in Time

Although the tale that Lacan presents is teleological in that it contains a logical movement from the inauguration of the situation to the final conclusion, Lacan aims to emphasise the pauses contained within this teleology. For these pauses are contained within the logical succession only to the extent that they found it, insofar as they signify to A the logic of his position. In order to further emphasise the fact that it is not the forward movement of the logical process that concerns him, Lacan states that 'what constitutes these suspended motions as signifying is not their direction, but rather their *interruption* [temps d'arrêt]' (Lacan, 2007: 166). In other words, the pauses do not signify insofar as they are pauses in the forward advancement of the prisoners' logic; rather, they signify *as* interruptions – their value is in the force of their interruption.

These interruptions are not merely interruptions either, for as Lacan states, the interruptions constitute 'the subjective unfolding of a temporal instance' (Lacan, 2007: 166). These stoppages (here Lacan uses the phrase *temps d'arrêt*, which literally translated means the stopping of time) unfold the instant, suspending the future to come. In this way, the instant is stripped of its

⁷ Dylan Evans states that 'the big Other is inscribed in the order of the Symbolic. Indeed, the big Other is the Symbolic insofar as it is particularised for each subject' (Evans, 1996: 133). In the case of the prisoners, the Other could be the other inmates, the warden, the entire justice system and so on and so forth. That is the Other; it is the whole system of Symbolic structures that exist, but fixed, in any specific situation, onto a particular individual or group of individuals.

essential characteristic as a present, in the manner suggested by Lévinas (2000) with his notion of the *meanwhile*.

Doing Time

John Forrester, in reference to Lacan's use of variable-length sessions, highlights the patient's waiting as a key part of the analytic process. He states that 'the Lacanian period of waiting deprives the clock of its senselessly objective tyranny' (Forrester, 1990: 170). In giving this essay the title *Doing Time* I emphasise the very nature of time spent in prison as inducing this form of waiting, a period of waiting that produces a sense of anxiety. And as described above, it is this sense of anxiety that, like the anxiety felt by prisoner A as he hastily concludes, undermines the Imaginary constructions that the patient carries with them during analysis.

The anxiety puts the question "what does the Other want of me (Che vuoi)?" to the forefront for the subject. The prisoners thus pose themselves as a question in relation to their situation – who am I for these others, the other inmates, the guards, the outside world. Though these are questions that arise in the Imaginary register rather than the Symbolic, they produce changes in the Symbolic by bringing about the hesitation that opens out the instant. Indeed, it is this production of anxiety that drives prisoner A to run headlong for the door even though he cannot be sure of his reasons for doing so. As Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth state, 'there is a line of reasoning and there is a spontaneity. But here, the line of reasoning creates a void of uncertainty' (Hoens and Pluth, 2004: 185).

In the void of uncertainty, in the frozen instant of time widened out, something can happen or nothing can happen. In that window of time separated from any sense of before and after, possibility⁸ exists. This notion of the separation of the extended instant or pause from its before and after is important, for without this we inevitably fall into the trap of focusing on the time of the signifier, as I have done in my initial reading of Lacan's text. What I now concentrate on is how Lacan conceives of this separation, this possible break in the chain of signifiers.

The Cut

Further to the notion of punctuation, discussed above, there is a second way of considering the end of a session, one that was developed by Lacan during the latter part of his career; namely the *cut*. The ending of the session, where it is considered as a form of punctuation, is an act that carries a signifying function, providing a retroactive meaning that while retroactive was also

⁸ Note that this term resonates with Lacan's mathematical proclivity, particularly in relation to the logical time essay.

anticipated. It thus acts to highlight the role of the signifier in the analytic process. The ending of the session considered as a cut, however, lends it a very different function, since a cut does not add any further signifiers; rather, it has a separating function. The pauses in the logical puzzle, considered in this new light, take on a very different role from that discussed above.

As Vinciguerra notes: 'if punctuation adds to the signifier another signifier extracted by the analyst, and produces a certain signification, the cut on the other hand separates' (Vinciguerra, 2003: 128). The cut thus acts to halt the signifying chain, leaving the signifier that was to follow in a state of supposition or suspension. In other words, rather than a signifier followed by a pause followed by another signifier, the cut produces a situation in which there is a signifier followed by a pause followed by ...⁹

With a focus on the signifier, a pause always leaves us waiting for or anticipating the next signifier. However, the pause considered in and of itself does not necessarily have to be followed by anything. Jacques-Alain Miller (2007) suggests that one think of the use of the cut here as a reverse kind of interpretation, one that holds off signifiers, leaving them paused or resisted, in order to lead the subject to a sense of its opacity. In reference to the logical time essay, the pauses have this role of cut, giving a period or break in which something – without one quite being able to ascertain what – occurs. Lacan uses the word 'scansion' to designate these pauses, this word having the meaning of cutting a line of verse into its metrical or rhythmic components.

Opening and Closing: The Unconscious

The unconscious is characterised by Lacan as a function of opening and closing; it does not, however, open onto anything but simply *is* an opening and closing. Lacan here describes the time of the unconscious as an instant in a manner similar to the way he describes the subject. Indeed, the unconscious is, according to Lacan, 'a concept founded on the trail [trace] left by that which operates to constitute the subject' (Lacan, 2007: 703).

The cut is, then, that which founds the subject as well as the unconscious, thereby establishing two pieces, one recognisable in the Symbolic, the other not. While the subject is created by way of the functioning of the cut, it also disappears in that cut; it is the cancelling out that the cut instigates. The cut, therefore, has a twofold status in Lacanian theory. Firstly, as constitutive of the subject and the unconscious; secondly as that which intervenes in this constitutive process (for the subject and the unconscious are both, for Lacan, processes rather than complete entities), provoking change in these structures.

⁹ I use ... as Lacan does in his Seminar XIX (Lacan, 2001), where part of the title is replaced with these three dots, thus creating an empty place. Doing this, Lacan suggests, underlines the importance of the empty place, the pause.

'Insofar as the analyst intervenes by [cutting] the patient's discourse', Lacan states, 'an adjustment occurs in the pulsation of the rim through which the being that resides just shy of it must flow' (Lacan, 2007: 716). The rim described in this quote is the unconscious; in describing it as a rim, Lacan again highlights the fact that the unconscious is a pure function of opening and closing rather than an opening onto anything. The rim that is the unconscious is described as pulsating. When the subject's discourse is cut a change in this pulsation occurs, allowing something to be experienced or perceived through the gap produced.

However, to reach such a position is far from easy, for what Lacan presents, in a play on Plato's allegory, is a cave whose entrance can only be reached as it closes and which can be opened only from the inside. Having said this, however, he surmises that 'the "open sesame" of the unconscious' (Lacan, 2007, 711) lies in speech effects, with the analyst using the cutting of a session to provoke the unconscious into opening in order to move the analysis towards a conclusion.

The Topology of the Cut as a Topology of Time

With his notion of the rim, given in 1964, Lacan begins to develop a topology of the unconscious, with surfaces such as the Moebius strip and the Klein bottle¹⁰ being indicative of the unconscious' state of openness and closedness. Though a true Moebius strip is an unbroken surface, Lacan is interested in the visual demonstration of its construction using a strip of paper; he in fact gives such a demonstration during his Seminar of 1965-66. In this way, he describes the Moebius strip as an edge that is twisted and soldered to itself, this then being a spatial and structural model for the constitution of the subject. Indeed, Lacan states of the Moebius strip that it is 'a surface such that the cut which is traced in its centre is itself the Moebius strip. The Moebius strip is in its essence the cut itself' (Lacan, 1994: iii). While he is here speaking from a purely mathematical standpoint, one could easily replace the words 'Moebius strip' with the word 'subject' and have a wonderfully lucid declaration regarding the subject's constitution.

The Klein bottle is described by Lacan in 1965-66 as being a structure that links what is inside and outside whilst all the same being a closed structure (Lacan, 1994). The button ties, those points where the sliding of signification is halted, are also described as opening up a hole and sewing together what is inside and outside. Though Lacan here presents a thesis regarding the insides and outsides of spaces, he is very clear that when he speaks of topology he is in fact

¹⁰ For more on the Klein bottle and Moebius strip see <http://lisamaroski.com/2010/11/11/introducing-mobius-strips-and-klein-bottles>

proposing something special about the function of time in psychoanalysis. He thus, in a way, presents us with a topology of time.

Though the logical time essay is a relatively early essay, by the time he gives his Seminar XII in 1964-65 Lacan connects the logical time essay with his developing notions of the topology of time. Here he states that what is presented in the logical time essay is an 'experiment which is carried out along paths turned back upon themselves, cycles that are accomplished by being pursued completely around this toric shape of [...] the Klein bottle' (Lacan, 1993: v). The paths turned back on themselves alluded to here are, I posit, the functions of anticipation and retroaction, in this case A's anticipatory and hasty rush to the exit and his retroactive positing of the logical reasons for doing so. Lacan thus suggests that the completion of the logical puzzle, and hence of an analysis (the concluding moment of the puzzle is used by Lacan as a metaphor for the conclusion of an analysis), runs through a complete circuit of a Klein bottle.

This circuit of the Klein bottle is, like the simpler circuit of the Moebius strip, one that connects two 'sides' together, thereby creating only one 'side'. What we have here is, then, a metaphor for the function of time, connecting one time (before) with another (after) so that there is in the cut one seamless order of time. The cut thus sews together past and future, connecting anticipation with retroaction.

In order to picture this, imagine taking a strip of paper and writing on one side 'past' and on the other, 'future'. Now bring the two ends of the paper together and the past is cut off from the future; they are both independent of each other, it not being possible to move from one to the other without jumping off the paper. However, if you put a twist in the paper and do the same, the past and future are now the same surface, running into each other at the join. Thus while the past and present seem to be separated by the cut, they are in fact joined, the cut that is the Moebius strip or the Klein bottle connecting past and future together, just as it does the subject and the unconscious or the Symbolic and the Real.

The cut, as described above, thus has a dual function; it cuts into or across time, separating the time before from the time after. This cut creates or, rather, opens up a time, the time of the instant or pause. However, the cut also acts to bring together the past and future, the time before and the time after, stitching these together into an unbroken surface. This 'space', which is in fact a temporal rather than Euclidian or geometric space, opened up by the cut bridges the separation that the cut has created.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this essay, Lacan, throughout his career, developed an expansive theory of time, which was driven by his conviction that time is fundamental to both the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. However, Adrian Johnston finds an antagonism between 'Freud, with his emphasis on the power of the past upon the present, and Lacan with his emphasis on the

vacillating, dialectical dynamic between past, present and future' (Johnston, 2005: 57). Secondly, and more importantly, he points out an antagonism between the Freudian notion of the timelessness of the unconscious and the Lacanian notion of the temporality of the signifier and of logic. It is this antagonism, Johnston suggests, that accounts for Lacan's ambiguity and lack of clarity when developing his temporal thesis.

In presenting this essay, I propose the pause as a way out of the impasse, the antagonism between the Freudian notion of timelessness and the various Lacanian notions of time that I have been describing. Indeed, the notion of the pause as a space that both separates the before from the after and also joins them together, seems to connect together Lacan's disparate, disjointed attempts at providing a theory of time. Further, the pause, though it encapsulates a specific form of temporality also encapsulates a timeless space, an interval of unknown, possibly infinite magnitude.

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