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Subjectivity in-between Times

An Exploration of the Notion of Time in Jacques Lacan's Work

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD Psychosocial Studies

Birkbeck College, University of London

July 2018

Declaration

I, Chenyang Wang, hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and contributions from other persons are fully cited and referenced.

Abstract

Although time has been seriously contemplated by various philosophies of the Western tradition, it remains an underdeveloped topic in Lacanian studies. This thesis attempts to provide a comprehensive elaboration of the notion of time in Jacques Lacan's work and to develop an argument to show how it contributes to our understanding of subjectivity. By working through various presentations of time in Lacan's writings, this thesis puts forward the idea of dual temporality and demonstrates how it supports Lacan's overall theoretical position. Chapter one introduces the idea of dual temporality through a critical examination of Lacan's "Logical Time" essay. It is shown that Lacan's "perfect solution" to the prisoner's dilemma is logically flawed. It constructs an imaginary temporal experience that covers the unresolved tension between two temporal registers, which I name Real time and Symbolic time respectively. The two independent temporal registers are further explored in the context of the Real body and the Symbolic order. Chapter Four discusses how the fundamental desynchrony between these two temporal registers initiates the process of subject-formation, which is symptomatic in its essence. Chapter five develops a new epistemology of sexed subjectivity built upon a fresh reading of the relationship between time and sexual difference. Whereas others have thought that time is an intrinsic human experience, the result of my work is to show that, on the contrary, time in Lacan's work is characterised by otherness and alterity, experienced by the subject as foreign and alienating. It is argued that the very split nature of the Lacanian subject shall be understood through time that is split in itself.

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Introduction

This thesis concerns the notion of time in Jacques Lacan's work. As one of the most influential theorists of the twentieth century, Jacques Lacan addressed a wide range of topics in his writings, yet the notion of time has been largely overlooked by commentators both inside and outside psychoanalytic circles, who often portray Lacanian psychoanalysis as a theory that does not take time into account. The experience of time has been studied psychoanalytically mainly through ego psychology and classical analysis (Kurtz, 1988), while, as Žižek points out, Lacanian psychoanalysis is believed to take the ostensible historical account as "a temporal projection of the possibilities of variation within the 'timeless' structure itself" (Žižek, 2006, p.377). Its well-known theoretical debt to the structural linguistics of Saussure, which emphasises the primacy of synchronic analysis to understand the inner function of linguistics rather than a diachronic approach to the historical evolution of languages, leads many critics to restrict their analyses of Lacan to the wider philosophical context of structuralism and prevents the reader from exploring its temporal dimension. While twentieth-century continental philosophy, from Bergson's intuitionism, German and French phenomenology to postmodernism, all witnessed the growing interests in issues revolving around time, it is unclear how Lacanian psychoanalysis, which can be situated in the continental tradition theoretically, can engage in this conversation and have its voice on questions of the temporal nature of meaning, body, language and subjectivity. However, I believe that to Lacan, time does matter. It is not a marginal topic of concern absent from his basic theoretical structure, nor is it merely a technical issue encountered in the practice of psychoanalysis to which he responds with the infamous "short session". Time is a notion of definitive importance in Lacan's theory around which separate discussions in his articles and seminars congregate. Through a sustained and systematic reading of Lacan's work with a particular focus on his various presentations of time, I intend to explore Lacan's understanding of the relationship between time and subjectivity, and develop a unified Lacanian theory of time that can be taken as the inner logic in a general exposition of Lacan's key ideas and themes.

In this introduction, I will first give the reader a sense of the purpose of my writing, namely why it is important to understand Lacan's theory of time in the context of Lacan's own theoretical system and in the broader context of the philosophy of time. Then I present the methodology of my reading, explaining several principles of interpretation I am going to follow throughout this thesis. The last part will be a brief overview of the five main chapters of this thesis.

The reason for highlighting the notion of time among a variety of topics Lacan's writings have covered, I believe, is that it is key to understanding his theory as a whole. Problems concerning time were considered by Lacan throughout his theoretical development, although not always explicitly. The 1945 article entitled "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism" brought out the significance of time in a fully-fledged way. *Seminar II* made an important reference to time when Lacan discussed memory and history, so did *Seminar V* with a delimitation of "the three times of the Oedipus complex" and *Seminar XI* with the chapter "Tuché and Automaton". By tracking the notion of time across different stages, we can endow a sense of continuity to Lacan's divergent theoretical explorations and also provide coherence to his fragmentary style of writing. Moreover, I argue that Lacan's theory cannot be comprehensively understood without an appreciation of time at the heart of his conceptual structure. Unlike other fundamental concepts that frequently appear in Lacan's writings, the notion of time is discussed in a distinctive way. In most cases, it is not a direct object of study, as Lacan seems to be less interested in the ontological status of time despite his frequent engagement with many metaphysical theories of time. Instead, time is discussed in relation to other concepts in Lacan's metapsychology with the aim of exploring a specific dimension of different forms of human experience. It functions as the epistemological ground of Lacan's theory on which crucial psychoanalytic questions can be addressed. In Chapter Two, I explore how Lacan reinvents Freud's idea of the death drive by highlighting its temporal factor. In Chapter Three, I discuss the temporal nature of the symbolic order that distinguishes Lacan's theory from static structuralism. As such, the addition of a temporal dimension offers new insights into old conceptual models and allows

Lacan to develop a more dynamic theory beyond the stereotypical impression of structural psychoanalysis.

It is difficult to appreciate Lacan's contribution to our understanding of time without a general understanding of the evolution of the philosophy of time. In fact, many discussions of time in Lacan's writings only make sense if they are understood as responses to the philosophical work of others. Here, I will not attempt to provide an up-to-date review of various philosophical theories of time in history, a task that has been most comprehensively done by Zygmunt Zawirski (1994) in *L'évolution de la Notion du Temps*. However, a brief review of several key lines of thinking is necessary. As one of the most fundamental human experiences, time has puzzled western philosophers since ancient Greek times. What is time? Does it exist independently of human experience or as an attribute of the mind? Over the centuries, philosophical theories that attempt to answer these major questions concerning the ontological status of time have been resolved into three main categories: Idealism, realism, and relationism (Bardon, 2013, p.7). Idealism regards time as a kind of idea in mind. The Eleatic school, for example, believed that all temporal changes are illusions while the world itself is timeless. St. Augustine and Kant held similar views. The former — despite his self-admitted ignorance of the nature of time: “What is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one that asks, I know not” — provided a theological account of time as the extension of the eternal Word of God (Augustine, 1939); the latter developed transcendental idealism that takes time as an a priori form of experience. The realist views, in turn, are most famously held by Heraclitus, who claimed that reality is as endlessly changing as a flowing river; and Newton, who assumed the existence of an absolute and uniform time corresponding to the new development of natural science he himself advanced. In addition to these two positions, there also existed an intermediate position chosen by philosophers including Aristotle and Leibniz. They treated time as a set of relations between objects that are “not something real in itself, but rather our way of representing or measuring change” (Bardon, 2013, p.117).

Divergent as these attempts to understand the “nature of time” may appear, the question of what time is nevertheless presupposes time as an object of metaphysics whose attributes can be described objectively. It requires philosophers to adopt an impersonal viewpoint instead of paying attention to everyday experience and sensibility that are so intrinsically related to time. This situation changed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the philosophy of time was increasingly characterised by an interest in the subjective experience of time. This interest can be seen as a response to the process of modernisation that throws the individual into an ever-present flow of production, circulation and consumption. What used to be a repetitive experience of time is replaced by unpredictable encounters with a series of fragmented moments.

To reflect the distinctive way in which time is experienced in modernity, the philosophy of time needs to not only engage with the experienced world more actively, but also face the challenge proposed by scientific accounts of time based on the development of relativistic physics. The following examples present some attempts to situate time back in the phenomenal world and take it as an embodied experience beyond mental representation. To Henri Bergson, modern philosophy of time “can quite readily admit Minkowski’s and Einstein’s space-time” (Bergson, 2002, p.217), but the mathematical measurement of time “cannot express all of reality”, at least, it fails to cover an experienced time that flows. The continuity of change is at the core of Henri Bergson’s theory of duration. Instead of distinguishing between past, present and future, Bergson takes an extended present, including the actualised past and the immediate future, as the only presence that can be captured by intuition rather than intellectual reasoning (Bergson, 2002). Husserl’s phenomenological account of time-consciousness also privileges the experiencing act as the foundation of a temporally extended sensed content, evidence of which can be found in the bodily movement and action of infants that reflects an inherent temporality (Gallagher, 2013). In comparison, Deleuze goes even further with his theory of the passive syntheses of time and attributes the production of our sense of time to the unconscious body. Enlightened by Nietzsche’s idea of eternal return, Deleuze reinvents the classical

notion of eternity by substituting the immanent or absolute presence as its original meaning with the continuation of bodily intensity. These theories have a strong influence on Lacan's thinking and will be examined further in subsequent chapters.

Situated against this philosophical background, I argue that Lacan's theory of time engages in dialogue with both classical and contemporary continental philosophy. Developing his ideas from the practice of psychoanalysis, Lacan certainly appreciates the pivotal role embodied experience plays in shaping our conception of time, and indeed emphasises the importance of recognising time for an authentic understanding of being. However, this does not mean that time to Lacan can be reduced to one's own feelings and therefore means nothing from an objective perspective. Insofar as the Lacanian subject is not the ego that sustains a false sense of being, its experience of time must not be reduced to temporal consciousness or time-awareness produced by the ego's imaginary construction. It is instead a foreign or alienated experience that entails a radical otherness, the recognition of which is crucial for subject formation. This thesis will demonstrate that, to Lacan, to be a subject means not only to have a place in the Other, but also to experience time as the Other that is both independent and embodied. The idea of time as otherness deconstructs the opposition between subjective time and objective time. It gives rise to a new ontology of time from which we can develop important conclusions about subjectivity.

My thesis does not attempt to undertake an exhaustive reading of Lacan. Some texts, most of which are Lacan's articles and seminars from the 1970s, are left unattended to. Although the issue of time was not forgotten during this period when Lacan's teaching had been taken up by mathematics and topological images, as his last seminar on "Topology and Time" continued to assign time to a position of importance, these discussions, most of which are Lacan's own elaboration, free from classic psychoanalytic references, require the dedicated work of exegesis that cannot be achieved within the scope of this thesis. Meanwhile, a large number of references to Freud's work are included in this thesis to demonstrate a theoretical

continuity and development between these two authors. Freud's theory is not only a significant source that inspires Lacan's thinking about time, but it also provides the necessary context in which Lacan's own presentation can be understood. Lacan's famous call for the "return to Freud" itself is a perfect metaphor for time that does not intend to recollect what *was* there but to discover what *was not* there in the first place that can only be grasped afterwards. My returning to Freud follows the same principle, as I read Freud's work "not as a domesticated, reassuring answer but as an irreducibly uncanny question" (Felman, 1989, p.54), to which Lacan's theory of time is a response.

In terms of methodology, this is an interpretative study of Jacques Lacan's writings. I focus on presuppositions, methods, reasoning and conclusions in Lacan's work that contribute to our understanding of time and deploy an interpretive strategy that is in line with the Lacanian interpretation. To Lacan, interpretation is not a method to elucidate a pre-existing truth embedded in the text or to delimit a single substantive concept of rationality, nor is it, according to postmodernists, a process of textual reproduction by readers who complicate and displace the narrative of the author in favour of an infinite play of meaning. What Lacan learns from the practice of psychoanalysis can also apply to textual analysis and interpretation: "There are two dangers in anything related to the understanding of our clinical domain. The first is not to be sufficiently curious" (Lacan, 1988b, p.103), as if it is only the patient's (author) own work to remember, while the analyst (reader) merely receives the information passively; "the second is to understand too much", which is the case when the analyst (reader) assigns the role of meaning-making to one's own ego. Lacan makes the second point clear in *Seminar XI*: "It is false to say, as has been said, that interpretation is open to all meanings under the pretext that it is a question only of the connection of a signifier to a signifier, and consequently of an uncontrollable connection. Interpretation is not open to any meaning" (Lacan, 1998, pp.249-50). Refusing the idea of multiple interpretations does not mean that Lacan is trying to revive the traditional authorship which suppresses difference embedded in the flow of signifiers, or to privilege the intentionality of the author as the origin of all the work's meaning. To Lacan, a good interpretation

in psychoanalytic treatment must have the effect of isolating “in the subject a kernel, a kern, to use Freud’s own term, of *non-sense*” (ibid.). It is this nonsense that has been given a particular role in exploring the truth of the unconscious. By confronting the irreducible, traumatic and non-meaning to which he is subjected, the subject can work through the imaginary and re-arrange its relationship with the symbolic.

If the purpose of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to uncover the kernel of non-meaning at the heart of subjectivity, then the Lacanian interpretation, as I argue, is able to provide an alternative to both the traditional and the postmodern interpretative models. It aims not to decipher a hidden meaning or to disentangle many potential meanings, but to disrupt the whole meaning-making process. My reading intends to apply Lacan’s insight to his own work by following several principles. To start with, I take the actuality and potentiality of the text, rather than the intentionality of the author, as a basis for the act of interpretation. As Lacan says in *Seminar II*: “Man is always cultivating a great many more signs that he thinks” (Lacan, 1988b, p.122). Words and sentences Lacan wrote down may associate and interact in many ways beyond Lacan’s own expectation. In the present case, it means that I focus on what Lacan’s words express by themselves and provide various materials in Lacan’s texts from which my arguments could be made. I am not concerned with whether Lacan has come to the same conclusion in his mind, since it is a claim that can never be verified, yet the theory of time I formulate is indeed consistent with Lacan’s fundamental viewpoint that emphasises the split nature of the subject while exposing the imaginary coherence of the ego. In so doing, I try to inhibit some all-too-familiar characterisations of Lacan’s theoretical structure and contribute to a new perspective in Lacan scholarship.

Secondly, throughout the thesis, my analysis and interpretation are loosely guided by a unifying concern with the notion of “contradiction”. I am particularly interested in those crucial points in Freud’s and Lacan’s texts where different lines of thinking go against each other and ostensible reasoning processes fail to work

out. Contradiction here is understood not in the Hegelian sense as a dialectical way to absorb oppositions and move towards the unity of reason. It corresponds to what Lacan calls “the nonsensical” that breaks the flow of meaning and challenges the normative reading. In the practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unconscious truth interrupts our consistent everyday experience and reveals its contradictions. The same principle applies to the field of textual analysis where identifying the contradiction becomes the necessary condition of new possibilities of interpretation. As Lacan states in *Seminar VI*: “It is in the nature of what is said to confront us with a very particular difficulty which at the same time opens up very special possibilities” (Lacan, 1959, p.64). In fact, all my following chapters offer some analyses of contradictions that give rise to a different understanding of time.

Thirdly, as a study questioning the meaning of time, this thesis will not interpret Lacan’s work in developmental order. Although an attempt at periodisation is common in many commentaries of Lacan’s teaching, in my view, it provides too simplistic a conceptualisation of Lacan’s complex theory in which ideas often make sense retrospectively, as if they “were there all the time and had only to be picked up” (Lacan, 1998, p.216). In the following chapters, I will argue with respect to each significant point about time made by Lacan across different stages of his theoretical development, but I will not organise multiple figures of time in Lacan’s work chronologically, nor will I present them only as a “diachronic heterogeneity”, in the same way André Green treats Freud’s different hypotheses on time (Green, 2002). Such an approach does not explain why Lacan took up a certain opinion at a given moment, and thus fails to reveal Lacan’s basic line of thinking from where his discussions of time on various occasions can be brought together. Contrary to these readings, I argue that time to Lacan is fundamentally characterised by otherness without which it cannot condition human subjectivity. By focusing on the character of time with which Lacan is especially concerned and to which his texts always come back from different angles, I argue that it is possible to work on separate segments of Lacan’s discussion of time and develop a logically coherent theory of time as a whole that fits into Lacan’s overall theoretical framework.

Fourthly, my interpretation will bring Lacan into contact with a range of philosophers, not only because Lacan himself often comments on other philosophers and constantly borrows ideas from phenomenology, existentialism and constructionism in his teaching, but also because Lacan's understanding of time offers a response to contradictions in other lines of investigation undertaken by philosophers both before and since. In Chapter Two, I put Lacan's arguments in dialogue with Kant's philosophy of time and attend to the problem of a passive synthesis of time that troubles the latter; while in Chapter Five, I examine some feminist readings of the relationship between time and sexuality that have emerged since Lacan's time, yet failed to provide a satisfactory answer. It is not my intention to explicate Lacan's theory of time only on its own, as I always put it in a web of signifiers where questions, presuppositions and results of other philosophies of time have already existed. I do this to prove that Lacan's theory of time not only has its roots in the history of philosophy but also remains relevant to contemporary continental philosophy.

The thesis includes five chapters. In Chapter One, I provide what I take to be the basic argument of the thesis through a careful reading of Lacan's essay "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism", published in 1945. As one of Lacan's earliest works directly commenting on time, the "Logical Time" essay uses a three-prisoner game as an example to demonstrate how a sense of time is experienced by the subject through interpersonal anticipation, judgment and reconsideration. Every prisoner's decision to move depends on the action of others, suggesting that the temporal experience does not merely represent the relationship between the subject and the objective world, but also includes the desire and the intentionality of the Other. It is generally believed that Lacan in this essay uses a logical model of intersubjectivity to understand time (Hook, 2013a, 2013b; Williams, 2013), yet by working through the steps of Lacan's analysis of the three-prisoner game, I argue that we should not accept Lacan's account at face value. The logic Lacan applies to the three-prisoner game turns out to be the logic of its failure, as I demonstrate that the prisoner cannot obtain the temporal

experience of duration/hesitation and follow the logical reasoning process at the same time.

However, the failure of “logical time” does not come to undermine the whole project, nor does it mark the failure of Lacan’s understanding of time. I take one step further by arguing that the contradiction that prevents us from theorising time in a logical mode is the contradiction within time. We perceive time as a whole in our representational consciousness, but it does not mean that time should remain the same outside of representation. In fact, the failure of “Logical time” reveals precisely the true essence of time as conflicted and disjointed when a conscious representation of time falls apart. Time is a difference-in-itself that constantly dislocates the individual’s subject position. My analysis of the last section of the “Logical Time” essay allows us to see how Lacan inverts his arguments by returning from a logical form of assimilation to the essential determination of the “I”. I argue that this conclusion only makes sense if we introduce the idea of dual temporality. The logical process that determines the individual’s movement is shown to correspond to what I call “Symbolic time”; while the moment in which the subject’s self-determination takes place is a moment of “Real time”. The so-called “logical time”, therefore, is only a fantasy of time that attempts to reconcile the tension between these two underlying temporal registers. At the end of this chapter, I show how the idea of dual temporality plays itself out in other themes of Lacan’s theory and prepare the reader for the analysis of each temporal register that follows.

Chapter Two explains the meaning of “Real time” and how it fits into Lacan’s overall theoretical structure. The concept of the Real is crucial in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which has been examined systematically in many commentaries. Yet few discussions have touched upon the relationship between time and the Real. In this chapter, I understand Real time as the time of the Real body and argue that a Lacanian metaphysics of bodily time can be developed from his reworking of Freud’s theory of metapsychology. The idea of bodily time is rooted in Freudian

psychoanalysis, which claims that “the true essence of what is psychological” can be found in the somatic process (Freud, 1938, p.157). Following the same principle, it is not surprising for us to find that time as an embodied experience exists in Freud’s metapsychology. I develop a Freudian metaphysics of time in the first part of this chapter, an interpretation that has not been attempted before. I read Freud’s unpublished *Project for a Scientific Psychology* through Kant, whose theory of the three syntheses of time provides a useful framework to understand the ontology of time. It turns out that the syntheses of the present, the past and the future are undertaken by the body process rather than the subject of thought in Freud’s work. This Freudian metaphysics of time introduces the crucial idea of passive synthesis and lays the foundation for Lacan’s Real time. In the second part, I focus on Lacan’s early seminars where he comments on Freud’s metapsychology. By putting forward the idea of the “consciousness without the ego” and reformulating the notion of “death drive”, Lacan eliminates the residue of active representation in Freud’s metaphysics of time and thus completes a theory of Real time firmly grounded on the body process, a theory that enables the possibility of liberation from the established temporal order.

Chapter Three moves from the theorisation of time on an organismic level to another passive synthesis of time that takes place on the unconscious level. I intend to add something new to the account of the symbolic order that has been an essential part of most secondary literature on Lacan. It is generally believed that to Lacan, the symbolic order is constituted in the field of language. It is the realm of pure difference between signifiers that present to the subject synchronically. However, a temporal dimension is also essential in Lacan’s understanding of the symbolic order. To argue that the unconscious belongs to the symbolic order, one must accept the precondition that the symbolic order is able to account for the time of the unconscious, a time, which, as my interpretation of Freud’s argument “the unconscious is timeless” suggests, is outside representation. Lacan’s theorisation of the time of the symbolic order is made possible by the theory of cybernetics, which introduces the notion of the machine as an impersonal agent that sets the symbolic order in motion. This means that the symbolic order not

only determines one's subject position at a given moment but also structures one's life trajectory through a flow of signifiers. This conclusion is supported by Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man case and Lacan's reading of Hamlet, in both of which we confront the time of the Other that is entirely autonomous and at the same time conditions the subject's unconscious desire.

Having clarified the meaning of Real time and Symbolic time respectively, Chapter Four and Chapter Five focus on specific themes in Lacan's theory to which the idea of dual temporality can apply. Chapter Four considers the assumption of time underlying Lacan's construction of the process of subject-formation. I use "symptomatic time" to name the time of subject-formation as I argue that if the subject to Lacan is a symptomatic being-in-the-world, subjective time must also be experienced in a symptomatic way. By working through the Freud-Rank debate and investigating the meaning of primal repression, I argue that there is not a linear, developmental order that can explain the process of subject-formation, and any theory that takes this traditional assumption of time as granted will find difficulty in solving the problem of the origin that has troubled psychoanalysis since Freud's time. I revisit Lacan's theory of the mirror stage and identify the presence of both Real time and Symbolic time without which imaginary identification of the ego cannot be achieved. It is shown that the split of the subject is first and foremost a split between two temporal registers during its formation. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the interplay between Real time and Symbolic time that Lacan's writings present as separation and alienation.

Chapter Five uses the notion of dual temporality to take a comprehensive look at Lacan's theorisation of sexed subjectivity. The emphasis of this chapter is on the development of "sexed time" as a new epistemology through which the construction of sexual identity and the meaning of sexual difference can be understood. In other words, I am interested in how a psychoanalytic knowledge of sexuality is produced and what implicit assumption is required to theorise sexuality in a certain way. It is shown that the popular reading of the Freudian-

Lacanian theory follows a logic of spatialisation and overlooks the role of time. So-called sexual development does not really designate a process of becoming since the penis/phallus functions as an indicator of spatial demarcation through which masculinity and femininity as two opposed sexual categories have already been defined. My reading of Freud's Oedipal narrative reveals not one but two epistemological approaches to the problem of sexual difference, the second of which can be characterised by Lacan's idea of the future anterior. Through a radical interpretation of the formulas of sexuation in Lacan's *Seminar XX* as a general theory of what becoming a sexed being means in the Symbolic and the Real, I further develop this new epistemology which situates sexed subjectivity not against a background of absence or presence but between two temporal registers. Following this line of work, we can think about sexual difference beyond different forms of symbolic dualism and give every construction of sexual identity a positive account.

1. Logical Time

First published in the 1940s, the essay “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” was one of Lacan’s earliest attempts to deal with the problem of time. It was constantly revived throughout his career. Even in the 1970s, when mathematics and topology, gradually replacing structural linguistics, dominated his thinking and further led to a spatialised formalisation of his theory, Lacan still reminded his audience of this early essay and the connection between the “time-function” it emphasised back then and the “surface-function” he was trying to formulate now (Lacan, 1973, pp.45-47). Therefore, a reference to this essay is necessary to any attempt to answer how Lacan understands time and how crucial a temporal dimension is to his theory. In this chapter, I have restricted my analysis almost exclusively to the “Logical Time” essay because I believe it encompasses Lacan’s fundamental argument about time that will determine the structure of the thesis.

When reading “Logical Time”, one is often relieved to find that the density and obscurity of Lacan’s writing style, as a typical obstacle to our understanding of Lacan’s many other texts, is not a problem here. Instead, Lacan uses a vivid example to illustrate his ideas and clearly names three logical times as his theoretical achievement. However, in my view, the difficulty of the “Logical Time” essay lies elsewhere. Because it is so tempting to accept what Lacan says at face value, many commentaries fail to critically engage with the text and work out Lacan’s subtle ideas beneath the ostensible account of reasoning. Through a close examination of the “Logical Time” essay and related literature, I suggest that despite its perceived importance, Lacan’s theory of logical time has not yet been comprehensively explored, nor has its possible implication for understanding Lacan’s other concepts been fully realised. In other words, while it is believed that the idea of logical time has given Lacan “a certain amount of fixed intellectual capital in this area of psychoanalytic theory and practice, capital which he was never to allow to be foreclosed” (Forrester, 1991, p. 192), the exact nature of this intellectual capital remains in question.

This chapter intends to address this issue with the following steps: To begin with, I replay the three-prisoner game Lacan asks the reader to imagine for the exercise of thought, and examine how Lacan solves it with his “perfect solution”, through which the idea of logical time is introduced. However, unlike many secondary sources that take Lacan’s account at face value, I question the rationality of the “second moment of hesitation” and thus expose an illogical point in a logical process. Then in the following section, I examine Alain Badiou’s interpretation of “Logical Time” which further challenges Lacan’s solution. Badiou draws our attention to the absolute reciprocity between three prisoners as a fundamental assumption underlying the whole logical game, which he regards as an elimination of all subjective temporal experiences. The possibility of intersubjective heterogeneity problematises the idea that a prisoner must take the other as an imaginary image of oneself, thinking what the other is thinking at the same moment. This leads to a radical reconsideration of the relationship between subjectivity and the symbolic rules prefigured by the warden as the big Other. Based on this reading, I conclude that Lacan’s “perfect solution” is logically untenable. Meanwhile, Badiou’s notions of “subjective process” and “subjectivisation” provide two possible yet opposite solutions to the three-prisoner game: one that eliminates subjectivity and replaces three prisoners with three logical machines reasoning according to prepared scripts, the other that maintains the subjective experience of time but only ends up with a self-confirmed subject who breaks with symbolic rules in pursuit of the truth. By analysing how these two solutions are hidden in Lacan’s writings, I argue that there are not one, but two temporal registers in which the subject lives, an idea supported by the way Lacan concludes his “Logical Time” essay, the idea of “two clocks” he puts forward in *Seminar II*, and the distinction he makes between *tuché* and *automaton* in *Seminar XI*. I believe that the idea of dual temporality is fundamental to Lacan’s understanding of time and thus take it as a point of departure that leads to my further explorations of time in different directions.

1.1 The Imperfection of Lacan's "Perfect Solution"

The "Logical Time" essay opens with a three-prisoner game that I will first examine. A warden announces to three prisoners that they are going to undergo a test. The prisoners are informed that there are five disks differing in colour, three white and two black, but only three of them will be used in this test. They will stand in a circle, and one disk will be placed between the shoulders of each prisoner in such a way that it is out of his own line of vision but can be seen by others. When the test starts, each prisoner needs to logically deduce the colour of his own disk from the colour of the other two disks he sees. The one who first figures out the correct colour and passes through the exit door will be given freedom. Having said that, the warden then places a white disk on all three prisoners. When they open their eyes, each prisoner will see two white disks in front of him. The question Lacan asks is: how can the subjects solve the problem?

To answer this question, I reframe the "perfect solution" Lacan gives, which is exemplified by prisoner A but also works for prisoner B or C: "I see two white disks. If I had a black disk, B and C would have seen one black and one white. Therefore, each of them would think: 'If I had a black, the other one who bears the white disk would have seen two blacks, then he would have left immediately for knowing himself as a white. Since he hasn't moved, I am not a black and I can leave.' Since B and C still haven't moved, I must also bear a white disk." As all three of them process the same logical reasoning, they will all exit simultaneously with the correct conclusion.

As we can immediately see, Lacan's "perfect solution" is fascinating for its incorporation of a temporal dimension, as one's decision to move relies on the fact that others *haven't* moved, which requires a moment of hesitation, or a suspensive scansion. This characteristic reveals Lacan's ambitious aim behind the "Logical Time" essay, that is to put forward a new "temporal logic" as a challenge to classical logic, "whose eternal prestige reflects an infirmity which is nonetheless recognised as their own – namely, that these forms never give us anything which cannot

already *be seen all at once*" (Lacan, 2006b, p.166). In classical logic, one certainly needs time to solve a logical puzzle, but this type of time has no subjective meaning to the subject. Time spent by an individual to reason is not part of the logical reasoning process in classical logic, nor would time others spend to work out the same puzzle influence one's own deduction. To solve the three-prisoner game, however, time must be considered as an inherent factor in the logical process. The correctness of the subject's conclusion very much depends on how the duration of the other two prisoners' thinking is perceived by himself. Lacan goes even further to isolate specifically "three evidential moments" in the three-prisoner game, "whose logical values prove to be different and of increasing order" (Lacan, 2006b, p.167). Nonetheless, are these moments authentic enough to sustain an entirely different logic that indeed makes use of one's experience of time? To answer this question, we should put ourselves in the prisoner's shoes and first consider all possible scenarios one might face in the test. Since there are three white disks and two black disks and only three out of five will be actually used, each prisoner should be prepared to see three possible combinations of disk colours when he opens his eyes at the beginning of the test: two blacks, one black and one white, or two whites.

In the first scenario (S_1), prisoner A sees two black disks, which immediately leads him to the absolute certainty that he is a white, given the impossibility of having three black disks. In this case, there is no time for comprehending and hesitation. The instant of the glance is conflated with the moment of concluding: "we see the instantaneousness of its evidence – its fulguration time, so to speak, being equal to zero" (Lacan, 2006b, p. 167).

In the second scenario (S_2), prisoner A sees one black and one white. The instant of the glance is no longer sufficient for A to reach a conclusion. He needs to make an "authentic hypothesis" of himself being a black, thus imaginarily recreating the first scenario for B, the one he sees with a white disk. In that scenario, B would have already left because he sees two black disks. Now A faces two possibilities:

Either the reality corresponds to his imagination, which confirms his hypothesis that he is a black; or B hasn't moved, which enables A to refute his hypothesis and know he is a white without any question. Therefore, in S₂, A's reasoning can be summarised as follows: "were I a black, the one white that I see would waste no time realising that he is a white". The time for comprehending this logical process will be manifested as a period of hesitation, and one's conclusion depends on whether the prisoner he sees with a white disk has hesitated or not.

In the third scenario (S₃) which is the most complex situation, prisoner A sees two whites. A needs to hypothesise that he bears a black disk, thus imaginarily recreating the second scenario for B and C, in which both would have seen one black and one white. Therefore, in A's imagination, B and C would reason according to S₂ and should have already concluded. If in reality, they haven't moved, A's hypothesis can be refuted, and thus A can conclude that he is also a white. Lacan summarises the logical process in the third scenario as "were I a black, the two whites that I see would waste no time realising that they are white" (Lacan, 2006b, p.168). However, this summary is not accurate enough, because even if B and C see A as a black, they still need a moment of hesitation to confirm each other that they are all whites. A better formulation, as I would suggest, is "were I a black, the two whites that I see would waste *some time* realising that they are white, but they would definitely not waste *as much time as* I have already wasted". The fact that A needs to first assume that he is a black in order to start thinking what B and C are thinking whereas B and C don't need to do so if they actually see A as a black will make A fall behind the other two, in the same way that B has got the jump on A in S₂ if he does see A as a black:

If his hypothesis is correct – if, that is, the two whites actually see a black – they do not have to make an assumption about it, and will thus precede him by the beat he misses in having to formulate this very hypothesis (Lacan, 2006b, p. 169).

Therefore, if A completes his thinking and finds out that B and C haven't moved, it would suggest that A hasn't fallen behind thus confirming his identity as a white. In this case, the time for comprehending in S_3 will still be manifested as a period of hesitation, but longer than in S_2 , and one's conclusion depends on whether the other two have hesitated for the same amount of time as he has.

Now we can go back to the original story, in which the warden places a white disk on each prisoner. As a result, every prisoner will find himself dealing with S_3 , and the fact that not one of them left first allows all of them to conclude that they are all whites. Equal duration of hesitation would suffice to convince them of this conclusion, which proves the experience of time as intrinsic to the whole logical process. So far, the solution Lacan presents appears to be solid, but a twist that follows complicates the situation, as Lacan goes on to point out the existence of the mysterious "second moment of hesitation":

If A, seeing B and C set off with him, wonders again whether they have not in fact seen that he is black, it suffices for him to stop and newly pose the question in order to answer it. For he sees that they too stop: since each of them is really in the same situation as him (Lacan, 2006b, p.164).

Assuredly, but logical progress must have been made in the interim. For this time A can draw but one unequivocal conclusion from the common cessation of movement: had he been a black, B and C absolutely should not have stopped. Their hesitating a second time in concluding that they are whites would be ruled out at this point: Indeed, a single hesitation suffices for them to demonstrate to each other that certainly neither of them is a black. Thus, if B and C have halted again, A can only be a white. Which is to say that this time the three subjects are confirmed in a certainty permitting of no further doubt or objection (Lacan, 2006b, p.165).

As Lacan explains, the reason for three prisoners to hesitate again after they all set off at the same time is that each of them will start to doubt whether the other prisoners move because they have completed the same logical process as he has, or because they see him as a black. However, based on our discussion, there is no

sufficient reason to support this doubt, for if the other two prisoners do see A as a black, they would only need to deal with S₂ rather than S₃. Therefore, they should have already left when A is still thinking. In this case, the last thing A would do is to hesitate again since both B and C are moving ahead of him. So why would A suddenly worry about something he has no reason to worry? Is this really an authentic temporal experience required by the logical process? Examining some explanations provided by secondary sources fails to generate a satisfactory answer. For example, Alexander Williams suggests:

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 (Williams, 2013, p. 183).

This explanation fails because it is built upon a false assumption of the reason A makes his move. In S₃, A bases his conclusion not “on the fact that both B and C paused at the outset”, but on how long they have paused. Hence, when B and C cease to be stationary the moment A starts moving, A’s reasoning will not lose its basis, but rather be reinforced. Lacan has made this point quite clear, that it is not the others’ departure, but rather their waiting in relation to the following departure that determines the subject’s judgment. Ironically, by suggesting that the movement of B and C has the same significance for A whenever it happens, Williams makes a mistake which is precisely the one Lacan tries to avoid in the “Logical Time” essay, that is, depriving the logical process of the temporal experience and regarding human behaviour as signs with fixed meaning rather than signifiers that can only be interpreted in relation to other signifiers.

The second moment of hesitation has been commonly read as a necessary requirement for the objectification/de-subjectification of the certainty prisoners acquire from the first hesitation, so that “in the end the conclusion is no longer

grounded on anything but completely objectified temporal instances” (Lacan, 2006b, p.171). To Bruce Fink, without the second hesitation, the prisoner’s certainty of the colour of his disk cannot be transformed into the truth about what the colour really is: “Subjective certainty already exists at the moment of concluding, but its status as objective truth has in no sense yet been ascertained” (Fink, 1996a, p.379). Similarly, Derek Hook regards the second moment of hesitation as a solution to the indecision caused by the other prisoners’ gestures: “If each of the three rises at the same time, how are they to interpret the reactions of the other prisoners? The meaning of the actions of their fellow prisoners permits for more than one explanation. They will each need to ask themselves whether the other prisoners have arrived at the same logical conclusion as they have, or whether they stood up simply because they saw a black disk?” (Hook, 2013, p.16). However, this account of reasoning, whose similar versions can be found in almost every reading of the “Logical Time” essay, does not stand up to scrutiny. My examination has shown that the fact that others have not moved earlier than me is the only proof a prisoner needs to ascertain his decision, the ground of which is not the first hesitation of other prisoners but the duration of that hesitation. So, what does this second moment of hesitation tell us, if it is merely a redundant moment that undermines rather than supports logical time?

1.2 Time against Logic

Among various readings of “Logical Time”, Alain Badiou has provided an interpretation that is both theoretically novel and logically convincing. In his seminars in the 1970s, Alain Badiou devoted two successive sessions to discussing “Logical Time” in relation to what he called “subjectivisation and subjective process”. His attitude towards Lacan’s own solution is critical, as he argues that in order to contain the “asymptotic effects of time”, including suspension, anticipation and retroaction as Lacan describes in the solution to the three-prisoner game, “something else would actually be needed than the axioms with which Lacan regulates his game” (Badiou, 2009, p.252). In other words, either there are some other preliminary conditions which Lacan fails to tell the reader, or these temporal effects do not exist at all. To support this argument, Badiou distinguishes

three reasonings in terms of the length - R_1 for comprehending S_1 , R_2 for comprehending S_2 and R_3 for comprehending S_3 - so that they will constitute a chain of inclusion. R_1 is contained within R_2 and R_2 is contained within R_3 . For example, when A sees two whites, he will accomplish R_3 by presuming himself as a black so that B and C in his imagination will accomplish R_2 . This makes it clear that R_3 requires more time to process than R_2 since R_2 is an internal piece of R_3 . After the work of periodisation, it cannot be more obvious that three prisoners will simultaneously leave with absolute certainty that they are all whites after reasoning out R_3 if they are indeed logical subjects and reasoning in an identical way. In this case, as Badiou says, “there is neither anticipation nor retroaction” (Badiou, 2009, p.254), and certainly no need for the second moment of hesitation. More importantly, there appears to be no space for subjectivity in this scenario, as three prisoners can be easily substituted by three logical machines which follow prefigured R_1 , R_2 or R_3 strictly and the logical process can still be unfolded in the same way with the same result. Time becomes a fixed variable and intersubjectivity is replaced by a simple replication of artificial intelligence: “by granting too much to the algebra, there ends up being no more place for the outpace nor any time for the outtime” (ibid., p.253).

To avoid this possibility, Badiou suggests that “the differential heterogeneity of the other” must be reintroduced into the three-prisoner game. In Lacan’s original account, three prisoners are equally intelligent, which is the fundamental premise of the logical game. Why do we need this setting to make the three-prisoner game work? In *Seminar II*, when an audience confronts Lacan with this problem, he replies that “the problem is only interesting if you assume the times for understanding to be equal. If the times for understanding are unequal, not only is it an uninteresting problem, but you will see how complicated it gets” (Lacan, 1988b, p.290). However, the presupposition that there is “an absolute reciprocity, a strict logical identity between the three prisoners” (Badiou, 2009, p.251) puts every prisoner in a mechanical routine where no temporal experience is needed. The other cannot be a pure reflection of the subject. The fact that the other could and should be qualitatively heterogeneous to me indicates the existence of a

different type of interpersonal network that Badiou terms “topology”. In “Logical Time”, each prisoner is a subject and thus is entitled to recognise the heterogeneity of the other and take the possibility “that there are different ‘speeds’ of reasoning” (Badiou, 2009, p.254) into account. In this case, Badiou is able to defend Lacan’s idea that there exists a second moment of hesitation: the moment A starts moving and sees that B and C are doing the same thing, an idea emerges in his head which forces him to stop: “what if B and C are knuckleheads?” To be more specific, what if they do not think as quickly as I do, and thus spend the time I accomplish R₃ only accomplishing R₂? So maybe they do see me as a black, despite our moving at the same time. This thought would indeed lead another hesitation, for if B and C also hesitate, it means that they are equally intelligent and now share the same doubt with me; if they continue moving without hesitation, it means that they are knuckleheads who have just accomplished R₂. Therefore, A must change his conclusion and catch up with them.

However, this solution is still problematic, since there is no reason to assume that A’s idea that others may reckon at a different speed will only emerge after he starts moving. In fact, Badiou admits that “(this difference of intellectual force) must structure the entire field *from the start*, as the necessary concept of the subject” (Badiou, 2009, p.255), yet this new assumption has some serious consequences that make the three-prisoner game almost unsolvable. In the “Logical Time” essay, the idea that certainty can only be achieved through an anticipatory act is the central point Lacan seeks to make, but the way he explains it is overall confusing. Do three prisoners hurry up because only the first person who reaches the exit will be given freedom? Lacan’s answer is no, as he claims that “it is thus not because of some dramatic contingency, the seriousness of the stakes, or the competitiveness of the game, that time presses; it is owing to the urgency of the logical movement that the subject precipitates both his judgment and his departure” (Lacan, 2006b, p.169). The so-called “urgency of the logical movement” is placed by Lacan in the moment of concluding, but it is not after obtaining certainty that the subject acts in a hurry in order to beat out other subjects. Instead, the subject worries that he may never arrive at the conclusion: “if, on the contrary, he let the others precede him and, in

so doing, convince him that he is a black, he cannot doubt whether he has grasped the moment of concluding precisely because he has not *subjectively appropriated* it” (Lacan, 2006b, p.171). We can cite the syllogism Lacan uses to conclude the essay, which explains the same point in a more succinct way: “I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man” (ibid., p.174). But why? On the one hand, on the basis of the homogeneity between subjects Lacan has insisted on throughout the essay, if no one is smarter or more stupid than the other, the possibility that “others may precede me” simply does not exist; On the other hand, according to the heterogeneity between subjects Badiou has introduced, even if others have preceded A, it cannot convince him that he is a black. For the same reason as in A’s second moment of hesitation later, he is entitled to doubt now: “Do B and C move earlier because they only need to accomplish R₂, or because they are smarter than me thus spending less time accomplishing R₃?”

A does not have enough information to eliminate this doubt and arrive at a conclusion. If the difference of the temporal length used to be the only standard that separated R₁, R₂ and R₃, then the introduction of the possible “qualitative difference” of intellectuality would easily blur the boundary between them and thus collapse all the logical articulation a subject can possibly make. In an extremely ridiculous but logically possible scenario, seeing that others have hesitated, A cannot even rule out the possibility of R₁. It is true that if one person sees two black, he should immediately leave without hesitation, but what if they are so stupid that they cannot even work out this easiest puzzle?

How could I have, since the extent of my difference from the other, topologically constituted, does not fall under any stable temporal measure and always leave me guessing when it comes to knowing whether the supposed knucklehead may not be about to get lost in the most straightforward premises? (Badiou, 2009, p.256)

Therefore, Badiou is forced to make the only possible conclusion his premises have permitted:

During the first moment of my reasoning suspense, no conviction regarding the different forces involved *serves any purpose*, for lack of falling under some reasonable calculation of its inscription in duration. (emphasis added) (ibid.)

It turns out that the first moment of hesitation after every prisoner opened his eyes has no meaning for each other. Badiou's introduction of the immanent topology logically nullifies any attempt to think what the other is thinking or to project one's own thinking onto his opponents. The meaning of the other's stillness or movement can be interpreted in infinite ways. The belief that they are thinking exactly what I suppose them to think leads me to the certainty that is built upon an illusion rather than logic. The time for comprehending is indeterminate not only for an outsider but for an insider as well. In Badiou's version of the three-prisoner game, each subject faces the other whose thought and desire are incomprehensible and unrecognisable, whose subjectivity cannot be assimilated by the process of identification. It is precisely in this case that time can be experienced. The subject knows that the "right moment" for him to make the conclusion will never come. The game designed by the warden, the big Other, may contain a line of reasoning, but this reasoning will never work for the subject. The more time he wastes on speculation and doubt, the less likely he will subjectively grasp the answer. Having realised that, the subject hastens to move, not because, as Lacan suggests, that others who precede him will convince him that he is a black, an explanation that is still trapped by one's own imaginary projection and introjection. Instead, the act of moving is a radical break with the line of reasoning prefigured by the Other, "for the simple reason that being the first to exit is the only real that matters. The act takes precedence over the reasoning" (ibid., p.257).

At first glance, the temporal experience of haste and anticipation Badiou has articulated is not fundamentally different from what Lacan intends to say despite

some nuances. By hastening to the exit, the act of the subject precedes the line of reasoning that should have led him to his certainty. As Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth comment, “according to Badiou, Lacan’s text tries to make the right point about the act - it should possess an anticipatory certitude - but it does not set about doing so correctly... Despite this difference between Badiou and Lacan, they both want to stress the same point: anticipatory certitude is a hallmark of this type of act” (Pluth & Hoens, 2004, p.185). Both of them appear to subvert the linear causality of the classical logic that runs from the premise X to the conclusion Y by jumping directly to Y as a symbolic declaration of subjectivity. However, a careful reading would suggest otherwise. It is true that Lacan has said that “what makes this act (the act of concluding) so remarkable in the subjective assertion demonstrated by the sophism is that it anticipates its own certainty owing to the temporal tension with which it is subjectively charged” (Lacan, 2006b, p.171), but the reader should not make a judgment so hasty as Lacan’s writing continues:

And that, based on this very anticipation, its certainty is verified in a logical precipitation that is determined by the discharge of this tension - so that in the end the conclusion is no longer grounded on anything but completely objectified temporal instance, and the assertion is desubjectified to the utmost.

As we can see, the prisoner in Lacan’s original account not only anticipates the conclusion but more importantly, he also anticipates the subsequent retrospective verification which will ultimately objectify his conclusion. Here we shall reformulate prisoner A’s thinking at the moment of concluding to make this point clear: “I must move now, because if I don’t move and let B and C precede me, I will be convinced by them that I am a black, which may be wrong; but if I move now without being one hundred percent sure that I am a white, don’t worry, I will get a second chance to verify my conclusion later.” As a result, all three prisoners start moving with the belief that “I may be uncertain about my conclusion now but I will definitely be certain later”, as the second moment of hesitation “will have it confirmed without fail if it was correct, rectified - perhaps - if it was erroneous” (Lacan, 2006b, p.171). But an authentic act of anticipation, as I would argue, involves

the imaginary actualisation of some future possibilities, the belief that a certain event will take place without knowing for sure. It is the other side of such an anticipation that makes it a mark of subjectivity, that is, the courage to take the risk when the future possibilities turn out to be impossible, when the subject confronts something unanticipated and unanticipatable in the future. Judging by this standard, the apparent anticipated certainty in “Logical Time” is a pseudo-anticipation at most, or rather the certainty of a will-be-retrospectively-verified anticipation that involves no risk at all. In the context where subjects are homogeneous, prisoners act as if they have experienced a sense of haste which in fact is only their fantasies of time; they simultaneously run to the exit thinking the certainty they have ascertained is an achievement of subjectivity, which in fact is only the result of a mechanic articulation, the same result that will be deduced every time the test runs.

In his analysis of the “Logical Time” essay, Adrian Johnston is correct to point out that these temporal instances Lacan presents only reflect a false time: “a staged time in which the diachronic unfolding of crucial moments is immanent to the synchronic script of the *Grand Autre*” (A. Johnston, 2005, p. 33). In Žižek’s famous example, the “close door” button in the elevator provides the same false consciousness of time as we witness in “Logical Time”: By pushing the button, individuals get the impression that they are somehow making a subjective contribution to the speed of the elevator journey, that they are “making things happen” rather than “letting things happen”, whereas in fact the door closes in the same time as when individuals only press the floor button (Žižek, 2013, p.259). What appears to be a moment of urgency turns out to be always-already encoded in the logical script prefigured by the big Other.

The experience of haste and anticipation in Badiou’s version of the three-prisoner game where subjects are heterogeneous, on the other hand, is different. In Badiou’s analysis, a prisoner may leave “without giving any thought to the qualitative difference of the other” (Badiou, 2009, p.257). In this case, by reasoning according

to R₁, R₂ or R₃, the subject falls into a subjective process in which “I no doubt subjectivise but purely according to the effect of a stiffened and lifeless algebra” (ibid.). In so doing, the prisoner surrenders himself to the symbolic rules given in advance by the warden, from whom he seeks for recognition and begs for freedom. But there is another option, which confers the contrary, more radical type of ethical attitude: the subject abandons the line of reasoning that he is supposed to follow, thus making his own decision about whom he is without even attempting to reach an objectively grounded certainty. After all, why must the subject first make an assumption that he is a black only to imaginarily construct an “easier” scenario for others which in turn leaves himself at a disadvantaged position?¹ The belief that I must think of myself as a black and others must think in the same way is an illogical premise that makes all the following logical articulation possible.² Having realised

¹ Bruce Fink explains that such an hypothesis “reflects Lacan’s early notion of underlying paranoia at the root of personality: *the other two are alike, I must be different*” (Fink, 1996a, p.364). Although its innocent intention to secure a psychoanalytic foundation for a logical assumption is appreciated, this explanation is untenable because even in S₂ where a prisoner sees one black and one white, he is still supposed to assume that he is a black. In fact, by making this assumption which the other who really sees him as a black never needs to make, the subject completely gives away the possibility that he can win this game alone: either he is a black and loses, or he is lucky enough to be a white thus leaving together with others. But nothing can stop the reader from easily imagining a cleverer prisoner who does not put himself in such a vulnerable position. For example, seeing one black and one white, instead of waiting and making an abundant assumption, A immediately moves by reasoning in this way: “If B who I see as a white moves at the same time, I know that he must see two blacks so I can claim that I’m a black; If B sees one black and one white, he will play by the book and reason according to R₂. In this case, my movement without hesitation must mislead him to think that I see him as a black, thus closing his reasoning process and propelling him to catch up with me as quickly as possible. Therefore, seeing him moving after me would be suffice for me to conclude that I am a white.” The obvious advantage of this superior line of reasoning is that A will never lose: either he is a black and leaves together with B, or he is a white and wins alone since the other white has been misled to believe that he is a black.

² Based on this reading, I oppose Bruce Fink’s association which links the logical reasoning of three prisoners to the effect of castration. By using a psychotic who bases his conclusion on the fact that others look at him in askance as a counterexample, Fink argues that “had he not already succumbed to the blow of castration, he would never have precipitated the conclusion that he was white” (Fink, 1996a, p.377). However, as I would suggest, in the sense that castration is

that, the subject comes to the conclusion that it is not the symbolic, but the real that “defines the stake, that is, the subject itself qua free subject” (Badiou, 2009, p.256). The subject then moves in a hurry. This kind of haste, as Badiou makes it clear, “cannot be inferred from the symbolic”, but “is the mode in which the subject exceeds the latter by exposing itself to the real” (ibid.).

In Lacan’s original account, the temporal experience of haste comes from a paranoid imagination that others may leave before me and a fear “of being convinced by men that I am not a man”. Following Badiou’s interpretation, we come to see another experience of haste which is driven by the purest desire to win, as “victory belongs to the one who gains the upper hand by thinking on the go” (ibid., p.258). In contrast to the subjective process, the moment the subject acts by taking precedence over the reasoning is defined by Badiou as the moment of subjectivisation. Whereas the former is ultimately sustained by the law, the latter “designates the event of Truth that disrupts the closure of the hegemonic ideological domain and/or the existing social edifice (the Other of Being)” (Žižek, 2000, p.183). Truth mentioned here does not equal fact, which in the case of the three-prisoner game is the correct answer about the colour of the disk on the individual’s back that can only be confirmed by the warden as the Other. Truth instead indicates that the subject stands for its own desire and takes responsibility for its own choice. To put it bluntly, the prisoner may get the colour wrong. He may not be able to earn the freedom as a reward for his subordination to the law, but this is the risk a subject is willing to take when he anticipates the certainty by “exposing myself to the real without resorting to the immobile time of the law” (Badiou, 2009, p.258). Insofar as obtaining the correct answer requires the subject to desubjectify or even dehumanise himself to the extent that he must faithfully

psychoanalytically understood as a symbolic act which reveals the lack in the subject and thus sets its desire in motion, the line of reasoning a prisoner is supposed to follow is precisely the opposite of castration: by showing not the impossibility but the only possibility a person would grasp (“Assume that you are a black at the beginning!”), the so-called logical solution eliminates desires and dehumanises the subject by reducing him to a logical machine.

occupy a symbolic position assigned by the law, the freedom he is promised to have is only a pseudo-freedom that will continue to imprison the subject.

With the distinction between the subjective process and the moment of subjectivisation, we are able to see that the only possible subjective experience of time, which Badiou does not directly discuss here but can nevertheless be derived from his reading, fails to match the one Lacan describes in “Logical Time”. Even though the same movement resulted from the same genuine belief that “I must seize this moment”, haste in Lacan’s original version is essentially a false consciousness of autonomy experienced by the subject who is sucked in by a logical procedure that works in its own way, whereas in Badiou’s case it reflects the subject’s free will to break with the rules altogether: “its subjectivising essence lies in this very interruption, by which the place, where the rule is deregulated, consists in destruction” (Badiou, 2009, p.259). In fact, the unresolvable, inherent conflict between logic and time revealed by Badiou’s reading leads us to reframe “logical time” as “time against logic”: either we have “logic without time”, since the final cause of the logical operation cannot be attributed to an agent of thought but is internal to the symbolic law; or we have “time without logic”, a time experienced by the subject who refuses to follow prefigured logical steps but instead defines its own moment of freedom. In either case, it is impossible for the prisoner, as Lacan indicates in his text, to paradoxically “subjectively desubjectify” oneself so that he can be subjectively true and objectively correct at the same time.

1.3 Dual Temporality

After a close textual analysis, we now find ourselves in an awkward situation: Our desire to develop a theory of time from an original text ends up with a refusal of the author’s argument. It seems that Lacan’s intention to integrate the subjective experience of time into classical logic turns out to be no more than a fantasy. One is compelled to ask: Does “Logical Time” simply fall short of the goal it intends to achieve and thus is no longer worth consideration when reviewing Lacan’s theorisation of time? Or is there any specific significance that can be grasped from

this unacknowledged contradiction embedded in Lacan's text, which may still matter when we work through his other writings? Lacan's own attitude is ambivalent. Despite the fact that in the early 1950s Lacan spoke highly of "Logical Time" for establishing "intersubjective logic and the time of the subject" as the new scientific foundation for psychoanalysis (Lacan, 2006j, p.239), the idea of "intersubjective logic" itself soon fell out of favour with Lacan, as he later privileged the symbolic over the imaginary, and thus became more sceptical about the idea of intersubjectivity which seems trapped by the Hegelian model of imaginary recognition. In fact, the tendency to periodise Lacan's teaching – the early Lacan who focused on the elaboration of the Imaginary; the middle Lacan who was occupied with issues of the Symbolic; and the Late Lacan who shifted to the Real in the 1970s (Eyers, 2011b) – may lead many to believe that the "Logical Time" essay published in the 1940s only reflected Lacan's "immature" thinking of time at that time.³ However, I reject this convenient solution which attributes the inner

³ An illustrative example of this point can be found in Adrian Johnston (Johnston, 2005). He claims that the 1940s emphasis on the logical genesis of the "I" through "Logical Time" should be read as a priori underpinning of "imaginary developments in Lacan's thought – heralds the explicit glorification of the symbolic in the structuralist period of the 1950s" (p.35). He further suggests that Lacan gave up his original point of view in the eleventh seminar of 1964 by returning to the Freudian idea of the timeless unconscious:

Eighteen years after the original argument, Lacan stealthily changes his tune on the significance of time in the prisoners' dilemma. Whereas in 1946 he erroneously asserts that his three logical times challenge the spatial simultaneity ("d'un seul coup") of "classical logic," in 1964 he transforms the necessary failure of this challenge into a conceptual virtue. In other words, the disc game is exemplary in demonstrating why the Freudian unconscious is timeless, why its apparently temporal unfolding is, in fact, an epiphenomenal effect dictated by structures that are out of joint with time (ibid., p.37).

However, this theoretical break is not as clear as Johnston has claimed. Although there may be a difference in Lacan's understanding of time derived from his writing at different times, we must also recognise the consistency: in Lacan's later work, the idea of logical time has not been eliminated completely but continues to inform his thinking. For example, even Johnston himself has to admit the similarity between logical time and the late Lacan's use of topology, which leads him to an awkward conclusion that "the late Lacan's vision is similarly fooled by the imagery of topological objects" (Johnston, 2005, p.35). But is it truly because Lacan "steps in the

contradiction of logical time to the slip of the author. This explanation oversimplifies Lacan's complex view of time in this essay. As I will demonstrate in this section, there are sufficient reasons to believe that this contradiction is not accidental, but rather a sustained and cultivated one, an unresolved tension internal to time per se. In this sense, this slip should at least be understood as a Freudian slip, whose occurrence is symptomatic in the psychoanalytic sense. If the symptom is a compromise-formation between two trends in which both have found an incomplete expression, then Lacan's "perfect solution" may equally be understood as a compromise between two unrepresentable temporal registers of which he is fully aware.

To elaborate this argument, I go back to the "Logical Time" essay, whose ending has not yet been carefully examined. The last section of this essay is dedicated to the discussion of the possible implication of logical time, beginning with Lacan's argument that the logical solution he puts forward which incorporates a temporal reference is appropriate to the psychoanalytic understanding of collectivity. Collectivity, according to Lacan, "is defined as a group formed by the reciprocal relations of a definite number of individuals" (Lacan, 2006b, p. 174). Here Lacan makes a reference to Freud's "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" written in 1921, a key paper that shall be first reviewed in order to provide further grounds on which Lacan's contribution can be made visible.

The central question Freud put forward at the beginning of "Group Psychology" is the psychological function of the group, namely, how does a group "acquire the capacity for exercising such a decisive influence over the mental life of the individual? And what is the nature of the mental change which it forces upon the individual?" (Freud, 1921, p.72) Having observed the surprising fact that individuals in the group feel and act in quite a different way from what would be expected of individual psychology, Freud suggests that group psychology embraces "an

same river twice", or because there is another reading of logical time implied by Lacan which escapes the reader's attention?

immense number of separate issues” which individual psychology is inadequate to handle. Through his analysis of two artificial groups, the church and the army, Freud portrays a libidinal structure of groups in which the individual “gives up his ego ideal and substitutes for it the group ideal as embodied in the leader” (ibid., p.129) It is through identification as libidinal bonds that different individuals are able to unite together and have a share of the common emotional quality. However, does every individual go through this process in the same way? Freud has certainly realised this problem, as he quickly adds that “the prodigy is not equally great in every case. In many individuals, the separation between the ego and the ego ideal is not very far advanced.” But in so doing, Freud simply regards the heterogeneity between individual subjects as a difference-in-degree rather than a difference-in-kind, which needs no further consideration. Since the group leader takes the place of the ego ideal for every individual in the same way, the psychological function of the group has been reduced to the psychological experience of the individual in a group setting, and further reduced to a pure analysis of the ego in which the actualised group is not necessarily required. To Freud, it is the ego, which is built upon identification with others in order to reexperience primary identification with one’s own image, that facilitates the transformation of an individual into a member of the group. Ironically, whereas Freud’s original intention is to investigate the overlooked field of group psychology, the paper ends up providing an elaboration of individual psychology that treats in-group phenomenon as the externalisation of one’s inner psychological mechanism.

In many ways, collectivity in Lacan’s “Logical Time” can be seen as a continuation of Freud’s discussion. Even though Freud believes that the group setting can profoundly alter an individual’s mental activity (p. 88), the subjective experience of time as one type of mental activity is not covered within his vision. Lacan goes a step further by arguing that for an “I” to be situated in relation to others in a group, a certain time of comprehending is required, “which proves to be an essential function of the logical relationship of reciprocity” (Lacan, 2006b, p. 173). In order to reach a collective certainty, subjective experience of time must be objectified so that his conclusion can be as solid as a rock. Whereas Freud’s group is a collective

homogeneity, a multiplicity of single relations, where interpersonal difference has been eliminated or repressed, the three-prisoner group presented by Lacan is not much different. One's temporal experience in its essence is individually unique, but in this specific game, three prisoners are forced to experience hesitation, anticipation and haste in coordination at exactly the same time. The strict logical process does not tolerate separate temporal experiences but organises them into a single time-unconsciousness that is unknown to prisoners but nevertheless determines their behaviour. However, this is not Lacan's final consideration of logical time. The ending sentence introduces a nuance that many have apparently missed:

This movement provides the logical form of all "human" assimilation, precisely insofar as it posits itself as assimilative of a barbarism, but it nonetheless reserves the essential determination of the "I" (Lacan, 2006b, p.174).

If "the logical form of all human assimilation" can still be understood as the logical requirement of de-subjectivisation, which is associated with a barbarism in terms of the primal horde used by Freud in "Group Psychology" as the archetype of modern group formation, then how shall we make sense of the final twist, in which the essential determination comes from the singular "I"? Meanwhile, what does Lacan mean in the footnote to this sentence, where he says that "the collective is nothing but the subject of the individual"? Is this merely a repetition of Freud's reduction of group psychology to individual psychology, or a confirmation of individual specificity that is impossible to be homogenized in the collective? Following Jacques-Alain Miller's interpretation, I accept the second possibility that maintains Lacan's distinction between subject and individual:

This is Freudian. This is Lacan's reading of the Freudian text. The individual is not the subjective. The subject is not the individual, is not at the level of the individual. What is individual, is a body, is an ego. The subject-effect which is produced through it and which disturbs its

functions, is articulated with the Other, the big Other. It is this that is called the collective or the social (Miller, 2000, p.3).

The subject is indeed not an ego. According to Lacan's theory, whereas the ego is born out of a mirror image misrecognised as the unity of the body and thus maintains an illusion of sameness between the self and the other through imaginary identification, the subject, on the other hand, is split "between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic function of language in the unconscious" (Fink, 1996b, p.45). What Lacan calls "the ontological form of anxiety" (Lacan, 2006b, p.169) is intrinsic to subjectivity as the subject must constantly confront radical otherness both outside and within itself. By defining the collective not as "the ego of the individual" but as "the subject of the individual", Lacan has dramatically advanced Freud's notion of collectivity, which is no longer situated at the imaginary level but at the symbolic level. Such an essential difference might have already been implied by examples they use. Whereas Freud is fascinated by the group organised around a leading figure as an object of identification, be it actual in the case of the army, or imaginary in the case of the church, Lacan's group is constituted exclusively by symbolic rules – the rules of the game. The three-prisoner game is determined by the possible combinations of different signifiers (the white disk and the black disk), under the control of the Other with which the subject cannot imaginarily identify. Moreover, by concluding his work of collective logic, paradoxically, with the essential determination of the "I", "Lacan returns each one to his loneliness as a subject, to the relation that each one has with the master-signifier of the Ideal beneath which he places himself. In the very moment when Lacan institutes a collective formation his first words are to dissociate, and bring forward the subjective loneliness" (Miller, 2000, p.4). This "subjective loneliness", which emerges from one's encounter with the symbolic Other and cannot be possibly covered up by one's feeling of togetherness with reflective others, dovetails perfectly with the radical experience of time Badiou has articulated, when the subject decides to expose himself to the real without resorting to the time of the law.

This new knowledge brings us to a possible response to the popular critique of the “Logical Time” essay, which accuses it of assuming an absolute reciprocity between the self and the other. One should ask: has Lacan not already deconstructed this assumption by himself with this unexpected ending, as a typical Lacanian punctuation that fixes the constant flow of signifiers, retrospectively renews the meaning of the sequence of words before and upsets the reader’s anticipation of “what this text should be like”? By privileging the determination of the “I” at the end of his essay as his last word on this issue, Lacan changes the meaning of his previous narrative within the same horizon. In his analysis of fantasy, Žižek makes an important distinction between two types of intersubjectivity in Lacan’s writing, each belonging to a different period. The early Lacan is said to insist on imaginary intersubjectivity which reproduces the Hegelian-Kojevian mode of the struggle for recognition, “of the dialectical connection between recognition of desire and desire for recognition” (Žižek, 1999, p. 194). The late Lacan, however, replaces this idea with radical intersubjectivity as the relation between the subject and the Other in the symbolic field. Instead of identifying the desire of the other in fantasy as the subject’s own, the subject is now confronted with “the enigma of the impenetrable desire of the Other, epitomized in the phrase *Che Vuoi?* (What do you want?)” (ibid.). Žižek’s analysis is insightful, but his periodisation appears to be a little hasty. As we have seen in “Logical Time”, two types of intersubjectivity may have already co-existed in Lacan’s early writing. Not only does the prisoner encounter other prisoners in terms of identification, that is, putting himself in the position of the other and seeing this other as his pure reflection, but he also encounters the Other at a different level. Being forced to participate in the game, the subject finds itself captured by a complex network of signifiers whose logic of time is beyond its apprehension. More importantly, it is precisely the traumatic encounter with the Symbolic Other that makes one’s imaginary construction of one’s encounter with the other necessary. The false consciousness of time shared by all subjects in the game thus can be understood: It is indeed a fantasy of time, a fantasy, as Žižek has suggested, that “provides him with an answer to this enigma – at its most fundamental level, fantasy tells me what I am for my others” (Žižek, 2012, p.686).

Having extensively examined “Logical Time” and the confusing way in which Lacan discusses time, I present Lacan’s explanation of the three-prisoner game as a narrative with rich meaning and multiple layers that must not be taken at face value. What Lacan says literally is troubled and disrupted by the unsaid and the not yet said. Previous readings we have reviewed, which either genuinely believe that Lacan has elaborated a logic of time, or totally dismiss this work by arguing that ‘Lacan falls prey to a perspectival illusion’ (Johnston, 2005, p.35), or radically subvert Lacan’s solution by positing a different dimension of time experienced by the free subject, all partially make sense but are no longer sufficient for us to grasp the whole picture in which Lacan struggles to maintain a temporal tension. This temporal tension, I argue, is not between individuals who experience time differently, nor is it an iteration of the philosophical debate between objective time (chronological time) which is out there in the world on the one hand, and subjective time through which we directly experience ourselves as being and becoming on the other. It is the tension between two different temporal registers out of sync with each other, which I would name respectively as “Real time” and “Symbolic time”. The contradiction embedded in Lacan’s “perfect solution” reflects the irreconcilability between these two temporal registers: Real time does not subordinate to the symbolic order or the logical articulation, but creates a founding moment for the subject that disrupts the rule; Symbolic time, on the other hand, is a temporal order entirely deprived of subjectivity. It has its own logic that captures the subject without being fully comprehended by the latter. The subject we witness in the three-prisoner game, therefore, is split between these two times: He is too afraid to have his own moment of subjectivisation in Real time, as the warden’s recognition has been taken as the sole criteria for evaluating his existence; meanwhile, he faces the danger of remaining indecisive forever, since the “right moment” in Symbolic time always eludes his apprehension. As a result, the choice he makes is imaginary in its essence which contains both the illusion of absolute reciprocity and the fantasy of anticipated certainty. It is “the imaginary exit from the master’s prison in accordance with certain scansion, with a certain timing” (Lacan, 1988a, p.287).

The idea of dual temporality I put forward is not only the result of an unconventional reading of the “Logical Time” essay. Several lines of continuity can be traced between this idea and the way Lacan understands time in his other writings. Lacan’s 1954-1955 seminar on Freud’s psychoanalytic technique contains a similar idea. In response to the privileging of the rationality of scientific method as well as the increasing scientification of human interaction, Lacan provides a critique of the contemporary attempt to decipher the secret of “the great clock of nature”, which is “one of the most decisive steps in the constitution of exact science” (Lacan, 1988b, p.298). To Lacan, the great clock is devoid of subjective meaning but keeps man in check:

From the moment man thinks that the great clock of nature turns all by itself, and continues to mark the hour even when he isn't there, the order of science is born. The order of science hangs on the following, that in officiating over nature, man has become its officious servant. He will not rule over it, except by obeying it. And like the slave, he tries to make the master dependent on him by serving him well (ibid.).

In the course of refuting the exact science within a broadly cybernetic framework, Lacan recreates a scenario familiar to the reader of the “Logical Time” essay. The master-slave relationship between the great clock of nature and man clearly resembles the relationship between the warden as the representative of the symbolic law and the prisoner whose desperate attempt to find his own secret in the Other ends in vain. However, rather than resorting to an imaginary solution, here Lacan points out what remains unsaid in “Logical Time”: Symbolic time cannot fully account for subjectivity. “Man must have his clock, his watch.” (Ibid.) The completion of the subjective process does not take the form of an individualised assertion of anticipated certainty at the moment of concluding, but becomes “the encounter of two times in nature.” Although the determinist effect of the symbolic order on subject formation – “My loved one always makes the rendezvous, because when she doesn’t come, I no longer call her my loved one” – forces man to synchronise his watch with the great clock in order to show up on time, Lacan nevertheless challenges this fantasmatic “exactitude” by asking “is it

man who is on time?” In other words, does man who submits his Real time to the rule of Symbolic time continue to be man, or, as the prisoners in “Logical Time”, become a part of the symbolic mechanism in the guise of pseudo-subjectivity? In fact, the primary aim of Lacan’s idea of dual temporality is precisely to keep the minimal gap between man’s own watch and the great clock open, to make one either come too early or too late for the rendezvous, and to withhold a possibility of breaking away from the subjective process in pursuit of a moment of subjectivisation.

Seminar II is not the only place where the idea of dual temporality has been made clear, further evidence can be found in *Seminar XI*, where Lacan makes use of the Aristotelian division between *tuché* and *automaton* to further elaborate psychoanalytic causality. In Aristotle’s usage, *tuché* means “chance modelled on human/natural intentionality”. It only applies to a restricted domain of events affected by an agent “capable of choosing”. By contrast, *automaton* applies “to the animals other than man and to...inanimate objects.” According to Mark Hansen’s explanation, Aristotle’s *automaton* lacks a “purpose-in-itself”. Therefore it is opaque to thought and can only be rendered meaningful through mediation carried by an intentional agent (Hansen, 2000, p.99). By way of analogy, Lacan imbues these philosophical terms with psychoanalytic meaning. *Tuché*, as “the encounter with the real” (Lacan, 1998, p.53), denotes a disruptive moment in the subject’s life when he is fully living-in-the-now by leaving behind both his reliance on the past and his expectation of the future. On the other hand, Lacan’s interpretation of *automaton* as “the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs” (ibid., p.54) inherits Aristotle’s idea of *para physin* (“contrary to nature”, a radical break with the model of internal meaning). It designates the temporal movement of the signifier within the network of the signifying chain through which the subject is constituted. Once again, old contents have been given new forms. The idea of dual temporality is fully in bloom here. Lacan not only reaffirms the existence of two different temporal registers but also adds some nuances to this logic. If the idea of “two clocks” in *Seminar II* demonstrates the impossibility of living in synch with Symbolic time, Lacan in *Seminar XI* highlights another

impossibility, that is to experience Real time without any reference to the great clock: “The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter” (ibid., p.55). Only the after-effect of this encounter can be experienced by the subject. Like the prisoner in “Logical Time”, he is destined to miss the moment of subjectivisation because this moment has always-already been retrospectively assimilated by the subjective process.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter is not only to provide a novel reading of “Logical Time”, but uses this reading as a starting-point that leads to further exploration of Lacan’s understanding of time in different directions. My analysis departs from many secondary resources that accept Lacan’s “perfect solution” as a logical description of the way time is perceived interpersonally. On the contrary, enlightened by Badiou’s reading, I argue that the experience of hesitation, haste or anticipation presented by Lacan is illogical, and should be regarded as an imaginary construction which covers the unresolved tension between two different temporal registers. Time is not unitary as the “Logical time” essay appears to suggest, which arranges various temporal experiences (the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending, and the moment of concluding) in a linear sequence. The fact that time can often be experienced as a loss of simultaneity in the sense of “too early” or “too late” implies the existence of two temporal registers that conflict with each other. My examination of Lacan’s idea of “two clocks” in *Seminar II* and his distinction between *tuché* and *automaton* in *Seminar XI* further proves that the idea of dual temporality remains critical in Lacan’s theoretical development. In the following chapters of my thesis, I will analyse these two temporal registers respectively and explain how the idea of dual temporality contributes to our understanding of the Lacanian subject.

2. Real Time

Having deduced the existence of two temporal registers in Lacan's "Logical Time" essay, both of which, through their relations with the Imaginary, become essential for generating the prisoner's temporal experience, I will now start to investigate them separately. This chapter will focus on the nature of the moment of subjectivisation (*tuché*), when the individual is freed from the temporal constraint in accordance with "the great clock of nature" and looks for a time of his own. What does the individual's "own watch" tell him, and how does it constitute a fundamental layer of his temporal experience? I suggest that we can answer this question by extracting a distinctive temporal register from Lacan's writings, which I call "Real time".

Speaking of "Real time", I have no intention to invoke the idea of "objective time", namely time flowing independently from the human subject and measured by watch, clock or calendar. Real time is not a measurement of reality, since in Lacan's vocabulary, reality as the product of mental representations is the opposite of the Real. The Real, as part of Lacan's Symbolic-Real-Imaginary triad, is crucial to the formation of the whole intrapsychic realm. It designates various ineffable and unnameable phenomena that resist both imaginary construction and symbolisation. In Lacan's writings, imaginary antagonism, the material insistence of the signifier and the breakdown of meaning in psychosis have all been understood in terms of the Real (Eyers, 2011a). In this chapter, I restrict my analysis to the material substance of the Real, i.e., the Real body. The Real body is the cornerstone of Lacanian psychoanalysis, as Lacan once said: "For, of course, psychoanalysis involves the real of the body and the imaginary of its mental schema" (Lacan, 2001, p.230). Differentiated from the body as the object of natural science, the Real body stands for the mysterious "material metabolisms" deprived of mental representation, "which caused him (the subject) to come forth into this semblance of existence which is life" (Lacan, 1988b, p.283). It is a body that cannot be discursively constructed or fantasmatically projected. As a result, Real time in my thesis equals organismic time or bodily time. As I will show in the course of

this chapter, the idea that a temporal register originates not in the mind but in the body which passively processes excitations of various intensities is latent in Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. In drawing upon those underdeveloped materials, I present Real time as a Lacanian metaphysics of bodily time.

Although Lacan fails to provide a sustained discussion of the relationship between time and body, as most of his references to time are related to the movement of the signifying chain (which I will discuss in the next chapter), it does not mean that the temporal register I propose using this term to indicate cannot be detected in Lacan's work, particularly in his reading of Freud's metapsychology, where a psychoanalytic understanding of the body process is most comprehensively formulated. Therefore, I structure my discussion in this chapter by following Lacan's project of "a return to Freud" (Lacan, 2006i, p.336). In the first section, against the mainstream opinion that regards Freud's metapsychology as historically outdated and scientifically discredited, I explain why Freud's theory of energetics is still valuable and how Lacan's reinterpretation, by introducing the idea of the machine, makes it a legitimate theoretical construction. I suggest that we can find in Freud's metapsychology the answer to a crucial problem in the philosophy of time. In the second section, I provide a novel reading of Freud's *Project* from a philosophical perspective, primarily influenced by Kant's theory of the three syntheses of time. Although I will not address the detail of Kant's text, it will be used as a spur to reading Freud. Freud's neurology introduces different systems of neurones that are shown to give rise to syntheses of the present, the past and the future. Unlike Kant's theory that regards all syntheses of time as active syntheses conducted by the logical subject of thought, Freud's work demonstrates how time is fundamentally synthesised by the organism through energy charge and discharge as part of the body process. In the next two sections, I discuss how Lacan criticises and develops Freud's metaphysics of time in two aspects. On the one hand, Lacan identifies the problem of consciousness in the Freudian synthesis of the past. He rejects Freud's attempt to reduce consciousness to a by-product of the ego's active synthesis and puts forward the notion of the "consciousness without the ego" that accounts for the passive synthesis of the Real past; on the other hand,

while the future in Freud's theory remains as an active representation of the mind, Lacan restores the power of synthesis to the body by reinventing the notion of the "death drive". This passive synthesis of the Real future opposes the teleological view of time. It is not the anticipation but the return of the future that confirms all possible outcomes as the expression of subjectivity.

2.1 From Freud's Energetics to Lacan's Body-Machine

Among Freud's various approaches to revealing the secrets of the human psyche, metapsychology is his most distinctive and controversial attempt. Freud's metapsychology consists of three viewpoints: the dynamic, the topographic and the economic. Among them, the economic viewpoint is of exceptional importance. It is based on Freud's theory of energetics, the most hypothetical part of metapsychology, which assumes the existence of certain psychic energy and regards psychical processes as the circulation and distribution of this energy. The other two viewpoints are built upon the economic: The dynamic viewpoint explains psychical phenomena in terms of the conflict and combination of forces, whose ultimate origin is psychic energy; while the topographic viewpoint provides a descriptive account of the differentiation of psychic systems through binding, transformation, discharge and cathexis of psychic energy. First appearing in his letters to Fliess, metapsychology was regarded by Freud as a scientific endeavour, which would transform metaphysics into a genuine science of the unconscious and legitimise psychoanalysis after all. From his early unpublished work the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) to his late overview of his career in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1938), Freud remained confident about his metapsychology and his assumption that "as other natural sciences have led us to expect.....in mental life some kind of energy is at work", even though "we have nothing to go upon which will enable us to come nearer to a knowledge of it" (Freud, 1938, p.163).

The scientific justification of metapsychology never arrived as Freud expected. Instead, in post-Freudian psychoanalysis, metapsychology, the economic viewpoint in particular, has been heavily reproached for its unfounded biologism.

Empirical data collected by contemporary biology has not supported the existence of psychic energy of the character described by Freud in the nervous system. As Breger claims: “the concepts of psychic energy, of libido, of conservation or economy, of the life and death instincts – has long been its weakest aspect” (Breger, 1968, p.44). Objections to Freud’s metapsychological construction lead to two different solutions. One, as André Green has observed, is to discard these weak points and circuit the biological issues by other explanatory systems (object-relations theory). Emphasis is then placed on object relations, intersubjectivity and the primacy of the other (Green, 2005, p.171). The other solution goes further in the direction of modern science and intends to implant the neurosciences as the authentically scientific guideline for psychoanalysis. However, in so doing, both solutions seem to overlook the potentially metaphysical implication of Freud’s metapsychology. If metapsychology fails to achieve the status of science, it does not mean that it cannot remain a valid metaphysical theory that still resonates with contemporary philosophical inquiries.

At the core of metapsychology, Freud’s economic viewpoint has three basic functions. As Richard Boothby has summarised, the first function is of clinical value, which “conveys something essential about the subjective experience of the patient.....affording a conceptualization of the lived experience of depression or mania, exhaustion or anxiety”; the second function is of theoretical value in the realm of psychoanalysis, which “provides a way of explaining the origin and function of excessively intense ideas”; in addition to these, it also has a function of philosophical value beyond psychoanalysis, which is an “even more fundamental dimension along which the energetic concept was indispensable for Freud’s thinking: that in which psychoanalysis tries to theorize the relation of the psychical to the somatic, the relation of the mind to the body” (Boothby, 1996, p.345). By identifying two terminal points in our psyche, namely its bodily organ and our acts of consciousness, Freud intends to explore “everything that lies between (which) is unknown to us” (Freud, 1938, p.144). The idea of psychic energy is his tool to enter the discussion which, until then, had been only reserved to philosophical thought. Before Freud, the mind-body problem had been most famously addressed

by Descartes. Descartes argued that the mind and the body are separate substances with independent existence, but he also defined the mind or the soul as the primary substance of the human, while the human body, characterised as a biophysical mechanism, is only secondary to the mental substance. This substance dualism became the dominant approach to the mind-body problem for the next three centuries. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the advancement of natural science, including Darwin's evolution theory, undermined this Cartesian model and changed the expression of human being in a body to "a primordial rather than an incidental and secondary feature of human existence and the expression of meaning" (Protevi, 2006, p.166).

Against this background, it is hardly surprising to find that Freud is not a dualist as many would believe. From as early as the *Project* (1895), Freud refused to recognise the psyche as an independent substance. Influenced by Fechner's panpsychism, which was popular during the late nineteenth century, Freud regards mind and body as two aspects of one and the same existent. However, neither Freud nor Lacan follows Fechner to "go a long way down the path of universal subjectivisation" (Lacan, 1988b, p.60). Unlike Fechner who believes that the same existent can be equally viewed from the psychical as from the physical perspective, Freud moves towards a physicalist viewpoint, arguing psychoanalysis should find "the true essence of what is psychical" in these somatic processes (Freud, 1938, p.157), not the other way around. The dramatic change from panpsychism to materialism is understandable in the context of the nineteenth century, as Macdougall explains: "(Early materialists) were concerned to show matter consists not merely of inert solid particles...But that it is rather endowed with intrinsic powers of activity, of which thought and feeling are special developments" (MacDougall, 1911, p.98). The obscurity of psychic energy is largely due to the impossible task it is expected to undertake. We can never locate psychic energy in specific organic cells and nerve-fibres, an attempt Freud recognised as doomed: "Every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as travelling along nerve-fibres, has miscarried completely" (Freud, 1915c, p.174), but at the same time it in some manner reproduces these psychical paths in "organic

elements of the nervous system” (Freud, 1905a, p.148) (emphasis is added). While its qualitative aspect cannot be clarified, the measurement of its quantitative aspect constitutes the psychic economy. After Freud, alternative psychoanalytic theories based on an interpersonal model may well explain relevant functions of the psyche without referring to the energetic framework, which they regard as pseudo-physiological residues, but they can hardly substitute for the missing link between the somatic and the mind, nor are they capable of having their own metapsychology to explain how the passive activity of the body gives rise to consciousness, and how the “raw” sensational matter recorded by the bodily organ is transformed into mental representation. In his famous essay “Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness”, David Chalmers nicely summarises the myth that has troubled philosophy, psychoanalysis and natural science up to today, under the name of “the hard problem of consciousness”:

It is undeniable that some organisms are subjects of experience. But the question of how it is that these systems are subjects of experience is perplexing. Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue, the sensation of middle C? How can we explain why there is something it is like to entertain a mental image, or to experience an emotion? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of *why* and *how* it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does (Chalmers, 1995) (emphasis is added).

Freud nowhere explains the *why* question, but it seems that after one hundred years, the energetic account Freud formulated in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and continued to insist on for the remainder of his life is still the most comprehensive answer psychoanalysis can give to the *how* question, since “it is not clear how referring to the object relation which, from a psychoanalytic perspective, consists essentially in demonstrating its unconscious modalities, would allow us to advance an inch” (Green, 2005, p.134).

In contrast to his Anglo-American colleagues, Lacan warmly embraces Freud's theory of energetics. He remarks in his early work on paranoid psychosis that the idea of psychic energy is "the innovation of Freud.....which provides a common measure to very diverse phenomena" (Boothby, 1991, p.49). Following his announcement of "returning to Freud" in 1953, he discusses the Freudian notions of consciousness, ego and death drive from an energetic perspective throughout *Seminar II*, including a detailed reading of the *Project*. His appreciation of the idea of psychic energy is clearly reflected in his comment that "Freud's psycho-physical conception of the investments of the intra-organic systems is extremely ingenious at explaining what takes place in the individual" (Lacan, 1988b, p.45). Later in *Seminar XI*, Lacan puts the energetically based notion of drive among the "four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis" and reconceptualises the body as a part of the Real, alongside the material insistence of the signifier. Although Lacan's heavy use of linguistics and the way he constructs the unconscious as like language may leave the impression that Lacanian psychoanalysis overlooks the role of body and affect, the truth is that Freud's theory of energetics is well preserved in Lacan's work and enables Lacan to continue Freud's exploration of the mind-body relationship.

Lacan is fully aware of the post-Freudian critiques of Freud's metapsychology. The first step he makes to save Freud from his fatal encounter with modern biology is to change the scientific ground on which we can think of psychic energy. Before turning to psychoanalysis, Lacan, during his medical apprentice years at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, had already abandoned old-fashioned organicism, vitalism and constitutionalism in favour of a dynamic approach to madness. Therefore, he does not believe that the theory of energetics needs to seek approval from modern biology: "Freudian biology has nothing to do with biology" (Lacan, 1988b, p.75). By reducing the body to an object within the territory of scientific rationality, modern biology has diverged from psychoanalysis since the beginning:

Biologists think that they devote themselves to the study of life. It's not clear why. Until further notice, their fundamental concepts' point of origin

has nothing to do with the phenomenon of life, which in its essence remains completely impenetrable (ibid., p.75).

According to Lacan, the real aim of “Freudian biology” is not to reveal the secret of the phenomenon of life, which remains unthinkable in the domain of the Real, but to understand the body in terms of the machine. Although Freud’s work spurred on and implied this idea, he never went so far as to say that “compared to the animal, we are machines” (ibid., p.31). Lacan certainly does not believe that the body is a machine. He makes it very clear that “the question as to whether it [the machine] is human or not is obviously entirely settled – it isn’t”. However, he adds that “there’s also the question of knowing whether the human, in the sense in which you understand it, is as human as all that” (ibid., p.319). What Lacan insists is an “epistemological parallelism” that might help us find in the machine the answer to the problem of the body, so that we can explain the living organism in terms of mechanism and reinterpret Freud’s energetic principles as basic principles of physics that sustain the function of a machine. If “what Descartes is looking for in man is the clock” (ibid., p.74), then what Freud is looking for in man is the steam engine, a machine that balances energy input and output: “Let us call this regulation the restitutive function of the psychic organisation. At a very elementary level...Not only is there discharge, but withdrawal - which testifies to the still very primitive functioning of a principle of restitution, of equilibration of the machine” (ibid., p.60). To any objection that the idea of psychic energy cannot be given a biological meaning, Lacan’s answer would be that psychic energy is couched in an explicit mechanical framework:

It is the machine that is at cause in the accumulation of any energy whatever, in this instance electric power, which can later be distributed and put at the service of consumers. What is accumulated in the machine has above all the strictest ratio with the machine. To say that the energy was already there in a virtual state in the current of the river does not advance us at all. It means, strictly speaking, nothing, because the energy, in this instance, only begins to interest us from the moment that it is accumulated, and it is only accumulated at the moment when machines come into action (Lacan, 1957, p.27).

Energy and machine are inextricably linked. On the one hand, a machine needs energy: “what could the desire of a machine be, except to restock on energy sources?” (Lacan, 1988b, p.54); on the other hand, circulations of energy require a machine as well: “Energy...is a notion which can only emerge once there are machines” (ibid., p.75). The concept of psychic energy now becomes a legitimate theoretical construction validated by the law of conservation of energy in physics. Applying this analogy to a broader context, Lacan later claims that Freud’s metapsychology in general is a mechanical theory: “Their economic/dynamic import can be illustrated by a comparison that is equivalent to its own reason: what a turbine, a machine that operates according to a chain of equations, brings to a natural waterfall in order to produce energy” (Lacan, 2006g, p.544). We shall notice that Lacan’s body-machine is not controlled by the mind or destined to be surpassed by the mind. Instead, it follows its own rules and functions from the very beginning, prior to the formation of self-consciousness. The body-machine leads us to the material bodily principles that transcend various individualised bodies. It is an organising centre of subjectivity which undermines the autonomy of selfhood through a passive, organismic manner. By introducing the machine as the essence of the body, which “goes much further in the direction of what we are in reality, further even than the people who build them suspect” (Lacan, 1988b, p.74), Lacan’s ontological transformation not only provides an epistemological approach to directly confront the body without eliminating the Real, it also consolidates the status of Freud’s theory of energetics as a genuine metaphysics to investigate the mind-body problem.

After considering the controversy around Freud’s metapsychology, we can begin to understand it from a temporal perspective. If Freud’s metapsychology, in general, is an attempt to answer David Chalmers’ “hard problem” concerning the idea of consciousness, then in terms of the nature and meaning of time, we once again confront a variant of this problem, which I will call “the hard problem of temporal consciousness”: It is clear that the organism is in constant flux, experiencing changes in both the external and internal environments. Time is perceived by the

body and reflected in the bodily rhythm. However, how does this fundamental, organismic sense of time give rise to temporal consciousness including the temporal order (Before, During, After), the time-series (Past, Present, Future) and various temporal experiences such as succession, simultaneity and duration? How does the human subject move from a passive perception of time to a subjective understanding of time? How might we correlate psychological time with the cycle of bodily movement? Explaining this “hard question” is the first step to make any coherent theory of time possible. Modern science has tried and failed to find a neurobiological locus that serves as the core “clock” in the human brain (Merchant, Harrington, & Meck, 2013), and most attempts to build psychological time on an organismic basis remain metaphysical speculations.

Although scholars have observed that through Freud’s work, there is “a continual growth in richness and complexity” in the way he treats time (Green, 2005, p.169), and have further identified multiple themes of time in Freud’s writings (Abraham, 1976; Green, 2007, 2008), most discussions are limited to mechanisms of psychic time without paying attention to the possibility of bodily time embedded in Freud’s metapsychology. As Lacan points out, Freud’s body-machine is “constructed so as to embody something which is called time and is the mystery of mysteries” (Lacan, 1988b, p.74). Deleuze is one of a few who realise that a psychoanalytic response to “the hard problem of temporal consciousness” can be extracted from Freud’s work, although he never gives this body of work an independent status but only selectively chooses some Freudian materials in the service of his own theoretical construction. In fact, as we will see in the following chapter, the *Project*, which stands for Freud’s most elaborated energetic account of the psychic apparatus, contains a metaphysical insight into the human body’s relationship with time. Using the hypothesis of psychic energy to explain how time is primarily synthesised in the organism, this metaphysical account of time not only supplements existing theories of time in Freud’s work but defines the genesis of the latter. Lacan’s return to Freud allows a more specific understanding of this point. He closely follows Freud’s theoretical construction and points out its inherent impasses, contradictions and limitations, from where he takes over Freud’s energetic

principles and the overall conceptual framework to build his own metaphysics of bodily time.

2.2 The Freudian Metaphysics of Time

If, as Lacan suggests, Freud's whole discussion of metapsychology revolves around the question "what, in terms of energy, is the psyche?" (Lacan, 1988b, p.75), then the main question I am going to pursue in this section is "what, in terms of energy, is time?" Before I turn to Freud's answer, I will first use Kant's metaphysics of time as a necessary background against which the distinctive contribution of both Freud's and Lacan's work can be understood. At the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant lays down his fundamental point of view regarding the nature of time and space: they are relations "that only attach to the form of intuition alone, and thus to the subjective constitution of our mind, without which these predicates could not be ascribed to anything at all" (Kant, 1998, p. A23). According to Kant, intuitions are representations given in sensation which are related immediately to objects, but time and space do not belong to intuitions in this empirical sense. Instead, they are pure intuitions which do not contain sensation, but contain "merely the form under which something is intuited" (ibid., p. A51). Time is an *a priori* form of sensibility through which we acquire representations of objects, and any sensible representation is always-already spatio-temporally determined. Simply put, our temporal experience first and foremost includes the experience of ourselves as a temporal being. We are constituted by time to experience "outer" objects temporally. Kant further points out that time as a transcendental condition of sensation is still far away from time as our temporal consciousness. In order to move from sensation to understanding and combine intuitions with concepts, a transcendental process is needed, which he calls "synthesis". In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant provides three syntheses to synthesise the intuited diversity into three different dimensions of temporal consciousness, in which the main act of cognition and understanding can be performed:

1. The synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, or the synthesis of the present.

Every intuition, as Kant argues, is an immediate and singular representation, and thus is only perceived in one moment. In order for the mind to perceive temporal succession, there must be a synthesis, “aimed directly at the intuition”, to “take together this manifoldness” (ibid., p.A100). Meanwhile, in order to sustain this synthesis at the empirical level, we also need a *pure* synthesis of apprehension that takes together the sensibility of time and space as pure intuitions.

2. The synthesis of reproduction in the imagination, or the synthesis of the past. After the first synthesis, we have the unity of intuitions as the present. “But if I were always to lose the preceding representation from my thoughts and not reproduce them when I proceed to the following ones, then no whole representation and none of the previously mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise” (ibid., p.A102). Therefore, a second synthesis must supplement the first one: the empirical synthesis of reproduction reproduces a synthetic unity; while the pure synthesis of reproduction constitutes the transcendental ground of reproducibility.
3. The synthesis of recognition in the concept, or the synthesis of the future. After the second synthesis, we have two unities of intuitions at hand: the newly synthesised one, standing for the present; and the reproduction of the former one, standing for the past. The problem is that “without consciousness that which we think is the very same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be in vain” (ibid., p.A103). A reproduction may be mistaken as a new apprehension if one fails to recognise that it is the same as what was apprehended. Therefore, the empirical synthesis of recognition is needed, alongside the pure synthesis of recognition that unifies sensibility and reproducibility. According to Heidegger’s interpretation, this synthesis “also proves to be essentially time-forming”: “If the function of this pure synthesis is recognition, this does not mean that its prospecting is concerned with an essent which it can pro-pose to itself as identical but that it prospectes the horizon of proposition in general. As pure, its prospecting is the pure formation of that which makes all projection [*Vorhaften*] possible, i.e., the future”

(Heidegger, 1965, p.191).

Kant's philosophy of time contains some theoretical ambiguities that would become the targets of later philosophers. On the one hand, by treating time as "properties of the mind, not of the things we experience" (Brook, 2013, p.123), Kant seems to rule out the possibility for the body to synthesise time. Although the empirical intuition occurs at a very fundamental level of sensation, time is not brought into being by any object of the senses but functions as a permanent subjective condition for experiencing external objects through internal mental activity. If we omit from empirical intuitions everything empirical or sensible, "time and space still remain, which are therefore pure intuitions that lie a priori at the basis of the empirical" (Kant, 1912, p.36); on the other hand, a part of the mind in Kant's philosophy seems to share the noncognitive in-the-world character with the body. The first and second syntheses of time, despite occurring in the mind, are not conscious. Consciousness starts from the third synthesis, which recognises what the first and second syntheses have synthesised and thus constitutes knowledge. The first two syntheses are not conscious because they are not self-conscious, but rather blind, passive and unconscious syntheses. However, as a transcendental idealist, Kant finds it difficult to digest the idea of passive synthesis. As we have seen, three pure syntheses of time condition three empirical syntheses of time. Therefore, no matter how the "I" given in an empirical content is passively synthesised as a sensible, perceptible and concrete being, there must be a transcendental "I" which actively makes these passive syntheses possible. In the 1787 edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the risk of confusing the sequence of three syntheses, Kant eliminates the possibility of passive synthesis and puts the active synthesis, or "an action of the understanding", at the beginning of the whole process:

The manifold of representations can be given in an intuition that is merely sensible, i.e., nothing but receptivity, and the form of this intuition can lie a priori in our faculty of representation without being anything other than the way in which the subject is affected. Yet the combination of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses, and therefore cannot already be contained in the pure form of sensible intuition; *for it is an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation, and, since one must call*

the latter understanding, in distinction from sensibility, all combination, whether we are conscious of it or not...is an action of the understanding” (Kant, 1998, p. B130) (emphasis is added).

By insisting that all syntheses of time are actively accomplished by a transcendental “I”, Kant’s theory of time reflects a limitation of his representational philosophy in general, which only contemplates how the mind constructs the world as representations but never asks how the mind itself is constructed. Kant may not think of it as a problem, as Faulkner suggests that Kant began his thinking with the assumption of a fully formed human, capable of rational thought (Faulkner, 2004). But after the theory of evolution, this tension lying in Kant’s theory, “in which the self arises within the world and yet somehow peers at nature from an external and detached perspective” (Tauber, 2010, p.153), is becoming more and more evident.

In the twentieth century, Husserl first singled out the idea of passive synthesis in Kant’s philosophy as a genuine phenomenological concept, even though Kant himself failed to recognise its importance. According to Husserl, in Kant’s synthesis of productive imagination, there is “nothing other than what we call passive constitution, nothing other than the team-work of the constantly higher developing intentionalities of passive consciousness in which an extremely multiform process of immanent and transcendent sense-giving is carried out passively and is organized into encompassing formations of sense and formations of being” (Husserl, 2001, p.410). While Kant is not in a position to localise the passive synthesis except holding it in subjection to the transcendental principles, Husserl relates the passive synthesis to his understanding of the body as the experiential centre of sensational orientations. Adopting this crucial aspect of Husserl’s interpretation of Kant, Deleuze rewrites the entire structure of the syntheses of time. The transcendental “I” is discarded and replaced by the passive organism. The syntheses of time start from the passive syntheses through the body, which “are not carried out by the mind” but “prior to all memory and all reflection” (Deleuze, 1994, p.71). In this sense, “time is subjective, but in relation to the subjectivity of a passive subject” (ibid.).

There are a number of themes in this brief examination of Kant's metaphysics of time and its influence that will become important below. First of all, in parallel to Husserl and Deleuze, both Freud and Lacan have produced responses to the lack of passivity or the bodily dimension in Kant's philosophy of time. This is why their theories of time manifest primary philosophical relevance. Secondly, Freud's theory of energetics provides an experiential or empirical basis for the idea of passive synthesis, which is lacking in Husserl and Deleuze's theory. Thirdly, I apply "three syntheses of time" as the overall structure of my interpretation of Freud's original theory and Lacan's further development, which can be put into comparison with Kant's "three active syntheses of time" and Deleuze's "three passive syntheses of time". While these models have some points in common, they are also significantly different at some crucial points.

Freud's metaphysics of time is most systematically presented in the *Project*, which is the primary text for my analysis in this section. The aim of the *Project* is "to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles" (Freud, 1895a, p.295). It starts with "a basic principle of neuronal activity in relation to Q"⁴: the principle of neuronal inertia. According to this principle, the neurons completely and instantly discharge the energy they have received by "giving it off through a connecting path to the muscular mechanisms, and in that way keeps itself [the nervous system] free from stimulus" (Freud, 1895a, p.296). In doing so, the organism achieves an experience of pleasure since the diminution of excitation is defined by Freud as pleasure, in contrast to unpleasure as the accumulation of excitation. For instance, if the organism of an individual is impinged upon by an external stimulus such as fire, the neurons, following the principle of neuronal inertia, will immediately divest themselves of Q and lead the organism to react by a single motor response: removing itself from the presence of

⁴ According to Freud, Q means activity in the form of excitation/energy, and the neuron is the material particle which is capable of absorbing and discharging excitation/energy. Excitation or energy carried by the neuron is called Qη, which means neural excitation or neural energy.

fire. Freud names the system of these neurones “the system ϕ ”. As Lacan nicely summarises:

What is Freud calling the system ϕ ? He starts from the schema of the reflex-arc in its simplest version, which offered such hope of grasping the relations of the living being with its environment. This schema displays the essential property of the system of relations of a living being – it receives something, an excitation, and it responds with something (Lacan, 1988b, p.106).

Similar to Kant’s concept of “empirical intuition”, Husserl’s concept of “sensory matter” (or “hyletic data”), and Deleuze’s concept of “discontinuous matter”, the system ϕ , which is characterised by pure passivity, receptivity and bodily sensibility, gives rise to the experience of the Now, the singular instant of time. The Now is not time, but an essential component of time. It is absolute immediacy without either the past or the future. It passes as soon as the organism tries to hold this Now. Since the reception and discharge of energy in the system ϕ happen at the same time without any delay, the experience of the Now simultaneously stands for the birth of a moment and its death. Lacan, later in his work, will refer to the experience of the Now as the “momentary fashion”: “not only is destruction possible, but at every instant there is creation” (1988b, p.293).

The Now is not a self-subsistent reality. It is a pure evanescence in the form of energy intensity that cannot be singled out of the living present. From a phenomenological perspective, the living present emerges as a multiplied unity. It is an ongoing sense that contains a temporally extended (although narrowly) sensed content (Gallagher, 2013), exceeds and contextualises separate instants. This raises the question of how to collect these scattered instants of time together in a bodily horizon. In Kant’s philosophy, we have the synthesis of apprehension which “take together this manifoldness”; while in Deleuze’s philosophy, the imagination is defined as a contractile power, “which contracts the successive independent instants into one another, thereby constituting the lived, or living,

present” (Deleuze, 1994, p.70). Coming back to the *Project*, we find that the unification of isolated Nows is demanded “under the compulsion of exigencies of life” (Freud, 1895a, p.301). The principle of neuronal inertia proves to be inadequate after further contemplation, because the organism is not only interfered with by the external stimuli. It also “receives stimuli from the somatic element itself – endogenous stimuli – which have equally to be discharged. They have their origin in the cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration, sexuality” (Freud, 1985, p.297). The organism is unable to get rid of these endogenous stimuli, and thus “is obliged to abandon its original trend to inertia”. A different system of neurones, the system ψ , is indicated to handle these internal stimuli. Unlike the system ϕ which only contains permeable neurones, the system ψ contains impermeable ones with “contact barriers” in between in order to perform two functions. On the one hand, it is “loaded with resistance and holding back Q_n ” (ibid., p.300); only when the Q_s increase up above a certain threshold can they pass into ψ neurones. On the other hand, ψ neurones do not evacuate all energy that comes into them, but “put up with a store of Q_n sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action” (ibid., p.297).

The system ψ undertakes the energetic synthesis of the present in Freud’s metapsychology due to its unique characteristics. We have already seen that the experience of the Now is fleeting because the system ϕ discharges everything and retains nothing. By contrast, the system ψ has “a capacity for being permanently altered by a single occurrence” (ibid., p.299). Contact barriers retain a small amount of Q_n to maintain ψ neurones in a permanently cathected state. Moreover, the system ψ is more than a pure reflex-system in response to the environment. It integrates externality and internality by “receiving Q , on the one hand from the ϕ neurones themselves, and on the other from the cellular elements in the interior of the body” (ibid., p.304), and contains both energy charge and discharge as part of the living process. Through the system ϕ , the present as a temporal extension is produced, a present that enables the organism to grasp “the magnitude of the impression and on the frequency with which the same impression is repeated” (ibid., p.300).

However, the temporal extension is not limitless. As Deleuze explains: “Time does not escape the present, but the present does not stop moving by leaps and bounds which encroach upon one another. This is the paradox of the present: to constitute time while passing in the time constituted. We cannot avoid the necessary conclusion – that there must be another time in which the first synthesis of time can occur” (Deleuze, 1994, p.79). This leads us to the second synthesis, the synthesis of the past. In Kant’s metaphysics, this synthesis is built on the transcendental ground of reproducibility. The former representation has to be reproduced. Otherwise, it simply passes into oblivion. Unlike Kant, Freud’s reason to have the second synthesis is empirically based. A series of contact barriers between neurones already make the system ψ able to remember and reproduce, as Freud says, “memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the ψ neurones”. The issue here is the material to remember or reproduce. So far, the neural system we have built only deals with different quantities of energy or excitations, which can be retained, resisted or discharged, but only perceptual images or “qualities-sensations” cathected by energy can be remembered or reproduced. To overcome this difficulty, Freud assumes that “there is a third system of neurones – ω perhaps [we might call it] – which is excited along with perception, but not along with reproduction, and whose states of excitation give rise to the various qualities – are, that is to say, conscious sensations” (Freud, 1895a, p.309).

The system ω itself does not generate a different temporal dimension, but it stores mnemonic images that can be activated by the system ψ to synthesise the past so that the organism can bring back the previous perception and perceives its content in the living present. In this sense, the second synthesis of the past in Freud’s theory is still a passive, organismic synthesis, facilitated by the energy exchange between the buffer-system (the system ψ) and the organ of perception (the system ω). The past and the present should not be regarded as two different parts in a single line of time. They are two overlapping dimensions. The past depends on the present to be representable while the present needs the past to be reproducible. In

accordance with Deleuzian terminology, we might call the present the “foundation of time”, and the past the “ground of time”.

In the *Project*, one example of this energetic synthesis of the past is hallucination. After receiving a certain amount of $Q\eta$ from the internal stimuli, there is an urgent need for the system ψ to discharge surplus energy or excitations. However, the infant, due to “the initial helplessness of human beings”, is unable to alter the external environment to meet his or her need without external intervention. The discharge can only be achieved when “an experienced person is drawn to the child’s state” (Freud, 1985, p.318). In order to reduce the risk of unpleasure caused by the uncontrollability of the other’s intervention, the system ψ turns to the mnemonic images of the object of satisfaction stored in the system ω . Therefore, the next time the same pressure of internal needs increases, the system ψ , instead of suffering from unpleasure while waiting for external intervention, simply reproductively remembers the motor image associated with the first experience of satisfaction, and thus discharges the excitations through this short circuit. We can use the example Freud gives to understand this process:

A hungry baby screams or kicks helplessly. But the situation remains unaltered, for the excitation arising from an internal need is not due to a force producing a momentary impact but to one which is in continuous operation. A change can only come about if in some way or other (in the case of the baby, through outside help) an ‘experience of satisfaction’ can be achieved which puts an end to the internal stimulus. An essential component of this experience of satisfaction is a particular perception (that of nourishment, in our example), the mnemonic image of which remains associated thenceforward with the memory trace of the excitation produced by the need. *As a result of the link that has thus been established, next time this need arises a psychical impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathect the mnemonic image of the perception and to re-evolve the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction.* (Freud, 1900, pp.565–66) (emphasis is added)

The hallucination is produced in the living present, yet its realisation always requires the association between a past moment and a present one. The

combination of the first and the second syntheses of time constitutes the primary process of the psyche, in which “wishful cathexis to the point of hallucination complete generation of unpleasure which involves a complete expenditure of defence” (Freud, 1895a, p.326). It is worth noting that the principle of inertia, suspended in the first synthesis of time, seems to return here in the form of the primary process. The short circuit to discharge energy through hallucination overcomes the material constraint imposed by the “temporal asymmetry” between the constant internal needs and the discontinuous external intervention. However, a hallucination of nourishment will not feed a starving infant. It is only a temporary solution to the internal needs at the expense of a large amount of psychic energy and at the risk of the exhaustion of the organism. Lacan’s reading points out the danger in the primary process: “How is it that the living organism nonetheless succeeds in not falling into terrible traps, biologically speaking?” (Lacan, 1988b, p.144). To prevent the body from being “made helpless and suffer[ing] injury”, “satisfaction must fail to occur, because the object is not real but is present only as an imaginary idea” (Freud, 1895a, pp.324–25). As a result, another system, which Lacan calls “a mechanism of regulation”, needs to be introduced in order to distinguish between perception and memory, hallucination and reality.

Here we move to the third synthesis of time in Freud’s work. This synthesis is achieved by the ego, “an organisation...formed in ψ whose presence interferes with passages [of quantity] which on the first occasion occurred in a particular way [i.e. accompanied by satisfaction or pain]” (ibid., p.323). The ego is formed as a response to the biological need of self-preservation, a defensive apparatus against the over-discharge of energy that “is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body” (Freud, 1923a, p.26 footnote). This genesis justifies Freud’s well-known statement in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) that “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego” (Freud, 1923a, p.26). The ego prevents the cathexis of the desired mnemonic image from generating hallucination and only allows energy discharge towards the specific action. It is responsible for many complicated mental operations including the activation of certain memory traces, the reservation of a major part of energy for the sake of efficiency, and the selection

of a particular need to be cathected in order to reduce unpleasure. In so doing, it introduces the secondary process of the psyche to take over without contradicting the primary one. By inhibiting the immediate discharge of excitation based on a realistic and economic consideration and regulating the flow of energy along various conductive pathways, it chooses a different, longer route to achieve the same goal as the primary process.

In *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911), Freud reformulates the primary/secondary process in terms of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, and implies that the transition between them is essentially a requirement for the synthesis of the future as a new temporal dimension: “Actually the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but *only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time*” (Freud, 1911, p.223) (emphasis is added). The future here is not another organised and unified series of instants. Freud doesn’t come up with a new system to synthesise the future, nor does he introduce new materials to be synthesised. The ego is formed in the system ψ , the living present. The future can only be contemplated as “future in the present”. It inhibits the self-realisation of the present and opens it up towards something that has not yet come. By assuring that satisfaction will be realised in the horizon of the future, the ego appeases the urgent needs in the living present and resists the temptation to find comfort in the past.

Freud’s third synthesis of the future strongly resembles the synthesis of recognition in the concept in the Kantian structure. First of all, these two syntheses have similar causes. Kant also needs this synthesis to solve the problem of hallucination, or in his words, the problem of the lack of recognition of the difference between what is reproduced and what is actually manifest in perception. Secondly, the synthesis of the future is an active synthesis, as is the synthesis of recognition in Kant’s philosophy, which is called “an action of the understanding” that gives rise

to pure knowledge. In Freud's metapsychology, the ego indeed originates from passive syntheses in the body. Nonetheless, "as a mental projection of the surface of the body" (Freud, 1923a, p.26, footnote), it is located at the boundary between the body and the psyche and mostly undertakes psychic functions in the name of the "I". Under its influence, the secondary process involves thought activity and replaces "perceptual-identity" with "thought-identity". Thirdly, to both Freud and Kant, the third synthesis does not synthesise something new. It instead synthesises the products of the first and second syntheses in each one's work. It governs the other two and directs the present and the past towards the future. At the end of Freud's metaphysics of time, the ego becomes the master of the organism: "The ego is the nucleus, that is how Freud expresses it, the kernel of this apparatus" (Lacan, 1988b, p.145).

2.3 The Consciousness Without the Ego

In *Seminar II*, Lacan presents a close reading of Freud's *Project* and explains the different roles played by the system ϕ , ψ and ω . For the most part, Lacan endorses Freud's theoretical construction of the psychic apparatus based on the energetic principles of the intra-organic system, which, "however hypothetical it may be", helps us acquire in the way of experiencing "the diffusion and distribution of nervous input" (Lacan, 1988b, p.45). But at the same time, Lacan also identifies, repeatedly, a crucial contradiction in the text which Freud fails to solve, namely the problem of consciousness:

In the metapsychology, when he tries to explain the different pathological forms...through investments of systems, he repeatedly finds himself confronted with a paradox when it is a matter of making the system of consciousness function (ibid.).

Here for the first time we find ourselves faced with this difficulty, which reoccurs at every turn throughout Freud's work – one doesn't know what to do with the system of consciousness (ibid., p.99-100).

Freud doesn't succeed in finding a coherent model of it, and this isn't due to the existence of the unconscious. While he can give a coherent, balanced account of the majority of the other parts of the psychic apparatus, when it's a question of consciousness, he always encounters mutually contradictory conditions (ibid. p.117).

To understand this impasse, we have to return to the *Project*, where the word "consciousness" first appears when Freud faces the problem of quality. The essential function of consciousness, according to Freud, is that "it gives us what are called *qualities-sensations*" (Freud, 1895a, p.308). The psychic apparatus constituted by system ϕ and system ψ only involves the charge and discharge of psychic energy in a quantitative way. In this sense, it functions independently of consciousness and does not explain how we are aware of qualities-sensations through consciousness. So where do qualities originate? Freud points to the third system ω , the organismic system of consciousness: "Here consciousness is the subjective side of one part of the physical processes in the nervous system, namely of the ω process" (ibid., p.311). By defining consciousness as the physical, excitatory process in the ω neurones, Freud does not accept the idea of consciousness understood in psychology that usually contains an active process but gives it the characteristic of immediacy and passivity.

However, this definition and localisation of consciousness is challenged when the temporal dimension of the past is introduced. On the one hand, if the ω neurones whose states of excitation give rise to the various qualities "behave like organs of perception" (ibid., p.309), then consciousness as perception, or at least the qualitative part of perception, ought to be localised in the upper storey of the nervous system and in direct contact with the external world. It needs to be linked with "masses in motion" and reflect them as images. This point is confirmed when Freud attributes to the ω neurones the function of "the indication of reality" (ibid., p.325). In this sense, consciousness partakes of the living present. On the other hand, as we have already discussed in the previous section, the system ψ needs mnemonic images to remember and reproduce, and the only place to store mnemonic images is the system ω . If this is the case, consciousness has to be localised in the

understorey of the nervous system, as a mere appendage to the system ψ . It has to be detached from the present and falls into the past. This is what Lacan calls “the paradox of the system of consciousness”:

It both has to be there, and not be there. If it is included in the energy system as constituted at the ψ level, it won't be any more than a part of it, and won't be able to play its role as reference to reality. Still, some energy has to go through it. But it can't be directly linked to the external world's massive input, as is presumed in the first, so-called discharge, system, that is, of elementary stimulus-response reflex. On the contrary, it must be completely separated off from it.....On the other hand, beginning with what happens in ω , the system ψ needs information, as Valabrega said the other day, which I found somewhat hasty, but not false in itself. It can only find this information at the level of the discharge of the perceptual system (Lacan, 1988b, p.117).

Consciousness, as a result, is split between fresh perceptions, standing for the present, and mnemonic images, standing for the past. In fact, this paradox is not as fatal as it appears. If it is handled delicately, in the way Lacan does, it will generate new insights into the synthesis of the past. But first, we may have a look at Freud's own solution. Five years later, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud presented another version of the psychic apparatus, which, despite largely resembling the one formulated in the *Project*, includes several revisions specifically in relation to the system and function of consciousness.

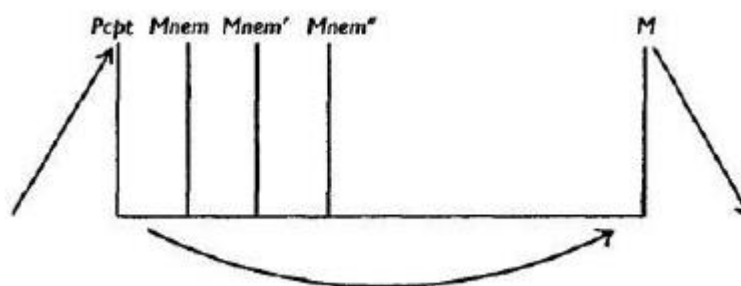


Figure 1. Graph of the Psychic Apparatus. Reprinted from Freud, S. (1900), *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (p.538). In *S.E. IV*

In this schema, Freud divides the system ω , the system of consciousness, into three parts. The left end of the diagram is a sensory end, which is responsible for receiving perceptions in addition to quantitative excitations. Its mechanism is a reflex process, which preserves the characteristic of immediacy and passivity in the living present: “The very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory” (ibid., p.358). In the middle portion, Freud locates mnemonic images and impressions in another system “which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces” (ibid.). These mnemonic images are no longer consciousness and completely separated off from the organ which receives fresh perceptions. As Freud says: “Our memories – not excepting those which are most deeply stamped on our minds – are in themselves unconscious” (ibid., p.539). Alongside them are various facilitating pathways ready for remembering and reproducing. In this sense, this mnemonic system can be regarded as an extended system ψ . It is able to synthesise the past without relying on a supplement from another system. Freud puts “consciousness” near the other end (the motor end) of the diagram. The system lying behind it is the *Pcs.* system, which takes over various functions Freud attributed to the ego in the *Project*. According to this new schema, not only “memory and the quality that characterises consciousness are mutually exclusive” (ibid., p.540), but consciousness is also separated from the *Pcpt.* System. It is no longer a passive, organismic process that synthesises, but is an after-effect, or a by-product of the ego’s active synthesis in a “censored present”.

Lacan has observed this revision: “The first schema gave us a representation of perception and consciousness at only one extremity of the apparatus, united together, just as they are in experience. The second schema compounds the difficulties of the first by dissociating the location of the perceptual system and that of the system of consciousness” (Lacan, 1988b, p.141). Why Freud makes such an arrangement is not a concern for this chapter.⁵ It is sufficient to say here that

⁵ According to Lacan, Freud “encounters this difficulty just when he introduces the temporal dimension” (Lacan, 1988b, p.145). To be more specific, Freud wants to introduce the idea of regression to explain hallucination and the determination of

Lacan disapproves of this revision. He regards the change of consciousness from a physical phenomenon to a psychic phenomenon as the wrong solution to “the paradox of the system of consciousness”, because what makes the second synthesis of the past possible is not mnemonic images, but precisely consciousness as a passive process.

Let us think about this question again: does the recollection of mnemonic images, i.e., traces of present perceptions, synthesise the past? Images coming into consciousness, be they for the first time as new qualities-sensations, or for the second time through remembering or reproducing, are always perceived in the living present. Alterations of the neurones ω caused by mnemonic images, according to Freud, are permanent alterations. They do not direct us to the past since they are always present and will continue to be present. What do mnemonic images carry with them that can tell us about the past? Philosophers who have paid attention to this question help us shed some new light on the relationship between mnemonic images and the past. According to Merleau-Ponty, “no preservation, no physiological or psychic ‘trace’ of the past can make consciousness of the past understandable...These traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some ‘previous’ event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance within myself” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.479–80). Similarly, Bergson argues that “the image, pure and simple, will not be referred to the past unless, indeed, it was in the past that I sought it” (Bergson, 1991, p.135). What can be derived from these remarks and resonate usefully with Lacanian psychoanalysis is the idea that neither mnemonic images, nor the psychic process that reproduces these images in the present synthesises the past. An image is a past image because the individual gives the meaning “past” to it in the present. It is not “past-in-itself”

infantile wishes, to provide another version of the synthesis of the past. However, Lacan believes that in the chronological sense, “regression doesn’t exist” (ibid., p.103). “(One) doesn’t have to go back to childhood memories, nor to think of regression” (ibid., p.126). What needs to be introduced here is not a temporal dimension, but an entirely different temporal register, that is Symbolic time. This topic will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

but “past-for-itself”. The system ψ will not be able to cathect the image of a previous satisfaction to achieve hallucination if the organism has not already possessed the past as a temporal dimension, and thus associated this image with a sense of “something past”. It is not memory that constitutes the past; on the contrary, it is a sense of the past that constitutes memory. The past as a horizon of “having-been” must have already been synthesised before any image that can be stored in the past.

Therefore, what is synthesised as the past must mean the Real past. This idea corresponds not to the “empirical reproduction” but to the Kantian “transcendental reproducibility”; not to the “memory image” but to the Bergsonian “pure memory”; not to a “past present” but to the Deleuzian “pure past”. All of these concepts define the past as something different from a “former present” that stands out as specific moments in a temporal chronology. Firstly, the past as such does not pass. If it passes, it no longer defines a temporal horizon but becomes something in the past; secondly, it is not represented. Otherwise, it becomes something in the present; thirdly, it causes the passing of the present. In Lacan’s work, we find that this synthesis is embodied by the “consciousness without the ego”. In *Seminar II*, Lacan gives an unequivocal definition of consciousness: “There’s a surface such that it can produce what is called an image. That is a materialist definition” (Lacan, 1988b, p.49). He urges his audience to think of a phenomenon of consciousness “which won’t have been perceived by any ego, which won’t have been reflected upon in any ego-like experience – any ego kind of ego and of consciousness of ego being absent at the time” (ibid., p.47). But isn’t this impossible? Isn’t the transparency of consciousness “an indisputable given”, indicating that “nothing can be experienced without the subject being able to be aware of himself within this experience in a kind of immediate reflection” (ibid., p.46)? The problem of this philosophical tradition is that it fails to detach itself from a transcendental “I”. If consciousness is only understood in the form of “I am conscious of”, then it is almost impossible to ask for the genesis of consciousness without presupposing the consciousness of the “I”. Lacan rejects this circular logic by pointing out that “the issue is how to free our notion of consciousness of any

mortgages as regards the subject's apprehension of itself" (ibid., p.57). He argues that consciousness is not an active operation, but a passive function primarily carried out by the organism, in the form of "it is conscious of". The apprehension of self-existence, essentially required for the constitution of "I", is only "a particular experience, tied to objectifiable conditions", and "has no privileged character" in consciousness:

We are conscious of seeing, and nothing seems to us more homologous to the transparency of consciousness than the fact that we see what we see - seeing imposes its own transparency on itself. But on the other hand, we are not in the least bit aware, except in a very marginal, limitrophe, way, of what we are doing, efficaciously, actively, in a motoric sense, in this synchronisation, in the palpation at a distance which the eyes undertake when they try to see (ibid., p.118).

According to Lacan, there is an illusion of autonomous agency underlying the statement "I see", which must be distinguished from "the eyes see". The difference is between the active consciousness, which, as the ego's function, finds itself in the unified image through what Deleuze calls "attentive recognition", and the passive consciousness as "a neutral and abstract, and even abstracted form of the totality of the possible mirages" (ibid., p.224).⁶ The consciousness without the ego perceives the totality of images of partial objects without unifying these images as a totality. These objects are partial not because they are part of a total body – since, without the ego's imaginary intervention, the Real body itself is disorganised, fragmented and partial, a body in pieces – but because they participate in the non-totalisable energetic economy among various sensible/perceptual organs disseminated on the surface of the body. In this sense, the consciousness without

⁶ It may not be a coincidence that Lacan's detachment of consciousness from the ego resonates with the distinction made by Sartre between the pure consciousness and the ego in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, first published in 1936: "The ego is not the owner of consciousness; it is the object of consciousness" (Sartre, 1960, p.97). To Sartre, the pure consciousness is a mere openness to the world. It is characterised by the non-positional, non-substantial spontaneity. Consciousness does not emanate from the I; instead, the ego only appears "on the horizon of a spontaneity" (ibid.).

the ego matches our definition of the Real past. Firstly, it does not pass because the present is the only place of consciousness; secondly, it is not represented because it is not perceived by the ego; thirdly, it causes the passing of the present because it frustrates the ego. As Lacan writes: “The ego, which you allegedly perceive within the field of clear consciousness as being the unity of the latter, is precisely what the immediacy of sensation is in tension with” (ibid., p.50). The tension here is essentially a virtual tension. What the organism perceives as a presence, namely the partial object, is what the ego perceives as a lack in the imaginarily unified image. As a result, every present becomes the recognition of the impossibility of unification, driven by the need to replace itself with a new present.

The second synthesis of the past is a passive foundation of the active consciousness governed by the ego. The consciousness without the ego, as the “past in the present”, makes mnemonic images as the “past of the present” possible. The individual’s subjective experience of the past not only refers to the combination of a passive faculty and an active faculty but more precisely refers to the contrast between the two. By taking consciousness as a physical phenomenon located in the system ω , before the emergence of the ego, Freud in the *Project* could have arrived at the same conclusion as Lacan. However, he confused the Real past and memory material. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, this confusion leads to the subordination of consciousness to the preconscious and the prioritisation of infantile wishes as the determination of the past.⁷ In so doing, psychoanalysis becomes dominated by one specific structuration of human experience, which Lacan calls “ancient, based on reminiscence”. This structuration presupposes

⁷ Freud argues that, in terms of daytime thought, “it is obliged to find a connection in some way or other with an infantile wish which was now conscious and suppressed” (Freud, 1900, p.556); in terms of dream formation, “our theory of dreams regards wishes originating in infancy as the indispensable motive force for the formation of dreams” (ibid., p.589); in terms of symptom formation, “the theory of the psychoneuroses asserts as an indisputable and invariable fact that only sexual wishful impulses from infancy, which have undergone repression (i.e. a transformation of their affect) during the developmental period of childhood, are capable of being revived during later developmental periods” (ibid., pp.605-06).

“agreement, harmony between man and the world of his objects, which means that he recognises them, because in some way, he has always known them” (Lacan, 1988b, p.100).

Lacan maintains that this human experience is fundamentally a misrecognition. Reminiscence is “the passage into the imaginary” rather than the reality because the subject fails to realise that there is no “ideal object” that was once possessed and then lost, no memory trace that carried with it the definite meaning of the past. Reminiscence is conducted not by the organism but by the ego, as an imagination in which a unified but also isolated representation has long been forgotten, yet exercising a power of attraction that reshapes the present in the same manner. It constitutes an enclosed system in which one’s present is predetermined by one’s past. However, Freud in the *Project* would endorse another structuration of human experience, as Lacan argues, “what distinguishes Freud here from all the authors who have written on the same subject, and even from the great Fechner to whom he constantly refers, is the idea that the object of the human quest is never an object of rediscovery in the sense of reminiscence” (ibid., p.136). Instead, it is a rediscovery in the sense of repetition, a repetitive encounter with objects in the present which correspond “only partially with what has already gained him satisfaction”. In this sense, “the human object always constitutes itself through the intermediary of a first loss” (ibid.). This “first loss” must not be understood as a loss occurring at the earliest point in the chronological sequence of an individual’s life. It occurs in every instant of the present when the organism receives far more than what the ego is able to perceive. In other words, the object here is nothing other than the partial object perceived by the consciousness without the ego. It does not reside in the memory trace but belongs to the Real past, in the form of lack lingering beyond the periphery or margin of the ego’s sensory field.

The idea of the Real past introduces a new understanding of the relationship between the past and the present, which conforms neither to “past-based” determinism nor to “present-based” constructionism. The former, a variation of

the reminiscence model, fails to see that the past is not a series of instants we have left behind to which a part of our being is attached, but a horizon perpetually re-emerging and repeating; the latter, on the other hand, restricts itself to the ego's function of imagination and creation, rejecting the fact that the past is never fully in the grasp of the ego. Against these two options, the Real past does not identify itself with a past moment or a present moment, but connects them into a process of displacement and substitution, in which the original and the derived constantly change their moments. In this sense, the Real past does not include the object of desire but stands for the object-cause of desire, through which desired objects circulate across time. It is a past open to the present in which one will not cease perceiving something new, as well as something impossible.

2.4 Death Drive as the Real Future

If Lacan's idea of the "consciousness without the ego" intends to reappraise the passive synthesis of the past discarded by Freud himself, his interpretation of the death drive can be regarded as an attempt to reveal an unformulated passive synthesis of the future in Freud's work. Consistent with his theoretical development in the *Project*, Freud concludes *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) with the triumph of the ego (or the Pcs. /Cs. system) and the dominance of the active synthesis of the future. The secondary process takes over the primary process, suspends hallucination as an immediate satisfaction and binds the free-flowing psychical forces in the dream. It is only through the ego that the active syntheses of the present, the past and the future, represented by attention, memory and thinking respectively, are produced.⁸ The ego, in the form of an "I", promises

⁸ Freud's discussion in relation to the three active syntheses of time, conducted by the ego, can be found in *Formulations on two principles of mental function* (Freud, 1911). The ego's function of attention as a form of active consciousness replaces bodily sensations. It is no longer a passive faculty of receptivity, but "meets the sense-impressions half way, instead of awaiting their appearance" (ibid., p.220). The ego's function of memory lays down the result of the periodic searches for satisfaction, thus constituting the subjective experience of the past. Last but not least, the function of thinking directs both attention and memory towards the future: "Thinking was endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of

in the present the future satisfaction of an unfulfilled wish from the past. In this sense, both the present and the past are no longer independent temporal registers but re-synthesised by the ego in accordance with the future, which determines what can be perceived in the present and what can be recollected from the past. This vision of the future conforms to a widespread belief held by many philosophers before and since, which takes the synthesis of the future as the “synthesis of synthesis”, an ultimate force of coordination which either “unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation” (Kant, 1998, p. A104), or “governs the other two described above...anticipates them, as it were” (Heidegger, 1965, p.191), or “subordinates the two to itself and strips them of their autonomy...ensures the order, the totality of the series and the final end of time” (Deleuze, 1994, p.94).

However, according to Lacan’s interpretation, the evolution from the organism to egoism, from a physiological perspective of time to a psychological perspective of time, should not be considered as Freud’s final answer. The ego is a very unstable and fragile psychological organisation. The existence of the “consciousness without the ego” has exposed the myth that the unity of the ego is guaranteed by “the fact of consciousness” (Lacan, 1988b, p.45), thus depriving the ego of any ontological privilege it is supposed to enjoy. The ego’s formation is closely associated with the process of energy binding, but only in an imaginary way. As Lacan points out, “any conception of the unity of the psyche, of the supposed totalising, synthesising psyche, ascending towards consciousness, perishes there” (Lacan, 1998, p.51). Lacan suggests that his critique of the ego is supported by Freud’s later theoretical development. In 1920, the celebrated but also controversial work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* marked a radical revision of Freud’s early theory. With the introduction of the death instinct, Freud’s attention was no longer restricted to the psychological conflict within the “primary process – secondary process” system. He returned to the organism to find another, not yet identifiable body process that is

discharge was postponed” (ibid., p.221).

able to account for the multiple dimensions of human experience. However, Freud's theorisation of the death instinct turns out to be unsatisfactory. To begin with, we shall remember that the term "Instinct"⁹ made its first appearance in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b). At that time, it did not suggest a leap in Freud's theoretical development, as we have already seen the prototype of this notion in the *Project*, where endogenous stimuli originating in the cells of the body generate a constant impact on the neural system. As Laplanche and Pontalis explain, "the idea originates as an energetic notion in a

⁹ Regarding the long-lasting controversy around the English translation of Freud's *Trieb*, both Lacan and many Anglo-American psychoanalysts have made a clear distinction between "instinct" and "drive", and preferred the latter as the more correct translation. However, it is important to note different reasons behind their common choice. Anglo-American psychoanalysts generally regard the opposition between instinct and drive as "biological forces vs. psychological forces". Otto F. Kernberg suggests, "the Strachey translation has had the unfortunate effect of linking Freud's drive concept too closely with biology, inhibiting psychoanalytic research into the nature of the mediating process that bridges biological instincts with drives, defined as pure psychic motivation" (Kernberg, 1995, p.4). However, it is impossible to deny that the term *Trieb* indeed has a strong biological connotation. According to Freud's definition, *Trieb* "appears to us...as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind" (Freud, 1915a, p.122). It stands for "the forces which we assume to exist behind the tension caused by the needs of the id" (Freud, 1938, p. 148). One has to admit that Freud understands *Trieb*, at least before his introduction of *Todestrieb*, largely as a biological given. The fact that Freud contrasts *Instinkt* and *Trieb* only suggests a possible difference between animal instinct and human instinct without endorsing any over-psychologising interpretation. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will follow Strachey to translate both *Instinkt* and *Trieb* in Freud's work into "instinct", not only for the sake of consistency with the translations being quoted, but also to remain faithful to Freud's original thinking. On the other hand, I will use "drive" to translate the same term in Lacan's work. Although Lacan equally rejects "instinct" as the English translation of *Trieb*, and has even made a strong claim that "the drive – the Freudian drive – has nothing to do with instinct (none of Freud's expressions allows for confusion here)" (Lacan, 2006d, p.722), the meaning of his "drive" is not an overall psychologisation of Freud's various instincts, but, if we look closely, derived exclusively from a rereading and reconstruction of Freud's *Todestrieb*. While the *Todestrieb*, in Freud's opinion, is one *Trieb* that exists alongside the other, Lacan, by arguing that "every drive is virtually a death drive" (Lacan, 2006f, p. 719), takes it as the genus under which all drives must fall. In so doing, Lacan does not translate but reclassifies Freud's conceptual vocabulary. My following discussion concentrates precisely on this conceptual nuance, as I will demonstrate how Lacan's "death drive" rescues Freud's "death instinct" from its theoretical impasse.

distinction that Freud made in very early days between two types of excitation...there exist internal sources of a constant inflow of excitation which the organism cannot evade and which is the basis of the functioning of the psychical apparatus" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p.215). In Freud's first instinctual model, the origin of both the sexual instinct and the ego instinct (the self-preservative instinct) can be easily located at some fundamental types of internal energy sources, such as hunger, thirst and sexuality. However, the same task becomes much more difficult when it comes to the death instinct (Thanatos), whose existence is only descriptively demonstrated rather than ontologically explained in energetical terms.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, three sets of behaviours, from the repetitive emergence of unpleasant experience in dreams of patients suffering from traumatic neurosis, to a child's play that involves repeatedly throwing a reel by the string away while saying "o-o-o-o" and pulling it back while saying "da", to the repetition of unwanted situations and painful emotions in the transference phenomena of neurotics, lead Freud to wonder if the individual is "pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some daemonic power" (Freud, 1920a, p.21). Based on these observations, Freud "finds courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle" (ibid., p.22). However, energetically speaking, all instincts Freud identified before lead to certain repetitive activities corresponding to the recurrent needs which generate a state of tension in the organism, no matter if the activity is eating, drinking or sexual discharge. A repetitive phenomenon without a clear instinctual ground can be interpreted in infinite ways, many of which conform to rather than contradict the pleasure principle. For example, the child's play can be understood as a representation of the self-preservative instinct, which drives the child, through active repetition, to master a passive situation that has overwhelmed him; transference repetition can be understood as the representation of the sexual instinct, a demand to re-experience the absolute satisfaction against the delay of the reality principle. As a matter of fact, Freud soon realises his overconfidence about his discovery, as he admits that "none of this contradicts the pleasure

principle; repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure” (ibid., p.36). The repetitive compulsion only overrides the pleasure principle when it attaches to an instinctual force that refuses to follow the pleasure principle. In response to this demand, Freud postulates an instinct that is “inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces” (ibid.), an instinct that is “brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance” (ibid., p.60, footnote), an instinct that literally has death as its aim.

Freud’s biological explanation of these observed psychic phenomena in terms of a new instinct is unexpected if not entirely unreasonable. First of all, it is unclear how the death instinct will explain the repetition compulsion better than other existing instincts, as Richard Boothby points out: “The idea of repetition does not by itself imply any tendency toward a restoration of an earlier state of things” (Boothby, 1991, p.79). Secondly, the idea that an instinct seeks its own death sounds even less compelling. Although Freud has recourse to Weismann’s morphological theory, whose distinction between soma and germ-plasm seems to share “striking similarity” with his distinction between the death instinct and the life instinct (Eros, the fusion of the sexual instinct and the ego instinct), the result is disappointing. Weismann’s assertion that death is a late acquisition “is of very little help to us. For...there can be no question of there having been death instincts from the very beginning of life on this earth” (Freud, 1920a, p.47). Apart from that, scientific evidence of a biologically determined trend towards death lacks in Freud’s text, although it does not discourage Freud from believing that “we are at liberty to continue concerning ourselves with their possibility” (ibid., p.49)¹⁰.

¹⁰ Some commentators suggest that human suffering during the First World War may be a main factor causing Freud to invent the death instinct responsible for destruction, aggression and death. However, Freud completed *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death* (1915) five years earlier, and at the same time, he attributed hate, destruction and aggression to the ego instinct: “The object is brought to the ego from the external world in the first instance by the instincts of self-preservation; and it cannot be denied that hating, too, originally characterized the relation of the ego to the alien external world with the stimuli it introduces...this hate can afterwards be intensified to the point of an aggressive inclination against the

Thirdly, the death instinct is incompatible with the definition of instinct in Freud's *Instincts and their vicissitudes* (1915). As many have noted, "the death instinct and the outwardly directed aggressive drive, that some take to be independent of it, lack one or more of the defining attributes of source, aim, object, and impetus or pressure" (Johnston, 2005; Loewenstein, 1940; Lowental, 1983; Macmillan, 1997). Last but not least, Freud's distinction between the death instinct and the life instinct collapses at the end of his paper when it comes to the problem of psychical tension. The life instinct, following the pleasure principle, aims at the diminution of psychic tension, whereas the death instinct is also defined by Freud as an impulse reducing tensions to a minimum. As a result:

The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the 'Nirvana principle', to borrow a term from Barbara Low) – a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of the fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts (Freud, 1920a, pp.55-56).

An instinct that accounts for psychic phenomena that override the pleasure principle ends up following the pleasure principle. This paradox, along with a number of logical inconsistencies summarised above, leads many post-Freudian psychoanalysts to question the validity of the death instinct. However, from a different perspective, it is difficult for the reader not to be puzzled and also impressed by Freud's insistence on this new discovery against all objections, as if something matters so much that he has no choice but to reconstruct the instinctual theory and the psychic apparatus completely. As Lacan observes, "the death instinct is itself a leap in relation to the phenomena accounted for, an enormous leap", but "if this articulation has seemed to him to be worth communicating, it is because he was of necessity brought down the path of this problematic" (Lacan, 1988b, p.67). Following the direction Freud has pointed out, Lacan's interpretation of the

object—an intention to destroy it" (Freud, 1915a, pp.136–37). Therefore, it hardly explains the necessity for Freud to introduce a new "death instinct" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Todestrieb reveals the necessity buried under Freud's confusing if not contradictory descriptions. In so doing, he reclaims the last piece of the puzzle that completes our theorisation of Real time.

As we have already discussed, the guideline of Lacan's rereading of Freud's metapsychology is to replace the original biological framework with a mechanical framework. With regard to the death instinct, Lacan does not hesitate to point out in the same way that the appeal to biology is the root of most confusions and contradictions in Freud's discussion. The psychological repetitive tendency must not be explained in terms of a biological restitutive tendency, as Lacan makes it clear that "I can cite you several authors for whom reducing the stimuli to the minimum means nothing more nor less than the death of the living being...when Freud speaks of the death instinct, he is, thank God, designating something less absurd, less anti-biological, anti-scientific" (ibid., p.80). Against the biological inclination, Lacan reformulates the *Todestrieb* in terms of the death drive rather than the death instinct. "Death" here has no relationship with biological death, but designates symbolic death: "it is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is" (Lacan, 1992, p.295). Lacan would even go so far as to conceive of death as a signifier and nothing but a signifier (Lacan, 1998, p.257). This conceptual reinvention seems far-fetched at first sight, but it actually can be situated within Freud's text and turns *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* into a more coherent piece of work.

To begin with, the repetitive phenomena of the death drive are now clearly differentiated from those of the life instinct. Instinctual tensions are generated and discharged recurrently because their sources are biological needs, whereas the drive which presses towards discharge of tensions "is of a quite different nature, and is on a quite different plane". Its machinelike constancy "forbids any assimilation of the drive to a biological function, which always has a rhythm" (Lacan, 1998, p.165). Moreover, the opposition between Thanatos and Eros can now be unequivocally

confirmed. It is not an opposition between two types of instincts but between drive and instinct. The life instinct is the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism. The death drive, on the other hand, is the psychical representative of the symbolic order, or in Lacan's words, "only the mask of the symbolic order" (Lacan, 1988b, p.326). Identifying the death drive with the symbolic order does not mean that the death drive functions symbolically. It simply means that the death drive is a somatic process initiated by symbolic causes outside of the body. It is the result of the embodiment of the nets of language in the organism, "an effect of the signifier into something fragmented and panic-stricken" (Lacan, 1992, p.301). Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes can be applied here. The physical substratum is the material cause of the death drive while the symbolic order is the formal cause of the death drive. In other words, if the instinct is the demand of the body on the mind, then the drive posits the demand of the symbolic order on the body as its presupposition. To understand this point, we shall turn to Lacan's graph of drive in *Seminar XI*:

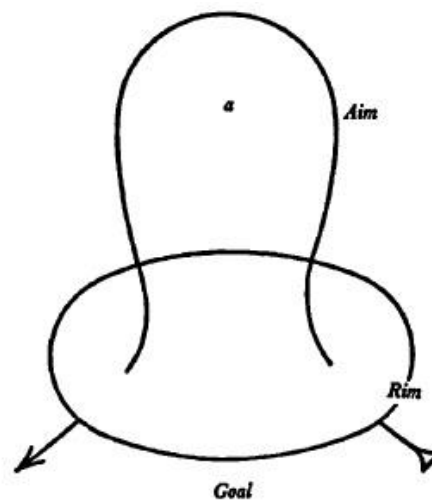


Figure 2 Graph of the Movement of the Drive. Reprinted from Lacan, J. (1998). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964.* (p.178). (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Translated by Alan Sheridan. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

This graph represents the journey of the drive through a certain path. Unlike Freud's instinct which seeks discharge along established one-way paths, presses the internal tensions outwards to the muscular mechanisms and achieves satisfaction, in Lacan's formulation of the drive, "what is fundamental at the level of each drive

is the movement outwards and back in which it is structured” (ibid., p.177), and the aim of the drive “is simply this return into circuit” (ibid., p.179). Yet how can we explain this strange circular movement of the drive? A common misunderstanding of this graph, which presumes the part below the rim as the body, and the part above the rim as the outside world, makes this problem incomprehensible. The drive which moves outside the body will discharge all energy and is impossible to move back. In fact, Lacan never clarifies which is the body, and which is the outside world in this picture, but if we rotate it 90 degrees counter clockwise and juxtapose it with another graph we find in *Seminar XI*, the circular movement of the drive will be much easier to understand:

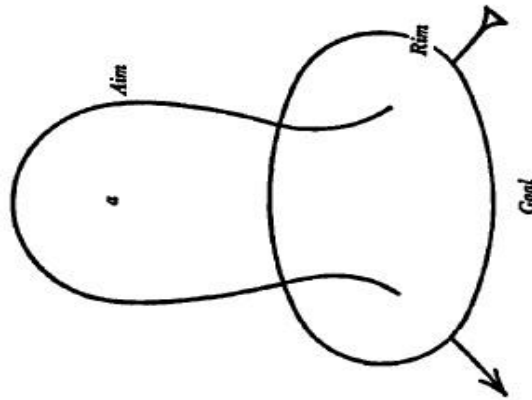


Figure 3. Graph of the Movement of the Drive Rotated

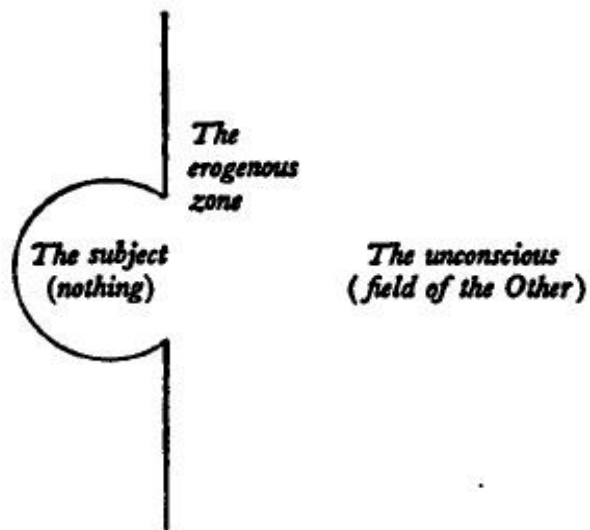


Figure 4. Graph of the Subject, the Erogenous Zone and the Unconscious. Reprinted from Lacan, J. (1998). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*. (p.187) (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Translated by Alan Sheridan. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Our previous spatial assumption must be reversed. The drive does not come from the body towards the outside world and then miraculously return; on the contrary, originating in the field of the Other, the drive is brought into existence by forces impinging from the outside. Having dramatically increased tensions in the organism, it then turns around, moves with the life instinct towards the motor exit and strives for satisfaction. The trajectory of the drive movement Lacan depicts in *Seminar XI* resonates with what Freud understands as the traumatic process in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: Excitations “from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” break the barrier against stimuli, “set in motion every possible defensive measure” so that the intruder can then be disposed of (Freud, 1920a, p.29). During this process, the death drive achieves what can never be done by the instinct, that is the undoing and the unbinding of the ego. The death drive maintains an “unbound” state in the organism, not in the sense of having-not-yet-been-bound, as in the case of some rudimentary instinctual forces, whose freely mobile processes are destined to be replaced by bound processes controlled by the ego; but in the sense of having-already-destroyed-the-binding, since a massive influx of forces from outside overwhelms the ego’s capacity to bind energy and threatens its imaginary coherence.

Freud, despite his obsession with biologism, comes so close to this insight at one point in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when he puts the contrast between the organic and the inorganic aside for a moment and picks up the difference between binding and unbinding: “The aim of the first of these basic instincts [Eros] is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus – in short, to bind together; the aim of the destructive instinct is on the contrary, to undo connections and so to destroy things” (Freud, 1938, p.148). If the life instinct tends to decrease tension in the control of the ego, since “the binding is a preparatory act which introduces and assures the dominance of the pleasure principle” (Freud, 1920a, p.62), we may say that the death drive intends to do the same only after the negation of the ego.

In this sense, what the death drive really goes beyond is the reality principle as “a prolongation or an application of the pleasure principle” (Lacan, 1992, p.21).

The death drive is Lacan’s most powerful weapon in his tireless attack on the sovereignty of the ego. Although Lacan’s death drive is commonly understood as a representation of the return of the Real in the Symbolic, based on our reading of Lacan’s graph of the movement of the drive, I argue that it should be more accurately defined as a traumatic intrusion of the Symbolic into the organism at the expense of the Imaginary, which evokes a strong reaction of the Real. It is clear that the death drive in Lacan’s work stands for the passive synthesis of the Real future. It subverts the temporal narrative elaborated by Freud in his first topology, in which a dominant, “ego-based” future incorporates both the past and the present, and constrains the passive, primary process of the body so that it can only take an imaginarily bound state as its final destination. What distinguishes the Real future in Lacan’s work from this narrative, and from other philosophical thinking about the future following the Kantian model, is that it rejects any form of active involvement from the human subject. While the ego posits a distant horizon which one must struggle to reach, produces a fantasy screen of fulfilment which absorbs all dissatisfaction in the past and the present, and introduces a sense of inertia in the present situation where every impulse must “wait” until the future unfolds; the death drive eliminates the imaginary future in the disguise of unreachability or unattainability, and is experienced by the subject as what comes back from the future.

In *Seminar I*, Lacan explains what this backward temporal movement means: “If one of them sends a message to the other, for example, a square, the being going in the opposite direction will first of all see the square vanishing, before seeing the square” (Lacan, 1988a, p.157). This is precisely what the movement of the death drive suggests, as we first witness the after-effect of the death drive, namely the undoing of the ego, before it can possibly come into the body and presents itself as a somatic process with the aim of complete discharge. The genesis of the death

drive demonstrates how the organism perceives a temporal dimension incomprehensible to the ego. It subverts the chronological sequence of the maturity of the sexual instinct, “disrupts the smooth fitting together of reality and the imaginary which should in principle exist” (ibid., p.149). The Real future synthesised by the death drive is not a “future after the present” but a “future in the present”. Without being constricted to a few fixed biological stimuli, the death drive draws unlimited possibilities from the symbolic order. Therefore, it frees the present from the form imposed upon it by the ego – whether as the constraint of memory or as the moulding of fantasy – and enlarges the present to include the Real past, so that it can cover the whole of our relationship to the world. It is a future in the Deleuzian sense of the “eternal return”, which “affirms everything of the multiple, everything of the different, everything of change except what subordinates them to the One, to the Same, to necessity, everything except the One, the Same and the Necessary” (Deleuze, 1994, p.115).

The synthesis of the Real future is of crucial importance in Lacan’s Real time because it stands for the temporal dimension of freedom. Freedom is realised when the subject lives the future in the present when the present becomes a “present of difference” overwhelmed by actualised possibilities. Freedom does not mean that the subject is freed from the Real body as the material substratum; on the contrary, it means that the subject is freed from the ego by returning to the body and recognises that its passivity is another kind of activity that determines how itself should be determined. This is precisely what the prisoner feels at the moment of subjectivisation in Lacan’s “Logical Time” essay. For as long as he discards his imaginary identification with the pre-existing rule in order to make his own rule, he has already won and will always win.

In summary, Real time concerns the bodily dimension of time. Built on Freud’s theory of energetics, Lacan’s idea of the “consciousness without the ego” and his reformulation of the death drive contribute to a robust theory about how different temporal dimensions are first and foremost synthesised by the body. It responds to

the mind-body problem which perplexes philosophical investigations of time. The body or the organism here is not a biologically determined entity, nor is it a blank surface completely shaped and reconfigured culturally, politically or linguistically. Instead, it is an autonomous “body-machine” outside of what is being symbolised that perpetually receives, circulates and disseminates tensions while resisting, disrupting and defying the ego’s manipulation. It distances “what is the marvellous harmony of the living organism in its milieu in order to operate and dislocate, dismember and disarticulate” (Miller, 2001, p.14). It is in this sense that we can understand the body as the Real, and speak of time synthesised by the body as Real time. Far from restricting its attention to experiences of time in the forms of perception, memory or expectation, Lacanian psychoanalysis, through critically inheriting and developing Freud’s metapsychology, shows how these experiences are only organised by the imaginary ego, and further questions how they are made possible and impossible by passive, organismic processes. Real time leads the subject to perceive reality in the Real present, a present which is not characterised by instantaneity and immediacy but contains what “have already been structured” (i.e., the Real past as the past in the present) and what “presents itself in his experience as something that always returns to the same place” (i.e., the Real future as the future in the present) (Lacan, 1992, pp.74-75). The body may be a passive substance, but the temporal life produced out of this body is deeply positive. It offers the possibility of freedom that transcends the isolated, egotistic individual and conditions an act of liberation from the established temporal order.

3. Symbolic Time

In *Seminar II*, Lacan points out that “I in fact believe that there are two sorts of relations to time. From the moment that a part of the symbolic world comes into existence, it does indeed create its own past. But not in the same way as the form at the intuitive level” (Lacan, 1988b, p.19). While the last chapter on Real time can be considered as a study of time at the level of intuition, sensation and drive, where time is passively synthesised and remains unrepresentable, but nevertheless constitutes the world of representations and conditions the active experience of time which is regulated by the ego, this chapter will be devoted to an explanation of this “second relation” to time as a result of the intervention of the symbolic world. What Lacan points out in this statement and will continue to explore in his later work is another register of time at the level of representation, where objects are represented to the individual by signifiers from the symbolic order. It’s a temporal register that defines man’s existential condition in the symbolic reality by connecting the subject and the Other through temporal interactions.

Let us begin to approach this temporal register by first asking what the temporal nature of the symbolic order is. Lacan’s work on the symbolic order has often been referenced to support the argument that he was part of the structuralist phenomenon in France since the 1950s, sharing viewpoints with a group of intellectuals including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson and Roland Barthes. We should certainly admit that using Saussure’s structural linguistics to reformulate Freudian psychoanalysis is an essential component of Lacan’s work. What Lacan finds interesting is the mechanism of word-plays in numerous psychic phenomena studied by Freud, from jokes and parapraxes to dreams. Not only can the signification of these phenomena be read through the linguistic structure, but they themselves are structured like language. By replacing Freud’s ideas of condensation and replacement with rhetorical devices such as metaphor and metonymy, Lacan moves away from individual psychology, which, according to him, is a misdirected development of Freudian psychoanalysis represented by the American ego psychology, to a study of symbolic functions as the determination of

the human order: “Everything is ordered in accordance with the symbols which have emerged, in accordance with the symbols once they have appeared” and “everything which is human has to be ordained within a universe constituted by the symbolic function” (Lacan, 1993, p.29). The idea of the “symbolic universe” seems to imply some universal and autonomous rules of human society and the human mind, an assumption fundamental to structuralist thoughts.

This being the case, many have argued that the overall theoretical edifice of Lacan cannot be confined to a structuralist framework. Bruce Fink suggests that “while structure plays a very important role in Lacan’s work, it is not the whole story, nor was it ever at any point in Lacan’s development” (Fink, 1995, p.64). Not only because chronologically, the later Lacan in the 1970s became more interested in the Real which lies outside language and resists assimilation by the symbolic structure, but also because Lacan’s theory, in general, does not share the strong sense of determinism and conformity with structuralism. As Eve Tavor Bannet suggests, if we cease to regard the label ‘structuralist’ as a description of method, and begin to think of it ideologically, as an intellectual endeavour that defines society as a system that exclusively restricts human action, “leaving no place for innovation, creativity and non-conformity”, then we must read Lacan as an anti-structuralist or counter-structuralist (Bannet, 1989, pp.3-4). The Lacanian subject, despite being alienated by the symbolic order and determined by the name-of-the-father, retains what Jacques Alain Miller calls “the ineliminable feature of subjectivity” that has often been excluded in typical structuralist thinking (Miller, 2012). Lacan is able to maintain this seemingly paradoxical position by reversing Saussure’s algorithm and putting the signifier over the signified, which not only indicates the primacy of the signifier but also produces an incessant sliding of meaning in the symbolic structure that can never be pinned down to a fixed point. The subject in the symbolic structure is not an entity but a void that lacks substantial existence, a speaking being that does not manifest itself in speech. Introducing the subject as pure negativity also radicalises the notion of structure itself, which no longer designates an all-encompassing system but a dynamic one in the process of constitution. There is a dialectic relation between the structure

and the subject: “the absence is produced in the real order of the structure”, while “the action of the structure comes to be supported by a lack” (ibid.).

As we have seen, these attempts to distance Lacan from structuralism often takes the form of a different imagination of space, in the sense that the Lacanian structure is understood as an incomplete structure and the Lacanian subject appears as lack or absence, something that the symbolic order leaves ungrasped. On the other hand, time has also been a central problem of structuralism. Following Saussure’s privileging of synchronic analysis over diachronic analysis of language, structuralist theories often focus on principles, rules and relational models that are supposed to be universal and permanent, at the same time failing to address the question of how the structure itself comes into being. However, it is striking to find that this ignorance of time is repeated by the critics of structuralism. In post-structuralist thinking, rather than being a problem that needs to be solved, the historicisation of the structure becomes a metaphysical illusion that should be discarded to serve the logic of spatialisation. Derrida’s classic critique of structuralism in his paper “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” is an example of this strategy. To Derrida, the quest for the origin is a reiteration of a basic metaphysical assumption of Western philosophy, which insists on the existence of a fixed centre and a static presence. The fact that structuralism is haunted by the “structurality of structure” itself is a testimony to its inability to imagine an unorganised, centreless space where a play of signification replaces the historical substitution of the centre. He points out that “the thematic of historicity, although it seems to be a somewhat late arrival in philosophy, has always been required by the determination of Being as presence” (Derrida, 2005b, p.368). Therefore, to deconstruct the structure necessarily requires “a rupture with its past, its origin and its cause”. An ideal structure for Derrida “compels a neutralisation of time and history” (ibid.), leading to an infinite number of sign-substitutions that come into play.

In contrast to both the structuralist and the post-structuralist reading, what I intend to demonstrate in this chapter is that Lacan's understanding of the symbolic structure takes time into account and refuses to follow the logic of spatialisation. It is Lacan's claim in *Seminar XII* that "the field of the Other is inscribed in what I will call Cartesian coordinates, a sort of space that for its part is three dimensional, except that it is not space, it is time" (Lacan, 1964, p.58). Time is neither overlooked nor intentionally rejected, but inherent in the symbolic structure, which is not only an incomplete meaning-system but also a dynamic one, characterised by mutability and fluidity of signifiers. As Lacan continues: "For in the experience which is the creative experience of the subject at the locus of the Other, we well and truly, whatever has been said in previous formulations, have to take into account a time that cannot in any way be reduced to the linear property – past, present, future" (ibid.). To contain time within the structure does not mean that Lacan returns to what Derrida calls "a teleological and eschatological metaphysics". On the contrary, this specific temporal register Lacan develops accounts for a non-linear process of encounters between the subject and the Other.

Throughout this chapter, I intend to bring together scattered pieces of writings in Lacan's work which imply the existence of Symbolic time and explore how this temporal register introduces a new approach to understanding the Lacanian subject. In the first section, I examine how Freud's famous argument that "the unconscious is timeless" has been given a fresh meaning in the Lacanian framework. Like his development of Real time from Freud's metapsychology, the notion of Symbolic time is also derived from Lacan's radical reinterpretation of Freud's argument on the time of the unconscious. In the second section, I explore how Lacan theorises Symbolic time on the basis of cybernetics. The symbolic machine produces an impenetrable temporal dimension in which the unconscious is constituted. In the third section, I move from abstract symbolic articulation back to the practice of psychoanalysis by examining Freud's case study of the Wolf Man and Lacan's reading of Hamlet. I suggest that there is continuity between these two texts, as both of them rely on the time of the Other to explain psychic causality and subjectivity.

3.1 The Unconscious: Timelessness or Otherness?

Throughout Freud's theoretical development, there was a rich account of time in relation to a range of psychic phenomena, from trauma and dream to infantile development. As part of this "tree of time" in Freud's thought, the idea of the timelessness of the unconscious plays a central role (Green, 2005, p.173). It describes a distinctive characteristic of the unconscious and determines the way we understand psychic causality. It is also a problem highly relevant to our theorisation of Symbolic time because if the unconscious, as Lacan claims over and over again, is structured like a language, any attempt to introduce time into the symbolic structure must first deal with the Freudian unconscious which seemingly resists being subordinated to time.

To understand the definition of Freudian timelessness requires us to first examine the genesis of this concept in Freud's work. As Adrian Johnston suggests, Freud's argument that the unconscious is timeless is a result of a long line of observations and thinking. It is abstracted from a congregation of various psychoanalytic ideas including "the indestructibility of infantile wishes, the persistence of polymorphously perverse libidinal activities through sublimation, the mechanisms of transference object-choice in neurosis" (Johnston, 2005, p.7). Strachey, in his examination of appearances of the term "timelessness" throughout Freud's writing, points out that while the idea had already been indirectly alluded to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*,¹¹ the first explicit reference to it was in a footnote added in 1907 to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), where Freud made a comment that "in the case of repressed memory-traces it can be demonstrated that they undergo no alteration even in the course of the longest period of time" (Freud, 1901, p.274). The timelessness of the unconscious takes the form of psychical fixation which preserves all previous impressions, "not only in the same form in

¹¹ Freud claims in this book that "it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible. In the unconscious, nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten" (Freud, 1900, p.577).

which they were first received, but also in all the forms which they have adopted in their further developments”. In *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914), Freud continued to elaborate this idea by highlighting how early childhood impressions are the most valuable memories for psychoanalysis: “Not only some but all of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to extract it out of them by analysis” (Freud, 1914b, p.148). Based on these speculations, Freud formally introduced timelessness as an essential characteristic of the system *Ucs.* in his 1915 metapsychological paper *The Unconscious* (1915):

The processes of the system *Ucs.* are timeless; i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with the work of the system *Cs* (Freud, 1915c, p.187).

According to these statements, it is clear that what Freud had in mind when he talked about “timelessness” is certain representational content (memories, wishes and fantasies) in the unconscious that is unforgettable. In this sense, timelessness equals permanence and immutability. If the discovery of the Freudian unconscious, as generally believed, amounts to the “Copernican revolution”, the idea of the timeless unconscious can be regarded as his most original contribution to the philosophy of time, which puts the validity of Kant’s famous argument that time is a priori form of intuition into question. In the previous chapter, I discussed and compared Kant’s and Freud’s different understandings of the syntheses of time, an idea which remains latent in Freud’s work. Here, in relation to the timeless unconscious, Freud made some direct comments on Kant’s philosophy. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920a), Freud indicates that after certain psychoanalytic discoveries, we are now in a position to discuss “the Kantian theorem that time and space are ‘necessary forms of thought’” (Freud, 1920a, p.28). He then goes on saying that “we have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves ‘timeless’” without making clear the relationship between this “timelessness” and Kant’s point of view of time. Such a clarification only arrived years later in *New Introductory*

Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1933), where Freud offers a direct refutation of the Kantian notion of time:

There is nothing in the id that could be compared with negation; and we perceive with surprise an exception to the philosophical theorem that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and—a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought—no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time (Freud, 1933, p.74).

It appears that in Freud's opinion, the psychoanalytic finding that a portion of the mind is timeless is in contrast to Kant's understanding of consciousness where time is given as an a priori form, which shapes experience and makes all actuality of appearances possible (Kant, 1998). However, subversive as it sounds to many commentators of Freud (Green, 2005, p.165; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968), Freud's is not sustainable upon closer inspection. To begin with, Freud's timelessness and Kantian time are not even constituted at the same level to be contestable. By arguing that time is a transcendental principle of subjective cognition that "lies a priori at the basis of the empirical" (Kant, 1912, p.36), Kantian time belongs on a nonrepresentational level that determines our perceptions of the world of representations. On the other hand, the Freudian unconscious, consisting not of abstract forms but of very concrete contents, often in relation to infantile sexuality and primary object relations, is firmly rooted at the level of the representation. Yet the ability to represent is incompatible with the idea of atemporality since the difference between the original perception and its re-presentation can only be perceived through time. In other words, Freud's unconscious contents must have an origin, a specific moment when they are acquired and individualised through the subject's sensibility. It shall also have a history, in which the individual's life is

influenced by the unconscious at various moments. Defining the unconscious as timeless seems to deny the essential temporal dimension of representation.¹²

More importantly, if the unconscious must have a beginning, it also has an ending. In the paper “Time and the Unconscious”, based on her conversation with Freud, Marie Bonaparte argues that “even Freud is prepared to admit that repressed psychic content undergoes some modification, however unalterable it may appear to our conscious minds” (Bonaparte, 1940, p.439). For example, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), Freud revisits the topic of the timeless unconscious and goes on to suggest that the unconscious contents “can only be recognised as belonging to the past, can only lose their importance and be deprived of their cathexis of energy, when they have been made conscious by the work of analysis, and it is on this that the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment

¹² As a response to this problem, one may argue that Freud’s unconscious needs to be understood in terms of Kant’s idea of noumenon as thing-in-itself, which indeed does not recognise the passage of time since it cannot be represented. In fact, Freud adds credence to this speculation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920):

Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object (Freud, 1920a, p.171).

However, there are considerable philosophical differences between the ways these two concepts are construed and employed by two authors that should make us reject this parallel. In Kant’s philosophy, the noumenal is the entity lying beyond the subjective representation. For a human agent capable of rational cognition, it is forever unknown and inaccessible. On the other hand, the unconscious, according to Freud, is located within the limit of subjective cognition. Being part of the psychic system that constantly influences the *Pcs.* and is subject to the influences from the latter at the same time, the unconscious is phenomenologically unknown because of repression but epistemologically knowable. In this sense, Bettina Bergo makes the point that “the unconscious was arguably more than Kant’s noumenon, because it did not set a speculative limit to the possibilities of experience but instead opened certain types of experience to systematic investigation” (Bergo, 2004, p.345).

rests to no small extent” (Freud, 1933, p.92). If the task of psychoanalysis is to render the unconscious contents conscious by putting it in the temporal sequence of an individual’s life, to recognise and reconstruct the forgotten in the present, we must admit the possibility that the unconscious can be altered by the passage of time. For this reason, Charles Hanly points out that “Freud’s attributions of timelessness to unconscious constellations of memory, phantasy and wishful motives are inconsistent with his valid claim that these constellations can be modified by psychoanalysis” (Hanly, 2009, para.24). The assumption of the timeless unconscious is ontologically unjustifiable as it not only fails to be an exception to Kant’s philosophy of time, but also undermines the foundation of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic technique to bring change.¹³

Having realised the problem in Freud’s treatment of time in relation to the unconscious, some contemporary readers of Freud come to suggest another possibility that the unconscious is not timeless but instead follows a different temporal order which Freud failed to describe. To Derrida, understanding Freud’s

¹³ In her book, Kelly Ann Noel-Smith defends the validity of the timeless unconscious by arguing that “Freud never claims that the cathartic effect of psychotherapy is to change the unconscious” (Noel-Smith, 2016, p.144). She describes a transition in Freud’s thinking on this topic, from an ego-centred view in the beginning, which regards the task of psychotherapy as permanent strengthening of the ego, “either enabling it to firm up its repressive function or to permit what is repressed access to consciousness: that is, either to keep material timeless or to impose temporal order on it” (pp.144-45), to a more pessimistic perspective in the end, which admits the temporariness of the therapeutic effect, due to the strength of the death drive “that undermines the help afforded by psychoanalysis” (p.146). However, I find this argument unconvincing. Firstly, imposing a temporal order on the unconscious is not merely a temporal relocation. The unconscious contents have also been changed since they are now related to other conscious memories and subject to meaningful associations. It is impossible to relocate the unconscious without a minimum working-through. To argue that the unconscious remains intact after being revealed is to deny the subjective reconstruction and resignification of memories which occurred at the conscious level. Secondly, the impossibility of permanent change does not mean that any change is impossible. On the contrary, it further indicates that the unconscious is no less temporal than the conscious, both of which defy the idea of permanence and belong to a process of constant transformation.

opposition between timelessness and time requires a more careful examination of the context in which the term “time” is defined:

The timelessness of the unconscious is no doubt determined only in opposition to a common concept of time, a traditional concept, the metaphysical concept, the time of mechanics or the time of consciousness...The unconscious is no doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time (Derrida, 2005a, p.270).

This argument is echoed by Julia Kristeva, who, in her reading of Freud, suggests that Freud’s idea of timelessness does not imply non-time, but refers to a “lost time”, a “time outside time” (Kristeva, 2002). Both Derrida and Kristeva reject the absolute absence of time in the Freudian unconscious while maintaining that the time of the unconscious cannot be confused with our everyday concept of time, namely the individual’s conscious temporal experience. In this sense, the term “timelessness” is indeed misleading, since it does not adequately convey the metapsychological meaning Freud attributes to the unconscious. If the target of Freud’s critique is only a form of time that is conscious, linear and chronological, there is no good reason to consider the negation of time as the only alternative.

Similar to Derrida and Kristeva, we find in Lacan’s work a radical reworking of the relationship between time and the unconscious that does not fall into the naive opposition between chronological time and timelessness, but actively explores new possibilities of time. As we will see in Lacan’s interpretation, time of the unconscious is not eliminated, but articulated as a different temporal register separated from conscious time, one that manifests itself to the subject in the form of otherness.

Throughout his reading of Freud, not only does Lacan rarely make use of the idea of the timeless unconscious, but he actually offers an explicit critique of the indestructibility of infantile wishes as the cornerstone of Freud’s argument. Freud

derives the idea that wishes in early childhood are most persistent and highly immutable from his study of dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, although Freud covers “dreams of hunger, dreams stimulated by thirst or by excretory needs, and dreams of mere convenience” (Freud, 1900, p.160), dreams caused by infantile wishes are considered to be of most psychoanalytic significance, as he claims that “our theory of dreams regards wishes originating in infancy as the indispensable motive force for the formation of dreams” (ibid., p.589). Hunger, thirst or excretory needs, standing for internal organic sensations, have only retained a “humbler” place in Freud’s dream theory by providing materials “accessible at any time” for the dream work to express repressed thoughts. Even the daytime thought is “obliged to find a connection in some way or other with an infantile wish which was now unconscious and suppressed, and which would enable it—suitably decocted, it is true—to ‘originate’ in consciousness.” (ibid., p.556).

Although the theory of the determination of infantile wishes in one’s psychic life remains influential among various post-Freudian schools, there is a sense of vagueness in Freud’s explanation of this point that remains troubling. Firstly, if these infantile wishes are permanently unsatisfiable and developmentally inaccessible, it still needs to be explained how they become unconscious in the first place. According to Freud’s description of the primary process as characteristic of the unconscious, psychic excitations are subject to free and instant discharge without obstruction or delay. “An inhibition of the tendency of cathected ideas towards discharge”, as Freud would later indicate, belongs to the process of the system *Pcs.* (Freud, 1915c, p.188). Provided that we agree with this distinction, then how is it possible for the unconscious, at the time of childhood when the *Pcs.* has not yet fully developed, to be able to reserve wishes, often highly structured and well-organised wishes which require different objects, relationships and emotional feelings combining into an indissoluble representational unity? Clearly, forming such wishes necessarily requires the use of mimic materials kept in the system *Mnem.* system and the allocation of psychic energy performed by the secondary process, thus giving the system *Pcs.* a power to alter the unconscious which is in contradiction to Freud’s statement that the mechanism of the preconscious “is

restricted once and for all to directing along the most expedient paths the wishful impulses that arise from the unconscious” (Freud, 1900, p.603). Reflecting on this contradiction, Malcolm Macmillan concluded that “Freud’s explanations of the formation of symptoms and of some types of dreams requires the existence of a class of fantasies the theory of the mind says cannot exist. Repressed fantasies cannot exist in the Ucs. and cannot therefore be incorporated into dreams” (Macmillan, 1997, p.271).

Secondly, there is a noteworthy inconsistency in Freud’s explanation of the mechanism of regression essential to the formation of dreams in adult life. According to Freud, everyday experience in adult life is not strong enough to produce a dream, unless it is connected with the forbidden expression of infantile wishes, and thus “attracted by the memory into regression as being the form of representation in which the memory itself is couched” (Freud, 1900, pp.544-45). Therefore, an adult dream is “a substitute for an infantile scene modified by being transferred on to a recent experience” (ibid., p.545). However, how do infantile wishes hold such a determinate power in the timeless unconscious? Adrian Johnston has drawn attention to this problem in Freud’s theory, as he points out that “if the unconscious is truly timeless, then it shouldn’t be capable of recognizing any chronological differences between the mnemic traces forming its content. This would therefore imply the possibility of nonhierarchized interactions between representations being the paradigm of unconscious processes” (Johnston, 2005, p.136). In this sense, recent adult wishes should be as influential as earlier infantile wishes, both of which deserve equal distribution of wishful impetus from the unconscious. At least the activation of the former should not rely on the energetic displacement from the latter. In fact, Freud himself admits that:

We have learnt, lastly, from numerous analyses that wherever a dream has undergone distortion the wish has arisen from the unconscious and was one which could not be perceived during the day. Thus it seems at a first glance as though all wishes are of equal importance and equal power in dreams. I cannot offer any proof here that the truth is nevertheless otherwise. (Freud, 1900, p.552).

Unlike Freud, who nevertheless continues to insist on the regression to infantile wishes when evidence is lacking, Lacan in *Seminar II* explicitly rejects the idea of regression in any developmental sense. He remarks that “do we ever see any adult actually regress, return to the state of a small child, start wailing? Regression doesn’t exist” (Lacan, 1993, p.103), and “the idea of the regression of the individual to the initial stage of his development dominates...The entering into play of this notion, which now seems so familiar, is however not a matter of course” (ibid., p.147). To Lacan, infantile wishes do not enjoy any particular psychical significance whose distribution is based on chronological order. The unconscious is not defined by the residues of a phase of development when the primary process is the only kind of psychical process, nor must we have recourse to the childhood experience in order to understand the present. If the indestructibility and immutability of infantile wishes are put into question, so is the timelessness of the unconscious. However, how can we interpret the unconscious in the dream after getting rid of the dependence on the distant past? Does it mean that the unconscious is merely the sedimentation of the present experience during the day, or does it belong to another temporal register beyond the chronological order of conscious time?

Lacan’s interpretation of the dream of Irma’s injection provides us with an answer. As the first dream presented by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a dream through which the secret of the unconscious is revealed to him, the dream of Irma’s injection occupies a crucial position in Freud’s theoretical development. However, as Lacan points out, Freud’s treatment of this dream does not lead to the conclusion he summarises later in the book, that the indestructible infantile wish is determinant in the dream formation. In his meticulous analysis of this now well-known dream, Freud reveals two wishes - excusing his own responsibility in the unsuccessful treatment of Irma’s symptoms and putting the blame on his friend “Otto” - both of which are merely responses to the waking experience of recent events in Freud’s adult life. One may wonder where the unconscious infantile wishes are. If it is so important, how can they be absent in the dream which Freud carefully chooses to demonstrate the technique of dream interpretation?

The question in my view is rather more like this – how is it that Freud, who later on will develop the function of unconscious desire, is here content, for the first step in his demonstration, to present a dream which is entirely explained by the satisfaction of a desire which one cannot but call preconscious, and even entirely conscious? (ibid., p.151).

Apart from Lacan, many commentators note the absence of evidence for infantile wishes in Freud's dream interpretations and the lack of a method to test for their presence (Foulkes, 1978; R. M. Jones, 1978). While rejecting the need to regress to infantile wishes to explain this dream, Lacan does not accept the two preconscious wishes as the ultimate meaning of this dream either. In his two consecutive sessions devoted to the analysis of the dream of Irma's injection, Lacan divides it into two parts. In the first part, Freud in the dream maintains an imaginary relationship with Irma by seeing his wife and another ideal patient behind her image. This part ends when he gets Irma to open her mouth, where a horrendous scene appears, "that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands par excellence" (Lacan, 1993, p.154). To Lacan, this horrendous picture designates the subject's encounter with the Real, and "the experience of his being torn apart, of his isolation in relation to the world has been attained" (ibid., p.167).

If this traumatic moment in the dream marks the disintegration of the ego as a loose aggregation of a series of imaginary identification, then the theme of the second part of the dream can be interpreted as symbolic reorganisation. After Freud's ego being decomposed into three doctors, all of whom desperately try to explain the scene and thus to symbolise the Real, the dream ends with another peak, when a mysterious word presents to the subject: *trimethylamine*. This, in Lacan's word, "explains everything." In Freud's original account, a series of associations are produced in relation to this word. However, to Lacan, the significance of this word does not come from what it may signify, be it the mystic trio (three women, three doctors) or a sexual meaning (trimethylamine as a decomposition product of sperm), but is derived precisely from a lack of meaning.

It is the pure gesture of pronunciation that introduces the discourse of the Other into play, “discourse as such, independently of its meaning, since it is a senseless discourse” (ibid., p.170). *Trimethylamine* appears in the dream as a signifier without signified to represent the subject, whose lack of being is revealed through its encounter with the Real. Substituting the “I of the subject” with the “N of the trimethylamine formula”, the subject in the dream regains a sense of self not by imaginary attachment but by symbolic fixation in the discourse of the Other so that it can recognise itself as a subject of the signifier. In this sense, the dream of Irma’s injection is indeed extraordinary, as it does not convey a personal secret but expresses the truth of psychoanalysis and tells an allegory of the constitution of the subject.

Lacan's interpretation of Irma’s injection offers an insight into his understanding of the relation between time and the unconscious. The unconscious meaning of the dream is far more complicated than a narrowed range of infantile wishes, and far more dynamic than a limited number of messages with unchanging contents. To understand the unconscious necessarily means to locate the subject in the symbolic order and to find the signifier through which it speaks. The word *trimethylamine* in Freud’s dream can be seen as an “enigmatic signifier” in Laplanche’s terminology that comes from the Other. However, different from Laplanche’s theory, the encounter with the signifier does not take place in the subject’s conscious time. A linear narrative cannot be provided in which an enigmatic signifier was received in one’s early childhood and then revives in one’s adult life, calling for reinterpretation and retranslation.¹⁴ On the contrary, nothing

¹⁴ The problem of Laplanche’s theory of *après-coup* is that although it intends to go beyond the either-or choice between two temporal directions in the traditional understanding of time – a determinist one that proceeds from the past to the future and a retrospective or hermeneutic one that proceeds from the present to the past – by introducing the unconscious of the other, so that the dilemma of the primal scene between reality and fantasy can be solved by the idea of “enigmatic signifier”, it is still dominated by a unified and singular temporal register that is subjective and conscious. To place the enigmatic signifier in one’s childhood means that the individual only reaches the unconscious in a closed temporal circle consisting of his “own past” and “own present”. The problem of the temporal hierarchy which always prioritises the past remains to be solved.

in the subject's life-history makes *trimethylamine* a certainty to come in the present, neither does the subject come across this signifier purely by accident. This signifier rather belongs to a temporal register independent of the subject's existence and experience, produced through the autonomous mechanism of symbolic substitution and condensation, and spoken in a voice that is "nothing more than the voice of no one", "which speaks in me, beyond me" (ibid., pp.170-171).

The game Freud mentions at the end of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* further clarifies this point. In this game, the subject is invited to say numbers at random. In the following association, these numbers turn out to be not random at all but contain significance unique to the subject. In Lacan's reading, the reason why "what he chose goes well beyond anything we might expect from pure chance" is not that these numbers were acquired in the past and repressed in memory, or that these numbers have already been articulated by the subject unconsciously, which means that one's following association is simply a rediscovery of what one has already known. On the contrary, Lacan argues that these mathematical combinations are counted by the symbolic machine (Lacan, 1988b, p.56). The subject pronounces numbers as the production of a temporal process to which he himself does not belong: "Chance doesn't exist. While the subject doesn't think about it, the symbols continue to mount one another, to copulate, to proliferate, to fertilise each other, to jump on each other, to tear each other apart" (ibid., p.185). The individual's following association is not a kind of reminiscence directed towards his own past, but a genuine exploration that introduces him into the discourse of the Other and generates meaning which he has never sensed before. In this sense, an encounter with the signifier from the Other is always an encounter with the time of the Other, or what I call "Symbolic time". The history of the signifier is not "my past" in which the signifier is acquired, remembered and utilised, but an unknown process of becoming in the Other that will only unfold to me in the future.

3.2 Mechanisation of the Symbolic Order

By replacing the repressed messages left in the individual's own past with the unknown signifier emerging from the operation of the symbolic order, Lacan's reinterpretation of the unconscious opens up a different temporal register which externally determines the subject's psychical life. However, how can we approach this temporal movement in which a thinking subject is absent? In the previous chapter, we examined Real time as the result of Lacan's theorisation of the body-machine. In this section, we will see that Lacan has done similar work in relation to the symbolic order by claiming that the world of the symbolic is indeed the world of the machine, and Symbolic time is the time of the signifying kinetics.

Considering the theoretical continuity between Saussure and Lacan in terms of the privileged synchronic characteristic of the linguistic structure, it is understandable to see that the notion of time rarely appears in the contemporary discussion of Lacan's idea of the Symbolic. For many thinkers, Lacan's analysis of the signifier follows the fundamental principles of Saussure's theory of language, in which the notion of time seems thoroughly repressed. To Saussure, language is defined by double perspectives: synchronic and diachronic, which lead to two branches of linguistic studies. These two perspectives, despite both being essential, cannot be analysed simultaneously. Transformations of a linguistic system over time can only be understood once a synchronic description of language is provided and functions as "the solid ground for discussion" (Saussure, 1965, p.73). More importantly, against the predominant historical linguistics of the nineteenth century, Saussure claims in his work that diachronic changes of language are in fact produced out of synchronic difference within language. With regard to the question of "the meaning that we attach to the word change", Saussure refers to "a shift in the relationship between the signified and the signifier" (ibid., p.75). The relationship itself must remain stable, permanent and even transcendental during the constant historical evolution of various languages, and it is precisely because the nature of language is "a system of arbitrary signs and lacks the necessary basis", that the historical changes of linguistic signs can become possible. In other words,

diachronic change is an effect of the synchronic structure, which unfolds spatial differences on the temporal axis. As Culler in this reading of Saussure explains:

Historical or causal explanation is not what is required...Explanation in linguistics is structural: one explains forms and rules of combination by setting out the underlying system of relations, in a particular synchronic state, which create and define the elements of that synchronic system (Culler, 1986, p.45).

This remark brings us back to Lacan, because similarly, the reduction of the signifier's diachronic movement to its synchronicity can also be observed in Lacan's texts. While Saussure argues that "language is a system whose parts can and must all be considered in their synchronic solidarity" (ibid., p.87), Lacan maintains that "the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other" (Lacan, 1998, p.188). The synchronic point of view occupies a significant proportion of Lacan's discussion of the relationship between words and things. To Lacan, "The word doesn't answer to the spatial distinctiveness of the object...but to its temporal dimension" (Lacan, 1988b, p.169). The world of things is always in motion and connected to the past and the future. Objects appear and disappear, leaving the subject a momentary experience. "If the human subject didn't name," Lacan says, "no world, not even a perception, could be sustained for more than one instant" (ibid., p.169). This remark resonates with Freud's 1915 essay *On Transience* (1915), in which the ephemeral nature of all the beauty and mutability of human life become a source of profound emotional disturbance. The world of signifiers, on the other hand, stabilises and prolongs subjective experience through the operation of synchronic signification, since "it is through nomination that man makes objects subsist with a certain consistence" (ibid., p.169). If the transition between presence and absence necessarily implies the presence of time, then by substituting the absence of the object with its own presence, the signifier erases time and replaces it with an enduring presence that cannot fade away. This process is summarised in the obscure comments Lacan repeats in *Seminar I* and *Seminar II*: "The concept is the time of the thing" (Lacan, 1988a, p.242) and "The name is the time of the object" (Lacan, 1988b, p.169). If an object takes the place, a signifier

can be said to hold the place, and hence makes what Saussure calls “linguistic identity”, that is, the recognition and repetition of the same, possible within a semiological system.

Built upon the de-temporalised relationship between signifiers and things, Lacan’s theory of synchrony can be understood in two ways: on the one hand, it means that the static, atemporal symbolic order is presented to the subject as a given, whose origin cannot be traced. As Lacan cautions his audience in Seminar XVII: “Language is present and already there, already efficacious...Our first rule is never to seek the origins of language.” (Lacan, 2007, p.155) Language presents a complex network of oppositions that relates one signifier to another at one point in time. The infinite combinations and displacements of signifiers include and predetermine any potentiality, if not actuality, of meaning. On the other hand, it provides a structuration of various diachronic events encountered by the subject in one’s life history so that they don’t appear as contingent but necessary, in the sense that they repeat some fundamental themes of the discourse of the Other in a circular pattern. The whole symbolic structure, according to Lacan, can be seen as a symbolic circuit external to the subject, “tied to a certain group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject, the small circle which is called his destiny, is indeterminately included” (Lacan, 1988b, p.98). If this is the case, what is left to be considered from a temporal perspective? Having noticed the seeming superiority of synchronicity over diachronicity, Adrian Johnston questions whether the subject’s interaction with the Symbolic can lead to a genuine temporal experience or the Lacanian model of time is simply a redoubled synchronicity, reaffirming the hegemony of static, spatialised logic (Johnston, 2005, p.43). Slavoj Žižek, in his own manner, arrives at a similar conclusion, as he suggests that Lacan’s theoretical models take the ostensible historical account simply as “a temporal projection of the possibilities of variation within the timeless structure itself” (Žižek, 2006, p.377).

Although there is some truth in these critiques, Johnston's and Žižek's elaborations of Lacan's engagement with Saussurean theory are only valid in a restricted sense. Paradoxically, alongside various assertions of static, synchronic characteristics of the symbolic structure, Lacan, throughout his seminars, also insists on the existence of another side of the symbolic structure that is intrinsically temporal. For example, in *Seminar VI*, Lacan speaks of language not as the fixation of the momentary appearance of things, but as the very creation of time:

At a time when the whole of philosophy is engaged in articulating what it is that links time to being...It is quite simple to see that time, in its very constitution, past-present-future, refers itself to the act of the word – and to nothing else.

It is strictly impossible for us to conceive of a temporality in an animal dimension, namely in a dimension of appetite. The abc of temporality requires even the structure of language (Lacan, 1959, p.254).

Further on, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan continues to introduce time into the unconscious which is supposed to be structured like a language by claiming that “we are beginning to circumscribe the unconscious in a structure, a temporal structure” (Lacan, 1998, p.32) and “I speak to you of the unconscious as of that which appears in the temporal pulsation” (ibid., p.143). However, how can the temporal pulsation become compatible with the synchronic structure of the unconscious? Is this merely another linguistic effect that produces the illusion of time? Or does the Lacanian symbolic order show a complexity that cannot be reduced to the Saussurean model?

Based on my reading of Lacan, I suggest that these questions can be answered if we pay attention to another theoretical resource underlying Lacan's construction of the symbolic order. In the 1950s, what Lacan appropriated as new epistemological approaches to reinterpreting the Freudian unconscious and thus reinventing psychoanalysis include not only Saussurean linguistics and Lévi-

Strauss's anthropology, but also cybernetic theory, to which Lacan devotes a large proportion of the discussion in his early seminars. While the former two are more concerned with the synchronic structure, cybernetic theory, as Lacan explains in *Seminar II*, "was born very straightforwardly from the work of engineers concerned with the economics of information passing through conductors" (Lacan, 1988b, p.296). It is dedicated to the study of data transmission and feedback that highlight the importance of time. More importantly, this temporal dimension offered by cybernetics is inaccessible through the lens of Saussurean linguistics. To Saussure, to think time or diachronic change of language necessarily means a transition from *la langue* to *la parole*, from a study of the language itself "which is social in its essence and independent of the individual" to a study of the individual part of language. As he writes in the *Course*:

If we considered language in time, without the community of speakers...we probably would notice no change; time would not influence language. Conversely, if we considered the community of speakers without considering time, we would not see the effect of the social forces that influence language (Saussure, 1965, p.78).

While "language is not a function of the speaking subject" (*ibid.*, p.14), speech, for Saussure, certainly is. This opposition of language to speech clearly designates language users as the subject that sets the historical changes of language in motion. In other words, the time of language only appears in interpersonal communication where meaning is generated by humans. However, in making this distinction, Saussure's theory seems to return to a notion of "consciousness" as the metaphysical presupposition of time, a consciousness capable of receiving and transmitting signs and meanings that logically precedes the time in which differences between signifiers are realised. If the human being is the only agent that can change the potentiality of time embedded in the synchronic differences within a linguistic system into actuality, it means, as Derrida points out, that "difference [which] has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being...this present being, for example, a being

present to itself, as consciousness, eventually would come to defer or to differ” (Derrida, 1982, p.15).

The characterisation of consciousness as the determination of temporal experience clearly contradicts the fundamental viewpoint of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which persistently enhances the idea of a decentred subject that inscribes itself within the symbolic order. To Lacan, “what’s involved is knowing what time is involved” (Lacan, 1988b, p.286). The historicity of language is not defined by the time of language users. Instead, language has its own time and to use language is to “introduce ourselves into the temporal succession” (ibid.). What Lacan learns from cybernetics pushes him further in this direction. In *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, a book written by Norbert Wiener, the originator of cybernetics to whom Lacan refers in his seminars, we find a different description of language which not only exists independently, as Saussure argues, but can also function independently without human involvement: “Language is not exclusively an attribute of living beings but one which they may share to a certain degree with the machines man has constructed...We ordinarily think of communication and language as being directed from person to person. However, it is quite possible for a person to talk to a machine, a machine to a person, and a machine to a machine” (Wiener, 1989, p.76). The human being does not exist as a stable entity prior to the symbolic order, nor is he in control of the symbolic machinery that automatically functions. Opposing the argument that the human subject is the only speaking being that manifests itself as an unconditional self-presence, this anti-humanist point of view makes cybernetics “one of the principal destabilizing instruments of the anthropocentric conception of man” (Dupuy, 2009, p.109).

It is easy to imagine how Lacan was impressed by Wiener’s assertions that would have likely led him towards the conclusion that “cybernetics also stems from a reaction of astonishment at rediscovering that this human language works almost by itself, seemingly to outwit us” (Lacan, 1988b, p.19). If Saussure’s linguistics provides a theoretical framework for Lacan to investigate the systematicity of the

symbolic order, and Lévi-Strauss's anthropology demonstrates how fundamental symbolic relations are set up, then cybernetics can be regarded as the only science utilised by Lacan that illustrates the autonomy of the symbolic process. By recognising the existence of the machine that transmits messages according to its own algebraic laws, Lacan is able to move away from a traditional binary distinction between atemporal, impersonal language and temporal, subjective speech, from where he can start to theorise the idea of Symbolic time that transcends human consciousness.

In cybernetics, what interests Lacan most is the cybernetic idea of the machine. The machine has long been a fascinating topic in Western philosophy, particularly since the eighteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution initiated rapid development of labour-saving machinery that would eventually change the landscape of social life. The steam engine that ushered in the industrial age became a key object of contemplation for theorists who popularised the idea of mechanism that explains human behaviour in terms of an outside or internal motor force. However, in the 1950s when Lacan started his seminars, he had observed that "there is a mutation taking place in the function of the machine, which is leaving all those who are still bent on criticising the old mechanism miles behind" (Lacan, 1988b, p.32). The first electronic computers were constructed in the years just preceding Lacan's seminar. These symbol-processing machines, which "automated the 'laws of thought' in a series of logical and combinatorial operations" (Johnston, 2008, p.71), radically redefined what the idea of the machine could offer for philosophical thinking. We can observe that Lacan's theoretical development throughout *Seminar II* is, in fact, a transition from an old mechanical model based on the energy-driven machine to a new one based on the information machine. In the first half of the book where the body and the Real are concerned, Lacan develops but does not go beyond the Freudian machine, which uses the steam engine as a template to construct a theory of energetics; however, in the second half, preoccupied with Poe's *The Purloined Letter* and in particular with the game of even and odd in the story, Lacan attributes the cybernetic machine a central role in the mobilisation of the symbolic order.

In the fifteenth chapter of *Seminar II*, Lacan dedicates the whole seminar to the discussion of the cybernetic machine. It is no coincidence that Lacan makes this move just after he finishes the reinterpretation of the dream of Irma's injection, which, as we have examined in the first section, ends with a symbol that is devoid of meaning but nevertheless represents the subject. Such a conclusion opens rather than closes the question about what constitutes the being of the subject. Therefore, in the following seminar, in order to make fully comprehensible his claim that cybernetics is something "which concerns us in the highest degree" (Lacan, 1988b, p.175), Lacan turns to the game of even and odd which appears in Poe's story as an anecdote. It is a simple game in which one puts two or three marbles in his hand and lets the other guess whether the number is odd or even. In the original account, the detective Dupin talks about a brilliant boy he knows that always wins the game by "mere observation and measurement of the astuteness of his opponents": a simpleton keeps changing the number of marbles every time he loses, while a smart one chooses the same number for the next round. By "making himself other, and to end up thinking that the other, being himself an other, thinks like him, and that he has to place himself in the position of a third party, to get out of being this other who is his pure reflection" (ibid., p.180), the boy is able to beat his opponent. However, in his seminar, Lacan points out some problems in this strategy. Since the boy can only recognise the opponent as either naive or smart, it will be extremely difficult for him to play against "someone of superior intelligence [who] can in fact understand that trick", whose play-style does not fall into the prefigured scripts. Similar to the prisoner's process of reasoning in *Logical Time*, the boy's strategy to play the game of even and odd remains on the level of the dual relation, "of the equivalence of one and the other, of the alter ego and the ego" (ibid., p.181). In order to escape this imaginary intersubjectivity, Lacan asks the audience to imagine a game of even and odd not between two persons, but between a person and a machine, which will allow the emergence of the symbolic function.

What is it like to play with a machine? As Lacan suggests, because of the complexity of the mechanic articulation which makes it impossible for the subject

to identify with, the game of odd and even is no longer a psychological game but a symbolic game based on probability and chance. What the subject addresses is the symbol and his chances “bear only on the symbol” (ibid., p.182). The process in which the machine automatically generates seemingly random numbers for the subject bears a resemblance to the operation of the symbolic order, whose secrets remain inaccessible to human intelligence. The machine does not require the intervention of a thinking subject to produce an infinite sequence of numeric combinations. But on the other hand, Lacan also points out that “there are the temporal breaks which we make in it (the machine)” (Lacan, 1988b, p.284) that produce signification for us. The subject comes to find himself being determined in this symbolic process over which he has no control. What produces the effect of symbolic subjectivisation is precisely “the temporal element, the intervention of a scansion permitting the insertion of something which can take on meaning for a subject” (ibid. p.285). To illustrate this point, Lacan asks his audience to imagine a case in which a player surprisingly wins multiple times against the machine. If we examine each round separately, his chance of winning is always fifty percent; however, on the symbolic level, his chance of continuing to win the next round actually decreases. As Lacan summarises:

Anything from the real can always come out. But once the symbolic chain is constituted, as soon as you introduce a certain significant unity, in the form of unities of succession, what comes out can no longer be anything (ibid., p.193).

Chance exists in the Real but doesn't exist in the Symbolic, where an isolated signifier is always oriented towards a certain direction in the temporal succession of signifying substitution and displacement. What appears random often turns out to be determined when the whole cybernetic circuit of signifiers are taken into consideration. As Lacan points out: “Since there is a temporal succession, things are oriented, and it is evidently not the same if there is first 2 then 1, or 1 then 2” (Lacan, 1993, p.269). John Johnston gives a succinct explanation of this point: “The very recording of random events gives rise to a rudimentary form of order, since it allows the formation of units and hence the emergence of a syntax governing their

possible sequences of succession” (Johnston, 2008, p.76). Lacan gets this idea from the practice of psychoanalysis. Although the patient on the couch is encouraged to free associate, the more he “gets as close as possible to chance” (Lacan, 1988b, p.296), the more evident it becomes that this speech is not free at all but reveals some sort of determinism. In this sense, Lacan’s symbolic order is not a spectrum of signifiers that is open to the play of differences and thus becomes subject to multiple interpretations. On the contrary, as Lacan mentions in *Seminar IV*: “It is evidently not the same if there is first 2 then I, or 1 then 2” (Lacan, 1957, p.269), the symbolic order is always a temporal order that sets itself in motion and restricts the ways in which differences can be distributed, and meaning can be derived.

Lacan’s analysis of the game of even and odd sets the tone of his reading of Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*. Although Lacan’s delineation of a triadic structure within Poe’s text has now become classic, the primary focus of his analysis is not the structure as such but the temporal movement from one symbolic position to another, the very concrete way in which Symbolic time intervenes in human reality. As Lacan declares at the beginning of his *Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”*:

This is why I have decided to illustrate for you today a truth which may be drawn from the moment in Freud’s thought we have been studying – namely, that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject – by demonstrating in a story the major determination the subject receives from the *itinerary* of a signifier (Lacan, 2006h, p.7) (emphasis added).

As is well-known, Lacan abstracts from Poe’s story “three moments, ordering three glances, sustained by three subjects, incarnated in each case by different people” (ibid., p.10). These three subject positions are organised around a letter received by the Queen, whose content remains mysterious throughout the whole story. In the first scene, the King sees nothing; the Queen sees that he doesn’t see and thus believes the letter to be covered; the Minister sees what the Queen is hiding and takes advantage of it. However, in the second scene, the possession of the letter puts the Minister in the Queen’s position. The way he conceals the letter by leaving

it uncovered fools the police but not Dupin, who uses the same strategy the Minister had used against the Queen to retrieve the letter. The letter, therefore, functions as a signifying mark in the story that sustains the repetitive moment of displacement of three subjects. Lacan summarises the relation between the letter and the subject as such: “When the characters get a hold of this letter, something gets a hold of them and carries them along and this something clearly has dominion over their individual idiosyncracies” (Lacan, 1988b, p.196). Each subject shows a certain degree of blindness regarding the symbolic chain that binds and orients them. Even Dupin himself, who uses the anecdote of the game of even and odd as a metaphor to demonstrate his capability of thinking what the Minister is thinking, cannot help but leave a vicious message to the latter in the last moment and thus becomes “a participant in the intersubjective triad, as such, finds himself in the median position previously occupied by the Queen and the Minister” (Lacan, 2006h, p.27).

So how does this letter have such power that determines the subject’s displacement in a symbolic temporal sequence? This leads us back to the idea of the unconscious, which presents itself to the subject in a radical sense of otherness. As Lacan specifies in *Seminar II*: “The letter itself, this phrase written on a piece of paper, in so far as it wanders about, is the unconscious” (Lacan, 1988b, p.209). When Lacan concludes his seminar on “The Purloined Letter” by claiming that a letter always arrives at its destination (Lacan, 2006h, p.30), It means the unconscious is not static or timeless but dynamic as well. It’s a sequence of signifiers digitally encoded by the symbolic machine that is radically foreign to the human experience but somehow touches the very essence of subjective existence. The subject’s own unconscious is “out there”, inscribed within the field of language and generated by the symbolic machine. In this sense, while Lacan famously suggests that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, it may be possible for us to substitute “Other” for “machine” in order to fully appreciate the work of the decentralisation of the ego Lacan continues after Freud based on a new theoretical foundation. This process through which the unconscious is produced by the Other can only be

understood in Symbolic time, a time of the constructed symbol which modern machines represent for us.

3.3 Time of the Other: From the Wolf Man to Hamlet

The idea of Symbolic time in Lacan's work is not merely the result of purely theoretical contemplation by means of cybernetics and mathematics. While these two disciplines certainly contribute to a rationalised formation of a somewhat obscure temporal register, Symbolic time can also be sufficiently derived from the practice of psychoanalysis and is indeed a hidden theme that can be traced back to Freud's clinical work. The seemingly counterintuitive idea that time, a taken-for-granted experience through which we experience the world around us, might not be under our own control opens up a series of questions in relation to our understanding of memory, history and symptom formation. Can we still locate the basis of memory in personal experience if time itself is organised by an agent other than the subject? What does it mean for psychoanalysis if one is a stranger to one's own life-history?

Since its beginning, the individual's relationship with their memory has remained a troubling matter for psychoanalysis, towards which Freud's ambivalent attitude is evident. In his early writings, Freud's understanding of memory is firmly centred on the function of the individual mind. For instance, in the *Project*, Freud takes memory as "a main characteristic of nervous tissue" and defines it as "a capacity for being permanently altered by single occurrences – which offers such a striking contrast to the behaviour of a material that permits the passage of a wave movement and thereafter returns to its former condition" (Freud, 1895a, p.299). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, memory continues to function as the individual trace of original perception or sensation, a cathexis of which is hoped to attain once more the same experience of satisfaction through an intermediate stage of motor experiences (Freud, 1900, p.602). The idea that the formation of memory is based on one's personal experience leads to an ontogenetic subject-formation which guarantees the continuity between the individual's past and present. It becomes

the very point at which psychoanalysis must intervene in order to treat the symptoms.

In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer highlight the problem of repressed memory in their investigation of the causes of hysteria. Their preliminary explanation regards the “abreaction” of surplus excitation produced by the memory of a traumatic event as the solution to any symptom. Testified to by the case of Anna O., it appears that as long as the repressed memory has been given verbal utterance, the symptom will be easily removed. In this sense, psychoanalytic treatment is identified with a technique to invoke memories and revive psychic excitations that were initially perceived. These case studies encourage Freud to put forward the seduction theory, which regards actual instances such as sexual assaults experienced in childhood, later registered as forgotten memories, as the cause of neurotic symptoms in adult life.

However, Freud soon realises the difficulty or rather improbability of designating any specific “real” factor that can emerge from memory as the definite cause of neurotic symptoms. In his letters to Fliess, Freud complains that the theory of childhood seduction is not able to explain “the complete resolution of a neurosis and the certain knowledge of its aetiology in childhood”. In many cases, “a single analysis” cannot reach a successful conclusion even when all the memories have been recovered (Freud, 1897b). Meanwhile, the idea that there is no indication of reality in the unconscious also makes Freud wonder whether he has mistaken memory as the recollection of actual events. Therefore, by formally declaring the collapse of the seduction theory, Freud’s understanding of memory also undergoes a dramatic change. The discovery of normal infantile sexuality (most clearly displayed in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) and the Oedipus complex (the term first appeared in 1910, but the primitive idea was already put forward in Freud’s letter to Fliess on October 15, 1897, and later publicly discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) paved the way for the search for the hard facts of sexual trauma in the individual’s past to be replaced by the new idea of primal fantasy.

Employing the term “fantasy” does not mean that Freud places the trauma as a psychical construction within the child, since Jung’s idea of “retroactive fantasy”, which understands the past as the retroactive effect of construction performed by the adult and fuelled by the regressive movement of libido regardless of any real basis, is directly rejected by Freud. On the contrary, throughout his later theoretical development, Freud is increasingly convinced that the primal fantasy is rather “a phylogenetic endowment”:

In them (primal fantasies), the individual reaches beyond his own experience into primaeval experience at points where his own experience has been too rudimentary. It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told to us to-day in analysis as phantasy—the seduction of children, the inflaming of sexual excitement by observing parental intercourse, the threat of castration (or rather castration itself)—were once real occurrences in the primaeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth. I have repeatedly been led to suspect that the psychology of the neuroses has stored up in it more of the antiquities of human development than any other source (Freud, 1917, p.371).

The phylogenetic explanation had come to occupy an important position in Freud’s theoretical construction since the 1910s. Before his definition of the primal fantasy in terms of the mechanism of archaic heritage, Freud’s strong belief in phylogeny already surfaced in his ideas about metapsychology, culture and psychopathology. In *The Unconscious*, Freud suggests that “if inherited mental formations exist in the human being – something analogous to instinct in animals – these constitute the nucleus of the Ucs.” (Freud, 1915c, p.195). Similarly, in *Totem and Taboo*, by explaining the power of the totem as “an inherited psychic endowment” (Freud, 1913, p.31), Freud argues for a form of psychical continuity in the sequence of generations which transmits mental states of one generation to the next. The clinical implication of this hypothesis is further investigated in the unpublished metapsychological paper *A phylogenetic fantasy: overview of the transference neuroses*, in which Freud boldly correlates present-day neurotic symptoms with the phyletic development of prehistoric humanity. More specifically, it is the harsh environment of the Ice Age that produces a “phylogenetic disposition” towards

certain neuroses (Freud, 1987). As Freud succinctly summarises in his letter to Ferenczi: “What are now neuroses were once phases of the human condition” (Freud, 1996, p.66).

However, the theory of phylogeny is also a site of controversy in Freud’s theory. On the one hand, it is treated as absurd by critics who point out that Freud’s arguments rely on the Lamarckian model which postulates that one’s acquired characteristics can be genetically inherited, a theory that has been discredited in modern biology (Rice, 1990; Sulloway, 1992; Yerushalmi, 1991). From this point of view, because of a yearning for scientific justification of psychoanalytic findings, Freud is, once again, trapped by unfounded biologism and thus adopts a teleological view of psychic life as if it is predetermined genetically. On the other hand, some intimate associates of Freud, including Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris, have tried their best to distinguish Freud’s phylogeny from dubious Lamarckian assumptions, as they argue that the former is postulated mainly “for psychological reasons” (Hartmann, Kris, & Loewenstein, 1964, p.96). This argument makes sense if we notice that Freud himself is actually fully aware of the scientific evidence against Lamarckism, yet, as Ernest Jones complains, he never “gave up a lot of his belief in the inheritance of acquired characters” (Jones, 1957, p.313). The statement Freud makes in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), which is written near the end of his life, bears witness to this longstanding belief: “What may be operative in an individual’s psychical life may include not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth, elements with a phylogenetic origin—an archaic heritage” (Freud, 1939, p.98). The relation between Freud’s phylogeny and the claims of Lamarck is further challenged by Derrida:

[Freud] repeats here that this topic has nothing to do with the anatomy of the brain, and this is enough to complicate the phylogenetic dimension, which he judges to be in effect irreducible but which he is far from simplifying in its Lamarckian schemas (he is often accused of this, by Yerushalmi also), or even its Darwinian ones. The adherence to a biological doctrine of acquired characters – of the biological archive, in sum – cannot be made to agree in a simple and immediate way with all

Freud acknowledges otherwise: the memory of the experience of previous generations, the time of the formation of languages and of a symbolicity that transcends given languages and discursivity as such (Derrida, 1998a, pp.34-35).

In my opinion, the accusation of Freud's biologism and the defence of Freud which demands a psychological or cultural reading both hold some truth, yet they are too limited to appreciate the complexity of Freud's various phylogenetic explanations. It is impossible to deny the existence of the intergenerational transmission of instinctual impulse which is clearly biologically grounded in Freud's writings, particularly in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *The Ego and The Id*, where Freud's understanding of "need" and the revision of the drive theory largely rely on a problematic organic basis. In this sense, one must resist the temptation to entirely erase psycho-Lamarckism from Freudian psychoanalysis. However, the inheritance of collective memory which is more culturally and socially oriented should be regarded as Freud's original contribution to psychoanalytic thinking. What can be learnt from this idea is not genetic programming but a subversive understanding of memory, rationality and subjectivity. As Adrian Johnston points out: "The supposition of the actual, factual historical reality of early infantile/childhood episodes as the concrete ontogenetic basis of fundamental fantasies is manifestly what is explicitly at stake" (Johnston, 2013, p.61). The possibility that the memory of others' experiences determines one's own thinking disrupts the sense of self-containment and self-continuity promised by the ontogenetic representation of the individual's life history. It also provides an alternative solution to difficult clinical puzzles.

Freud's case study of the Wolf Man is paradigmatic of this shift between two opposite understandings of memory. What we find in the first part of the essay *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* is a discussion of symptom formation based on a traditional understanding of memory. The patient, through free association, provides two crucial moments in his life history when his neurotic symptoms can possibly be determined. The first moment was a dream of six white wolves sitting motionlessly outside his bedroom window when the patient was

“three, four or at most five years old”; the second moment identified by the patient was much earlier. At the age of eighteen months old, the patient woke up in the afternoon and witnessed coitus between his parents, three times repeated. The memory of such a traumatic encounter can be fitted into Freud’s seduction theory without difficulty and is promptly labelled as the primal scene. But is this memory a real occurrence with a historical basis in the patient’s infantile life? Freud initially gives a positive answer by arranging the temporal sequence of these events in a progressive way:

At the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he is unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and to be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four; and only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him (Freud, 1918, p.45 footnotes).

However, Freud’s reservation regarding this interpretation soon becomes evident, since thirteen pages later, he gives another view by putting emphasis on the moment of the dream. It turns out that the wolves in the dream may actually be sheep-dogs as the patient repeatedly visited flocks of sheep shortly before the dream, and he may also have witnessed some copulating activities between dogs. If this is the case, then the primal scene would become a fantasy: “The scene was innocent. The rest had been added by the inquisitive child’s subsequent wish, based on his experiences with the dogs, to witness his parents too in their love-making” (ibid., p.58). The temporal sequence became retrogressively constructed in the sense that the meaning of the earlier experience was given by the later one.

Confronting these two possible readings, Freud comes to realise that it is impossible to decide which solution is valid from the perspective of psychic causality. The discussion of the determinant moment in one’s life history is in vain since the two crucial psychical representations, located by the patient at the age of four years and the age of eighteen months, can both be constructions of the patient during the

analysis, or substitutions of another unconscious representation that has never been revealed. These subjective representations can easily change their psychic value through condensation or displacement, in a way that disrupts temporal sequences and spatial relations.

What rescues Freud from his failed attempt to account for an ontogenetic cause of the symptom is the introduction of phylogeny. In the second part of the paper, Freud abstracts the fear of castration as the common factor from the patient's various fragments of memory and attributes it to a phylogenetic pattern, which predominates over individual experience: "The first relates to the phylogenetically inherited schemata, which, like the categories of philosophy, are concerned with the business of 'placing' the impressions derived from actual experience. I am inclined to take the view that they are precipitates from the history of human civilization" (ibid., p.119). By introducing the notion of phylogenesis that stands for the cumulative experience of history rather than what is innate in the individual, Freud moves the unconscious representation out of one's inner-sense and re-localises it in a trans-subjective field.

When discussing Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok notice that "polemical in its explicit purpose, it also reflects another debate, that of the author with himself. Throughout this stirring account and within the meanderings of the theoretical discussion, attentive readers will sense a doubt – it is Freud's doubt regarding his own statement" (Abraham & Torok, 1986, p.2). This observation accurately points out the dramatic change occurring between the beginning and the end of Freud's paper. Through his self-challenge, Freud ends the paper in a complete break with the ontogenetic account which takes for granted the narrative of identity-based, developmental psychology: "I should myself be glad to know whether the primal scene in my present patient's case was a phantasy or a real experience; but, taking other similar cases into account, I must admit that the answer to this question is not in fact a matter of very great importance" (Freud, 1918, p.97). While the case of the Wolf Man starts with the problem of memory deficit in

terms of “what has been forgotten by him?”, it ends with a more radical sense of memory surplus, as if the individual knows something he is not supposed to know, something absent in his experienced-based mind process yet indispensable for the production of his unconscious desire. It is the discourse pertaining to the phylogenetic dimension, a memory which belongs to the collective and is inherited by the individual that determines the Wolf Man’s symptom formation. The theory of inherited memory breaks with fundamental ideas of rationality and self-sameness rooted in the ontogenetic narrative. It becomes a theory that Freud cannot do without when articulating the formation of unconscious knowledge.

However, although the theory of inherited memory is theoretically subversive and clinically useful, the way Freud frames it makes it difficult for the reader to appreciate his real intention. The idea of “the inheritance of prehistorical knowledge” shows a certain commonality with the notion of hereditary disposition, which remains in the shadow of psycho-Lamarckism and reflects Freud’s longstanding struggle with biological reductionism. Therefore, when Lacan picks up and further develops this theory, he does not hesitate to eliminate any biogenetic residue in Freud’s thinking to reinterpret it on the basis of completely different disciplines. In *Seminar V*, Lacan gives a rather harsh comment on the idea of “genetic reconstitution”, which he believes is “much more imbecilic than anything that you can find in these little books that you are taught under the guise of religious instruction” (Lacan, 1958, p.231). As Adrian Johnston points out, Lacan “has no sympathy whatsoever for the idea of the ontogenetic recapitulating the phylogenetic” (Johnston, 2013, p.61). However, while Lacan distances himself from any Lamarckian speculation, he also captures and preserves the essence of Freud’s phylogeny:

Freud no doubt claims to rediscover the origin of this primordial law, using a Goethean method, by following traces of critical events that have remained perceptible. But don’t be fooled: the ontogenesis that reproduces phylogenesis is merely a keyword used here in order to convince everyone. It is the *onto* [in ontogenesis] that serves here as a smokescreen [*trompe l’oeil*], for it is not the individual as an entity [*l’étant*]

but rather the subject's relation to being, assuming this relation is based on discourse. The past of the concrete discourse of the human line can be refound therein, inasmuch as in the course of the man's history, things have happened to him that have changed the subject's relation to being (Lacan, 2013, pp.21-22).

In *Seminar III*, Lacan claims that he has little interest in prehistory, precisely because "there is no point in searching so far back, for we can observe this lack in subjects within our reach" (Lacan, 1993, p.306). As we can see, Freud's idea of prehistorical knowledge is replaced by the Other's discourse, which is freed from the accusation of positivism and naturalism. It is no longer inherited but transmitted to the individual in symbolic form. Lacan's symbolic universe, an always-already given that pre-exists the subject, integrates and consolidates Freud's idea that "others' memories are there already. The memory of others' experiences exists at the outset" (White, 2008, p.40). More importantly, by introducing the whole symbolic dimension, Lacan enriches Freud's original theory. Whereas the Freudian subject is mostly determined by the other's past, such as the prehistorical murder of the primal patriarch in *Totem and Taboo*, the Lacanian subject is subordinate to the Other's time, an ongoing signifying process in which the individual must locate his own past, present and future.

In *Seminar II*, Lacan makes a crucial distinction between memory and remembering that helps us understand the function of the Other's time. Memory, Lacan says, is "a means of characterising the living organism as such" (Lacan, 1988b, p.185). It is the same memory that I have discussed in the previous chapter, a cognitive function with an organic basis that records ontogenetic information under the control of the ego. Remembering, on the other hand, "pertains to the order of history". It is "the grouping and the succession of symbolically defined events, the pure symbol engendering in its turn a succession" (ibid.). It is not difficult for us to see that the idea of remembering has its origin in Freud's inherited memory, especially considering that Lacan later gives remembering another name: symbolic memory. But what is really worth our attention is the way Lacan separates symbolic memory from (individual) memory. While (individual) memory is the reactivation of the

same, fixed message in one's own past, remembering or symbolic memory is regarded as the realisation of difference. As Lacan says, it is possible that symbolic memory has "changed content, changed sign, changed structure...it's not what happens afterwards which is modified, but everything which went before" (ibid.). What is produced by symbolic memory is "a world of truth entirely deprived of subjectivity", while on the other hand, "there has been a historical development of subjectivity manifestly directed towards the rediscovery of truth, which lies in the order of symbols" (1988b, p.285). In other words, because the Other functions according to its own time, continually producing a succession of symbolically defined events through which the subject lives, one can participate in this temporal movement at any moment and will always confront a reorganised sequence of life history.

Psychoanalysis, Lacan writes in *Seminar XI*, "posits itself as modulating in a more radical way this relation of man to the world that has always been regarded as knowledge" (Lacan, 1998, p.63). If this is the case, then the idea of the time of the Other undoubtedly makes an important contribution to this revolution. Before Freud, there were two most influential theories of knowledge in Western philosophy. One is the Platonic model which presumes the existence of pure and complete knowledge belonging to the immortal soul. The individual does not get access to new knowledge through sensory experience but only attains what is always there through reminiscence (see the previous chapter). Pure knowledge reflects an eternal and unchanging reality to which our living world is only an imperfect replication. The other is the Kantian model which is transcendently conditioned and experience based. To Kant, transcendental deduction of the categories conditions our action of understanding, but these pure concepts must be applied to the sensory manifold and combined with intuitions in order to make empirical knowledge intelligible. In this sense, the individual needs to adopt a cognitive attitude towards the external world and produces knowledge of their own. With the idea of the Other's time, Lacan sees a third possibility of knowledge formation promised by psychoanalysis, one in which we can speak of an externally

located knowledge that is produced by the discourse of the Other, and at the same time, always changes and responds to the individual's own desire and subjectivity.

If the Wolf Man is the embodiment of Freud's notion of the inherited memory, then Hamlet can be seen as the typical Lacanian subject who lives in the time of the Other. Lacan's interpretation of this Shakespearean drama in *Seminar VI* points directly to the conundrum of Hamlet's inability to act, even when the truth of Claudius's identity, as a killer and usurper, is revealed to him from the very beginning. Ernest Jones provides an explanation of Hamlet's mystery which, at first sight, is very Freudian. After rejecting both the temperamental explanation, which attributes Hamlet's delay to "some general defect in his constitution", and the situational explanation, which suggests the difficult political situation in which Hamlet is caught is the main reason, Jones draws Hamlet back to the Oedipus matrix, where he confronts Claudius as the person who realises his own hidden desire: "The long 'repressed desire to take his father's place in his mother's affection is stimulated to unconscious activity by the sight of someone usurping this place exactly as he himself had once longed to do" (Jones, 1910, p.99). It is this unconscious identification with the murderer that transforms the idea of punishing Claudius into the torture of Hamlet's own alter-ego. Meanwhile, by occupying the position of the father, Claudius reclaims the paternal power in the Oedipal triangle, which makes the action of killing him patricide that Hamlet is prohibited from committing. Therefore, Jones concludes:

The call of duty to slay his uncle cannot be obeyed because it links itself with the call of his nature to slay his mother's husband, whether this is the first or the second; the latter call is strongly 'repressed,' and therefore necessarily the former also (ibid., p.101).

Lacan's reading of Hamlet, however, does not accept the convenient analogy between Hamlet and Oedipus. Instead, he uses Hamlet as an example to analyse the Other's determination of the subject in a temporal sense. The core of his argument is that "Hamlet is always suspended on the other's time, and this up to

the end” (Lacan, 1959, p.273). While Jones’ understanding of the Oedipus complex is a fixed set of desires hidden within the individual, Lacan sees it as a dynamic structure within the field of language. Hamlet is not trapped in the internal psychic struggle between his ego and the superego represented by Claudius, a dual-relation in which the mother Gertrude as the object of desire is merely mentioned in the background. Instead, Lacan argues that he confronts his mother as a big Other, an omnipotent yet enigmatic presence on which his own desire depends. Hamlet is confused and immobilised by Gertrude’s desire for the “disparaged, contemptible object which is Claudius” that replaces the “idealised, exalted object which is his father”. He is overwhelmed by the sexual enjoyment Gertrude experiences as a woman rather than as a mother who is supposed to meet her son’s demands. Finding himself in the movement of the signifying chain that constantly produces new desires, Hamlet is dislocated from the subject position from where he acquires self-assurance and coherent meaning. Therefore, Hamlet cannot act because “it is not the other’s time. It is not the time that the other should have to give an account of himself before the eternal” (ibid.). Throughout the play, Hamlet never finds a moment when he can speak on his own behalf:

It is in his parents' good time that he remains there (Wittenberg). It is on the time of other people that he suspends his crime; it is in his step-father's time that he embarks for England; it is in Rosencrantz and Guildenstem's time that he is led, evidently with an ease which astonished Freud, to send them to their death thanks to a piece of trickery which is carried out very cleverly (ibid., p.274).

Even at the end of the play, when Hamlet finally makes up his mind to act, he does not do it in his own time. What is crucial in Hamlet’s action is that he feels compelled to act since the Other has left him no time. In Lacan’s words, it is “an act that he carries out, in some sense, in spite of himself” (Lacan, 1977, p.12). It is Hamlet’s realisation that he is going to die that prevents any further delay. Hamlet does not choose the right moment as an idiosyncratic ego. Instead, the Other’s time has chosen him to carry out a symbolic act which confirms rather than breaks the law. It is the only time, as Lacan says, “the time of his destruction. And the whole

tragedy of Hamlet is to show us the implacable journey of Hamlet toward this time” (ibid., p.281).

In Lacan’s reading, Hamlet is not the incarnation but the opposite of Oedipus. Whereas Oedipus tries to escape his fate by challenging the Other’s desire; Hamlet tries to remain at a distance from his desire and also to smother the desire of the Other. He is afraid to know the answer that reveals his own position in the Other’s desire, the mystery of which leads him to postpone his act. In so doing, Hamlet loses his own subjectivity and becomes the marionette of the symbolic order. “There is a level in the subject on which it can be said that his fate is expressed in terms of a pure signifier, a level at which he is merely the reverse side of a message that is not even his own,” says Lacan, “Well, Hamlet is the very image of this level of subjectivity” (Lacan, 1977, p.12). To Lacan, Hamlet’s tragedy “follows its course and attains completion at the hour of [the] Other” (ibid., p.19). It is an extreme case showing what happens when the influence of the time of the Other becomes overwhelming and, therefore, deepens our understanding of Symbolic time as a necessary condition of the subject’s symbolic existence.

To conclude, in this chapter, I move back and forth between different topics in Freud’s and Lacan’s work in order to demonstrate the existence of Symbolic time in psychoanalysis. The idea of Symbolic time is elusive because it counters our straightforward understanding that time is an intrinsic experience through which the individual perceives the external world, yet psychoanalysis, which pays attention to the unconscious process beyond rationality and sensibility of the individual, does not take time only as a conscious experience. Through my close reading, I argue that the timelessness Freud attributes to the unconscious suggests a temporal dimension different to conscious time. This temporal dimension is justified when Lacan introduces cybernetics to mechanise the symbolic order. I also have a look at the role of Symbolic time in the practice of psychoanalysis, which can be traced back to Freud’s employment of phylogeny in his case study of the Wolf Man but is most fully presented in Lacan’s reading of Hamlet. Symbolic time

is the time of the Other in the sense that it is embodied in the language machine that exists independently of us. The subject encounters the absolute otherness in Symbolic time and acts for reasons incomprehensible by its self-conscious existence. Therefore, by extending the inescapable symbolic determination to the temporal domain, Symbolic time in Lacan's theory can be said to be a profound conception of man's existential condition.

4. Symptomatic Time

As we worked through Lacan's dual temporality in the last two chapters, body and language, two important themes in twentieth-century philosophy, simultaneously emerged as two topics with which Lacan is primarily concerned and through which he rethinks and reinvents Freudian psychoanalysis. Although Lacan does not directly name Real time or Symbolic time within his theoretical structure, his analysis of the passive synthesis of the body process and the independent movement of the symbolic order clearly incorporates a temporal dimension, which, as I would argue, cannot be merely regarded as an insignificant addition to his overall theory. In this chapter, by extending the idea of dual temporality to other topics in Lacan's theory and connecting it with a wide range of psychoanalytic phenomena, I intend to show that this idea provides a solid ground for our understanding of Lacan's theory of subject-formation.

Symptomatic time, as in the title of this chapter, designates a particular temporal process rather than another independent temporal register. Insofar as the Lacanian subject is essentially a symptomatic being-in-the-world, I use this term to name the time of subject-formation in Lacan's theory. To do so, I will first make an important distinction between the pathological temporal experience and what I call "symptomatic time". In psychoanalytic and psychological literature, symptom-formation has long been studied from a temporal angle. In Freud's early work on hysteria, we find time as a central factor of symptom-formation, not only because disturbances those patients experience in the present, as Freud and Breuer believed at that time, are determined by events in the past, but also because psychic struggles in relation to the future are also predominant in these cases. As Frank Summers observes:

Anna O, fell ill fearing the prospect of life without her father. Both Lucy and Elizabeth von R. became symptomatic due to repression of a hoped-for future with men they felt guilty for loving...the point for our purpose is that whatever conflicts these patients possessed from childhood, they also suffered from highly conflictual future visions of their lives, and they

became ill when reality forced awareness of the illusionary nature of their hoped-for-future (Summers, 2013, p.121).

It does not matter whether the development of these symptoms in *Studies of Hysteria* is mainly orientated to the past or the future. The point is that patients, instead of living in the present moment, find themselves trapped at other moments that are only imaginarily created to satisfy their unconscious desires. This temporal discrepancy generates strong psychosomatic tensions, accompanied by feelings that are mainly painful. Following Freud, the idea that the displacement of temporal consciousness undermines the individual's self-coherence is inherited by many contemporary studies on the pathology of temporality. For instance, when discussing the phenomenon of mental disorder, Kouba Petr writes that "suffering (is) conditioned by the temporal disintegration of the self and accompanied by the collapse of the order of experience" (Kouba, 2014, p.169). Similarly, Thomas Fuchs argues that "mental illnesses not only interrupt the continuity of normal life. They can also be accompanied by a radical change in subjective temporality, even to the point of a fragmentation of the experience of the self in time" (Fuchs, 2013, p.76). For both authors, what proves to be symptomatic is the subject's disorientation to time that affects the individual's cognitive synthesis of time-consciousness. Meanwhile, based on a phenomenological reading, a coherent self that synthesises the three dimensions of past, present and future into a continuous process against which personal biography is constituted is taken for granted as the normal state.

However, Lacan's understanding of the symptom is exactly the opposite. Rather than something that is experienced as a psychopathological disturbance and expected to dissolve through psychotherapy, the symptom for Lacan has a structural position in the individual's psychic life. In his early writings including *The Freudian Thing*, Lacan emphasises the symbolic value of the symptom, "by which it differs from the natural index commonly designated by the term 'symptom' in medicine" (Lacan, 2006i, p.348). A symptom is a metaphor written on the body that signifies the return of repressed desire, articulated by the signifiers that then "captured in the signified of the current conflict and used by it as language" (Lacan,

1993, p.120). Lacan makes it clear that a symptom does not have a fixed meaning like smoke that always indicates a fire “with the possible call to put it out”. Instead, the truth of the symptom resides in the articulation of the relationship between one signifier and another on the basis of a signifying chain, which sets itself in motion (Lacan, 2006e, p.195). The symptom is an example of Lacan’s idea that “in language our message comes to us from the Other in an inverted form” since it contains a message from the Other but at the same time, is only interpretable through the Other. In this sense, we can say that the manifestation of the subject’s symptom is determined by Symbolic time, a temporal register that is not directly perceived by human consciousness but nevertheless organises the subject’s trajectory through different symbolic positions with which one identifies.

In the 1970s, Lacan’s understanding of the symptom went through a radical transformation, which responded to a fundamental problem that can be traced back to Freud’s case studies. While the psychoanalytic interpretation is supposed to reveal the truth embodied in the symptom, in many cases the symptom persists despite the interpretation, as if it is sustained by another source. Lacan’s initial answer is that there is a *jouissance* of the signifier in the symptom. Just like jokes and slips of the tongue, the linguistic strategies including substitution and displacement employed in the symptom-formation indicate a particular way in which the subject enjoys the signifier. Although the symptom causes us discomfort and suffering, “the deciphering of the symptom is correlative to a *jouissance* linked to the appearance, to the emergence of the signification of this symptom” (Brousse, 2007, p.84). However, in *Seminar XXII*, Lacan provides another answer that is almost the opposite of the first one: What the subject enjoys in the symptom is not the signifier or the sense-making but precisely the non-sense. He begins by redefining the symptom as a letter *x*:

What is it to say the symptom? It is the function of the symptom, a function to be understood as the mathematical formulation. $f(x)$ would do. What is this *x*? This is what can be expressed of the unconscious by a letter, insofar that only in the letter is the identity of self to self isolated from every quality (Lacan, 1974, p.59).

A letter stands for the materiality of a signifier, the elementary phenomenon of *lalangue*. Lacan distinguishes *lalangue* from language to emphasise the very expression of language through the body as an effect of cutting and jouissance. Therefore, a letter is attached more to the Real rather than the Symbolic since it does not acquire its meaning from another letter (from S_1 to S_2) but designates a unique self-identification of the speaking being, “isolated from every quality”. It is not a condensation of meaning but a condensation of enjoyment through which the Real invades the Symbolic.

This point is further developed in the next year’s Seminar *Le Sinthome*, which is dedicated to the discussion of Joyce and his writings. As a novelist who is famous for the experimental use of language, James Joyce completes *Finnegans Wake* with a writing technique that is based on the dissolution of language. By borrowing words from Danish, Swedish, Old Icelandic, Norwegian and many other languages, breaking them down and reassembling different phonetic and semantic elements into new words, Joyce creates a masterpiece full of puns, neologisms and syllogisms, which is detached from any stable signification and free from symbolic restraint. To Lacan, the nature of Joyce’s use of the letter is revealed by his slip of the *letter* into *litter*. It shows that the letter as trash bears no relationship to the Symbolic or the Imaginary. It belongs to the dimension of the Real that points towards the singular in each individual. In so doing, the symptom is no longer regarded merely as the product of the symbolic articulation. It becomes “the sign of something which is what is not working out in the Real” (Lacan, 1974, p.20). Rather than a sign of the Other’s desire that calls for interpretation, the symptom is a sign of jouissance “by the way in which each one *enjoys* the unconscious” (ibid., p.98). To Lacan, if jouissance is the only thing that we can get a hold of in Joyce’s writings, then it becomes a symptom. Yet Lacan talks about not the “symptom of Joyce” but “Joyce-the-symptom”, in the sense that Joyce “is the one who has gone to the extreme of incarnating the symptom in himself” (Lacan, 1987, p.29), living as the symptom against the possible psychotic breakdown that may be triggered by the fact that “his father had never been for him a father” (Lacan, 1975, p.14). This leads

Lacan to put forward the notion of *sinthome* in *Seminar XXIII*, as a unique trait of both signifier and jouissance that completes the knot of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The transition from symptom to *sinthome*, in Žižek's reading, suggests Lacan's attempt to capture the radical ontological status of symptom: "Symptom, conceived as *sinthome*, is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject" (Žižek, 1989, p.81).

If we take the symptom not as an illness that can be detached from the body it affects but as the core of the subject's being-in-the-world, the relationship between psychopathology and time must also be rethought. Insofar as the subject is always a symptomatic subject, fragmentation and desynchrony should be regarded as the "normal" state of time that conditions the human experience. On the other hand, the ego's insistence on the importance of linear temporal sequencing by denying other lived experience of time, from a Lacanian perspective, is indeed pathological. This explains why Lacan in *Seminar I* defines the ego as a "symptom" in the common sense of mental illness: "The ego is structured exactly like a symptom. At the heart of the subject, it is only a privileged symptom, the human symptom par excellence, the mental illness of man" (Lacan, 1988a, p.16). Therefore, instead of restricting the role of time within psychopathology, I put forward the idea of "symptomatic time" to cover the process of subject-formation that is symptomatic in its essence.

One cannot grasp how a subject comes into being without a fundamental understanding of time experienced by the subject. For Lacan's theory, this means that an analysis of the subject as a symptomatic being must always take into account how time functions in a symptomatic way. To do so, I begin with an examination of Lacan's theory of the origin. I focus on one famous episode in the history of Freudian psychoanalysis – the debate over the issues of birth trauma between Freud and Rank – to demonstrate how the absence of a definitive account of the origin gives rise to confusions and uncertainties in psychoanalysis. I sketch

out the ways in which Lacan confronts this problem by challenging the assumption of linear time on which the location of any substantial origin relies, and reconsider the role of prematuration in the formation of the subject. In the second section, I approach the problem of the origin from another perspective. Freud's notion of primal repression is crucial for a psychoanalytic understanding of the mechanism of repression and other workings of the psyche, yet its meaning remains obscure. Examining Lacan's interpretation of primal repression, especially the way he translates *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, I argue that primal repression cannot be understood within a linear framework of time in terms of the "first and earliest" repression. Instead, it designates a body-to-signifier process that binds two temporal registers together in order to maintain a subjective domain. The third section aims to prove that the idea of dual temporality fits into the Lacanian account of subject-formation. I explore how taking multiple temporal registers into account offers a more comprehensive and conceptually rich understanding of the mirror stage, and provide an account of the process of subject-formation in which alienation and separation are interpreted as the interplay between Real time and Symbolic time.

4.1 Freud-Rank Debate and Lacan's Idea of Prematuration

The articulation of subject-formation requires an understanding of the origin as a necessary foundation without which its temporal dimension cannot be conceived. Before we discuss Lacan's writings on this topic, I want to first present the Freud-Rank debate as a theoretical and historical background against which Lacan's theorisation of the origin can be taken as a response. The idea of the origin is a crucial element of Freudian psychoanalysis. It directs the methodology that Freud uses to develop psychoanalysis and later links up with major psychoanalytic concepts. From the beginning of his career as a psychiatrist, Freud had already shown a greater interest in the psychoneuroses that have their origins in the individual's past life rather than the actual neuroses which, in his opinion, are caused by the present sexual dysfunction (Freud, 1894). In his archaeological metaphor, Freud famously refers to psychoanalysis as a "psychology of the depths", which metaphorically spatialises the temporal nature of psychoanalytic inquiry, in

the sense that to excavate what lies below the surface is to reach the bygone origin that is covered over by the present. The exploration of the neurotic origin is not only clinically useful but also a key to grasping the formative influence on childhood development. This is why when the idea of primitive seduction was put forward as the origin of psychoneuroses, Freud could not but excitedly claim that he now held “a capital revelation, something akin to the discovery of the sources of the Nile of psychopathology” (Assoun, 2000, p.184). To the extent that the cause of the symptoms is given serious consideration in psychoanalysis, the discovery of which is often equivalent to a full understanding and cure of the mental disease, it is no surprise that Freud never completely gave up the quest for the origin. After abandoning the seduction theory, Freud didn't accept the Jungian idea of retrospective fantasies that reduces the traumatic childhood memory to the reconstruction in the present, instead, he continually returned to the starting-point of the individual's psychosexual development and attempted to provide a “single, tangible ‘ultimate cause’ of neurotic illness” (Freud, 1926, p.152).

In the early 1900s, Freud started to consolidate the theoretical connection between neuroses and sexuality. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he traced the cause of neurotic symptoms in adult life to libidinal flow in early childhood and pinpointed various erotogenic zones which determine and organise patterns of the individual's psychosomatic experience. If the occurrence of seduction can no longer be regarded as a formative factor in human development, then the course of libidinal satisfaction and its suppression must be explained in another way. To the question of what is there at the origin, Freud replies with a myth, the Oedipus story, whose narrative is interpreted as the prototype of infantile phantasies that express the wish for the satisfaction of sexual impulses. To Freud, Oedipus, a tragic hero in Greek mythology who murdered his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, “merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes” (Freud, 1900, p.262). He regards the Oedipus story as a projection of the unconscious complex structured within the psyche, which reveals the familiar relations that are in tension. Later in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud provided a historical account of the murder of the primal father that phylogenetically justifies the tragedy of

Sophocles. The origin of neuroses in the individual's psychic life, therefore, becomes the continuation and repetition of the origin of human society and civilisation.

Through replacing the seduction theory with the Oedipus story, Freud redirects the way quests for the origin should follow in psychoanalysis. Based on a myth rather than a real event, a universal theory of psychic life that rejects external determinism is made possible. However, defining the origin in such a way is only partially successful. The Oedipus story, as a myth or a phantasy that transcends individual experience and imagination, does not settle the question of the origin but rather covers up the void at the beginning. Speaking of the origin of the fantasy, Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that "the intrusion of the fantasy (or myth) into the subject cannot but occur to the organism, the little human being, at a point in time" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968, p.5). In other words, the pursuit of the origin leads Freud to postulate an origin more primitive or original than the answer he provides. One has to assign a chronological position in the individual's life history to the Oedipal myth, whose realisation always requires some internal preconditions. If psychic conflicts within the Oedipal narrative respond to and further channel the infantile sexual impulses, then what is there to explain the origin of sexuality that is supposed to be traumatic in itself? Instead of eliminating the need for a simple, substantial origin, Philippe Refabert points out that defining the origin in terms of the Oedipus story "makes the sexual a given, something natural, in short, a substance" (Refabert, 2014, p.12). It is inborn sexuality rather than the Oedipus complex that takes the place of the seduction and becomes the starting-point of the individual's psychosexual development. Yet the origin of the traumatic nature of sexuality remains unexplained.

A psychoanalytic account of the subject that recognises time as its essential dimension must give a pivotal role to the symptom in the formation and maintenance of personal identity, yet the myth Freud constructed around the problem of the origin only gave rise to more confusions and uncertainties within

the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. During the mid-1920s, it finally became a painful conflict involving different positions and interests between Freud and his faithful disciples. Otto Rank, who was once regarded as Freud's "favourite son" and designated heir, put forward the theory of birth trauma that directly challenged the original status of the Oedipal narrative. The opening pages of his book *The Trauma of Birth* shows a similar fascination about the origin, as the following arguments "indicate a first attempt to apply the psychoanalytic way of thinking, as such, to the comprehension of the whole development of mankind, even of the actual fact of becoming human" (Rank, 1924a, p.xi). To Rank, the incapability of Freudian psychoanalysis to provide a definitive account of the origin suggested the natural limitation of its methodology as well as its foundation. Meanwhile, his own clinical work led him to reach a conclusion that:

In attempting to reconstruct for the first time from analytic experiences the to all appearances purely physical birth trauma with its prodigious psychological consequences for the whole development of mankind, we are led to recognize in the birth trauma the ultimate biological basis of the psychical. (ibid., p.xii)

Replacing the male-oriented, oedipal origin with a physiological emphasis on birth constitutes the core of Rank's theoretical innovation. Downplaying the role of the Oedipal complex and its accompanying castration anxiety, Rank argued that the infant's separation from the maternal body is the original event that introduces the pleasure-unpleasure mechanism: "The child's every anxiety consists of the anxiety at birth (and the child's every pleasure aims at the re-establishing of the intrauterine primal pleasure" (ibid., p.20). The biological sense of separation will later be repeated in the infant-mother relationship when a loss of object takes place, while the anxiety felt at birth is the primary affective state which self-reproduces when similar situations are experienced by the individual in adult life. The child's mental development, therefore, becomes a process to master the unpleasant recapitulation of the birth trauma.

By claiming in the preface that his theory “has proceeded from the consistent application of the method created by Freud, and from the doctrine based on the method” (Rank, 1924a, p.xii), Rank presented the manuscript of his book to Freud not only as a birthday gift, but also as a development based on Freud’s own concepts. However, this alternative answer to the problem of the origin did not get a warm reception. Although his attitude towards Rank’s theses remained ambivalent for a long time¹⁵, Freud’s criticism of the birth trauma theory in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) was unequivocal: “I do not believe, therefore, that Rank’s attempt has solved the problems of the causation of neurosis; nor do I believe that we can say as yet how much it may nevertheless have contributed to such a solution” (Freud, 1926, p.152).

Many possible factors contributed to Freud’s break with Rank. Leaving the political and institutional ones aside, whose detail has already been well documented,¹⁶ Freud was mostly unsatisfied with Rank’s treatment of the Oedipus complex. He did not appreciate Rank’s attempt to “supplement the Oedipus theory from a biologic point of view” (Rank, 1924b, p.245), but questioned his motivation with a psychoanalytic interpretation:

The exclusion of the father in your theory seems to reveal too much the result of personal influences in your life which I think I recognize and my

¹⁵ Shortly after receiving Rank’s book, Freud in his correspondence with Abraham remarked that “I have no doubt in saying that I hold this work to be very important, that it has given me a lot to think about and that I haven’t yet reached an opinion” (Freud & Abraham, 1969, p.352). The theory of birth trauma clearly forced Freud to suspect the validity of the Oedipal origin. As in the conclusion part of *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex* (1924), Freud admitted that “since the publication of Otto Rank’s interesting study, *The Trauma of Birth*, even the conclusion arrived at by this modest investigation, to the effect that the boy’s Oedipus complex is destroyed by the fear of castration, cannot be accepted without further discussion” (Freud, 1924, p.179).

¹⁶ Rank’s theoretical innovation heralded his own intellectual independence while the “active therapy” he elaborated and advocated in his book deviated from classical psychoanalytic practice, both of which threatened Freud’s leading role in the psychoanalytic movement. See Bókay, A. 1998, Obaid, F. P. 2012.

suspicion grows that you would not have written this book had you gone through an analysis yourself (Taft, 1958, p. 99).

However, it is difficult to justify Freud's insistence on the primacy of the role of the father and his refusal to accept the existence of a more primitive stage that takes precedence over the Oedipal, especially if we consider that Freud himself had thought about the connection between birth and trauma in his first theory of anxiety neurosis, long before Rank's subversive publication. In a footnote added in 1909 to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud acknowledged his appreciation of "the importance of phantasies and unconscious thoughts about life in the womb":

They contain an explanation of the remarkable dread that many people have of being buried alive; and they also afford the deepest unconscious basis for the belief in survival after death, which merely represents a projection into the future of this uncanny life before birth. Moreover, the act of birth is the first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety (Freud, 1900, p.400).

Comparing with Rank's view, Freud's original explanation of anxiety formation also contained a biological dimension. It was not part of Freud's thinking on the psychoneuroses, which was his focus in the early 1890s, but instead came from the toxic theory he formulated in his writings on the actual neuroses. According to Freud, the actual neuroses were caused by the insufficient libidinal discharge that brought sexual toxins into the autonomic nervous system, which explained the clinical similarity between the neuroses derived only from disturbance of sexual life and "the phenomena of intoxication and abstinence that arise from the habitual use of toxic, pleasure-producing substances" (Freud, 1905b, p.216). The build-up of toxic substances thus produced anxiety as the physiological response. In *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-1917), Freud specified that the act of birth was the first time when the infant was put into the state of auto-intoxication: "the immense increase of stimulation owing to the interruption of the renovation of the blood (internal respiration) was at the time the cause of the experience of anxiety; the first anxiety was thus a toxic one" (Freud, 1917, p.396).

Therefore, by rejecting Rank's arguments, Freud was also distanced from his past self whose thinking had prepared, if not reached, Rank's theory of the birth trauma. As Freud admitted in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, "Rank's contention – which was originally my own –, that the affect of anxiety is a consequence of the event of birth and a repetition of the situation then experienced, obliged me to review the problem of anxiety once more" (Freud, 1926, p.161). With the advent of his structural theory, Freud's second theory of anxiety is framed within the psychical system. Anxiety becomes a signal of the danger originating from intrapsychic conflicts among different agencies (instinctual drives, superego prohibition, external reality demands). Although Freud acknowledged that the act of birth is experienced in a state of helplessness, he questioned whether the impressions made on the infants have deterministic relationships with their later phobias. Without reaching the stage of psychic maturity, "it is not credible that a child should retain any but tactile and general sensations relating to the process of birth" (Freud, 1926, p.135). Instead, the danger of birth, which "has yet no psychical content", can only be spoken of after the idea of a loss of the object has formed during the Oedipal stage.

In my investigation of the Freud-Rank debate, I am not concerned so much with its detailed content as with its underlying logic. Despite their differences, Freud's and Rank's arguments about the origin of the neuroses are all set along a linear axis of time. Rank returns to the chronological beginning of human existence, proposing an origin as a prototypic physiological experience of trauma, while Freud adopts a regressive approach, insisting that the oedipal myth is the beginning of meaning-making that provides us with an epistemological structure for interpreting the unknown biological sensations. In both cases, the origin is regarded as an occurrence taking place within time, succeeded by other moments that constitute a change in the temporal flow. Our ability to experience time is thus reduced to an ability to count different events in a succession of standardised moments. The temptation to think of the origin as being "located in" time follows the logic of spatialisation that exchanges the temporal concepts with conceptual

content from the spatial domain. Such an approach to the origin is ultimately a failure since it asks about the sense of being in time on the basis of a taken-for-granted existence of the being of time that is objective, linear and unary.

Understanding the problematic assumption which underlies the Freud-Rank debate helps us assess further the theoretical significance of Lacan's reconceptualisation of the origin. At first glance, Lacan's theory of the origin belongs to a linear temporal scheme. In his early piece of work *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu* (1938), published in volume 8 of the *Encyclopédie Française*, Lacan summarised different complexes in a linear sequence that "play the role of 'organisers' in psychic development" (Lacan, 1938, p.14): The first stage is the weaning complex, in which the infant experiences both the biological and psychic crises when losing the maternal breast. The second stage is the complex of intrusion, representing the infant's experience when interacting with fellow human beings such as siblings. The third stage is the Oedipus complex that defines the psychic relationships within the human family. By presenting the developmental trajectory of the psyche in this way, Lacan's understanding of the origin stands closer to Otto Rank's theory of birth trauma. As Lacan argues:

(The infant's separation from the maternal breast) gives the first and also the most adequate psychic expression to the more obscure imago of an earlier, more painful weaning that is of greater vital importance, that which, at birth, separates the infant from the womb, a premature separation from which comes a malaise that no maternal care can compensate for (ibid., p.20).

By prioritising the weaning complex, Lacan locates the primary affective relationship between the infant and the mother, since "nothing but the imago which is imprinted at the deepest level of the mind by the congenital weaning of man can explain the power, richness and duration of maternal sentiments" (ibid.). The Oedipus complex, on the other hand, is situated not at the beginning but as the ending, "the high point of infantile sexuality" (ibid., p.44), through which the

paternal figure marks both the ego-ideal and the super-ego. Yet while Freud insists that the castration complex must be confined to excitations that are bound up with the loss of the penis, Lacan emphasises that even the super-ego has a maternal origin. He understands the concept of castration not as the paternal punishment of the “eruption of genital desire in the subject”, but as “the anxiety this object awakens by reproducing the masochistic rejection through which he overcame his primordial loss” (ibid., p.45). We can find a similar if not identical statement in Rank’s *the Trauma of Birth*: “The importance of the castration fear is based...on the primal castration at birth, that is, on the separation of the child from the mother” (Rank, 1924a, p.20).

However, as Shuli Barzilai notices, the theoretical connection between Lacan and Rank in *Les complexes familiaux* is not openly acknowledged by Lacan (Barzilai, 1999, p.30). On several occasions, Lacan instead appears reluctant to accept the birth trauma theory. Only several pages after his statement that “the biological crisis (of weaning) is duplicated by a psychic crisis”, Lacan admits that “with our knowledge of the data of physiology...It is however impossible to see birth, as certain psychoanalysts do, as a psychic trauma” (Lacan, 1938, p.19). In his later work, Lacan seems to adopt a Freudian regressive approach to the origin and more clearly parts company with Rank. In *Seminar XI*, when again discussing different stages of childhood development, Lacan returns to the standard Freudian explanation. As Freud in *The Infantile Genital Organization* (1923) argues that “one ought not to speak of a castration complex until this idea of a loss has become connected with male genitals” (Freud, 1923c, p.144), Lacan now suggests that “the fear of castration is like a thread that perforates all the stages of development. It orientates the relations that are anterior to its actual appearance – weaning, toilet training, etc.” (Lacan, 1998, p.64).

So how can we make sense of Lacan’s changing positions in relation to the problem of the origin? Different from Shuli Barzilai who believes that Lacan revises his remapping of the psychical trajectory of the subject so that the paternal figure and

the phallic signifier are granted more significant status while the maternal role is gradually marginalised if not entirely excluded from the process of subject-formation (Barzilai, 1999), I argue that Lacan's understanding of the origin in his late work cannot be regarded merely as a demonstration of his affiliation with Freud. In fact, a closer investigation suggests that it remains consistent with his early thinking in *Les complexes familiaux*, both of which follow a temporal logic different from the linear, objective one. To begin with, despite all the similarities, Lacan's early formulation of the weaning complex is ontologically different from Rank's birth trauma. To Rank, birth trauma is "the ultimate biological basis of the physical" (Rank, 1924a, p.xii). It is a strict biological mechanism that lays the ground for psychic development. As Obaid points out, when Rank argues that every anxiety consists of the anxiety of birth, he means literally that anxiety experienced in the course of life is "an exact and complete physiological reproduction of that event" (Obaid, 2012, p.698), not in an allegorical or metaphorical way. Lacan's weaning complex, on the other hand, goes directly against this biological interpretation. Although it "appears with such broadly similar traits throughout the human species that it can be seen as generic" (ibid., p.15), Lacan stresses that "it is a cultural regulation that conditions weaning" (ibid.). The weaning complex continues to influence the human while the animal ceases to be driven by the maternal instinct with the completion of suckling, according to Lacan, due to the fact that weaning is a crisis of the psyche in response to an essential human characteristic, 'prematurity'.

The concept of prematurity is the key to understanding Lacan's account of the origin to which he frequently refers in his writings, mostly in the form of the "specific prematurity of birth". Drawing on anatomical evidence in modern biology, Lacan postulates a primordial discord between the human species and the environment at birth, in contrast to other new-born animals such as apes which have a greater control of motor coordination and are better adapted to the surroundings. "The apparatus which in the organism plays the role of nervous system, still a matter for debate, is not complete at birth" (Lacan, 1988a, p.149). In the case of the weaning complex, the prematurity of birth as a biological deficiency

that characterises humans “explains both the general nature of the complex and its independence of the accidents of ablactation” (Lacan, 1938, p.19). However, more than a biological phenomenon that explains the vital powerlessness and the psychic helplessness at birth, prematuration continues to be an important mechanism that organises the whole process of subject-formation in Lacan’s work. In the complex of intrusion, prematuration leads to a prolonged non-coordination between the body and the psychic function. The anticipated psychological mastery to solve this tension is manifested as an adaptive behaviour followed by a jubilant expression when one confronts one’s mirror image. In the Oedipus complex, the frustration one experiences when one’s attachment to the desired object cannot be realised is “inherent to the essential prematurity of the drives” (ibid., p.36). Lacan explains this point in detail:

The psychic correction of sexual prematurity is ensured by the super-ego when it represses the biologically inadequate object that the first sexual maturation proposes to desire and by the ego-ideal when it brings about an imaginary identification that will orient the [subject's] choice towards the biologically adequate object when pubertal maturity comes (ibid., p.71).

In these statements, we can see that what has been granted formative priority is not the weaning complex but prematuration as an everlasting and ongoing process. Lacan’s formulation of the three complexes of early childhood is not developmental since each of them is experienced as the present at that moment, with prematuration as the determinant principle which transforms and modifies relations within these complexes in which it appears. In this process, the original “specific prematurity of birth” as a biological phenomenon is doubled by another form of prematurity. While the human organism is premature in relation to the environment, the psychological mastery of the body through ego formation is also premature: “The sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery” (Lacan, 1988a, p.79). As Lacan further points out, the imaginary mastery can be anticipated and achieved prematurely because of the totality of the symbolic

universe, which predetermines one's subject position before one is ready to step in. The subject, therefore, sees its own image in the eyes of the Other: "The thing that we have tried to designate in the prematurity of birth...is that through the image of the other man finds the unification of his most elementary movements, whether it is there or elsewhere that this begins, what is certain, is that these images in their anarchic state characteristic of the human order, of the human species, are influenced, are caught up, are utilized by signifying management" (Lacan, 1958, p.82).

In *Seminar II*, Lacan provides a definition of the human being: "Psychoanalysis stresses that man isn't an object, but a being in the process of becoming" (Lacan, 1988b, p.105). I argue that the notion of prematuration perfectly explains this definition by bringing together two different but essential temporal registers of the human being in Lacan's theory. One is Real time, in which the human body is always in the process of becoming because of biological inadequacy; the other is Symbolic time, in which the subject is always-already presupposed before the physiological maturation is completed in order to enable its own formation. In response to the central temporal paradox in the Freud-Rank debate – the fundamental desynchrony between the biological origin and the symbolic origin of the subject – Lacan refuses to choose either along a linear timeline. Instead, he points out that this temporal desynchrony or the splitting of the timeline is the actual original mechanism that shapes the subjective structure in which the origin as a single moment is projected into the past, as something that comes too early, is too premature.

At the root of Lacan's thinking, we find that the temporal condition of subjectivity is redefined in the horizon of the present. While the Freudian account of the origin based on a linear notion of time is trapped largely, if not exclusively, in the past, Lacan argues that the origin of the present can only be revealed in the present itself. In *Seminar II*, Lacan has a discussion of this "common mistake" in one's quest for the origin: "When something comes to light, something which we are forced to

consider as new; when another structural order emerges, well then, it creates its own perspective within the past, and we say – This can never not have been there, this has existed from the beginning. Besides, isn't that a property which our own experience demonstrates?" (Lacan, 1988b, p.5). The subjective temporal experience is fundamentally an experience of difference when the subject engages with something present in various instances of the Now, however, because of the symbolic universe as a field of meaning which precedes the subject: "what appears to be new thus always seems to extend itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to itself" (ibid.). Insofar as the origin is understood as a past event that acts at a distance upon the present one, assigned a fixed place in the sequence of instances that can be arranged linearly, difference is reduced to repetition. What appears to be new is disguised in the form of a consequence in regard to the representation of the past. The dilemma is that while the ontological bearing of the present requires the origin, the Freudian origin itself eliminates the present. By taking prematuration as the origin that is contemporaneous with the present yet conditions the very experience of lack which causes the present to pass, Lacan's origin becomes an a priori horizon for the possibilities of being to manifest themselves in the present and thereby embraces changes that are contained in the moment of the Now.¹⁷

4.2 Primal Repression and Temporal Binding

In order to further comprehend the decisive significance of the idea of dual temporality in Lacan's theorisation of subject-formation, we ought to have another look at his analysis of primal repression, which, in Lacan's reading, is the fundamental mechanism that "essentially determines the unconscious" (Lacan, 1998, p.60). In Freudian metapsychology, primal repression is a difficult concept that has not been given sufficient elaboration in his subsequent writings. However,

¹⁷ The lack introduced by prematuration should be understood on two planes: the biological plane and the symbolic plane. As Lacan points out: "The gap opened up in the human being by the original biological presence in him of death, due to what I have called the prematurity of birth. This is the point of impact where the symbolic intrudes" (Lacan, 1958, p.3).

its significant status is undeniable, considering that in his later work *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, Freud takes the subsequent correction of primal repression as “the real achievement of analytic therapy” (Freud, 1937, p.227). It is common among Freudian commentators to take the idea of primal repression and the way Freud distinguishes it from repression proper or after-pressure as an explicit reference to the chronological priority of this type of repression in a linear axis of time. For example, Nunberg (1955) claims that all later repression are repetitions of the primal repression; Frank (1969) understands primal repression as “the unrememberable and the unforgettable” residue of the original trauma; Mangini (2010) suggests that the primal repression is the “first moment” of repression, “an original event that each time triggers a possible opening towards thinkability...avoiding the discharge of excitation and the experience of primal anxiety” (p. 54). Just as castration anxiety in the Oedipus complex is regarded by Freud as the origin of all neuroses, these readings take primal repression as the corresponding defence mechanism developed at the same time in the child’s psychosexual development. However, is this equation between primal repression and the “earliest” repression supported by Freud’s own writings?

In his 1915 metapsychology papers entitled *Repression* and *The Unconscious*, Freud for the first time presents the idea of primal repression¹⁸, yet his explanation is brief and vague. In *The Unconscious*, primal repression is introduced to solve the dilemma Freud confronts when he tries to apply the energetic principle to the process of repression. In the case of repression (repression proper), an idea is

¹⁸ Frank and Muslin (1967) argue that Freud’s thinking on primal repression can be traced back to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), in which he proposes a number of general principles and specific characteristics that fit into his later formulation of primal repression. For example, Freud discusses “infantile memories” and “wishful impulses” that are inaccessible to the preconscious system, the repression of which has a powerful influence on other mental activities. However, in my opinion, the difference between Freud’s early view of some “primarily repressed instincts”, which is caused either by an inhibition in development or a fixation in an infantile state, and his notion of primal repression cannot be overlooked. While the former is speculated on from a developmental perspective, the latter is situated in a structural model. The conflation of these two different ideas may be a reason for the popular misunderstanding of primal repression.

denied entrance into the conscious through the withdrawal of the preconscious cathexis. For this to happen, the same idea must have been cathected by the preconscious before. However, as Freud realises:

When it comes to describing primal repression, the mechanism just discussed of withdrawal of preconscious cathexis would fail to meet the case; for here we are dealing with an unconscious idea which has yet received no cathexis from the Pcs, and therefore cannot have that cathexis withdrawn from it (Freud, 1915c, pp.180–181).

A different mechanism must be put forward to account for primal repression, which is designated by Freud as anticathexis. It “represents the permanent expenditure [of energy] of a primal repression” (ibid.). However, Freud does not demonstrate how this mechanism works in primal repression. It is unclear from where anticathexis acquires its energy since Freud’s following speculation that “the cathexis which is withdrawn from the idea is used for anticathexis” clearly does not apply to the case of primal repression, in which case no cathexis is withdrawn. Freud’s other paper *Repression* also offers little help, as in the only place where primal repression is defined, another obscure concept is put forward to designate the object of anticathexis: “We have reason to assume that there is a primal repression, a first phase of repression, which consists in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious” (Freud, 1915b, p.148).

Therefore, clarifying the meaning of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* becomes the only entry for us to get valuable insights into the nature and mechanism of primal repression. The first issue concerns the translation of this concept. *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* consists of two individual parts: *Vorstellung* and *Repräsentanz*. In the philosophical and psychological sense, the former is traditionally translated as mental representation¹⁹, while the latter is the

¹⁹ Fayek in his paper (2002) argues that *Vorstellung* should be translated as presentation while mental representation is a misapplication of Freud’s concept.

corresponding term for representative. To Freud, the mental representation is the mental image of the intentional object in the external world. As we have already discussed in chapter two, Freud defines the conscious as the quality of these representations in the *Project*. Representative, on the other hand, can be understood in the sense of delegation. Now we can have a look at how these two individual parts are meaningfully combined in the available translations of this Freudian expression.

In the standard edition, *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is translated as “ideational representative”. The popular Spanish translation is “representante-representativo” (representative-representative); while the Italian translation is “rappresentanza rappresentativa” (representative representation) or “rappresentanza data da una rappresentazione” (representative given by a representation). The Spanish one is clearly a mistake as the adjective “representante” is not derived from the noun “representación”, which is the corresponding Spanish word for *Vorstellung*. Despite all the formal differences, the other three translations mean more or less the same if we investigate the mechanism they attempt to describe. In his other writings, Freud has already used *psychische Repräsentanz* to describe the instinct (Freud, 1905b, p.168, 1915a, p.122). According to Freud, the instinct as a somatic force cannot be represented in the psyche. Instead, it has a psychological representative that is knowable through the way the discharge of excitations at the level of the body affects the psyche. However, the question remains whether the representative of the instinct itself is a representation. This problem is further complicated since in the *Unconscious*, where Freud argues that “an instinct can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea [Vorstellung] that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea” (Freud, 1915c, p.177). This statement suggests that the instinct can be

Although the same concept in Brentano’s philosophy – which heavily influences Freud’s thinking – is often translated as ‘presentation’ not as ‘representation’, I prefer the term “representation” since the contemporary usage of “presentation” in philosophy and psychology minimises the difference between perception and presentation, which is not the intention when Freud and Brentano use *Vorstellung*. Both of them emphasise that the mental image bears the mark of a psychological rework or an attributive synthesis that can be understood as a re-presentation.

represented by an idea which contradicts the basic assumption of Freudian metapsychology that the instinct is unrepresentable, unless we reach a compromise that the representative of the instinct itself is a mental representation in the psyche. This is the basic idea embedded in the other three translations, that “the representative or delegate of the drive (instinct) in the psyche is one that is of the nature of a mental representation, which has the attribute of being itself a mental representation” (Herrera, 2010, p.797).

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan provides his own reading of Freud’s primal repression through a discussion of different translations of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. Although Lacan’s target is the standard French translation “représentant-représentatif” (representative-representative), which makes the same mistake as the Spanish translation, only a few readers have noticed that Lacan’s own translation – “représentatif de la représentation” (representative of the representation) - is also different from Strachey’s choice in the *SE*. Herrera, a supporter of the English translation of this term, believes that “Lacan has gone astray when he translates *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as ‘représentatif de la représentation’”, which contains the definite article “la” (the) that is absent in Freud’s original formulation. Trivial as this problem appears at first glance, Herrera argues that in the same way “silk dress” is totally different from “the dress of the silk”:

Lacan’s mistranslation of the Freudian compound inverts the relation which in German exists between both concepts: we no longer have a representative which is of the nature of the representation; now it is the representation itself which has a representative or a tenant-lieu (ibid., p.801).

But what if this is precisely Lacan’s intention? Translating *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* in terms of “ideational representative” or “representational representative” is too problematic to help us understand the mechanism of primal repression, because firstly, it is an awkward conflation that eliminates the essential difference between representation and representative;

secondly, it fails to separate primal repression from repression proper as both of them are repressions of the representation in the psyche; thirdly, it does not explain how anticathexis, without getting energy from the withdrawal of the preconscious cathexis, can be maintained in primal repression. By contrast, Lacan's translation of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is based on a clear distinction between representation and representative. Insofar as the representation is the mnemonic-image of an external object in the conscious under the control of the ego, it is associated with signification. Meanwhile, the representative, which suggests a many-to-one relationship that finds its place in the Freudian condensation, can be substituted by what Lacan calls "metaphor" in the symbolic domain. When we use a phrase such as "the representative of France", Lacan explains, we are referring to a diplomat who is "supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier" (Lacan, 1998, p.220). Therefore, the essential point about Lacan's "representative of the representation" is to move the entire mechanism from the individual psyche to the symbolic order in which the emergence of the subject is caught up in the signifying movement. As Lacan says:

We can locate this *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* in our schema of the original mechanisms of alienation in that first signifying coupling that enables us to conceive that the subject appears first in the Other, in so far as the first signifier, the unary signifier, emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for another signifier, which other signifier has as its effect the aphanisis of the subject. Hence the division of the subject – when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading', as disappearance. There is, then, one might say, a matter of life and death between the unary signifier and the subject, qua binary signifier, cause of his disappearance. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier (ibid., p.218).

Lacan depicts *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as a two-stage mechanism. In the first stage, the unary signifier emerges in the field of the Other and is the representative of the subject as the being of desire. Since the Real dimension of the subject is unrepresentable, the unary signifier is nothing but the signifier of the lack in the

Other, yet the emptiness of its signifying value also suggests its uniqueness as a signifier of pure difference. In the second stage, the unary signifier is included in a signifying chain, in which the subject is represented by one signifier to another, maintaining the dialectical movement between appearing and fading. In this process, the unique link between the unary signifier and the subject as a Real presence is erased, and meaning is generated through the difference between signifiers. By symbolising the absence or the lack that is not present, the movement of the signifying chain marks the effacing of one's connection to things in the external world and the beginning of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signification.

In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan rejects the chronological reduction of primal repression by defining the primary repressed as the absence of repression: "The enigmatic parentheses of the *Urverdrängt* means precisely what has not had to be repressed because it has been repressed from the start" (Lacan, 2007, p.90). Instead of taking *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as a representing entity disguised as the representative and subject to repression in an early moment of the individual history, Lacan understands it as the binary signifier - the "signifier which takes the place of the signification" - that is present in every moment of psychic life and conditions the meaning-making process. The problem of the energy source of anticathexis is thus settled in Lacan's reading, as we can see that in the case of primal repression, anticathexis is not a defence mechanism to push the representation out of the Pcs. / Cs. System but an active force that invests the instinctual impulse in the signifier. In other words, what distinguishes primal repression from repression proper is that primal repression is not repression at all, but rather a "jump" from the instinctual process immersed in the bodily matrix to the signifying movement in the symbolic order. It is a binding mechanism through which the exchange between Real time and Symbolic time is made possible.

We can better understand the unique temporal implication of Lacan's idea of primal repression by revisiting Laplanche's theorisation of the same concept.

Similar to Lacan, Laplanche in his reading of Freud criticises the tendency to assimilate primal repression, as “the creator of the unconscious as a place” (Laplanche, 1999a, p.87), to an exclusively biological or instinctual process. Yet, on the other hand, he rebuilds the theoretical connection between primal seduction and primal repression, not in the sense of confirming the fixation of an actual seduction or an early seduction fantasy as the core of the unconscious, but to introduce otherness in the formation of subjectivity. Unlike many commentators who take Freud’s self-critique of his early seduction theory as a necessary theoretical development, Laplanche suggests that Freud became even more “determinist” after his abandonment of the seduction theory because of the loss of the complex play between the external and the internal reality implied by the idea of seduction – “When Freud said, ‘Now I am abandoning the idea of external causality and turning to fantasy,’ he neglected this very dialectical theory he had between the external and the internal” (Caruth, 2001, p.2). To Laplanche, we shall not look for the origin as seduction in some form of abuse but understand it as the infant’s continuous enigmatic experience in its daily interactions with adults, more specifically, the mother. In the primal relationship between the child whose mental ability is limited and immature and the parent whose psyche is “richer”, it is inevitable that some messages from the parent cannot be processed or assimilated by the child but become aliens at the heart of the subject’s own internal psychic structure. These messages pertain to the satisfaction of the child’s needs but provide more than that. Laplanche uses the example of breastfeeding to argue that for the infant, the breast is not only an object, an organ for feeding, but also an erotic zone that is pregnant with the mother’s own unconscious desire. It is the otherness embedded in this enigmatic message that produces a destabilising effect on the infant’s subjective formation and thus becomes the object of primal repression.

As we can see, in Laplanche’s theory, primal repression is a psychic response to the discrepancy between the complexity of adult communications and the immature psychic world of the infant. Seduction is not a singular event but as Hinton summarises, “a sense of provocation, charm, allure and stimulation” (Hinton, 2009,

p.642) that pertains to the whole period of the early stage of psychosexual development. It is not initiated by any specific adult in a blatantly sexual manner, but stands for the always-already sexualised world of adults that implants what Laplanche calls the “enigmatic signifier” into the childhood life as “another thing in me”.²⁰ In this sense, by introducing the other’s desire, Laplanche moves away from Freud’s original “special theory of seduction”, which, according to him, “is restricted to the most obviously psychopathological level” (Laplanche, 1989, p.115), towards a “general theory of seduction” that takes seduction as the universal foundation of every subject’s psychic structure.

We can find in Laplanche’s theory a certain alliance with Lacan’s understanding of primal repression, both of which reject the reduction of the present to a past that is constructed out of fixed contents and argue that infantile development is immersed in the symbolic world from the beginning. What is primarily repressed demands not a revelation but a re-imagination or re-translation that “would be open to all meanings, and from then on, any attribution of meaning would be purely arbitrary” (Laplanche, 1999b, p.236). More importantly, Laplanche’s reading also indicates the desynchrony between the symbolic pattern and the individual’s existing pattern, experienced in the form of “too late” and “too early”. As Žižek points out: “The child is originally helpless, thrown into the world when he is unable to take care of himself – that is, his or her survival skills develop too late; at the same time, the encounter with the sexualized Other always, by a structural necessity, comes ‘too soon’, as an unexpected shock which can never be properly symbolised, translated into the universe of meaning” (Žižek, 2009, p.20). However, several crucial differences between Laplanche and Lacan cannot be overlooked. While Laplanche emphasises the role of the other in the development of subjectivity, Lacan believes that it is the Other as the symbolic order that has the

²⁰ Despite many theoretical nuances between them, Forrester’s interpretation of seduction follows the same logic as that of Laplanche. “It is not so much the presexual sexual shock or the fright induced in the child that is aetiologically significant,” he suggests, “rather, it is the implication of the child in a world that is foreign to it, a world which it is nonetheless destined, come puberty, to be obliged to make its own” (Forrester, 1991, p.80).

fundamental formative effect on subjectivity. Although Laplanche adopts the term “enigmatic signifier” from Lacan, he is reluctant to go as far as to say that the unconscious itself is structured like a language. To him, the unconscious is still an intrapsychic reservoir of unassimilated representations around which a series of attempts of meaning assignment throughout one’s life history is organised, yet in this case, the unconscious process is regarded as a hierarchised paradigm in which signifiers received earlier are prioritised. On the other hand, in Lacan’s theory, we cannot find the idea that the symbolic intervention will be more significant when the individual’s psyche is less mature. As I have discussed earlier, Lacan’s notion of prematuration designates an ongoing experience of temporal discord that extends to the Oedipal stage and later. In so doing, the linear notion of time is most radically eliminated and replaced by the absolute otherness of Symbolic time.

Secondly, Lacan’s understanding of primal repression endows the subject with a more active role in one’s interaction with the symbolic world. In Laplanche’s case, although the infant is allowed to perform creative activities in response to the enigmatic signifier, it is only a passive subject that receives the message at the beginning, whose enigmatic, destabilising nucleus is totally determined by the other’s desire. This idea that primal repression is an unconscious process through which an external enigmatic signifier is repressed within the individual’s internal psychic life is rejected by Lacan, who argues, on the contrary, that at the very moment of primal repression:

Something of the subject becomes detached in the very symbolic world that he is engaged in integrating. From then on, it will no longer be something belonging to the subject. The subject will no longer speak it, will no longer integrate it. Nevertheless, it will remain there, somewhere, spoken, if one can put it this way, by something the subject does not control (Lacan, 1988a, p.191).

In Lacan’s reading, primal repression is not a moment of integration when the embodiment of the other’s desire becomes a part of one’s own but rather a moment of disintegration. Following Freud’s original account that the permanent

expenditure of energy of primal repression attaches itself to an idea in the form of anticathexis, the Lacanian primal repression is an active investment in a signifier that replaces the subject's Real being with a symbolic existence. This signifier signifies not any particular object or event, but the very capacity of signification, the capacity of the subject "being signified". Although the symbolic order in which the subject's identity is defined is uncontrollable, functioning according to its own time, it is the nascent subject that initiates its own disintegration through the choice to "bind" its own living pattern with the symbolic movement. The idea of "determining one's own determination" can once again be found in this unique model of subjectivity made possible by primal repression, which transcends the bodily reality itself and reaches beyond to its own alien and thereby constitutes a compelling ground for an ontological dualism of Real time and Symbolic Time.

4.3 Mirror Stage, Alienation and Separation

Lacan devotes a great deal of explicit text to the discussion of the Freudian origin, in which his understanding of the time of symptom-formation can be extracted, yet there is no better place to obtain full comprehension of Lacan's thinking on this topic than his own narrative of the origin. In his 1949 essay, *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function*, Lacan provides an original account of the birth of a conscious subjective life by illustrating a metaphorical scene in which the infant comes to see and recognise an external image of their own body in the mirror. As a theory concerning the very beginning of subjectivity, the theory of the mirror stage also marks the beginning of Lacan's intellectual career. It has now become a tale of revenge that a young scholar whose debut at the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) Congress is not well accepted later finds his own path to becoming a worldwide renowned psychoanalyst and leads a strong anti-institutional movement in the history of psychoanalysis. Although to some degree, the theory of the mirror stage can be seen as a developed version of the intrusion complex Lacan put forward in his 1938 paper, the ontological ground on which the problem of the origin is discussed has been changed. Lacan moves from the discussion of the origin of psychoneurotic symptoms in a strictly pathological sense towards an exploration of the actual process of subject-formation that is

symptomatic in a more general sense. Meanwhile, the idea of dual temporality remains the underlying principle throughout this theoretical transformation. The fact that Lacan's own intellectual origin is accompanied by the Other's misrecognition proves the key point he makes in the paper that the origin of subjectivity is characterised by a "primordial discord" between the individual existence and the surrounding world.

Before discussing the psychic process involved in the mirror stage in detail, it will be helpful to first turn to the mirror experiments conducted by Henri Wallon, a French psychologist whose work is often considered as an important resource for Lacan's thinking. In his book *Les Origines du Caractère chez l'Enfant*, Wallon documents a series of experiments that compare the developmental difference between human and chimpanzee infants. He notices that while the human infant is able to form a reciprocal relationship between the self and its reflection in the mirror, the animal, on the other hand, fails to identify with its image. Through this identification, Wallon argues that immediate experience and transitory impressions of the human infant become "fixed by images initially concrete and seemingly coextensive with their object, and then give way to symbolic transmutations of pure and stable representation" (Wallon, 1949, p.183). This idea clearly resonates in Lacan's study of the mirror stage. Although Wallon's name is not singled out for recognition in Lacan's 1949 essay, his observation is mentioned as "a fact of comparative psychology": "The human child, at an age when he is for a short while, but for a while nevertheless, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can already recognize his own image as such in a mirror" (Lacan, 2006k, p.75). To Lacan, the mirror stage provides the infant with the first experience of unity that subsumes the chaotic bodily sensations. The moment when the infant, "in a flutter of jubilant activity...take(s) in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in mind" (ibid., p.76) marks the decisive transformation from an undifferentiated, narcissistic state to the emergence of self-differentiation and self-consciousness.

However, Lacan not only assimilates Wallon's empirical experiments and conceptual paradigms, but he also radically reworks the latter to the extent that he can speak of the idea of the mirror stage as his own "invention". In fact, it would be odd for Lacan, who is always sceptical of biologism, to make use of a biological experiment as his theoretical foundation without giving it a philosophical reading. The mirror mechanism Lacan presents in his essay parts company with Wallon's description on several crucial points. Whereas to Wallon, the mirror image is indeed the true image of the infant, only located at a different point in space; Lacan sees it rather as an illusion that promises the infant whose body is fragmented because of man's prematurity at birth a "total form of his body" (ibid., p.76). The imaginary mastery of one's own body is achieved through a form of anticipation rather than recognition, and the ego-formation is not the result of self-maturation but the incorporation of the other at the expense of one's primary self-being. It is an indication of an altered relationship between oneself and the other. Lacan follows Freud to define the ego as a bodily ego, but it is not simply a representation of reality but "the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development" (ibid.). Therefore, we can understand why the infant's jubilant experience in Lacan's account is reduced to a short moment. Far from being the ultimate harmony between the internal and the external envisioned by Wallon, Lacan's mirror stage is characterised by a fundamental loss of being that prefigures the constituted subject's alienating destination.

The cause of the divergence between Wallon's and Lacan's theoretical formulations is a difference of the underlying logic. For Wallon, what matters in the mirror stage is the ability to experience oneself as spatial and to comprehend the spatial relationship between model and image. By recognising what is "there" is also what is "here", the infant develops the spatial intuition to coordinate his own bodily existence with the environment. Lacan, on the other hand, introduces a temporal tension into this narrative. He makes this point clear in *Seminar VIII* that in the mirror stage, "There are not only spatial relationships that refer to the specular image it begins to come alive and become the other incarnate," since "there is also

a temporal relationship” (Lacan, 2015, p.363). The infant not only perceives the unity of its body image from the outside but also “in an anticipated manner” (Lacan, 1988b, p.166). Insofar as the infant’s psychic maturation is achieved “too late” while the total image is presented to him or her “too early”, “This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation” (Lacan, 2006k, p.78). The mirror image, as Lacan states in the *Subversion of the Subject*, “is the anticipated image – which had caught of himself in his mirror- coming to meet him” (Lacan, 2006m, p.684). It compresses the temporal state of human subjectivity into a spatial term. In this sense, the relationship between different positions in space is also temporal. The mirror image as something “there” is the very (imaginary) future of the individual’s bodily formation, something that I am not at this moment but anticipate becoming.

If this is the case, we can argue that what is misrecognised in the mirror stage is not only one’s self-image but one’s bodily time. The body image is not the result of reflectively representing the unified whole of one’s own body but a condensation of the flow of bodily related experiences, a “momentary snapshot” that imposes limits on the movement of the body. The perpetual exteriority of the mirror image is also a form of the absolute impossibility that always postpones the completion of self-recognition. The ego that comes into being takes what has not been realised as the very present, from where inner time-consciousness is developed, yet the illusion of “having been there” only temporarily covers the gap between the Real body and its completed gestalt, a gap that always threatens to break down the subject’s familiar sense of self-identity as well as the conscious temporal order. Therefore, we can understand why Lacan’s mirror stage is not the final stage of subject-formation, nor is it a particular phase of early childhood in Wallon’s view of human teleological development. Instead, Lacan points out that identification with the self-image is the “rootstock of secondary identifications” (ibid, p.76) that initiates a permanent subjective movement through various stages of identification/alienation. The tension between disorganised Real time and

conscious time that is imaginarily synthesised will extend to the whole lifespan of the subject.

Apart from Real time that stands for the primordial instability of human identity, against which the constituted ego performs its “libidinal normalisation functions” (ibid.), another temporal modality is required to make the mirror stage possible in the first place. If the mirror stage is considered as the birth of self- and other-consciousness, one is left with the puzzle of “how is the infant able to differentiate his mirror image in an undifferentiated, self-absorbing state that is defined by Freud as primary narcissism?” In Freud’s account, primary narcissism refers to the libidinal state of an infant in which all libido is directed towards itself (Freud, 1914a). It is a continuation of the intrauterine life that lacks the distinction between the external and the internal. The mirror stage marks the end of this pre-subjective stage, but this seemingly natural process only makes sense if one examines it retrospectively. It is not clear how the infant leaves the undifferentiated state when one has yet to acquire a limited sense of self. Lacan himself realises this problem in *Seminar VIII*:

Now, if one begins with a notion like that of an initially perfect narcissism as regards libidinal cathexis, and if one thinks that the primordial object is originally included in the subject in the narcissistic sphere – which is a primitive monad of jouissance, with which the infant is identified, in a way that is quite iffy – it is difficult to see what could lead to a subjective exit from it (Lacan, 2015, p.348).

If the mirror stage is accomplished by the infant alone, we face the logical difficulty that an intentionality to see must be prior to the act of (mis)recognition; but given that the mirror stage is the very mechanism that creates self-consciousness and establishes the boundary between self and other, there appears to be no subject that can initiate the whole process. What becomes clear in this analysis is that on its own terms the mirror stage as a theory of the origin is inadequate, for its commitment to illustrating the self-creation of human consciousness always requires a primordial form of self before its own creation. Confronting this dilemma,

Lacan's solution is not to presuppose some form of mysterious enlightenment in primary narcissism, such as "some ante-specular apprehension of the other, and of the ego" (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991, p.66), but to introduce the Other's intervention from another temporal register that supplements the theory of the mirror stage with a narrative of the pre-subjective stage.

To begin with, Lacan points out that what co-exists with the infant's pre-subjective state is the "symbolic matrix", "in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other" (Lacan, 2006k, p.76). The symbolic dimension is not developed after one's imaginary fulfilment but presented as a constitutive background of the individual's nascent existence against which the subject's ego ideal is formed through primary identification.²¹ The idea of primary identification is a controversial concept in Freudian psychoanalysis. Its theoretical and empirical validity is often questioned for two main reasons. Firstly, Freud defines primary identification as "a direct and immediate identification (that) takes place earlier than any object-cathexis" (Freud, 1923a, p.31), yet it is difficult to imagine an identification without any prior object-choice. Secondly, Freud argues that primary identification is the "identification with the father in his own personal prehistory", although the libidinous investment on the mother is dominant in the pre-Oedipal phase.²² In Seminar XVII, Lacan

²¹ Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) seems to misread Lacan, as she criticises Lacan's theory of the mirror stage for a lack of explanation of the transition from the pre-symbolic to the symbolic. In fact, Lacan's theory is consistent with her argument that for the infant to differentiate the other and identify oneself as a subject-self, the mirror stage must already appear to be symbolic.

²² There is a large body of literature on the topic of "primary identification". Post-Freudian theorists coming from traditions of ego psychology and object relations theory find it hard to digest Freud's original idea that the father is the object of primary identification. Some understand it as a bodily experience without an object. Joseph Sandler for example, restricts his discussion of primary identification as a sense of fusion between the self and the not-self. He dismisses the connection between primary identification and superego formation and attributes the later fully to secondary identification (Sandler, 1960). Simo Salonen, on the other hand, admits the importance of primary identification for the well-being of the individual, but refuses to define a particular object. For her, the aim of primary identification is

notices this “strange contradiction” in Freud’s description of primary identification: “one will speak about primary identification as what binds the child to the mother, and indeed this seems self-evident. However, if we refer to Freud, to his work of 1921 called *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, it is quite precisely the identification with the father that is given as primary. This is certainly very odd” (Lacan, 2007, p.88). Yet instead of following the discourse of post-Freudian psychoanalysts “concerning the primacy of the child’s relationship with the mother”, Lacan introduces the symbolic dimension to defend Freudian discourse. Primary identification can take place before any object-cathexis only if it takes place in the stage of primary narcissism, when subject and object have not been differentiated; meanwhile, identification with “the father in his own personal prehistory” only makes sense if we understand the prehistory as a part of the signifying movement in the symbolic order, and thus take the father not as a real paternal figure but as the representative of the big Other:

The single stroke (primary identification), in so far as the subject clings to it, is in the field of desire, which cannot in any sense be constituted other than in the reign of the signifier, other than at the level in which there is a relation of the subject to the Other. It is the field of the Other that determines the function of the single stroke, in so far as it is from it that a major stage of identification is established in the topography then developed by Freud – namely, idealization, the ego ideal (Lacan, 1998, p.256).

The interplay between Real time and Symbolic time already exists in primary narcissism, as the pre-subjective infant is caught between the bodily experience of fragmentation and the uncertainty of the other’s desire. Thus, the primary

to form a representative space of the ego that guarantees the constancy of personal experience against unsheltered, traumatic circumstances. Understood in this way, primary identification only needs to be instituted through early contact with, vaguely, “another human similar to oneself” (Salonen, 1989, p.114). Others turn their attention to the mother. Jacobson substitutes primary identification with “primitive identification” in order to highlight the infant’s original union with the mother (Jacobson, 1964). Identification with the father thus becomes a secondary process, which requires a move of “dis-identifying” (Greenson, 1968) with the primary object of one’s identification, the mother, as the first step.

identification with the Other is prior to the imaginary identification with one's total image of the body. The emergence of the ego ideal is prior to the creation of the ideal ego in the mirror stage. In fact, the presence of the Other in the form of the ego ideal is a necessary precondition for Lacan's mirror stage. Contra Wallon, Lacan argues that it is crucial for the infant standing in front of the mirror to be accompanied by an adult caretaker so that the mirror stage can be initiated successfully: "I have described elsewhere the sight in the mirror of the ego ideal, of that being that he first saw appearing in the form of the parent holding him up before the mirror" (ibid., p.257). He makes a similar argument in *Some Reflections on the Ego*: "One is all the more impressed when one realises that this behaviour occurs either in a babe in arms or in a child who is holding himself upright by one of those contrivances to help one to learn to walk without serious falls" (Lacan, 1953, p. 15). In this sense, instead of actively seeking its own image as an independent individual, the infant is "introduced" to the mirror by the Other, who recognises the infant as the object of desire. The infant's self-(mis)recognition without self-consciousness is possible because it is not the infant's own intentionality but the Other's gaze that gives substance to its mirror image (the ideal ego).²³ "The gaze in itself not only terminates the movement, it freezes it" (Lacan, 1998, p.117).

²³ A simplified optical model Lacan illustrates in *Seminar VIII* is a good example explaining what happens in the mirror stage. We can see that it is not the subject himself but the ego ideal that recognises one's ideal ego in the mirror:

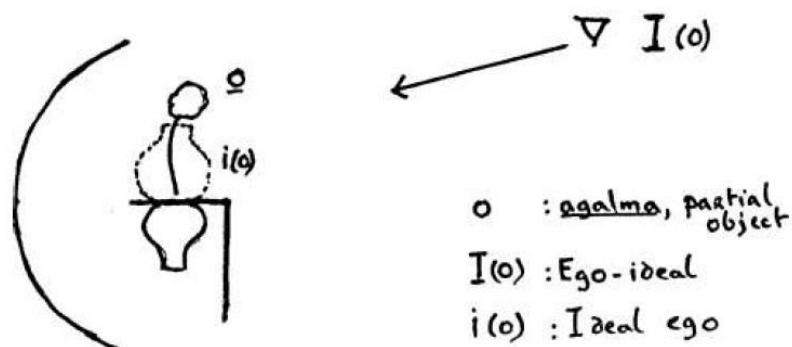


Figure 5. Graph of a simplified optical model. Reprinted from Lacan, J. (1961). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII: Transference, 1960-1961*. (p.139). Unpublished typescript. Translated by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French typescripts. Retrieved January 11, 2017, from <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/published-works/seminars/>

An additional point has to be made here that may further complicate the problem. While the Other's intervention is necessary for the recognition of the infant's mirror

The important argument that the infant's body image is not merely an imaginary configuration of the Real but rather a result of the symbolic intervention can be worked through more clearly in Lacan's Schema L, which is first introduced in his 1955 seminar to "illustrate the problems raised by the ego and the other, language and speech" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 243). The schema appears in the form of several horizontal arrows and diagonal arrows that link together four algebraic variables: S, a, a', A. Its main point, as commonly understood, is to demonstrate that the symbolic relationship between the Other (A) and the subject (S) is blocked by the imaginary axis a-a' as the "wall of language". Interpreting this schema from a spatial perspective, we can see how the opposition between the symbolic and the imaginary works in a single episode of human interaction. As Lacan illustrates: "Fundamentally, it is them (true Others, true subjects) I'm aiming at every time I utter true speech, but I always attain a', a", through reflection. I always aim at true subjects, and I have to be content with shadows" (Lacan, 1988b, p.244):

image, we shall not take it for granted that a concrete (m)other's presence is also reflected in the mirror. On the contrary, what appears in the mirror is always the "imago of one's own body" (Lacan, 2006a, p.97, 2006k, p.77). For this reason, Lacan has been criticised for excluding the maternal role from the origin of the infant's psychic life, since the mother is often expected to be the person that holds the infant in front of the mirror and helps it grasp the connection between the reflection and the real presence. As Shuli Barzilai complains, "the mirror is the mother of the ego. But the mother is not in the mirror" (Barzilai, 1999, p.4). However, as we see in the optical model above, if the gaze that initiates the process of recognition comes from the ego ideal, a symbolic place-holder without any substance, it certainly leaves no reflection in the mirror. The lack of mirroring on the part of the (m)other, therefore, can be seen as Lacan's attempt to radically differentiate the Symbolic (m)Other from the imaginary (m)other. Insofar as the specular image is always an imaginary unification, the (m)Other whose role in the infant's ego formation is purely symbolic must leave no trace in the mirror.

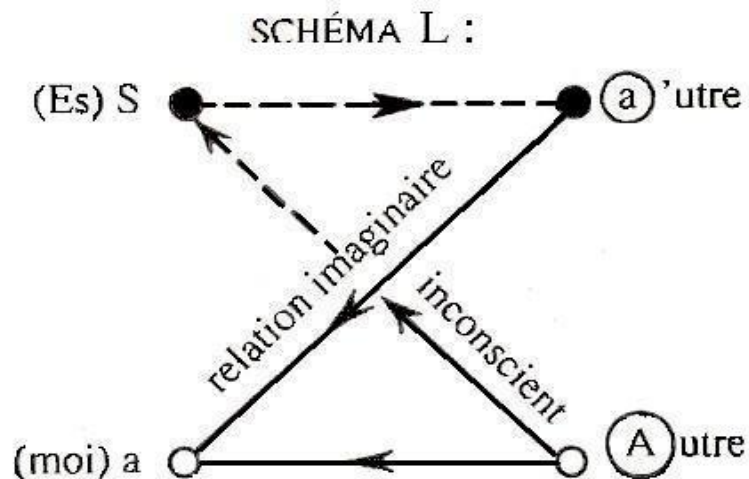


Figure 6. Schema L. Reprinted from Lacan, J. (1988b). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*. (p.243). (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

However, Schema L also permits other possible readings which lead to a temporal process of coming-into-being rather than a static structure. Different agencies in the schema can take on a temporal logic that maps the trajectory of subject-formation. According to Lacan, the imaginary axis a-a' can be interpreted as the relationship between the ego and the body image in the mirror stage: "So there's the plane of the mirror, the symmetrical world of the egos and of the homogeneous others." (ibid.) As the arrows indicate, the ego is modelled on the total image of the other (a') through the mediation of the Other (A). Yet it tells more than an iteration of the theory of the mirror stage. The top left part of the schema gives us a glimpse of the underlying process that will lay the foundation for the mirror stage.

To explain this process, we will need to come to a full comprehension of the significance of each variable and the relationship one bears to another. When applying this schema to understanding different variations of narcissism, Raul Moncayo points out that "a limitation of this schema is that it does not have a way of differentiating the ego or a, as the thought of the breast, and the ego or a as the specular image" (Moncayo, 2008, p.12). In other words, before being recognised in the form of a specular image, the bodily ego must already participate in the libidinal economy at the level of the Real. The same can be said for the a'. After Lacan

develops the notion of *objet petit a* in the late 1950s, it is the letter $i(a')$ that usually designates the image of the Other qua ideal-ego. The a' , on the other hand, is first and foremost a part-object of the inter-organismic mother-infant body when the individual's capacity of spatial differentiation remains unformed, before becoming the specular image of the other's total body in the mirror stage. By signifying the material basis and the imaginary dimension with the same letter, it is unclear how the body awareness becomes embedded in the real body. Therefore, following Moncayo's solution, I divide Schema L into two parts to represent two parallel processes in different domains:

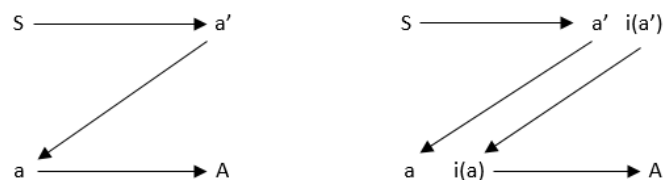


Figure 7. Schema L Divided

The triangle on the right side depicts the typical process in the mirror stage, in which the dual relation between $i(a)$ and $i(a')$ is supported by the symbolic Other (A). However, it is the triangle on the left side that deserves our attention, which, in my opinion, depicts how the Symbolic Other directly influences the circulation of libidinal energy around the infant's body. Starting from the upper left-hand corner of the triangle, we have the unbarred S situated at the beginning. It designates not a speaking subject within the symbolic order ($\$$) but the existential subject or the bodily subject in the state of initial auto-eroticism, "the brute quantity of an affect (such as pain or anxiety) seizing hold of the subject's body" (Robertson, 2015, p. 64). From here, the line leads directly to the upper right-hand corner, where we find the a' as the part-object that causes the subject's desire. Since auto-eroticism and primary narcissism is marked by an absence of object relations, this part-object (take the mother's breast as an example) is not an external one but taken by the infant as something of his own, something that sustains the hallucination of wholeness and completeness. So how does the infant leave the self-

closed psychic state and allow libidinal energy to be cathected to another object? The downward-tending diagonal line linking the a' and the a provides an answer to this question. While the infant internalizes the part-object (a') from the maternal body, he himself is singled out as the object of the other's desire (a). In this dialectical relationship between the existential subject and the primary other, the *objet petit a* has two roles. It is what the subject identifies *with*, and also what the subject is identified *as*. By presenting a void for the infant, the object a marks the end of the fantasy of the self/other fusion and introduces the infant to an alienating world in which he is expected to fill the other's lack.

The body interaction between the infant and the (m)other enables a process whereby the infant becomes a separate yet unified object for the Other. Using Lacan's vocabulary, we shall understand this object in terms of *objectality* rather than *objectivity*. Lacan regards objectivity as a Western scientific idea that is "summed up by a logical formalism" (Lacan, 2014, p.214). Objectality, on the other hand, "is the correlate to a pathos of the cut" (ibid.) that the subject must endure in order to enter the Symbolic. At this stage, the Other's recognition does not match the infant's primitive experiences of the body as fragmented and uncoordinated. It is only during the mirror stage that the infant subjectivises the external perception of itself and develops a sense of bodily mastery as if the complete and unified image of the body is not something that is forced to be but the natural achievement of its own self-consciousness. In order to complete the transformation from the a as the object for the other to the $i(a)$ as the image of an autonomous and self-determined ego, two different types of mirror are required, which can be represented in my reworked Schema L as two parallel diagonal lines $a-a'$, $i(a)-i(a')$. The mirror of the mirror stage in which the image of the Other is reflected is made possible only because of another mirror reflection in Symbolic time, when the infant encounters the Other without any imaginary mediation and finds itself to be the object a , the image of a cut, of a separation (a'):

The Other puts me in question, it interrogates me at the very root of my desire as a , as cause of this desire and not as object. And because this is

what the Other targets, in a temporal relation of antecedence, I can do nothing to break this hold except to engage with it (Lacan, 2014, p.153).

We find Lacan's description of the mirror reflection in Symbolic time in *Seminar X*:

I didn't speak to you today about a mirror just for the sake of it, not the mirror of the mirror stage, of narcissistic experience of the body in its totality, but rather the mirror inasmuch as it is the field of the Other in which there must appear for the first time, if not the a itself, then at least its place (Lacan, 2014, p.229).

This paragraph reveals several distinctive features of a more fundamental mirror reflection that lies beyond the locus in which the imaginary fulfilment is promised to be the destination of a linear temporal development. While the mirror of the mirror stage is situated *within* the field of the Other, the other mirror is the field of the Other, not only in the sense that the infant enjoys organismal totality by merging itself with the Other's body, but also because the infant lives in Symbolic time when its independence relies on the Other's recognition. Instead of reflecting the image of "the body in its totality" ($i(a)-i(a')$), the other mirror represents the object a or its place for the subject ($a-a'$). This point is particularly interesting because during the mirror stage, the object a is precisely what is missing from the image. As Raul Moncayo points out, "the *objet a*, as an absence, can be visually represented in the image in the mirror with the metaphor of a blank spot or hole within the image. This hole or blank spot will represent the *objet a* that is missing in the ego and that the ego will look for in the other" (Moncayo, 2008, p.23). Therefore, if in the pre-mirror stage, the object a undertakes the affirmative function by being the residue of the Real against the total Symbolic determination (something the subject *is*), then in the mirror stage, it performs a negative function by introducing an emptiness into the certainty of the image and maintaining the distance between subjectivity and the ego illusory (something the subject *lacks*).

By dividing Schema L into two triangle relationships, it becomes clear that the mirror stage is not the Lacanian origin of subject-formation but rather the end of a complicated negotiation between Symbolic time and Real time. Living in Symbolic time is to live in the field of the Other, where, Paul Verhaeghe writes, “the subject not only meets with its own unified image, but first of all encounters what the Other desires of this body” (Verhaeghe, 2013, p.68). It is a temporal dimension in which “we are objectal, which means we are only objects of desire as bodies” (Lacan, 2014, p.215). The formations of different erogenous zones are not the outcome of linear biological maturation, but rather bodily responses to the Other’s demand that inscribes the signifier into the flesh. The body thus becomes a signified body subject to a chain of symbolic articulation. On the other hand, since the existential subject as an independent and separate being must first be libidinised by the object of the drive (the object *a*) before visually acquiring the unified specular image, the body has a completely different role as a Real organism, “characterised by its orifices and functioning by means of the drive” (Verhaeghe, 2013, p.72). Between the objectalisation of the infant and the imaginary creation of the ego, the Real body gives birth to the “consciousness without the ego”, which we discussed earlier in the chapter of Real time as the definition of the Real past. This consciousness, instead of being the ego’s function, is carried out by the organism itself and functions as another cause of the realisation of the mirror stage besides the symbolic determination.

In *Seminar XIV*, when an audience asks Lacan “what need did you have to invent this little *o*-object?”, Lacan’s reply is that “taking from a broader horizon, it was about time” (Lacan, 1966, p.2). As we can see, Symbolic time and Real time run parallel against each other and provide different perspectives on the origin of the Lacanian subject, yet the object *a* is something that the subject encounters in both temporal registers. On the one hand, “the *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ.” (Lacan, 1998, p.103); on the other hand, “this portion of ourselves is what is caught in the (symbolic) machine, and it can never be retrieved” (Lacan, 2014, p.215). For this reason, we can understand how the missing of the object *a* in the mirror stage has

a significant impact on the subject's psychic life: Insofar as the object *a* is a nodal point at which Symbolic time and Real time are anchored together, the mirror stage denies its existence and thus becomes a defensive elaboration through which the subject covers the fundamental discord that characterises man's relation to the world with an imaginary consistency. Yet the Other's guarantee is not permanent, and the gap between the Real and the Imaginary is only bridged temporarily. As Lacan reminds us: "There is a moment when this gaze that appears in the mirror starts not to look at us any more. There's an initium, an aura, a dawning sense of uncanniness which leaves the door open to anxiety" (Lacan, 2014, p.88). The mirror stage is an "origin without origin", in the sense that it is the origin of inner time-consciousness under the control of the ego at the expense of two temporal registers as the cornerstone of subjectivity. This unique "repression of time" defines the subject as a symptomatic being from the beginning and turns life into one elongated struggle between the never-ending Symbolic production and the movement of the impenetrable Real body.

This struggle between two temporal registers that constitutes the human subject can be understood through Lacan's notions of alienation and separation, which designate two basic operations required for the advent of the subject. From a temporal perspective, I argue that these two operations also correspond to the subject's movement between two temporal registers. To begin with, there are two lacks that mark the limit of the subject's experience in each temporal register, both of which are explicitly named by Lacan. In Symbolic time, the subject's symbolic realisation in the field of the Other can never be completed due to a "central defect" (Lacan, 1998, p.205), meaning that the subject is devoid of substance and depends on the signifier to speak for itself. Apart from this symbolic lack, the subject also encounters another lack in Real time, a lack that literally means that the subject as a living being is not immortal: "The lack is real because it relates to something real, namely, that the living being, by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death" (ibid.).

In the case of alienation, the subject avoids the real lack by submitting to the Other. The signifier to which the subject attaches shields it from death, but it also introduces the symbolic lack: “This lack takes up the other lack, which is the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being” (ibid.). Living in Symbolic time, although the subject is able to express needs and desires through the medium of language, the experience of the Real body cannot be fully articulated in the signifying chain. In this sense, Lacan defines alienation by an either-or choice between being and meaning: “If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning” (ibid., p.211).

The part of non-meaning is the object *a*, which Lacan materialises in *Seminar XI* as *lamella*, meaning in Latin a small flake. Lamella is not an object external to the subject. It is an organ that articulates itself on the real body. Meanwhile, Lacan also points out that “this organ is unreal”, not because it is imaginary (“Unreal is not imaginary” (ibid., p.205)), but because it is articulated in a way that eludes us, thus being perceived by the subject as the “missing part”. Lacan uses the tattoo as an example to explain two different functions of lamella: one is being for the Other, as the tattoo marks the subject “in the field of the group’s relations, between each individual and all the others” (ibid., p.206); the other is being for the body, since the tattoo also has an erotic function that condenses the subject’s sensual experience.

As we have discussed earlier, the object *a* occupies a position where Real time and Symbolic time coincide. This is precisely what we find in Lacan’s writings on lamella during the process of alienation and separation. Lamella not only goes beyond the real lack during the process of alienation, but it also goes beyond the symbolic lack as an organ that cannot be symbolically exchanged.²⁴ Therefore, if

²⁴ Darian Leader points out another meaning of lamella that has not been revealed by Lacan but certainly contributes to the way Lacan uses this term: “Lamella were thin gold plates or foils buried with a cadaver and containing instructions and

the sacrifice of lamella is a necessary step for the subject to be represented by a signifier for another signifier, then it is also through lamella that the subject initiates separation. The process of separation is a process in which the subject confronts the lack of the Other, realising the limitations of its own symbolic existence. The typical question the subject asks during this process, as Lacan points out, is “can he lose me?” (ibid., p.214), which directly challenges the overdetermination of the Other. But how does the subject move beyond the symbolic lack? Lacan’s answer is a Hegelian “negation of the negation”: the subject does not find any ultimate fulfilment but paradoxically, reintroduces the real lack. “It is a lack engendered from the previous time that serves to reply to the lack raised by the following time” (ibid., p.215).

To make this point clear, Lacan suggests that we can define separation as another choice. In alienation, the choice between being and meaning can also be construed as a forced choice between freedom and life, since if I choose freedom (being), I lose both. If I choose life (meaning), I have life without freedom, a life deprived of something valuable. However, in the case of separation, the real lack is reintroduced into the choice, and it thus becomes “freedom or death!” According to Lacan, this changes everything: “Because death comes into play, there occurs an effect with a rather different structure. This is because, in both cases, I will have both” (ibid., p.213). The choice is no longer an “either-or” choice but a “both-and” one. If I choose freedom, I also choose freedom to die, a right that has been deprived by the symbolic order which demands the permanent existence of the subject as a signifier. If I choose death, it means that I also have freedom of choice, since the real freedom is precisely to choose something that has been rendered unthinkable by the Other who gets hold of the subject by taking advantage of the desire for survival. Acquiring freedom through returning to the death as the real lack does not mean that the subject abandons or retreats from the symbolic world. Instead, it is one step forward for the subject to be able to learn through Symbolic

passwords for use in the next world” (Leader, 2003, p.46). In this sense, Lamella can be regarded as a primitive form of symbolic expression that replace the finitude of individual life with the permanence of symbolic existence.

time that death is not the end of Real time, that subjectivity is not terminated by death but constantly reshaped by its relationship to death. Only a being that is capable of opening up to one's own death can achieve separation, so that its expression of subjectivity will not be determined only by the pursuit of the fulfilment of the Other's desire.

To recapitulate: this chapter on symptomatic time questions our immediate certainty of subjective temporal experience as the direct expression of self-consciousness. What I have tried to show is that the linear sequence of time organised by the ego is inadequate to explain the process of subject-formation in Lacan's theory. What Lacan demonstrates through the notion of prematuration, the mechanism of primal repression and the theory of the mirror stage is not only a difference in the timing, as the beginning of the subject's social existence does not match the beginning of the organismic life that provides the proper embodiment for a self-conscious self, but also a difference of time between the automation of Real bodily movement and the complex chain of Symbolic articulation. In this sense, the Lacanian origin of subject-formation is not a repression of certain events but rather a "repression of time" through which the ego resynchronises two distinctive processes into one unified and continuous series of past, present and future. This results in a fragile self which struggles to maintain itself in relation to different temporal registers, taking the form of a back-and-forth negotiation between embodiment and language as we have seen in the operations of alienation and separation. The notion of symptomatic time confirms and develops Lacan's understanding of the subject as decentred. Without "owning" time, we are thrown absolutely into a field of otherness from where there will be no end of the vacillation between defining oneself in terms of being-for-self and being-for-Other.

5. Sexed Time

Lacan's further development of Freud's psychoanalytic theory leads to a radical understanding of time, which suggests the notion of desynchrony as the fundamental character of the relationship between two temporal registers that construct human subjectivity. This chapter will apply Lacan's claims of time to sexuality, a topic that has been fundamental to psychoanalytic thinking since Freud's time and continues to stimulate debates among psychoanalysts who live in contemporary societies and confront rapid social and cultural changes. The increased visibility of various sexual and gender presentations challenges not only traditional psychoanalytic knowledge of psychosexual development and sexual difference but also the epistemological approach psychoanalysis adopts to thinking of these issues. The idea of sexed subjectivity, namely the subject's understanding and expression of sexuality as a sexed being, occupies a prominent position in Lacan's writings that deserves our full attention, yet I argue that Lacan's theorisation has not been interpreted in a way that can sufficiently respond to the changes sexuality undergoes in contemporary societies. To address this problem, I intend to provide a different reading of Lacan's theory of sexuality in this chapter by incorporating the idea of dual temporality. The result of my interpretive work is not another truth-claim about what sexuality is, but "sexed time" as an epistemological framework through which we can understand sexed subjectivity during the construction of sexual identity.

In the first section, I examine time, or rather the lack of time in the popular account of sexuality in the Freudian-Lacanian theory. It is shown that the Freudian proposal regarding the process of psychosexual development follows what I call a "linear-teleological model" while Lacan's theory of sexuality is interpreted as a "structural-timeless model" that reduces sexual diversities to two transcendental structural positions. In both cases, time as an indicator of becoming does not contribute to the way a sexual identity is constituted. Instead, it is the space that matters since sexual difference is determined by the ownership of a physical object or a symbolic space. I argue that this logic of spatialisation limits the ways sexuality

can be theorised. The opposition between presence and absence offered by our spatial imagination of the penis/phallus makes it difficult to analyse the construction of sexual identity without falling into a mode of binary thinking. On the other hand, my analytic work shows that it is possible to temporalise the phallus by exploring Lacan's writings. Through rereading key passages in Freud's Oedipal narrative, I find sexual difference is first and foremost experienced as a sense of temporal desynchrony by the subject when the penis is perceived, an experience that can be explained differently by Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit* and Lacan's idea of the future anterior. In so doing, I understand the phallus not as a privileged signifier of spatial demarcation, but a temporal construction that is always envisioned by the subject in different temporal dimensions. This enables us to develop a new epistemological frame to theorise sexed subjectivity that rejects the binary logic. In the third section, I argue that the difference between *Nachträglichkeit* and the future anterior is not sexual difference per se but the difference between two epistemological approaches to understanding sexual difference. I criticise the feminist attempts to theorise women's time that bind time and sexuality together in a direct yet problematic way. The idea of "sexed time" does not overgeneralise the individual's temporal experience into a gendered category. Instead, it supports Lacan's argument that sexual difference is Real, and cannot be fully assimilated by symbolic difference. I discuss how the idea of sexed time gives rise to a new epistemology that is able to account for the construction of sexual identity individually and accommodate various sexual expressions in contemporary societies.

5.1 Sexual Difference as Spatial Difference: From Freud to Lacan

Although Freud contributed enormous fresh ideas to the knowledge of sexuality, the theory of the Oedipus complex remains the meta-narrative of sexual identification and development in his writings. The hypothesis it provides that explains how sexual difference is realised when the individual is inserted into the culture is controversial, to which post-Freudian thinkers struggle to find an alternative, yet I argue that this theoretical framework is also crucial in

understanding the very logic that defines the limit of psychoanalytic thinking of sexuality.

As a centrepiece of Freud's theory that has been carefully scrutinised and heavily discussed, the Oedipus complex is named after the story of Oedipus from Greek mythology, which Freud uses as a metaphor to explain the process of psychosexual development in boys and girls. In Freud's reading, the tragedy of Oedipus, who killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, does not merely iterate the contrast between the gods' mighty will and humankind's inability to escape the fate, but also shows "the fulfilment of our childhood wishes" (Freud, 1900, p.261). Although Freud did not publicly use this term until 1910 (Freud, 1910), he discovered the family triangle of love and jealousy towards different-sex parents through his self-analysis in the late 1890's, which contributed to the final abandonment of the seduction theory. Freud believed in the universality of this complex from the beginning. In his letter to Fliess, he described *Oedipus Rex* as having "riveting power", of which everyone feels its existence within himself (Freud, 1897a, p.265), yet it takes years for Freud to fully develop this hypothesis into a theory that accounts for the transformation from perverse-polymorphous infantile sexuality to the formation of a socially acceptable sexual identity. The Oedipal narrative is saturated with time, as it describes a temporal movement involving different stages and different moments of the development of sexual desire. To Freud, "both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner" (Freud, 1933, p.117). The infant begins with an intense affection towards the maternal body, maintaining a state of primary narcissism in which the mother's breast "is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model" (Freud, 1923a, p.31). By immersing oneself in love towards the mother, not as a separate person but as an organic part of a unity, the child enjoys an integrative experience without differentiation. However, this child/mother dyad is intruded by the father, who symbolically forbids the child's incestuous wishes. This loss of the object of desire (the mother) takes place in the phallic stage when the penis - the male genital organ - gets recognised as the indicator of sexual difference. On

the boy's side, he perceives the lack of the penis as castration in the girl. It leads to castration anxiety which marks the resolution of the male Oedipus complex:

Along with the demolition of the Oedipus complex, the boy's object-cathexis of his mother must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of two things: either an identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father. We are accustomed to regard the latter outcome as the more normal (Freud, 1923a, p.32).

On the girl's side, the perception of female genitals is interpreted as a lack (of the penis), which opens up to different routes she may take in order to become a woman: The first one is fully accepting the lack but refusing to desire it. "The little girl, frightened by the comparison with boys, grows dissatisfied with her clitoris, and gives up her phallic activity and with it her sexuality in general as well as a good part of her masculinity in other fields". The second one is the opposite, refusing to accept the lack of the phallus and pretending to still have it: "The second line leads her to cling with defiant self-assertiveness to her threatened masculinity. To an incredibly late age she clings to the hope of getting a penis some time. That hope becomes her life's aim; and the phantasy of being a man in spite of everything often persists as a formative factor over long periods" (Freud, 1931, pp.229-30). The third one, which Freud believes to be the normal resolution of female Oedipus complex, is accepting the lack by identifying herself with the mother, as both of them are castrated, and taking the father as the object-choice in the hope that she may get a baby from another man as a substitute for the penis.

By presenting the Oedipus complex, Freud proposes that sexual identity is not innate but acquired. The infant must go through a process of conflict and resolution during the early years in order to achieve mature sexuality at puberty. On the other hand, the Oedipus complex is equally a definite proof of Freud's famous dictum that "anatomy is destiny". In Freud's description, the Oedipal process is guided either by castration anxiety or by penis envy, both of which takes the penis as the privileged genital organ that holds ultimate meaning for both sexes.

As he claims in *The Infantile Genital Organization*: “For both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the phallus” (Freud, 1923b, p.142). Access to sexual difference, therefore, is predetermined by a biological fact that can be observed at birth but only draws the infant’s attention when the right moment comes. Sexual difference reflects physical difference. There appears to be no development needed since sexual differentiation is already given by nature. The mixture of these two contradictory hypotheses results in a history of psychosexual development that contains an eternal teleology within itself, a long psycho-libidinal journey that is not open-ended but carefully categorised into several ideal developmental pathways, all of which include a biologically determined transition from the oral stage through the anal stage to the phallic stage.

This “linear-teleological model” that defines the time of Freud’s Oedipus complex becomes the primary target of post-Freudian critiques. His attempt to elevate the penis to a privileged status that accounts for all sexual identities is questionable even for psychoanalysts who are Freud’s disciples. It leads one to question if the Oedipal narrative only explains the girl’s psychosexual development from a masculine point of view, and thus excludes any possible development of female sexuality that is not mediated by penis envy. To Ernest Jones, the penis/phallus has a direct correspondence with phallocentrism that maintains the empowerment of men (Jones, 1942). If the penis is not an imaginary object whose definitive status can be substituted by any other object, at least an equivalent principle of male womb envy (Horney, 1926; Klein, 1975) should be inserted to alleviate the outgrowth of the patriarchal bias in Freud’s theory under the influence of prevailing gender attitudes in his times.

The biological underpinnings and the sexist assumptions of Freud’s Oedipal narrative have been extensively exposed by feminist critiques, notably in the work of Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray (Chodorow, 1974, 2012; Irigaray, 1985). On the other hand, there is another voice that calls for appreciation of the complexity

of Freud's thinking instead of reducing the Oedipus complex to a misogynistic caricature (Mitchell, 2000). A careful reading of Freud's texts reveals many ideas that contrast normativity and support a more nuanced understanding of sexed subjectivity. One example is his acknowledgement of the discordance between the infant's polymorphous perversity and the normalised heterosexual resolution in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905). Another can be found in *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman*, where Freud points out the futility of psychoanalysis to 'convert' homosexuals since, as he states elsewhere, homosexuality is "no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness" (Freud, 1960, p.423). These progressive ideas in Freud's thinking should certainly be acknowledged. Yet it is also important to insist that the Oedipus complex remains a linear-teleological model that is directed towards a particular destination. Permission of certain variations does not change the fact that there is no place in the Oedipal framework to represent the subject without referring to sexual difference as a binary opposition. As we see in the previously mentioned paper, Freud's analysis of the female patient, "a beautiful and clever girl of eighteen" who pursued a strong homosexual desire while also displaying heterosexual affection for a small boy, is restricted to an analysis of the psychological pathway from "the normal Oedipus attitude into that of homosexuality":

These presages of later homosexuality had always occupied her conscious life, while the attitude arising from the Oedipus complex had remained unconscious and had appeared only in such signs as her tender behaviour to the little boy. (Freud, 1920b, p.168).

The coexistence of heterosexual and homosexual desire, for Freud, could only be explained by the classification between conscious and unconscious, since the possibility of both maintaining conscious status without contradiction is unthinkable for the Oedipal narrative in which concepts of identification and repudiation are central. Bisexuality as a possible outcome of personal development, a sexual identity and a lifestyle remains outside of Freud's thinking. In this sense, Freud's theory of the universal bisexuality of human beings, which has long been credited for its radical potential, actually renders the bisexual as an actual living

being invisible. Putting bisexuality in the past (of the individual and the species) becomes a way to erase bisexuality in the present tense (Angelides, 2001, p.69). It enhances rather than challenges the linear-teleological development of human sexuality that ends up with an either/or formation.

From the start of his teaching, Lacan developed the Freudian theory of sexuality to a new destination, as an essential operation of his “returning to Freud” in early seminars is his reinterpretation of the Oedipal narrative through the symbolic-real-imaginary triad. To Lacan, the Oedipus complex is a process that aims at the symbolic integration of the subject. It is “a law of symbolisation” through which human sexuality must realise itself (Lacan, 1993, p.83). Unlike Freud, who equates the physical reality of the body with inner psychic reality in which sexual identity is constituted, Lacan argues that the complicated triangle relationships in the Oedipus complex must be disassembled and analysed on different levels:

You are aware of the profoundly dissymmetrical character, right from the start, of each of the dual relations included within the Oedipal structure. The relation linking the subject to the mother is distinct from that linking him to the father, the narcissistic or imaginary relation to the father is distinct from the symbolic relation, and also from the relation that we really do have to call real - which is residual with respect to the edifice which commands our attention in analysis (Lacan, 1988a, p.66).

Two most important layers of Lacan’s reconstruction of the Oedipus complex are the infant-mother symbiotic entity on the imaginary axis and the paternal function on the symbolic axis. The state of primary narcissism that characterises the infant’s earliest interaction with the mother belongs to the Imaginary order that offers a sense of sameness and wholeness. To Lacan, the key issue of this relationship is not the availability of the mother to the desire of the child, which in Freud’s theory is the cause of the infant’s anxiety that leads to separation, but the position of the child in relation to the desire of the mother. The infant’s incestuous desire for the mother is preceded by the mother’s desire which is fundamentally unsatisfiable. The tension contained within the over-intimate infant-mother relationship calls

for the father's intervention. In Freud's Oedipal theory, the father is the real being in the family who is assumed to hold the phallic power and is thus able to impose prohibition. Lacan, on the other hand, "distinguishes the paternal presence in the conflict under the triple headings of the symbolic father, the imaginary father and the real father" (Lacan, 1957, p.229). He traces the origin of the paternal power to the myth of the primal father that Freud himself introduces in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and further elaborates in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). This almighty father figure, writes Freud, owns every woman in the horde and forbids his sons' craving for sexual enjoyment, yet his power is even greater after being murdered by his sons, who, because of their guilt about patricide, submit to the law of the father (Freud, 1913, p.149). The symbolic father, therefore, is precisely this 'dead father', the name of the father which bears a structural function. The symbolic father is deprived of any positive representation of paternity. It is not only a "an essential signifier within the other" that signifies nothing except the fact that "the signifier exists" (Lacan, 1958, p.104), but also "the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law" that supports the entire symbolic system for the subject (Lacan, 2006c, p.485).

The distinction between the real father and the symbolic father is Lacan's attempt to distance himself from traditional patriarchy as found in Freud's theory, which is necessary in the context of the modern family, where the decline of the paternal function intensifies the discordance between the real father and the almighty figure he is supposed to be. On the other hand, the distinction Lacan maintains between the penis and the phallus is another important step in overcoming Freud's biological determinism. Lacan argues that the phallus does not refer to the body part and the biological organ (the penis). It is the "privileged signifier in which the role of Logos is wedded to the advent of desire" (Lacan, 2006l, p.581). While the problem of sexual difference cannot be answered by the presence/absence of the penis, the phallus as a fundamental signifier of desire continues to play a central role in the construction of sexual identity.

In *Seminar V*, Lacan discusses “three moments” of the Oedipus complex, all of which involve the phallus as the only currency of the libidinal economy between different desiring subjects. The first moment is the pre-Oedipal stage, which Lacan renames as the “primitive phallic stage” in the sense that “the paternal metaphor acts of itself...already in the world” and “the primacy of the phallus is established by the existence of the symbol, of discourse and of the law” (Lacan, 1958, p.137). The mother’s love towards her child is always-already influenced by her desire for the phallus, which leads to an unavoidable intrusion of otherness:

If the mother’s desire is for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her desire. Thus the division immanent in desire already make itself felt by virtue of being experienced in the Other’s desire, in that this division already stands in the way of the subject being satisfied with presenting to the Other the real [organ] he may have that corresponds to the phallus (Lacan, 2006l, p.582).

The child, who has no idea of the phallus, has already been forced to identify with it and thus to satisfy the mother’s desire. Lacan’s theory stresses that it is the infant’s primary anxiety about being reduced to an object of the mother’s enjoyment that initiates the process of separation. In the second moment, “on the imaginary plane, the father intervenes well and truly as one who deprives the mother” (Lacan, 1958, p.137). It is the moment when the infant comes to realise the significance of the phallus as an imaginary object “that the other has or does not have” (ibid., p.138). Not until the third moment will the infant recognise that the phallic power does not depend on the possession or non-possession of the imaginary phallus since the father is only the bearer of the law. To Lacan, the case of Little Hans is a fine example that demonstrates how the missing of the third moment, or the failure of the transition from the imaginary phallus to the symbolic phallus, leads to the phobic experience.

By introducing the symbolic phallus, Lacan disentangles the close link between sexual difference and anatomical difference in Freud’s theory and regards the former as different ways to access a symbolic register of difference. The subject can

define itself in relation to the phallus either in the mode of “having” (masculine structure) or in the mode of “being” (feminine structure), regardless of biological sex. Sexual identity is not established through having or not having a penis, since both boys and girls undergo castration, which “symbolically cuts the subject off from something imaginary” (Lacan, 1958, p.201), to enter the symbolic world and accept their phallic incompleteness. However, it is questionable whether this theory of sexuality is able to escape the accusation of phallocentrism. Insofar as the structures that govern the relations between the sexes continue to be indicated “by referring simply to the phallus’ function” (Lacan, 2006l, p.582), the seemingly neutral process of symbolisation in which language mediates the body remains a phallocentric account. As many feminist authors point out, the phallus, as a signifier at its purest that is only articulated at the symbolic level, cannot be completely dissociated from the penis and its biological function (K. Campbell, 2004; Gallop, 1987; Grosz, 1990). Even Lacan himself acknowledges this fact when he says that “this signifier is chosen as the most salient of what can be grasped in sexual intercourse as real...By virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation” (Lacan, 2006l, p.581). In his reading of Lacan, Richard Boothby also points out that many symbolic features of the phallus should be attributed to the penis’ very physiology: “The penis is especially well suited both to represent the breakdown of an imaginary Gestalt and to anticipate the structure of the linguistic signifier.....Aside from the mother's breast, the penis is the only bodily appendage unsupported by bone and the only appendage incapable of voluntary movement. It is sensitive and easily hurt” (Boothby, 1991, p.153). The inevitable slide from the phallus as a signifier to the penis as the male organ returns us to Freud’s original Oedipal narrative that privileges masculinity, since what is the difference between a sexual identity that only takes the penis as the object-choice and one that only structures desire around a male signifier? The position of the phallus as the fundamental signifier “by which the subject binds himself for life to the Law” (Lacan, 2006c, p.464) further phallicises the entire symbolic order and excludes any positive representation of the feminine position. The Lacanian Oedipus complex, therefore, may only serve as the symbolisation of anatomical sexual difference.

Lacan himself may have been aware of this problem. In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan surprisingly provides a critique of the Oedipus complex. In the chapter entitled “Beyond the Oedipus complex”, Lacan dismisses the structural importance of the Freudian family romance and names the Oedipus complex as “Freud’s dream” (Lacan, 2007, p.137) that reveals something about Freud’s own unconscious desire. He further points out that the Oedipus complex is “strictly unusable” in the treatment of hysteria since “the Oedipus complex plays the role of knowledge with a claim to truth” (ibid., p.99). By questioning the historically and culturally specific way in which Freud theorises the Oedipus complex, Lacan targets not the theory itself but the epistemology underlying Freud’s approach to the issue of sexuality. In Lacan’s reading, Oedipus in the Greek myth already occupies the position of the master, who, by solving the Sphinx’s riddle, is “capable of uniting society and protecting it against danger with his knowledge” (Haute & Geyskens, 2016, p.53). The Oedipal narrative in psychoanalysis continues to concern the incarnation of the master as a paternal figure, who regulates desire and *jouissance* by the law. By comparison, in the theory of four discourses Lacan puts forward in the same seminar, the hysteric’s discourse is characterised by a permanent split between truth (occupied by the object *a*) and knowledge produced by the master-who-knows with respect to sexual difference: “The experience with the hysteric...suggests that at the level of analysis itself, everything is to be put back into question concerning what is necessary from knowledge, in order for this knowledge to be called into question in the site of truth” (Lacan, 2007, p.101). What needs “to be called into question” certainly includes the phallogentric answer to the problem of sexual difference offered by Lacan’s early reading of the Oedipus complex, an answer that is based on the shared belief in certain socio-symbolic contexts yet functions as the master’s discourse that accounts for the universal formation of masculinity and femininity. In this way, as Haute and Geyskens suggest, “Lacan seems to take a much more ‘constructivist’ stance than before with regard to the problem of sexual identity” (Haute & Geyskens, 2016, p.57).

However, the formulas of sexuation Lacan puts forward in *Seminar XX* leave the reader a first impression that the process of de-Oedipalisation is suspended. If we

read sexualisation as “the outcome of a subject’s interpretation of sexual difference” (Ragland, 2012, p.91), it seems that the ways sexual difference can be interpreted are very limited. By introducing predicate logic, Lacan puts forward four propositions to define the masculine structure and the feminine structure respectively. On the one hand, men, a category regardless of sex or gender, are defined as a universal group subject to castration except for the father of the primal horde, who stands for the fantasy of an absolute phallic jouissance; on the other hand, not all women are organised by the phallic signifier, and not all women are freed from it either. Women, despite being attracted by the phallic jouissance, also have access to a “supplementary jouissance” (Lacan, 1999, p.73) not designated by the phallic function. As Colette Soler admits: “The logical formulas of sexualisation, produced in 1972, do not object at all to the phallogocentrism of the unconscious” (Soler, 2006, p.27). The phallus remains the master signifier around which all four formulas revolve. If “man” and “woman” are “nothing but signifiers” (Lacan, 1999, p.39), one may wonder why the meaning of these signifiers is not defined by the difference in relation to other signifiers in a signifying chain, but differentiated and fixed only by the phallic function. Defining femininity as a position not completely determined by the phallic function does not alter the fact that the only signifier of sexual difference is masculine, since the phallus has no corresponding feminine signifier. The idea that “there’s no such thing as Woman” (ibid., p.73) or “Woman cannot be said” (ibid., p.81) can hardly be seen as something radical that challenges the masculine hegemony since making the feminine position the equivalent of otherness and the unrepresentable has heavily permeated Western culture since the Greeks (Fiorini, 2017, p.4).

In our above examination, we rarely find reference to time in Lacan’s theorisation of sexual difference. It has drawn critics’ attention that although Lacan’s theory of sexuality departs from the Freudian “linear-teleological model”, it nevertheless adopts a “structural-timeless model” that continues to restrict the possibilities of sexed subjectivity. In Derrida’s view, underneath Lacan’s symbolic system lies the phallus as a transcendental element which grounds meaning and resists historical modification. The process of symbolisation is supposed to mobilise the subject in

the signifying chain, yet the phallus denies the time of symbolic formation by being “the condition, origin, and destination of the entire circulation, as of the entire logic of the signifier” (Derrida, 1987, p.437). This view is echoed by Judith Butler, who questions if Lacan’s phallic account of sexual difference stands as “a quasi-transcendental limitation on all possible subject-formation” (Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2011, p.5) and fails to explain the meaning of a particular sexual identity that is historically constituted. We have also heard the Lacanian responses to this critique, that Lacan only provides a limited number of sexual positions because he is concerned with “structurations of desire that join mind to body, not pathologies or descriptions of varying sexual behaviours” (Ragland, 2012, p.1); that the phallus is associated with its corporeal roots because it not only produces a symbolic reality but also opens up the Real dimension (Zupančič, 2012); that the phallus as a signifier of the lack does not guarantee the symbolic totality but indicates precisely its inherent failure, in the same sense that “sexual difference is thus ultimately not the difference between the sexes, but the difference which cuts across the very heart of the identity of each sex, stigmatizing it with the mark of impossibility” (Žižek, 2012, p.760).

However, these defences fail to reach the core problem that troubles the popular reading of Lacan’s theory of sexuation, namely the implicit logic with which to think about sexual difference. In Freud’s Oedipal narrative, it is through the presence or absence of the penis that sexual difference is apprehended by the child. Lacan’s work of symbolisation may introduce a dialectical factor to counter this biological determinism to the extent that one can argue “not having is also a form of having” (Moncayo, 2008, p.51) or “the absence of a feature also counts as a positive feature” (Žižek, 2012, p.769), but it does not change the fact that the opposition between presence and absence, be it real or symbolic, remains the only axis along which sexual difference can be thought. Defining the phallus as the signifier of the lack and emphasising its negative character does not constitute a radical innovation, nor does it, as some Lacanian psychoanalysts believe (Verhaeghe, 2011, p.204), make Lacan’s theory go beyond the supposedly patriarchal stance. The way Lacan’s theory of sexuation is understood may not

privilege the masculine sexual organ as a desired form of presence. It nevertheless defines the very idea of presence in a masculine way. As Jan Campbell points out, “The fiction of the phallus makes little difference as Oedipal authority becomes relayed and reiterated in a very real way” (J. Campbell, 2000, p.81). One may wonder whether each subject adopts either a masculine or a feminine position in its unconscious because there are only two ways of structuring desire, or because the spatial imagination of the penis/phallus does not offer a third option. If in Freud’s “linear-teleological model”, we deal with the penis as a concrete object, the characteristics of which must be considered in relation to the physical space it occupies, then in Lacan’s “structural-timeless model”, we have the phallus as a privileged signifier of spatial difference at the symbolic level, which, writes Elizabeth Grosz, “can be seen to represent some of the ways in which subjects are positioned in different locations within a hierarchized social geography” (Grosz, 1990, p.121). Sexual difference is merely transformed from the difference of physical space to the difference of symbolic space, in the sense that the symbolic universe is the phallic universe, supported by the signifier of the masculine position, while a woman, despite partially subscribing to the phallic order, has no place to live as Woman. The idea that sexual identity can have either masculine or feminine structure regardless of one’s biological sex only promises a false sense of sexual liberation since the socio-symbolic field which assigns masculinity and femininity to different bodies is already the production of biased sexual differentiation.

To prevent the reinscription of Freud’s Oedipal scenario on the linguistic and symbolic level, one may choose to displace the term “phallus”. Other body parts such as the breast, the anus and the clitoris should also be given social significance so that the sexed body can have alternative representations (Butler, 2011; Hocquenghem, 1993). In *Beyond Sexuality*, Tim Dean suggests substituting the phallus with the *objet a* as a “neutral object” and thus eliminating even a metaphorical presence of the penis: “Since ‘the phallus’ names various functions and structural elements that may be substituted with alternative conceptual terms,

it may be time to retire the phallus” (Dean, 2000, p.83).²⁵ However, the feminist debate over the status of the phallus has made it evident that displacing the phallus with the aim of arguing for a positive feminine presence risks the danger of constructing an ontology of “genuine femininity” and returning to essentialist claims of sexuality (Butler, 2006). Meanwhile, maintaining the alternative bodily configuration unsymbolised, as Butler does with the lesbian phallus, “limits the notion of performativity to a reiteration of an imaginary or ‘fantasy’ that is predicated in the work of Freud and Lacan on a male body” (Campbell, 2000, p.151).

In this sense, the phallus per se is not as much of a problem as the logic of presence and absence it stands for, and the deconstruction of the phallic arrangement of space requires much more work than discarding a signifier belonging to the realm of patriarchal language. The introduction of the phallus does not necessarily mean that sexual difference and sexual identification must be thought in terms of presence and absence. The real problem is the logic of spatialisation that remains implicit in our conceptualisation of the penis/phallus. In the next section, I will demonstrate that if we dissociate the penis/phallus from the spatial structure and position it alongside a temporal axis, it is possible for the penis/phallus to set the proliferation of various sexual arrangements in motion without implying a determinate characterisation of sexual difference.

5.2 When Did You Find It? Nachträglichkeit and the Perfect Anterior

I want to present my argument by first returning to Freud’s Oedipal narrative. In Freud’s paper *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes*, there is a passage concerning the discovery of sexual difference, whose significance has not been fully appreciated by critics:

²⁵ However, I shall mention that in *The Signification of the Phallus*, Lacan opposes the attempt to reduce the phallus to a partial object and he blames the object relations school for this view: “For on this subject they have no other reference than the approximate notion of part-object, which has never been subjected to criticism since Karl Abraham introduced it. This is unfortunate given the comfort it offers analysts today” (Lacan, 2006, p.577).

There is an interesting contrast between the behaviours of the two sexes. In the analogous situation, when a little boy first catches sight of a girl's genital region, he begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest; he sees nothing or disavows what he has seen, he softens it down or looks about for expedients for bringing it into line with his expectations. It is not until later, when some threat of castration has obtained a hold upon him, that the observation becomes important to him: if he then recollects or repeats it, it arouses a terrible storm of emotion in him and forces him to believe in the reality of the threat which he has hitherto laughed at. This combination of circumstances leads to two reactions, which may become fixed and will in that case, whether separately or together or in conjunction with other factors, permanently determine the boy's relations to women: horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her. These developments, however, belong to the future, though not to a very remote one.

A little girl behaves differently. She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it (Freud, 1925, p.252).

The text is significant because it not only shows that there is a temporal difference between the boy's and the girl's discovery of anatomical difference, but more importantly, it points out that after the infant-mother symbiotic unity as the first stage of psychosexual development, which every subject goes through in the same manner, this temporal difference is indeed the first difference that can be witnessed between sexes. In other words, access to sexual difference as spatial difference (having or not having the penis) itself is preceded and defined by the temporal difference of perceiving sexual difference as such. Moreover, Freud tells us that this temporal difference takes place not only *between* two sexes but also *within* each sex, since both the boy and the girl experience a sense of temporal desynchrony regarding the penis, only in different ways. On the boy's side, the moment he confronts a bodily self-representation is earlier than the moment he symbolises anatomical difference as sexual difference. We find the explanation of this temporal desynchrony in Freud's theory of *Nachträglichkeit*.

Among different forms that the issue of time assumes in Freudian psychoanalysis, *Nachträglichkeit* is regarded as a particularly unique one. Marion believes that it forms the basis of Freud's view of memory, causality and time (Marion, 2011). The dominant role it plays in the complexity of the various notions of time in Freud's work leads Perelberg to think of *Nachträglichkeit* as a "general illumination": as a central idea in Freud, it illuminates everything else (Perelberg, 2008). The way this concept is developed by Freud indicates not only a descriptive account of time, namely, what a specific temporal feature may look like, but it also introduces a temporal logic through which different temporal dimensions are connected.

In *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), the term "*Nachträglichkeit*" was formally introduced to explain the delay Freud noticed between the formation of memory and the experience of trauma. In this text and his subsequent letters to Fliess, Freud develops the seduction theory which takes traumatic incidents of seduction (sexual abuse) in early life as the cause of all neuroses, but there is a theoretical detour before he arrives at this conclusion. In *Studies on Hysteria*, where the method developed by Freud and Breuer was still "abreaction", the process through which the individual discharges affects which are attached to a repressed memory of trauma, the mechanism of *Nachträglichkeit* had already been taken into consideration. But it was only put into descriptive use when Freud discussed what he then called "retention hysteria", a hysteria not caused by childhood sexual trauma but born from a particular situation, in which an individual fails to deal with the overwhelming tasks of sick-nursing thus adopting "a habit of suppressing every sign of his own emotion". As a result, "he will accumulate a mass of impressions which are capable of affect" but were not sufficiently perceived at that moment, and only after the person he nursed had died would the hysteria, "whose seeds were sown during the time of nursing, breaks out" (Freud, 1895b, p.162). Here, time delay had not yet been elevated to the temporal logic of symptom formation in general.

However, soon after, Freud found that the therapeutic effect of the abreaction of trauma in speech was not as satisfactory as Breuer suggested. In many cases, various fairly recent memories recollected from patients did not explain their symptoms, and often lacked “a determinant and traumatic force” to do so:

When our procedure leads, as in the cases described above, to findings which are insufficient as an explanation both in respect to their suitability as determinants and to their traumatic effectiveness, we also fail to secure any therapeutic gain; the patient retains his symptoms unaltered, in spite of the initial result yielded by the analysis (Freud, 1896, p.195).

If new symptoms continue to emerge after the abreaction of the original one, then, as Paul Verhaeghe suggests, “it seems that a first moment is lacking, one which logically precedes” (Verhaeghe, 1999, p.129). To solve this problem, Freud introduced a temporal delay between cause and effect: “if the memory which we have uncovered does not answer our expectations, it may be that we ought to pursue the same path a little further”; and “If the first discovered scene is unsatisfactory, we tell our patient that this experience explains nothing, but that behind it there must be hidden a more significant, earlier, experience” (ibid.). In terms of the causal relationship, we now have two different causes, “one that has been discovered and the one that has still to be discovered”. Although the earlier event contains the traumatic force, it can only find its way into consciousness through the later event that provides the determining effect. The interval of a period of time between these two events forms the basis on which a psychoanalytic theory of hysteria is built, as Freud writes that “it is highly noteworthy that it (the sexual release) was not linked to the assault when this was experienced”, instead, “We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *Nachträglichkeit*. The cause of this state of things is the retardation of puberty as compared with the rest of the individual's development” (Freud, 1895a, p.356).

At first sight, the German word “*Nachträglichkeit*” is used here simply to designate the delayed effect of early trauma or a delayed discharge of libidinal energy that

fails to find its way into release in the beginning. In this sense, Strachey's translation of *Nachträglichkeit* as "deferred action" in the Standard Edition is accurate. However, the conceptual ambiguity of *Nachträglichkeit* is already embedded in this first reference, since alongside his psychodynamic explanation of the original traumatic experience in terms of delayed release of energy, Freud also provides a more hermeneutic reading of *Nachträglichkeit* which focuses on the meaning-making process: "Here we have the case of a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered" (ibid.). This "different understanding reappeared in Freud's letter to Fliess one year later, in which he suggests that "the material present in the shape of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a re-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstance – to a re-transcription" (Freud, 1896a, p.1). If deferred action stands for a compulsive tendency to repeat the original unpleasure experience with the arrival of puberty, then the work of re-arrangement and re-transcription suggests that the individual's assimilation of new experiences and meanings into one's living world at present does not provide conditions for the "repetition" of original trauma, but becomes the cause of trauma that is produced later than the event but nevertheless makes the earlier event possible. The original event is either imaginary, or insignificant in its own right. Therefore, two different definitions of *Nachträglichkeit* are presented from the very beginning in correspondence with this term's two meanings in German: "later-subsequent" and "supplementary" (Marion, 2011, p.25). Whereas Freud finds psychoanalytic implications for each meaning – "later-subsequent" suggests that the past event would bring about subsequent pathological consequence, while "supplementary" means that the trauma is only 'completed' at a later point in time - he does little to reconcile the contradiction between the progressive temporal direction on the one hand, which moves from past to present to convey the permanent influence of earlier experiences upon the present, and the retrogressive temporal direction on the other, which moves from the present to past and projects new meanings into the latter.

Freud's lack of clarification makes *Nachträglichkeit* a focal point around which different psychoanalytic theories oppose one another. "Deferred action" has often been criticised by analysts who focus on the "supplementary" aspect of *Nachträglichkeit*. To Laplanche and Pontalis, it would be a serious simplification to understand *Nachträglichkeit* "in terms of a variable time-lapse, due to some kind of storing procedure, between stimuli and response". Translating it as deferred action encourages a reading that reduces the complex process of symptom-formation to a narrowly economic theory of abreaction (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p.114). Analysts influenced by ego psychology and object relations theory favour subjective construction in the here-and-now. Faimberg, for instance, calls for a broader conceptualisation of *Nachträglichkeit* not even in terms of re-transcription but "the giving of retroactive meaning *for a first time*" (Faimberg, 2007, p.1227). It is argued that there is no event as such whose memory trace is waiting to be grasped, "but only the belated context-dependent allocation of meaning" (Eickhoff, 2006, p.1461). However, a purely hermeneutic understanding of *Nachträglichkeit* may confuse Freud's viewpoint with Jung's idea of "retroactive fantasy" which he publicly rejects. In his discussion of screen memory, Freud makes a statement that "mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled" (Freud, 1908, p.147). By emphasising the priority attached to the significance of the earlier experience, Freud continues to give those past events a foundation in reality even after his abandonment of the seduction theory.

Returning to our present case, I argue that the boy's temporal experience of sexual difference in Freud's Oedipal narrative is a perfect example that demonstrates how two meanings of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* can supplement rather than contradict each other. From the perspective of deferred action, the perception of the female genital region is too traumatic to be made sense of at once. The boy's ignorance can, therefore, be interpreted as an unconscious defence against an absolute impossibility that shatters the psychic reality. On the other hand, the boy does not

passively “wait” for this repressed memory to be activated by chance. He retrospectively understands this original moment only through the lens of his current phallic situation in which the paternal power defines the meaning of lack. The progressive direction of the objective causal relation and the retrogressive direction of meaning-attribution are compatible because they are two processes taking place in different temporal registers. Borrowing terminology from Thoma and Cheshire’s work on the causality of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* (Thoma & Cheshire, 1991), I argue that the boy’s perception of sexual difference is the outcome of “empirical causation” of the body process which takes place in Real time. As Freud admits, “We are not accustomed to the notion of powers emanating from a mnemonic image which was absent from the real impression” (Freud, 1896b, p.213). The boy’s original impression is indeed real, in the sense that it concerns the materiality of the body as something unthematized and unactualized, which resists but at the same time conditions every figuration and symbolisation. Meanwhile, this perception also reflects “logical causation” of symbolic articulation which takes place in Symbolic time. The Symbolic has a constituting and formative effect on the realisation of sexual difference. Yet it does not replace the bodily cause but rather provides a rational-cognitive consistency so that the subject can finally perceive the already-existed cause as the cause. In other words, the direction from cause to effect is forward, but the direction from cause to the actualisation of cause is metaphorically “in retrospect”.

Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* provides a model to contemplate the articulation of sexual difference between a determinant past and a retrospective present. However, the girl’s temporal experience of sexual difference described by Freud in the Oedipal narrative is totally different. From the perspective of biological determinism, it is easy to understand how the girl, by witnessing the male genital organ, “makes her judgement and her decision in a flash” and instantly positions herself as a subject that lacks, but I want to examine this statement following the Lacanian logic that the penis cannot be the indicator of sexual difference without symbolisation, a logic, I argue, that does not render Freud’s original statement invalid but only reveals its radical potential. If the elevation of the penis to the signifier of the lack is only

possible after the intervention of the symbolic father, as we have witnessed in the boy's case, then the decision the girl makes "in a flash" shall not be based on an empirical fact of presence and absence, since she does not have the phallic object for sure, but also does not not-have it at that moment. Therefore, I provide an alternative to explain how the girl processes sexual difference: The statement is made by her in the future anterior tense, not "I lack (a penis)" but "I will have lacked".

The future anterior, or the future perfect, is a tense that supposes a past anterior not to the present but to a future, a past that is also future in relation to the present of enunciation. Lacan uses this tense to describe how the historicity of the subject is delineated by the symbolic order. As he announces in *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*:

What is realised in my 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, 2006j, p.247).

In *Seminar VI*, Lacan points out "the necessity of using the future perfect" (Lacan, 1959, p. 63) to highlight the split nature of the subject in speech. From a spatial perspective, Lacan's distinction between the subject of the enunciated and the subject of the enunciation (or the subject of the statement) can be understood through the division of psychic layers. The former, which is identified with the personal pronoun "I" in the statement, corresponds to the speaker's ego; whereas the latter, emerging in a discursive structure and produced by the chain of signifiers, is equivalent to the subject of the unconscious. However, the irreparable gap between the enunciated content conveyed consciously by the speaker and the content of enunciation that disrupts the literal meaning of the sentence is also a temporal one. As Lacan suggests, there are two reference points to time when a subject speaks. Using the statement "by that date I will have become her husband" as an example, Lacan points out that the subject of the enunciated is located at the

future, the time “concerning the act that is going to be in question” (ibid.). The subject of the enunciation, on the other hand, exists in the present, since “it is the present point from which you speak from the act of enunciating which locates you”.

At first sight, the duplicity of the subject’s temporal location in the symbolic order simply reaffirms the double directionality of time suggested by Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*. In the same way that the unassimilated cause of trauma precedes the moment of its investment with meaning and significance, “the subject finds his signifying place in a way that is logically prior to any awakening of the signified” (Lacan, 2006l, p.579). Both ideas reject the progressive and linear-teleological course of events and regard the constitution of the subject as a result of the twofold movement of anticipation and retrospection. However, I disagree with the argument held by some commentators that Lacan merely deciphers *Nachträglichkeit* of the trauma grammatically as the future anterior (Kober, 2006, p.26; Milesi, 1999, p.190). To begin with, there is a subtle difference of the reference point to the future envisaged by Freud and Lacan: to Freud, the mechanism of *Nachträglichkeit* requires a moment X, in the future, when revision and reworking of memory traces to give the past a new meaning is made possible. Using Lacan’s vocabulary, we may say this moment X functions as the “last word” without which a sentence cannot be completed (Lacan, 2006f, p.711). It is at this moment that the subject’s signifying chain takes on a relatively fixed meaning. Yet what is missing from Lacan’s future anterior is precisely this moment X. What will have happened is distinguished from what will happen by adding a second event further into the future in relation to which the first event in the future becomes past. In other words, the defining moment X cannot be precisely located in the future anterior since the anticipated subject is constituted at a future point posterior to X. As Bruce Fink points out, “Lacan never pinpoints the subject’s chronological appearance on the scene: he or she is always either about to arrive – is on the verge of arriving – or will have already arrived by some later moment in time” (Fink, 1996b, p.63). The future anterior tells us the after-effect of an event if it will actually take place, “without specifying exactly when” (ibid.). The very moment of arrival, namely a moment when the meaningless pronoun ‘I’ is turned into a subject proper by the uttered

signifiers, remains elusive. Using Lacan’s example “by that date I will have become her husband” again, we can present the temporal relation in the future anterior graphically as such:

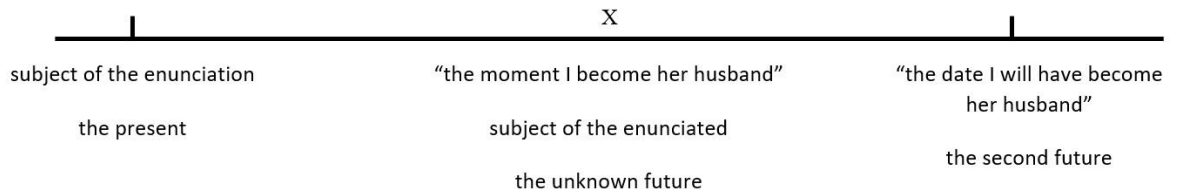


Figure 8. Graph of Lacan’s Example of the Future Anterior

The moment X is when the subject of the enunciated is supposed to be constituted. However, to Lacan, the ego remains an imaginary projection that cannot claim an exact place in the future. By leaving the moment X in suspense, Lacan’s future anterior posits a temporal trajectory of the subject’s symbolisation of sexual difference that is distinguished from the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, a difference that becomes obvious when we introduce the notion of dual temporality. In Freud’s framework, anticipation and retrospection are two ends of the same process that presents itself differently in Real time and Symbolic time. It is a process through which the meaning of the original trauma will eventually realise at the moment X in the future. To argue whether this meaning is deferred to be understood at this later point or given back retrospectively does not change the fact that confirmation of meaning will only come in the future. This principle guides the here-and-now model of interpretation that awaits the arrival of the moment X by making use of the present experience to produce explicit reconstruction. The workings of the psyche can also be explained at the level of language. In the same way that the essentially undefined pronoun “I” as the first word of a sentence lies in expectation of the final word that will confer meaning upon all the words that precede it, the moment X is anticipated as the point of completion, certainty and security from the beginning of the process of symbolisation. In this sense, Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* constructs a closed temporal loop in which retrospection is both of condition and the outcome of anticipation.

Lacan's future anterior is a significant departure from this model in the sense that it involves two different processes. The first process takes place in Symbolic time that links the undefined subject at the time of the utterance with the after-effect of a constituted symbolic identity at a future moment. However, one does not know the exact time when the master signifier marks the constitution of identity, a symbolic event that potentially takes place in-between. As I have demonstrated in the chapter on Symbolic time, the signifying chain runs automatically and throws the subject into the time of the Other. The subject confronts the impossibility of recognition in the first process because the constitution of symbolic identity is the work of the symbolic order in its own time that cannot be imaginarily anticipated. On the other hand, there is also a second process in the future anterior that is backward-oriented. It is not a retrospection that merely confirms the subject's anticipation at present, but an unexpected return of a future moment that claims its own actuality in spite of the fact that the very existence of an in-between symbolic event that makes it possible remains in question. This return of the future is the Real future I name in the chapter on Real time, a future that is impossible to imagine but realises its radical difference in the present. Therefore, what has been deferred in the future anterior is not the realisation of meaning, as Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* implies, but the very closure of meaning since the subject leaps into an unknown future when the determination of the symbolic signifier has become the past. While *Nachträglichkeit* offers a temporal loop that contains the future in the past, what Lacan's future anterior achieves is giving the character of openness and unpredictability back to the future. As Samuel Weber explains well in his book:

In invoking the future anterior, Lacan troubles the perfected closure of the always-already-having-been by inscribing it in the inconclusive futurity of what will-always-already-having-been, a "time" which can never be entirely remembered, since it will never have fully taken place. It is an irreducible remainder or remnant that will continually prevent the subject from ever becoming entirely self-identical (Weber, 1991, p.9).

How past and future are constructed differently in *Nachträglichkeit* and the future anterior can be further examined if we return to Freud's description of sexual difference as temporal difference. On the masculine side, the penis/phallus, as an object that requires the real or symbolic space, designates two different things: at the moment of the original traumatic encounter, it reveals a lack of the signifier in the pre-existent symbolic universe to signify the lived, Real body of the infant, as the subject of the enunciation fails to name whatever "it" is; then at the moment of symbolisation made possible by the name-of-the-father, it is a signifier of the lack that, instead of challenging a substantive sexual identity, becomes the symbolic ground on which the imaginary ego (the subject of the enunciated) comes to depend. Paternal identification designates the destination of the process of becoming a masculine subject, an end permitting no exception or surprise other than the mastery and self-sufficiency of the phallic imago. In this sense, *Nachträglichkeit* opens the past to constant reworking and reorganisation, but it closes the future by inserting a master-signifier as the ultimate guarantee of meaning. The future for the masculine subject, therefore, is not future at all. It is an illusion of the future attached to a particular object (penis/phallus) that affirms the singular truth of normativity.

On the feminine side, we observe the opposite result: instead of waiting uncertainly, the girl "makes her judgement and her decision in a flash". However, it is difficult to make sense of the judgement that "she lacks a penis" since the penis, as the biological organ, does not exist for the girl. If the penis is not an object the subject once had in the past, how can one speak of its "lacking" in the present? In response to this question, I argue that the girl's judgement should be understood from the perspective of the future anterior. Her judgement of lacking a penis is certainly not a description of anatomical reality, but a claim oriented towards the future that "I will have lacked a penis".

This claim should be understood in two ways. To say that "I will have lacked a penis" in Symbolic time means that one accepts the symbolic determination as a necessity

that is impending in the symbolic future. Although the subject can never foresee when this determination will take place, it is a necessity imposed upon the feminine subject by the symbolic reality and pronounced through her as if it is her fate. This temporal manoeuvre that turns the unknown future into a sense of certainty in the present is an important feature of the future anterior. According to Geoffrey Bennington's interpretation, the future anterior is not a prediction, "at least in so far as the future perfect has always-already been contained in the past" (Bennington, 1990, p.20). Since what the subject speaks of at the time of the utterance is the after-effect of another event, something that is complete, the future anterior becomes equivalent to a repetition of the present perfect. In our case, the very present in which the girl makes an instant judgement is contextualised by the symbolic order that sends a message back from the future, so that she can experience the Real body as calling upon her to fix its significance and accept what will have been offered by the symbolic future in which the phallus as the sign of symbolic determination marks the lack of being for each individual.

However, "I will have lacked a penis" is also pronounced in Real time. There is a crucial difference between the masculine anticipation of "I will lack the penis (as the result of castration)" and this feminine conviction. The former, as we have discussed, demonstrates a certain narrowness that will take hold of the subject. The subject's lack is compensated by the phallus as a signifier of lack that symbolises sexual difference and completes sexual identity. Yet what guides the future anterior, Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, is "the future (that) can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity" (Derrida, 1998b, p.5). To accept the forthcoming symbolic determination does not mean that the process of becoming a sexed subject must stop at this moment X. The future anterior opens the Real future for the subject by positing a "future beyond future" that coincides with the present in the form of eternal return. While castration marks the end of the Oedipus complex as a definitive future for the masculine subject, we can understand Freud's argument that it is only the beginning of the Oedipus complex for girls in the sense that the feminine subject has already

positioned herself further into the future when the moment of being determined as lacking becomes the past. The future anterior creates a new temporal dimension for the expression of sexed subjectivity that resists the very constraint of meaning embodied by the phallic future. It moves beyond the fantasy of self-realisation that only forecloses the futurism and maintains the void around which new sexual identities are both partly constituted and dislocated.

Lacan's future anterior offers a possibility of thinking of sexed subjectivity without resorting to the spatial logic of presence and absence. In the Oedipal narrative of the process of masculine symbolisation, the boy certainly experiences both the absence (in the past) and the presence (in the future) of a signifier for sexual difference. However, for the feminine subject, "I lack a penis" at the present cannot be taken as a guarantee of an authoritative self-possession of one's bodily experience or identity, since this claim exceeds the moment of the Now and attaches itself to an untenable future in which the subordination to the phallic power is taken for granted. The claim that "I will have lacked a penis" means precisely that such a lack has not yet taken place in the present. The subject can thus express itself as freely as it will do in the "future beyond future" when the lack already becomes the past. In the future anterior, the penis/phallus fails to prove itself as a privileged signifier of spatial demarcation in determining the subject's symbolic status. Instead, it will have been reduced to an undefinable reminder of symbolic negativity in the past future. If the girl truly lacks a penis, the penis is not an object but a moment: The subject lacks a moment in Real time to think through the enigma of sexual difference, since the supposed immediate presence of the Real body to the subject has been hijacked by the symbolic order that grounds its knowledge claim on an uncompleted articulation of signifiers; She also lacks a determinate moment in Symbolic time, a moment concluding the process of becoming that will have been "forgotten" in the not-yet-coming future.

5.3 Towards a New Epistemology of Sexed Subjectivity

By using Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* and Lacan's future anterior as two different ways that explain the child's first perception of sexual difference in the Oedipal narrative, I intend to deconstruct the logic of spatialisation that reduces sexual difference to spatial difference. However, this does not mean that I will construct sexual difference as temporal difference correspondingly, namely that man's time is *Nachträglichkeit* and woman's time is the future anterior. Such an argument returns to a dualistic, binary thinking that offers little to our understanding of sexuality in contemporary societies. The fact that we have found two different ways to perceive sexual difference in the Oedipal narrative indicates not two kinds of sexed being but rather two types of epistemology. It is the opposition between a traditional epistemology that adopts a masculine perspective and privileges a phallogocentric arrangement of sexual identity through a teleological development, and a new epistemology that deconstructs the spatial importance of the penis/phallus and embraces more possible sexual expressions by opening itself to the unpredictable future. Lacan's idea of the future anterior, I suggest, does not show how one kind of sexed identity is constructed. The way we understand how the girl in Freud's writings perceives sexual difference can be applied to every construction of sexual identity.

I want first to explain why it is problematic to characterise sexed subjectivity by a specific kind of temporal experience. This idea is associated with the issue of women's time in feminist writings that has been discussed from multiple viewpoints. Firstly, there are some attempts to associate women's biology with a distinct temporal experience. The menstrual cycle or the biological cycle of birth, pregnancy and death are taken as important sources of a time consciousness collectively shared by all women (Griffiths, 1999; Martin, 1992; O'Brien, 1981). Secondly, some theorists also pay attention to the social system of contemporary capitalism which shapes and disciplines the lives of women and approach women's time from a structured set of living patterns and ways of being that are consolidated over time through socialisation. While the temporal logic of capitalist production requires a linear time that is fast-speed, forward-moving and commercially

dividable, Rita Felski points out that women are often placed outside of the time of work in the public sphere. The result is that women's time is closely linked to repetition and cyclicity, since "they are primarily responsible for the repetitive tasks of social reproduction: cleaning, preparing meals, caring for children...in the domestic sphere (that) is deemed to exist outside the dynamic of history and change" (Felski, 2000, p.82). However, women's everyday practice of "doing time" does not only reaffirm the gendered temporal norms. Some indicate that it also contains possibilities to resist the dominant time culture. Nurturing and attachment that are important themes of the emotional and physical labour of women may give rise to "caring time", a temporal model that involves "caring about" and "caring for" other people (Davies, 1989, 1994). In Valerie Bryson's examination, caring time in many feminist writings has been taken as essentially relational time in contrast to capitalist time that promotes individualisation (Bryson, 2007, p.135). Since the very idea of caring involves a concern for well-being in the future, it changes women's devalued, repetitive domestic work into a meaningful flow of time without participating in the future of capitalist time driven by the imperatives of profit maximisation.

Julia Kristeva's essay "Women's Time" provides a comprehensive and influential discussion about this topic that summarises many points we have mentioned above. It theorises women's temporal experience in relation to biology, culture and the symbolic order. On the one hand, Kristeva's argument is grounded in women's embodiment and "naturalness", as she argues that "cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature" (Kristeva, 1981, p.16) are closely linked to a cyclical and monumental time that retains the essential characters of repetition and eternity. On the other hand, the constitution of female subjectivity is also "the result of a sociohistorical conjuncture" (ibid., p.15). Sexual difference as difference between women's time and men's teleological, linear, prospective unfolding time may at once be "biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction", but it has been translated by "a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then in relationship to power, language and meaning" (ibid., p.21). After examining how

different generations of feminism have reacted to the dominant time norm, as they either seek to gain a place in the time of history or radically reject it and celebrate women's difference, Kristeva argues that the challenge for a new generation of women is to find a satisfactory balance between women's time that originates from their bodily experience and historical time of the symbolic order that shapes women's living.

Sophisticated as it is, Kristeva's essay is also an excellent example that demonstrates the problematic nature of the attempts to speak of women's time. Although Kristeva is aware of the danger of recreating binary oppositions of sexual difference, as she criticises the logic of inclusion and exclusion that guides the strategies adopted by former generations of feminism and tries to move beyond the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity, her own arguments are still built upon binary categorisation such as nature vs civilisation, private vs public and cyclicity vs linearity. The talk of women's time in the first place inscribes an assumption that "woman" can be homogenised into "women" as a unitary category, yet the meaning of woman is constructed in varying ways according to the particular sociohistorical context in which this notion is perceived. Not all women share the same biological rhythm or social experience of repetition and caring that gives rise to a common temporal consciousness. Therefore, defining women's time in either way suppresses different temporalities available to the individual woman and denies some men's temporal experience outside conventional forms.

However, the real problem that concerns me in relation to the topic of this chapter is not whether there is a radical difference between "masculine" and "feminine" time that makes a separate women's time possible, since phenomenologically speaking, we may admit that women's physical and social experiences are loosely linked to a range of temporal perceptions different from men's. From a political point of view, women's time can also be a useful concept to mobilise collective actions on wider economic and social issues and thus "links campaigns around time to other dimensions of inequality and resistance" (Bryson, 2007, p.142). The

limitation of the idea of women's time, I argue, is epistemological, since it sexualises temporal difference while leaving the enigma of sexual difference untouched. The theorisation of the difference between men's time and women's time does not provide a new perspective to reevaluate sexual difference since "men" and "women" are already implicitly differentiated before the theorisation. In some cases, it is merely an extension of those spatially binary oppositions to the temporal dimension, so that "nature vs civilisation" becomes "biological time vs historical time". These differences are not temporal at all but differences between space-like qualities, attributes or characters of time that can only be retrieved by an observer standing outside time. The idea of women's time resists the way male-dominated society organises time into a "single streamlined story" (Felski, 2000, p.2) with a coherent goal or direction, yet its very existence is another version of this grand narrative that ignores the individual's fragmented temporal experience in favour of rational summarisation and overgeneralised apprehension. It is not surprising to see that Kristeva's *Women's Time* ends with an imagination of "another space" that balances women's symbolic and biological existence, since the idea of women's time serves to carve out a space in which femininity can be categorised. It is not a temporalisation of sexual difference but rather a spatialisation of time that converts the chaotic flux of time into an atemporal concept of non-linearity.

Therefore, by comparing Lacan's future anterior with Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, I have no intention of providing another version of women's time that continues to maintain the ontological opposition between two gendered categories. The difference between *Nachträglichkeit* and the future anterior should not be regarded as a determinate characterisation of sexual difference. The future anterior itself does not define the temporal experience of women, nor does it represent one side of sexual difference. Instead, it designates a new epistemology to understand how sexed subjectivity is expressed in a temporal process that leads to the construction of sexual identity.

Epistemology is a framework concerned with the production and generation of knowledge. A given epistemological framework, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise write, “specifies not only what ‘knowledge’ is and how to recognise it, but who are ‘knowers’ and by what means someone becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge-claims are adjudicated, and some rejected in favour of another/others” (Stanley & Wise, 2002, pp.188–89). All of these objectives are highly relevant to our investigation of sexual difference. So far, by examining Freud’s “linear-teleological model”, Lacan’s “structural-timeless model” and feminist constructions of women’s time, we have encountered various truth-claims of sexual difference. What these accounts have in common is that they all presume the existence of a knower able to describe the norm of sexual difference while remaining independent of embodied experience. Yet knowledge of sexual difference cannot be objective since the knowing subject is not external to sexual difference but is constituted by it. Freud’s notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, for example, is an epistemology that grounds sexual difference on a masculine cognitive style, not only because it promotes the penis as a valued object of desire, but also because in the self-closed process of symbolising sexual difference, it pursues the ultimate realisation of a phallic future in which the penis as “the epistemological object par excellence” guarantees knowledge to be conceptualised as whole, rounded and finished (Moi, 1981, p.72). Similarly, theorising the ontology of sexual difference in binary terms such as lacking vs not lacking the symbolic phallus or men’s time vs women’s time also implies a masculinist epistemology that is modelled on Cartesian dualism.²⁶ These binary categories contain an implicit hierarchy of difference and unavoidably lead to the valuation of one side over the other, thus recreating inequalities embedded in social and institutional practices. Even though one may attempt to promote femininity against male dominance through the binary opposition, it will more likely fail since to champion the feminine value means accepting the problematic definition of masculine and feminine, as well as the masculinist epistemology that leads to this definition. Moreover, by recognising

²⁶ Bordo explains that Cartesian dualism is a masculine response to the loss of social unity in the seventeenth century. It initiates the masculine orientation toward knowledge whose objectivity depends on “a clear and distinct determination of the boundaries between self and world” (Bordo, 1986, p.451).

sexual difference only as oppositional and dualistic, these accounts are unable to address the fluidity and metamorphism of sexual identity that become more visible in contemporary societies.

By contrast, Lacan's future anterior contributes to a new epistemology of sexed subjectivity that rejects the dominant masculinist model. Sexual difference is not understood as a binary opposition since difference in the future anterior is vertical rather than horizontal. It is not a difference between two gendered categories that is enclosed within a limited symbolic space, but a difference within a process of becoming that runs through time. The future anterior also works against the teleological narrative that completes the knowledge of sexual difference in the end. Instead, it puts the very ending in question and marks it as a "past future" that does not retrospectively determine the subject's life trajectory.

Using the future anterior to describe the process of the construction of sexual identity provides us with a different approach to understanding Lacan's formulas of sexuation. As I discussed earlier, the usual way of reading formulas of sexuation follows the logic of spatialisation that theorises difference alongside the axis of presence and absence. It reduces a multitude of sexes and sexual identities to two generalised categories. Each one designates a specific arrangement of space for the sexed subject. Men, apart from one "outsider" that stands for the fantasy of uncastrated satisfaction, occupy the symbolic space within the limit of the phallic law and thus are sexually representable by phallic signification; on the other side, women are not fully submitted to the phallic norm but nevertheless defined in relation to the phallic function. There is no signifier of femininity, and therefore women have to adopt the position of the exception. The epistemology underlying such a reading presents the knower as someone outside the field of sexual difference, yet a closer look shows that the knowing subject is clearly masculine, who uncritically preserves the centrality of the phallus in determining desire. Moreover, this reading fails to explain why there are only two types of sexed

subjectivity and thus reduces sexual difference to some simplistic drawings of “man” and “woman”.

As Žižek points out, in order to defend the construction of sexual difference as a binary opposition, one has to follow Hegel’s philosophy which defines the essential difference as the difference between the genus itself and its species “as such”. Therefore, “sexual difference is not simply the difference between the two species of the human genus but the difference between one term (man) that stands for the genus as such and the other term (woman) that stands for the Difference within the genus as such, for its specifying, particular moment” (Žižek, 2002, p.75). Here, Žižek distances himself from most Lacanian commentators whose interpretations of Lacan’s formulas of sexuation depend on a taken-for-granted ontological assumption, namely that two separate columns of Lacan’s graph designate two kinds of being, or at least two symbolic positions that must be adopted by the individual in one way or another. Instead of providing an either-or choice for an individual to be recognised as a “man” or “woman” in relation to the phallic signifier, four propositions of Lacan’s formulas of sexuation, in Žižek’s reading, are meant to be applied to the construction and differentiation of each sexual identity as such. It is precisely this line of thinking that I will develop by introducing the time of the future anterior, as I argue that sexual difference should be understood not as the spatial difference *between* two subject positions, but as the difference *within* one sexual identity during the process of becoming.

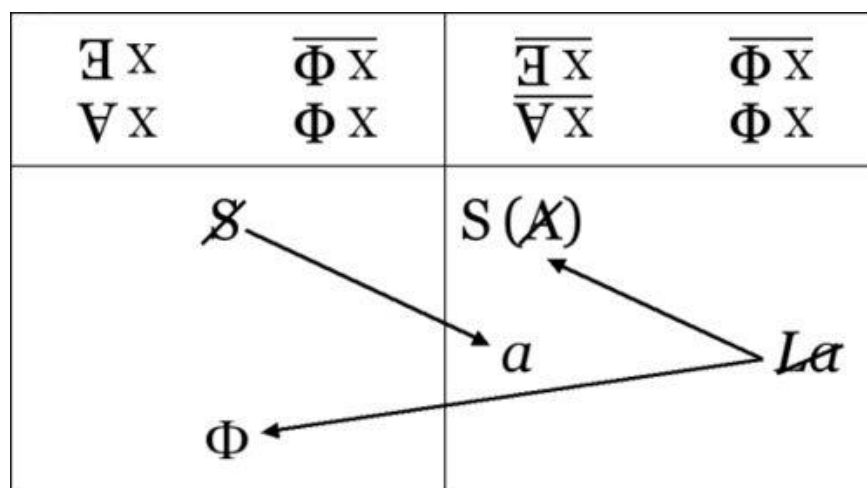


Figure 9. Graph of Sexuation. Reprinted from Lacan, J. (1999). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*. (p.78). (J. Miller, Ed.). Translated by Bruce Fink. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

According to this reading, the left column of Lacan's graph of sexuation consists of two propositions that theorise the formation of sexual identity as such. As subjects, we are always located in this column regardless of our sexual identities. The top-left proposition means that every sexual identity is subjected to symbolic determination. It is only within the symbolic order that one can experience one's sexual identity as something discursively constructed from socially and culturally contingent traits. However, this does not mean that every identity is already fixed in the present. The time of symbolic determination is always the moment X in the unknown future, which leaves the subject's current sexual identity uncompleted and open to further change. I read the phallic sign Φ as a neutral indicator of the future symbolic determination, which has no immediate effect on the way one understands sexuality at present. Like all other identities, sexual identity is fully articulated in Symbolic time, a temporal register in which different signifying temporal chains interact with each other so that the subject's sexual identifications are connected to parental desire, social discourse and cultural influence. Meanwhile, the bottom-left proposition points out that there exists one sexual identity that escapes symbolic determination. The subject experiences the process of symbolisation as foreign and responds with its own construction of the perfect sexual identity (an "ideal man" or "ideal woman" for example) which is expected to reveal the essence of one's being. This perfect sexual identity incarnates the fantasy of becoming a subject "outside-the-symbolic-order" and covers the fact that subjectivity is characterised by a fundamental lack of being. It is the tension caused by the unpredictability of symbolic formation that demands the existence of such an imaginary future, which gives a sense of coherence and consistency back to the subject even though it will never come true.

Correspondingly, the right column of Lacan's graph of sexuation does not represent a feminine being but theorises sexual difference within each identity. The top-right

proposition should be read as “there is no sexual difference which is not submitted to the symbolic articulation”. Sexual identity is fundamentally relational in the sense that its construction relies on the subject’s constant interchange with both the imaginary other and the Symbolic Other, represented by social discourses and norms. My examination of literature in this chapter has demonstrated how the term “sexual difference” has become a site where various discourses contest each other. It is impossible to speak of sexual difference without referring to social difference, psychic difference or anatomical difference, all of which stand for different ways of symbolisation. For the subject, it is only through the symbolisation of difference that one is able to give meaning to its own sexual identity. This explains why Lacan links \La , the sign of sexual difference on the right side, with Φ , the indicator of symbolic determination on the left side. In this sense, Lacan should not be the target of Judith Butler’s critique that questions the psychoanalytic assumption which affirms the primacy of sexual difference over other differences and overlooks “the convergent modalities of power by which sexual difference is articulated and assumed” (Butler, 2011, p.123). However, sexual difference cannot be understood only at the symbolic level, as we read the bottom-right proposition: “not-all sexual difference is subjected to the symbolic articulation”. That leads to an important argument in Lacan’s writings that sexual difference is Real, against which every attempt at symbolisation always fails.

In *Seminar XIV*, Lacan pointed out that “there is no sexual act” that connects the subject of each sex (Lacan, 1966, p.166), yet the famous claim he makes in *Seminar XX* - “I state that analytic discourse is premised solely on the statement that there is no such thing, that it is impossible to found a sexual relationship” (Lacan, 1999, p.9) – is still a theoretical breakthrough because it is the first time Lacan grounds the idea of the non-existent sexual relationship on a new epistemological framework, namely the formulas of sexuation. There is no sexual relationship not because “man” and “woman” are defined in asymmetrical ways, each desiring something different from the other. Such a reading is another version of phallogocentric dualism that fails to capture the plurality of sexual identifications. Instead, it is the lack of a signifier of sexual difference in the symbolic order that

situates every relationship between the sexes against the background of a fundamental impossibility. To Lacan, no matter how sexuality is symbolically representable, it is fundamentally an expression of the Real body's demand and thus linked to what he calls "jouissance of the body". Different from phallic jouissance as the enjoyment of an organ that is rendered desirable only by the symbolic articulation and thus "serves as a mere extension or instrument of the signifier" (Fink, 1996b, pp.106–7), jouissance of the body is situated outside the symbolic order and therefore cannot be articulated by language and speech. In Lacan's graph of sexuation, this jouissance is represented by the sign $S(A)$ in the right column and directly linked to \La , the unrepresentable sexual difference. In contrast to the formation of sexual identity on the left side, sexual difference is generated in Real time that describes the changing intensities of the Real body. By marking the difference between unprocessed real drives of the body and sexual desires produced by the symbolic articulations of the demand of the Other, sexual difference becomes what Žižek calls "Real-impossible", which is "impossible to symbolise, to formulate as a symbolic norm" (Žižek, 1998, p.82).²⁷

My reading of Lacan's graph of sexuation shows sexed subjectivity as the way an individual confronts the Real sexual difference during the construction of sexual identity. As we have discussed in the previous section, there are two ways of perceiving sexual difference. Lacan's formalisation clearly does not fit into the Freudian model of *Nachträglichkeit*, which anticipates the phallic determination that will retrospectively symbolise the Real difference. In Lacan's theory, the construction of sexual identity is never completed for two reasons. One is that such a process takes place in the Symbolic time which the subject experiences as foreign.

²⁷ The idea that sexual difference is Real once again proves why we should not read the formulas of sexuation as a logical formalisation of two binary subjective positions, since how can sexual difference be Real if it is only a difference between two opposed series of symbolic features and still consists of narrowed definitions of "man" and "woman"? If "sexual difference is that bedrock of impossibility on account of which every formalisation of sexual difference fails" (Žižek, 2002, p.71), there is no need for us to add Lacan's formulas of sexuation into these doomed-to-fail attempts.

The individual cannot be sure how the signifying chain affects its body, desire, identification, object-choice and fantasy, leading to a diversity of sexual representations far more than any dualistic classification is able to cover. The other is that the body process in Real time resists signification. Any phallic jouissance the individual enjoys within the symbolic universe is always disrupted by jouissance of the body as a certain excess that cannot be adequately contained. Therefore, as Žižek writes, “sexuality does not designate a particular ontic sphere of human reality” but rather stands for a certain displacement, distortion or a gap “out of joint” (Žižek, 2012, pp.739–40).

To accommodate both the unpredictability of the symbolic determination and the resistance of the Real body that characterise the process of becoming a sexed subject, the construction of sexual identity needs to be interpreted in terms of the future anterior. It is not determined by the symbolic order in the present or the future, but equivalent to what the subject will have been. By rendering the moment of symbolic determination unrepresentable, the future anterior puts the sexed subject in a process of becoming as it constantly encounters new perspectives to symbolise the Real sexual difference. However, this does not mean that the individual can only be a fragmented subject lost in the movement of indefinite self-difference since every moment of difference is also a moment of some identity that contextualises a new act of symbolisation. In fact, the future anterior never excludes a moment of resolution from Symbolic time. This distinguishes it from the simple future tense in which the individual speaks confidently of its sexual identity by virtue of fantasy and refuses to accept the fact that self-identity is not self-determined but mediated by the Other. On the contrary, to claim “what I will have been” is to make a decision about which past one needs to return to in the future in order to go beyond it, so that this “future beyond future” can manifest itself in the subject’s embodied present and guides the way one experiences sexual difference within its sexual identity. In other words, the future anterior makes the present a site where a determinate Symbolic future coincides with an all-embracing Real future, a moment when my passive undergoing of the Symbolic is also my active engagement with the Real.

By reading Lacan's formulas of sexuation as a general theory that describes the construction of sexual identity in the future anterior, I develop "sexed time" as a new epistemology of sexed subjectivity that radically rejects the phallogocentric understanding of sexuality. Its radicalness is demonstrated by the elimination of what I call "symbolic dualism", namely the way to think of symbolic difference in binary terms. The fact that such a binary thinking permeates culture and language, I argue, does not mean that a psychoanalytic epistemology should endorse it to understand sexual difference. The oppositions between "man" and "woman", "masculinity" and "femininity", hardly contribute to contemporary debates on sexual and gender pluralities. These different forms of dualism in each case precludes a theory of sexuality from explaining the expression of sexed subjectivity individually to which it has a constitutive commitment. Sexual identities are heterogeneous rather than oppositional, and every attempt at symbolisation in the form of translating sexual difference into binary opposition is merely a desperate effort to "compensate for the lack of the founding binary signifying couple that would directly stand for sexual difference" (Žižek, 2012, p.746).

Meanwhile, sexed time also counters a standard postmodern answer to the problem of sexual difference, which merely replaces binary oppositions with a multitude of sexual identities. As Žižek points out, understanding sexual difference purely on the symbolic level is inadequate, since the thriving of symbolic differences "relies on an underlying One, that is, on the radical obliteration of Difference, of the antagonistic gap" (Žižek, 2002, p.73). To address this problem, sexed time introduces the idea of dual temporality to defend Lacan's important argument that sexual difference is Real, which undermines every construction of sexual identity in the process of becoming. My reading of Lacan's formulas of sexuation excludes "Symbolic dualism" but contains "Real dualism". It is not a dualistic categorisation of subjective positions but a theorisation of the fundamental contradiction between sexual identity and sexual difference as such. According to this reading, women are no longer placed at the place of otherness in the classical masculine-feminine dichotomy. The notion of the "enigma of women" that has persisted in

psychoanalysis since Freud's reference to feminine sexuality as the "dark continent" is replaced by the Real of sexual difference that does not devalue one sex. As an epistemology, sexed time explains not what sexed subjectivity is or should be, but the way it can be understood: as a subjective response to the tension between the articulation of sexual identity in Symbolic time and the body experience of sexual difference in Real time, a response unique to each sexed being.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how the notion of time is conceptualised in Jacques Lacan's work. To achieve this aim, I proposed a detailed analysis of various presentations of time in Lacan's writings and brought different segments of Lacan's arguments together to work out the larger implication of Lacan's theory of time as a whole. I started with a close reading of the "Logical Time" essay, one of Lacan's earliest attempts to explore the meaning of time. My reading revealed some contradictions associated with the idea that the experience of time can be incorporated into a logical structure, an idea uncritically accepted by major commentators of Lacan who take his account of reasoning at face value. It turned out that there is a tension between the logical process articulated at the symbolic level and the instinctual temporal experience, to which I responded by introducing a new theoretical assumption that regards time as fundamentally split from the outset. The validity of this assumption has been further confirmed by two lines of thought extracted from Lacan's texts, concerning the relationship between time and the Real body on the one hand, and time and the Symbolic order on the other. After examining the way Lacan handles the problem of origin, I argued that the acknowledgement of the co-existence of two independent temporal registers in Lacan's work is essential to our comprehension of Lacan's construction of subject-formation. In the case of sexed subjectivity, I highlighted the significance of using this new temporal perspective to think about the concept of sexual difference and thus to produce a positive response to the phenomenon of sexual and gender diversity in contemporary societies. I want to now briefly review several important propositions I have developed throughout this thesis.

My first proposition is to think of the notion of time in Lacan's work beyond a one-dimensional, unitary category. In other words, we cannot reduce time either to a merely subjective matter, correlated only to one's intentionality; or to an objective measurement of movement pertaining to the non-living physical world. Such a singular ontological ground on which the conception of time can be theorised does not exist in Lacan's work. Instead, we are able to differentiate two independent

temporal registers, both of which have determining effects on the presence of being. My thesis detected the idea of dual temporality first in the “Logical Time” essay, in which Lacan describes a process of logical articulation underlying three prisoners’ interpersonal interactions that gives rise to different temporal modulations. Logical time consists of three key moments – the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending, and the moment of concluding – that chronologically follow each other. Through the prisoner’s speculation on the thoughts of the others, all three moments are objectified as necessary logical steps that ultimately lead to his final assertion: “I am white”, a conclusion marking the subject’s symbolic identification with structural authority. In my opinion, this account of reasoning is flawed because it presupposes an absolute reciprocity between three prisoners, which oversimplifies the complex nature of human interaction. By assuming that each prisoner is able to think what the other is thinking, participants of this logical game have been reduced to identical machines that run by themselves according to preassigned scripts, whose fates depend purely on the unknowable Other. Such a scenario excludes any genuine temporal experience. For example, how can we explain the appearance of the “second moment of hesitation”, a moment of uncertainty experienced by the subject when its identity has already been guaranteed by the symbolic Other?

However, this does not mean that the “Logical Time” essay offers no valuable insight into the relationship between time and subjectivity. A close reading of Lacan’s text revealed other lines of thinking that exceed the naïve imagination of intersubjectivity. I paid attention to the moment of concluding, when the prisoner makes a subjective assertion on his own behalf. By giving the final voice not to the symbolic Other but to the singular “I”, it is clear that the time in which the subject’s self-determination is expressed has not been entirely erased by the Other’s overreaching control. If the three-prisoner game is played out according to Symbolic time, a temporal register deprived of subjectivity, then Lacan’s essay also reserves a place for another time, which I name as Real time. It is the time that accounts for the bizarre experience of urgency and hesitation, of uncertainty about the symbolic arrangement of one’s life trajectory as well as identity. Living in the

Real time is the reason the prisoner can speak of who he is by the end of the game. In so doing, he stands for his own desire at the moment of subjectivisation and breaks away from the subjective process determined by the Other.

My second proposition is that the notion of time in Lacan's work is characterised by a radical sense of otherness. As I have mentioned in the Introduction, continental philosophy of time has become more interested in the time of lived experience since the late nineteenth century. This tendency is represented by Bergson's idea of duration as a continuous flux of our own consciousness without beginnings and endings (Bergson, 1910), and Husserl's idea of time-consciousness that conditions the possible disclosure of temporal objects (Husserl, 1964). In both cases, consciousness, as a sensory state and intentional experience, is taken as an absolute point of orientation without which objects cannot appear to the subject as temporal. By comparison, what distinguishes the conception of time I find in Lacan's work from these philosophical enquiries is a dissociation of time from the conscious ego. In his famous critique of the Cartesian cogito, Lacan points out that a pre-given, self-integrated and transparent substance of consciousness that unifies thinking and being does not exist. Instead, the conscious ego is merely an imaginary construction that covers up the subject's permanent state of splitting. If, as the title of Lacan's speech at the Johns Hopkins Humanities Centre (Lacan, 1966) suggests, an inmixing of an Otherness is a prerequisite to any subject whatever, there is certainly a need to understand the temporal constitution of the subject in the same way.

Apart from the imaginary small other, there are two types of otherness in Lacan's theory that correspond to the domain of the Real and the Symbolic. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that my reading was able to identify two unrepresentable temporal registers with distinct ontological grounds in Lacan's writings, both of which are free from a dependence upon the conscious ego as a faculty of representation. The idea of Real time designates time of the Real body. It is a temporal field produced out of the unrepresentable rhythm of the organism. I used

the notion of the body-machine as my point of entry into my study of the connection between Real time in Lacan's work and a Freudian understanding of bodily time, the latter of which is built upon the theory of energetics. To Lacan, principles of energetics Freud puts forward to regulate the flux of the body process should not be judged from the perspective of modern biology. Instead, they apply to the body as a machine, whose dynamic import and export of energy demonstrate a radical sense of autonomy that transcends various imaginary body-images. From my reading of Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, I developed the Freudian metaphysics of time which has a structure similar to that of Kant's threefold synthesis. Both of them attempt to explain the transition from sensation to understanding that makes the temporal consciousness of the past, the present and the future possible. However, differently from Kant's philosophy that privileges a transcendental "I" as the initiator of all three syntheses, Freud's *Project* indicates that there is a prior, passive synthesis of time as the result of the neuronal activity of the organism. This idea will later be picked up and further developed by Lacan, in whose work we find that the Real body is capable of constituting all three temporal dimensions (past-present-future).

My reading explained that the way Lacan theorises time as a body process is accompanied by a critique of Freud's misunderstanding of the ego's synthetic function. The distinction Lacan makes between a passive, bodily consciousness and the conscious ego in *Seminar II* challenges the transcendental time-constituting status held by the latter. Following Lacan's thinking, I suggested that a recollection of mnemonic images at the level of the conscious ego does not constitute our sense of the past. It is rather a cognitive behaviour conditioned by the organism's passive acceptance and distribution of differences in intensity. The Real past defines the past as a general element that preserves every living present within itself, and memory as the "past of the present" is conditioned by this "past in the present" as the result of the passive synthesis of the body. Similarly, I demonstrated that not only does a passive synthesis of the future exist, but it is also achieved through the undoing and unbinding of the ego. In Freud's theory, the secondary process postpones the process of energy discharge and thus creates

a sense of the future. However, this conscious future as a “deferred present” synthesised by the ego is undermined by the idea of the Real future I developed from Lacan’s work. The latter presents itself as an indeterminate diversity at the bodily level, made possible by the death drive as a traumatic intrusion of the Symbolic into the Real body that returns the organism to its original “unbound” state.

Regarding the idea of Symbolic time, I looked into the mechanism of the Symbolic order. It is well known that to Lacan, the space of the Symbolic order is the domain of language, in which every signifier is devoid of positive meaning and constituted purely by the difference between itself and the other. Yet one cannot ignore the time of the Symbolic order, in which the unconscious is produced through the metaphoric and metonymic processes. I traced the idea of Symbolic time back to Freud’s claim that the unconscious is timeless. My reading suggested that the notion of timelessness does not mean a negation of time but rather implies an unrepresentable temporal register radically different from the individual’s perception of chronological time. It is a time foreign to the conscious ego that questions the individual’s self-ownership of its identity. But how can we approach this temporal register if its existence cannot be experienced as “my time”? Bringing the theory of cybernetics into consideration, I argued that Lacan has provided an answer to this question. The Lacanian symbolic order is not a static structure governed by the principle of synchronicity. It is rather a machine (to be more specific, a symbol-processing computer), whose autonomous articulation produces the subject’s unconscious desire in its “own” time. The subject, therefore, is caught up in a process of symbolic formation that does not fall into its grasp. In this context, I read Hamlet as a typical Lacanian subject who lives in Symbolic time. His inability to fulfil the duty to avenge his father’s murder can be explained by the overwhelming determination of the time of the Symbolic other. One may say that Hamlet is not only troubled by the question “Che vuoi?” (What do you want?) when confronting the Other’s impenetrable, enigmatic presence, he is also paralysed by the question “What time am I living in?”, a question fundamental to the Symbolic existence of every subject.

It is clear that to Lacan, a study of the structure of consciousness that conditions the perception of temporal objects is inadequate to the task of understanding the subject's temporal existence, or what Heidegger means by "being-in-the-world". Time that is reduced to temporal consciousness cannot fully encompass the very existence of the human being and its engagement with the world. By highlighting a radical sense of otherness as the common characteristic shared by Lacan's implicit theorisation of Real time and Symbolic time, I argued that a theory of time developed from Lacan's work is a non-representational account of time. It moves beyond a narrow view of temporal being built upon the transcendental ground of "I think", and thus theorises the constitution of subjectivity on a greater level of complexity.

My third proposition is that the notion of time in Lacan's work offers a genuine appreciation of subjectivity in a process of becoming that goes against the logic of spatialisation. While time is fundamental to the existence of human beings, without which we cannot experience and understand the world, we often fail to think about time in its own terms, a problem that is apparent not only in everyday life but also in philosophical contemplations. As Bergson points out: "We set out states of consciousness side by side in such a way as to perceive them simultaneously, no longer in one another, but alongside one another; in a word, we project time into space, we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or a chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another" (Bergson, 2002, p.60). By mapping time onto a measurable grid, this mode of thinking does not simply put things in space or explicitly privilege space over time, but conceives and thinks of time in a space-like manner. In so doing, time becomes no more than a stock of experience and every moment becomes the culmination of all moments that have passed. Such a logic of spatialisation, Milic Capek asserts, "is one of the most persistent features of our intellectual tradition" (Capek, 1976, p.xxvi) and "a vicious distortion of the true nature of time" (ibid., p.xxx). It deprives time of moving, changing and

becoming as its essential characters that matter most to our understanding of subjectivity.

The co-existence of Real time and Symbolic time in Lacan's work can already be seen as an attempt to penetrate an obstacle for thought represented by the logic of spatialisation. Lacan's attention to the unrepresentable registers of time undermines the ego's arrangement of conscious time that geometrically separates the past, the present and the future as different points on a line. Furthermore, I argued that Lacan's critique becomes more evident when it comes to the problem of subject-formation. I first addressed the problematic temporal underpinning fundamental to the famous Freud-Rank debate over the problem of the origin of the neuroses. Be it the trauma of birth or the Oedipal fantasy, the common root of both Freud's and Rank's arguments is a logic of spatialisation upon which a linear history is erected. To think of the origin as what happened in history is to accept the assumption that time unfolds itself moment by moment in an extended space. By contrast, I argued that Lacan's understanding of the origin of the individual's psychic development does not follow the same logic. Although Lacan in *Les Complexes Familiaux* summarised different complexes in a linear sequence, the idea of prematuration persists throughout all three stages and works as the core mechanism that initiates change and development. The human organism – as a “thing” in the Real – is not only premature in relation to the environment at birth, but it also remains in a permanent premature state in relation to the symbolic order that “comes too early.” In this sense, I suggested that prematuration should not be understood as a one-time occurrence incorporated into a linear timeline. Instead, it designates the fundamental desynchrony that characterises the relationship between Real time and Symbolic time. By introducing the lack on both the biological and the symbolic planes, prematuration is the true origin in-between times that conditions the process of becoming.

My reading also pointed out Lacan's departure from the logic of spatialisation in his reinterpretation of Freud's idea of primal repression. As a key concept in

Freud's theory of the unconscious, primal repression is only vaguely described and thus becomes one of the Freudian myths of origin, attracting various interpretations from later psychoanalysts. To Lacan, primal repression is not the "first and earliest" repression, nor shall its relationship to the repression proper be understood in terms of "before" and "after". These misunderstandings common in psychoanalytic literature are caused by contemplating the temporal process in a spatial diagram. By translating Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as "representative of the representation", Lacan theorises primal repression as a mechanism of temporal binding in which the lack of presentation of the Real body in the Symbolic meets the representative (signifier) of the lack invested by the instinctual impulse. Once again, primal repression in Lacan's work takes place in-between times. It accompanies and contributes to the unfolding of the individual's history by being outside of one's conscious time. Comparing it with Laplanche's theorisation of the same concept, I pointed out that although Laplanche also sees primal repression as the result of the child's premature encounter with the enigmatic signifier of the other, he fails to situate the signifier in its own time but records its presence at a point-like moment in the child's life history. As a result, his theory implicitly lends deterministic force to the past and defends a hierarchised paradigm of time.

My reading suggested that a rejection of the logic of spatialisation is required if we want to fully comprehend Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. As a narrative that accounts for the origin of the "I", the mirror stage cannot be described alongside a linear time axis from the past to the future. Otherwise one faces the contradiction that the very mechanism that produces self-consciousness is also initiated by an intentional act coming from a primordial form of self. Regarding this problem, I argued that the epistemological leap from a self-closing, undifferentiated state of primary narcissism to a specular apprehension of the other (ego) is possible only if we apply the idea of dual temporality to the mirror stage. In brief, an imaginary configuration of what the body in Real time is anticipated to be during the mirror stage is preceded and conditioned by the primary identification of the pre-subjective infant with the Other. The latter, as a more fundamental mirror

reflection that takes place in Symbolic time, prior to the mirror stage, can be illustrated through my dissection of Lacan's Schema L. I divided Schema L into two triangular relationships, one of which depicts the direct impact of the Symbolic Other on libidinal flux of the Real body. The result is the production of the object *a*, something the pre-subject identifies with in Real time and is identified as in Symbolic time.

My discussion of Lacan's theory of subject-formation from three different angles demonstrates that there is a persistent critique of the logic of spatialisation in Lacan's work. I named the time of the Lacanian subject-formation as "symptomatic time" because its process is symptomatic at the core. The way we experience time as a succession of moments and understand coming-into-being as linear and progressive is the result of a repression of two unrepresentable temporal registers that determine our existential condition. We take comfort in the thought of a historically definable origin, as if its existence can give a sense of coherence to the fragile self. Such a veil of illusion is penetrated by the notion of time in Lacan's work that reaffirms the unpredictability and alienation of the living present, a present in which the origin of the decentred subject truly lies.

My fourth proposition is that the notion of time in Lacan's work contributes to a new epistemology of sexed subjectivity. Lacan's theory of sexualisation includes some of his most original ideas on the complicated relationship between the body and the psyche. However, these ideas have not been thoroughly investigated to respond to challenges posed by the gender and sexual diversity that is increasingly widespread in contemporary societies. In the first part of Chapter Five, I reviewed problems arising from the mainstream reading of sexual development and sexual difference in both Freud's and Lacan's work. I pointed out a lack of attention to the relationship between sexuality and time caused by the logic of spatialisation. The Freudian proposal delineates a linear, teleological process through which boys and girls are differentiated. Time in this narrative is a neutral background since what matters to the constitution of sexual identity is having or not-having the penis as

the most valued indicator of difference. Lacan's theory of sexuation, as commonly understood, falls into the same trap. The replacement of the biological penis with the symbolic phallus does not eliminate binary polarities such as masculine-feminine, presence-absence, universality-particularity, nor does it change the way sexual difference is theorised in terms of spatial difference. Sexed subjectivity is not truly considered in movement when a set of symbolic positions is already prepared as its destination. The phallus as a signifier determines who is included in and excluded from the symbolic space, but the reason for its privileged status is hardly convincing. I questioned the way Lacanian psychoanalysts uncritically accept the classical equation between woman and otherness, situate feminine jouissance outside the symbolic order and reduce a gender category to a plane of abjection, even though these operations are often claimed to serve an anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative purpose. After analysing the "linear-teleological model" of Freud's theory of sexuality and the "structural-timeless model" in which Lacan's theory of sexuation is often put, I came to the conclusion that without surpassing the logic of spatialisation, a theorisation of sexuality will inevitably fail to embrace a broad field of differences that characterises sexed subjectivity.

In the second part of Chapter Five, I re-examined Freud's and Lacan's writings on sexuality from a temporal perspective and looked for possibilities of understanding sexed subjectivity in an ongoing process of becoming. I identified two different ways to perceive sexual difference in the Oedipal narrative with regard to time. One can be explained by Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit*, which sees sexual difference as retrospectively actualised by the symbolic arrangement waiting in the future; the other can be explained by Lacan's idea of the future anterior, which regards the moment of determination as "what will have come" and thus leaves the present in an indeterminate state, full of possibilities. I argued that from the idea of the future anterior, it is possible to develop a new epistemology that more generously accepts a diversity of sexual difference and various ways to construct sexual identity. In the temporal perspective I proposed, Lacan's formulas of sexuation no longer designate two sexual positions alongside the axis of presence

and absence. By articulating the relation between sexual difference and sexual identity as such, it rather corresponds to the new epistemology of sexed subjectivity, through which we understand sexual difference not as a difference between one sexed being and another, but as a difference within oneself, taking place between the resistance of the Real body on one hand, and the unpredictability of the Symbolic determination on the other. The constitution of sexual identity depends on how this sexual difference is interpreted in terms of the future anterior, where one surpasses the Symbolic future as what-will-have-been, and realises the Real future of infinite differences in the living present.

So far, I have outlined important characteristics and implications of the notion of time in Lacan's work. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate how these characteristics of time reaffirm Lacan's argument that the subject is alienated from itself, struggle to find its place between the Real and the Symbolic, and how these implications of time shed new light on Lacan's ideas and themes that remain controversial. I hope my reading is able to open up an extended understanding of subjectivity and the way a temporal being engages with the world, an understanding that will be a starting point for more appreciation of the richness and complexities that the notion of time in Lacan's work presents to us.

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