

The unconscious is/and time

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Time is lacking, one repeats ever more often. Now, it's necessary to have time, a lot of time, in order to think psychoanalysis in its time and the time of psychoanalysis.

Of time in psychoanalysis there is, it seems, little to say today, so much has the theme been marked out and measured. We are far, in effect, from the time when we felt ourselves to be enclosed in the apparent paradox that made us say, on the one hand, with Freud, that “the unconscious does not know time” and, on the other hand, with Lacan, that it manifests according to a “temporal pulsation”. The opposition is immediately fruitful, since it indicates that Freud is treating the properties of a system-unconscious, where Lacan convokes principally, if not exclusively, the unconscious such as it is deployed in the process of an analytic treatment. In addition, even if we rally to the Freudian thesis, it is evident that the fact that the unconscious ignores time does not mean that psychoanalysis should ignore time.

Now, time concerns psychoanalysis in three ways.

Firstly, at the clinical level. In effect, it was not Freud's smallest merit to have conceived, in order to capture the “untemporality” of the unconscious-language, this ingenious procedure founded not solely on speech—the deployment and putting into temporal action of language—but also on the management of time as a variable within the transference. Not without excess moreover, as Lacan justly noted at times in relation to the treatment of the Wolf Man: “... with an audacity bordering on impudence, he declares that he considers it legitimate, in analysing the processes, to elide the time intervals during which the event remains latent in the subject. That is to say, he annuls the *times for understanding* in favour of the *moments of concluding* which precipitate the subject's mediation toward deciding the meaning to be attached to the early event.” (*Ecrits*, Fr. 256-257; Fink 2002, 48).

Let us pass over this “as to being, time is necessary to make oneself be”, and over the fact that time is needed for the *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*.

Psychoanalysis is concerned by time as well in the sense of historic time; should not this simply be because the discourses with which it makes its rounds—fundamental or not, the discourses of science and of capitalism having their price—and especially, the suffering subjects who address it, bear its mark? Can one forget that it is at the same moment that Lacan knots for the first time the “end of training analysis” to “engagement of the subject in his practice” that he warns, à propos the function of the analyst: “That [the

one] who renounces it is therefore rather the one who cannot join at its horizon the subjectivity of his epoch”?

To the ethical level now.

Psychoanalysis, as we know, owes a lot, if not all, to the science which is at the same time the purveyor of the subject on which it operates, its epistemic condition and, by its consequences—Kant—, its ethical condition. Psychoanalysis would not be able to follow science in its restoration of human life to pure, biological life without being dissolved as practice and as discourse. That a life's qualification as human depends on its purchase on, and deployment in, language, also accords strongly with Socrate's maxim: “A non-examined life is not worthy of being lived”. The Socratic examination is not the analytic examination; nevertheless, both require language and time; a life's being put into discourse or even into account. For psychoanalysis, this time oscillated between duration and flash. It was able to take the figure of short treatments with long sessions because it was oriented by a research into sense and a quest for truth; it was also able to take the figure of long treatments with short sessions because it was aiming at the act and oriented towards the real.

In each of these cases, it remains true that it is not a question of “to live in order to recount”, according to the nice title of the *Mémoires* of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, but of historicising one's life in ordering it, not by the time of the universe of precision—the time, indeed, of science and capitalism—but by the “speech which endures”, and which gives reason to the properly historicising operation that alone can make psychoanalysis effective: “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 had been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming”. (*Ecrits*, Fr. 300, Fink 2002, 84).

Finally, at the level of structure, if we “destructure” this in order to retain it as no more than a working sketch: language. It is the principle of the Lacanian solution to the question of time, and we know that it is [so] from the start. It holds, finally, this solution, in the ultimately very simple opposition between the unconscious as **place of the Other**—synchrony—and the unconscious as **discourse of the Other** (diachrony), the unconscious as history. Such that the Freudian a-temporality of the unconscious could only mean one thing: the non-alterable character of its contents, if one agrees with Heidegger that “time is first encountered in being which alters. The alteration is in time”. Applied to the unconscious, this is what Lacan will translate and reduce to a sober “indestructibility of certain desires”. (*Ecrits*, Fr. 575; Fink 2002, 205).

This is so for an obvious reason: if the affinity and the congruence of this thesis with the Freudian unconscious seem to be evident, the thesis becomes problematic, at the least, from the moment when the unconscious becomes

Lacanian, which is to say, real: “the unconscious (which is not what one believes it to be, I say: the unconscious is real, according to me)”. (*Autres Ecrits*, 571).

In effect, how can one exclude time from the concept of the unconscious, including that of Freud, given that it is indissolubly **memory**, **program** and principle of **repetition**? Do we not, on the contrary, have to go so far as to say that the unconscious is a work of time, even that the unconscious is time?