

The handling of time

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What is *time*? To tell the truth, we do not know it; the question slides between the fingers of our conceptual apprehension. Does it exist? Who has not dreamt of eternity, of remaining always the same, outside change? Is there an analysis who does not often feel that he is always the same, that time does not pass? 'The absence of time is a dream, and it is called eternity. One spends one's time dreaming, and we dream not only when we are asleep. The unconscious is precisely that hypothesis: that we dream not only when we are asleep' – this is what Lacan says in his seminar nevertheless entitled *The time to conclude*.

In the neuroses we find different ways of concealing time, of losing it pretending that it does not exist: distractions – killing time –, planning, boredom, the dilatory anticipation of the obsessional, the hysterical promptness, the melancholic too late, the rendezvous and the missed encounter, the disoriented subjective urgency, anguish taken as the motive for fleeing.

Although time's finitude is an established topic, which has even been incorporated by the media, the neurotic speaks of himself in an impersonal way, opposed to both surprise and determinism. Certainly death arrives, he says, but not right now. By means of this 'but', Heidegger writes, *one* removes all certainty from death. All men are mortal: yes, but I am not sure of anything. To this type of *one* there correspond inactivity, pastime, disinterest, even the 'inactive thinking about death'. This is a pity, Heidegger says, because in death there is something non-relational, absolute, an 'anticipation' that establishes a singularity. 'Death does not just "belong" to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual Dasein*.' (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §52, 53)

The lesson of the philosopher does not move the neurotic in his dream of eternity. Is a psychoanalysis able to do it? If it is, if it succeeds in promoting in the analysis a passage from eternity to finitude before the end of his life, it does not do so through the path of the philosopher. Psychoanalysis is not a *memento mori*; we do not repeat to the patient's ear: 'Remember that you will die' – as the Roman general was told in his moment of glory.

How is what time has of real introduced in the psychoanalytic clinic and in psychoanalytic practice? Through the renewal of the already lived experience of temporal discontinuity, which *marks* a before and an after, thus revealing the most real aspect of time: the impossibility of going back. The fantasies of some theoreticians in physics and the relativist readings of many psychoanalysts should not deceive us on this point: for us, *qua* beings capable of choice, the real of time consists of its irreversibility. There are words, acts and choices that establish a before and an after. Alan Turing's findings are in this respect conclusive: an automatic machine can be transported to a distant point and its time can be modified, rewound as a result of an external decision; but this cannot be done to a being capable of choices.

For the *parlêtre* time has a real coordinate, the irreversible temporal discontinuity, and approaching it is accompanied by a presentiment, a specific

affect called anxiety. Anxiety announces and prepares for the renewal of that moment. Its certainty, its pre-act nature, as pointed out by Freud ('Supplementary Remarks on Anxiety', in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. SE 20, pp. 164-8) make of it a fundamental temporal indicator, whose use the neurotic unfortunately ignores.

The experience of irreversible temporal discontinuity concerns several psychoanalytic concepts: trauma, castration, separation, act. In different ways, we can say of each of them that they affect us as subjects, or in other words that in them our being plays its game, its realization, its destiny. We may suffer from that irreversible discontinuity (in the shape of repetition as symptom), but we may also intervene in its production, in act, without further delay. Between the *subject situated at the wrong time* of neurosis and *being in time* – being in act – psychoanalysis places itself as an invitation and an active expectation for the advent of that being, which enables us to locate 'the true and final mainspring of what constitutes transference [...] in relation to [...] "the analyst's desire"' as a relation that is essentially tied up with time and its handling (Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 844 [English translation, p. 716]).

'The handling of time' sounds pretentious. Yet while there is time its handling depends on us. No matter how narrow the margin of choice left to us be, our desire is there, in that interval bound by the act, as a renewal of the original trauma that marks the body, and by death, which erases body, mark and jouissance. That is why in psychoanalysis we treat the neurotic not so much only as 'a being relative to death', but rather as 'a being relative to the act'.

Translated by Leonardo Rodríguez