

The Variable Session

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Abstract

This article presents a study of the origins of time handling in the psychoanalytic practice elaborated by Lacan. This maneuver became a fundamental tool in his clinic. Its starting point was the invention of his master signifier “Logical Time”, which is composed of three instances: the instant to see, the time to understand and the moment to conclude and act. It is argued that in this way Lacan reformulates the three instances of the psychic apparatus of the first Freudian topic, in temporal terms, in an attempt to free the temporal stages of the subject's constitution from its spatial constraints.

Key-words: LOGICAL TIME; LACAN; CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT.

A Sessão Variável

Resumo

O presente artigo é um estudo das origens do manuseio do tempo na prática psicanalítica elaborado por Lacan. Este manejo tornou-se uma ferramenta fundamental na prática psicanalítica. Lacan partiu da criação do seu significante mestre: “Tempo lógico”, composto pelas três instâncias: o instante de ver, o tempo de compreender e o momento de concluir e agir. Dessa forma, reformulou as três instâncias do aparato psíquico de Freud, da primeira tópica, em termos temporais numa tentativa de libertar as etapas temporais da constituição do sujeito das amarras do espaço.

Palavras-chaves: TEMPO LÓGICO; LACAN; CONSTITUIÇÃO DO SUJEITO.

La section variable

Résumé

Cet article est une étude des origines du maniement du temps dans la pratique psychanalytique élaborée par Lacan, qui est devenue un outil fondamental dans la pratique psychanalytique. Lacan est partie de la création de son signifiant maître : le «Temps logique», composé de trois instances : le instant de voir, le temps pour comprendre et le moment de conclure et d'agir. Il reformule ainsi les trois instances de l'appareil psychique de Freud, de la première topique, en termes temporels, en une tentative de libérer les étapes temporelles de la constitution du sujet des contraintes de l'espace.

Mots clés: TEMP LOGIQUE; LACAN; LA CONSTITUTION DU SUJET.

Time Driven

The notion of the variable session refers to the Lacanian practice in which the duration of a session is not a fixed span of time and the moment to terminate a session is not governed by the clock. The post Freudians, before Lacan, had fixed the time of the session and it was rigorously regulated by the IPA. A session lasted 45 to 50 minutes. Lacan noted

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that such praxis reduces the factor of time to a “spacelized time” and thus neglects the manoeuvre of time as an essential operator in the practice. Spatio-temporal relations at the human level are an effect of the subject’s position in language, the position Lacan studies using the signifier “logical time”. Lacan aimed to liberate the time of the session from the counted minutes and introduced the manoeuvre of time as a fundamental tool into the psychoanalytic field.

When Freud elaborated his first topography, it seemed that the dimension of space was implied in it as he was dealing with *topoi*, places. However, time, in its chronological aspect was disregarded, given that the Ucs does not recognise time. The assertion that the unconscious does not recognize time refers to the chronological aspect of time. Jacques Derrida adverts us that the Freudian “timelessness of the unconscious is no doubt determined only in opposition to a common concept of time ... the unconscious is no doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time (Derrida, 1978, p.215).”

Freud dealt with another aspect of time: he found that the relation between cause and effect in the Ucs is nonlinear and the cause could appear after the effect. His notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (“afterwardness”, translated as ‘deferred action’, ‘retroaction’, or ‘après-coup’) was one of his early discoveries but he did not consider its temporal aspect. Lacan, in his turn, concerned himself with time very early on in his itinerary, and referred to different philosophical notions of time and not merely to the chronological aspect of time, which is marked by the clocks. This regulated time is already time conjugated with space. Lacan’s contribution to the theory was established primarily by setting up a new alliance between the Ucs and temporality. He did it mainly by elaborating the temporality of the drive which is represented in and by the Ucs.

He teaches us that the process of a psychoanalysis is time driven, and we need to consider other aspects of time. We should not reduce time to chronological measured durations. The time in psychoanalysis is not that time which organizes our everyday life. The temporality of the Ucs regards other facets of time: its continuity and discontinuity, its repetitions and contingency, its direction from the past to the future and its reverse. When we speak of the three “tenses” of time: past, present and future, language already reveals that time is a tension. Consequently, when time is related to the notion of being it escapes: the past is not anymore; the future is not yet and the present is a fleeting instant. Above all, when we are working with the function and the field of language and speech, we must return to St. Augustine famous inquiry who asks: “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.” Time defies speech, it renders an intimate feeling we know it till we try to put this feeling in words.

Space-Time Metaphor

The consequence of this difficulty is noticed by linguists. They show us that the most basic metaphor in Language is speaking of time in terms of space. Guy Deutscher’s book *The Unfolding of language, the evolution of mankind’s greatest invention*, became a best seller when it came out. It is quite revealing to read him. He writes about “Space-Time”:

The Encyclopaedia Britannica begins its article on the concept on ‘space time’ with Einstein’s theory of relativity and makes the following declaration:

Space-time: In physical science, a single concept that recognizes the union of space and time, posited by Albert Einstein in the theories of relativity (1905, 1915). Common intuition previously supposed no connection between space and time ... (Deutscher, 2006. p. 133)

But, asks Deutscher, is it true that ‘common intuition’ did not spot the connection before Einstein? Physicists may not have identified the relation between space and time in their theories until a century ago, but everyday language proves that ‘common intuition’ has in fact recognized this link for many thousands of years (even if not exactly in Einstein’s sense). For in language — any language — no two domains are more intimately linked than space and time. Even if we are not always aware of it, we invariably speak and think of time in terms of space. Consider some of the simplest words we use to describe spatial relations. The most common prepositions such as: “in; at; by; from; to; behind; within and through”, they all migrate from space to connote time. The examples below should suffice to show that all these spatial terms function just as well in the domain of temporal relations:

SPACE

From London to Paris
 In England
 At the door
 The king rode before the army
 They are a mile behind us
 Sit by the window
 The shop after the post-office
 Within the prison
 Through the jungle
 Outside Africa
 Around the fire
 About the neighbourhood

TIME

From Monday to Friday
 In January, in time of war
 At noon
 Before the battle started
 They are an hour behind us
 Arrive by tomorrow
 The hours after darkness
 Within a year
 Through the month
 Outside office hours
 Around lunchtime
 About midnight

The list could be extended easily, and the correspondences are by no means coincidental. What’s more, if the same experiment were to be repeated with spatial concepts in any other language, the result would be the same, as there is no known language where spatial terms are not also used to describe temporal relations. Language thus demonstrates that long before physicists, common intuition had already spotted the relation between space and time, and the nature of this intuited link is none other than a metaphor. All the prepositions above originally denoted spatial terms, and all of them were metaphorically extended into the domain of time.

The link between space and time is an example of conceptual mappings between two domains. The movement often goes in one direction, from space to time, since time is an abstract concept that can only be grasped through something more tangible. So, we think of time as a line in space. Time line is used everywhere; on this line ‘now’ is ‘here’, the past is the part that is ‘behind’ us, while the future is stretching out ‘in front’ of us. A period, like a year, could be conceived as a segment of this line, and this enables us to talk of being “in it”, “going *through* it”, and so on.

This link between space and time is so entrenched in our cognition that it is extremely difficult to extricate ourselves from it, and appreciate that time cannot literally be ‘long’ or ‘short’ (unlike sticks or pieces of string), nor can time literally ‘pass’ (unlike a train). Time cannot even ‘go forwards’ and ‘backwards’ any more than it goes sideways, diagonally or downwards. Time does not actually go anywhere at all. The connection between space and time is so instinctive, and the metaphoric meaning so thoroughly naturalized in its new domain, that we need to make a considerable effort to register that even entirely functional prepositions like ‘to’, ‘from’, ‘in’, could be used metaphorically. And yet, even if two very different expressions like ‘from Monday’ and ‘treading on dreams’ seem worlds apart, both

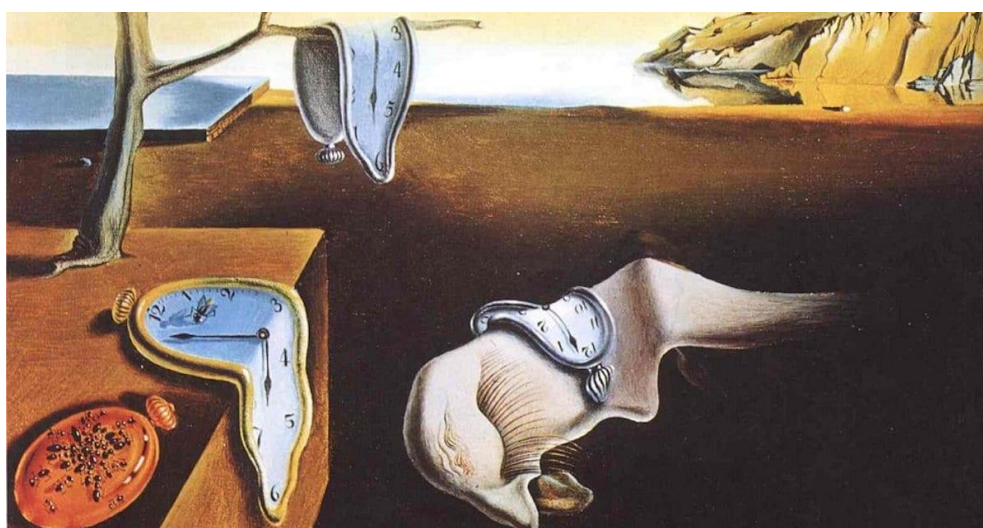
have the same essence, they are two instances of the same mechanism: the carrying of a concept away from its original environment into a different sphere. This is the kind of transference that metaphors execute.

But this is still not the last of it, since metaphor does not just dally with a few spatial prepositions here and there. It will soon emerge that metaphor is endemic within the structure of language, and that the flow from space to time is in fact only a part of a much more widespread drift. Lacan tries to go against this current, which flows from space to time, coining his concept of logical time. But even he is carried inadvertently by this current, as in the epigraph to the article where he speaks of logical time, describing the circumstances when it was first written, he speaks of the years of the war between 1940-1944 in terms of a space and not as a time.

Jacques Lacan

He endeavours to grasp time not affected by the attributes borrowed from space and aims at the subject of the Unconscious whose temporality is not chronological. This subject is submitted to a different modality of time. He names it a Logical Time, a temporal structure as it appears in the logic of the signifier, where the subject relates to the Other. Thus, a technique which aims to access the subject of the Ucs, and to have an impact on him, must operate with this temporal logic and not with chronological time. I would consider his concept of Logical Time to be Lacan's master signifier, to which he returned numerous times. Miller (1999-2000) . This is the concept that decides the moment when an analytic session should end. The analytic session becomes a logical session and the logic that presides it is that of the logical time. (Guéguen in Miller (1999-2000), p. 163).

Defending the concept of logical time, Lacan refused to give up his practice of sessions of variable duration. He would not submit himself to the rituals concerning this duration which became the codex of the IPA. The price he paid for his insistence was his exclusion from the IPA. Lacan's use of time as an operator in the praxis was the most controversial aspect of his innovations. *Logical time* has been and still is Lacan's most misinterpreted signifier, and meets the strongest resistance.



Salvador Dalí: *The Persistence of Memory* (1931)

He sustained that operation with time means the unexpected scansion of the session, and that it accelerated the manifestations of the Ucs. Each encounter becomes an opportunity

for a truth to reveal itself and for the unconscious to manifest its desire. When the duration of the session is not fixed, the session does not become a space of *jouissance*, correlated to the right of the analysand to have a certain amount of time with the analyst, instead, the desire is put in motion and pressed to manifest itself. He went against the pleasure everyone has when talking of himself. The course of the analysis is experimented, by both, the analysand and the analyst, as a series of sessions, of scissions, of acceleration, of slowing down, phases of a duration which are not regulated by a homogenous rhythm, but rather by remarkable moments which carry a temporal tension.

When we go back to Freud, we find his following observation:

An unwelcome question which the patient asks the doctor at the outset is: 'How long will the treatment take? How much time will you need to relieve me of my trouble? If one has proposed a trial treatment of few weeks one can avoid giving a direct answer to this question by promising to make a more reliable pronouncement at the end of the trial period. Our answer is like the answer given by the Philosopher to the Wayfarer in Aesop's fable. When the Wayfarer asks how long a journey lay ahead, the Philosopher merely answer 'Walk!' and afterwards explained his apparently unhelpful reply on the ground that he must know the length of the Wayfarer's stride before he could tell how long his journey would take. This expedient helps one over the first difficulties; but the comparison is not a good one, for the neurotic can easily alter his pace and may at times make only very slow progress. In point of fact, the question as to the probable duration of a treatment is almost unanswerable (Freud, 1913/2001, p. 129).

Freud spoke here of the entire analysis and with Lacan we can apply the fable Freud found in Aesop to the analyst manoeuvre to accelerate the stride of the patient and hasten his pace, in each session. We could think of an analysis as a temporal progress in the unveiling of the truth. The psychoanalytic treatment is an investigation of the truth of the position of *jouissance* of the subject.

Time used as an operator in the praxis aims at the temporal structure of the subject.

This structure is elaborated by Lacan in his article from 1945 and we will see how he unfolds the constitution of the subject in terms of stages of relations with the others and with big Other. However, we must remember that this article was written before he would formulat the logic of the signifier and the term Other.

Some history of the signifier 'Logical Time' which goes back to 1936

Erik Porge (1993), in his book, *Psychoanalysis and Time*, studies the history of Lacan's famous paper on the *New Sophism*. Through the account of the events it becomes clear that Lacan's famous signifier: "logical time" marks his thinking since early. In 1936, a propensity to the question of time already revealed itself when he published his critics on the work of E. Minkovski, *Le temps vécu* (1). At that time, Lacan was studding the disturbances in temporal intuition, and already pondered that time will be the future theme in the research of mental structure.

In the following years Lacan did not publish anything, and only after the Second World War he carried on his research regarding the relation between the individual subject and the society, as it unfold in time. He had been impressed by the experience of the British psychiatrists (Bion and Rickman), who managed to work, during the war, with soldiers who did not adapt. They had organised work groups who had no leaders and succeeded to integrate the delinquents in society and consequently to turn them to be efficient and useful. Those soldiers were given the opportunity to work and act, free from the enclosure limited by the vertical axis of disciplinary obedience to a military commander.

After the war, Lacan renewed his abandoned studies from 1936 concerning the internal links of identification in the organisation of groups and in 1945 he approached the theme from a temporal perspective. His starting point was Freud's social psychology texts. To his view, Freud had neglected the horizontal identification in favour of the vertical one and hence, Lacan took upon himself the task to explore it further.

When asked to produce a text for the special number of Christian Zervos's journal: *Les cahiers d'art*, Lacan offered the text of the "*Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée* (1945/1966), *Un nouveau sophisme*", focusing on the horizontal inter-subjective relations in a group. That journal was soon sold out and only in 1966, with the publication of the *Écrits*, this article was rewritten. Nevertheless, during the interval of twenty years, Lacan referred few times to the ideas contained in his text.

He had heard the story of the sophism, in 1935 in a social meeting. Became disturbed by the fact that he could not find the solution, stayed awake attempting to resolve it and when he failed, he phoned his friend André Weiss at three o'clock in the morning to ask for the solution. That was his logical time to appeal to the other who had left him in suspense. Beyond this anecdote, hides Lacan's deep concern with the problem of time.

In the *New Sophism*, he questions man's freedom, his autonomy and *non-autonomy*, and opposes the thesis set forth by Sartre. Lacan insists that man is not free to choose his chains. Freedom is not the first and original state for humans. To become free, one is condemned, in the first place, to submit himself and to integrate in a community of men. The community supports itself upon the ground of common reasoning, which requires a common language and a common logic. The expressions we frequently use like 'common sense' or 'commonplace', demonstrate perfectly what we consider to be objectivity. In the first instance, a man is obliged to integrate into the universe of language, and only in the second instance he would be able to express his own free mind. The horizontal axis of identification is the one which maintains unified the common language and common reasoning through which the community is established. This kind of identification creates that which Lacan later calls the locus or the field of language, the space of the Other. The subject needs grounds from which he could emerge. The field governed by common logic and common language is the prior condition for a man to become relatively free. Subsequent to his integration in the community of humans one can find his relative liberty and manifest his proper truth. Such truth would be produced within his relationship with the others following the dialectic of cognition and recognition. In Lacan's latter terms from seminar XI: the subject is first alienated, submits himself to the Other, and subsequently he can separate and manifest his singular difference.

Following Freud,(2) Lacan says that what is primal and original condition is the existential lack of determination of the I ("*je*"). The Ego is not given ready with birth. In the process of the constitution of the Ego, human's relative freedom submits itself to a certain temporality (Roudinesco, 1993, p. 231-241). Hence freedom can only be relative, not absolute. It comes as a second moment or in second place and depends on the relation between the subject and the others. The subject's liberating truth can find its place in the space of the Other if he convinces the others of his own truth, and to do it he must use their language. The Other that can guarantee this truth, besides of being the space of the word, has also the function to co-sign and guarantee the truth of the subject.

Lacan's Action

Lacan's new signifier was sustained by his actions: he used variable time in the sessions while he was still a member in the IPA. This practice was Lacan's subjective act

that bore serious consequences in the practice as it gave grounds to the ethic position of the psychoanalyst. In the fifties, this practice of variable time found serious resistance and ignited controversies in the French psychoanalytic society (Lagache, 1990 and Dor, 1996 ?). Such resistance is always raised by the community when a subject expresses an innovating truth. Daniel Lagache (1996) uses the term “objections” to denote the defensive oppositions which arose in the *I.P.A.* They stood fast against the insertion of the factor of time in the practice, and in fact, objection is a very appropriate term to describe that which sets itself in front of the subject as an impediment. That which resists is the object as a ‘being’ which endures, while the subject persists in ‘becoming’.

The *I.P.A.* is an organised body of knowledge. When knowledge is shared by all members of a society, it is accepted as objective. What is objective is in fact what we call: “common place”, everybody knows the same thing. This common knowledge resisted the emergence of the subversive truth that Lacan wanted to introduce. When a truth emerges, in the space of an established knowledge, it is always subjective and subversive. The space of the social community, *I.P.A.*, defends itself as an object, fearing a disintegration, but this defensive resistance renders the institution formal, inert and inactive. Its knowledge is petrified and is regarded as a code of laws which strives to maintain the integrity of the institution. In fact, Lacan ended by leaving the *Société Psychanalytique de Paris, S.P.P.*

I suggest that Lacan’s use of the time as an operator in the practice, is correlated with his renewed approach to the theory of drives. His wish to rectify all the misleading ideas inflicted on the theory of drives by previous writers, derives from his interest in the subject of time.

Lacan’s temporality

I will now examine Lacan’s basic essay on time:

1. *The logical time and the assertion of an anticipated assurance. A new sophism.*

In the article, *The new Sophism* (1945), Lacan shows us the structure of the subject, in his relationship to the other and to the Other, it is a temporal structure. This structural relation between subjects which generates the field of language unfolds itself in time.

When we focus on the singularity and the particularity of the subject, it is very clear that we should not use any dictionaries to “translate” and interpret the analysand’s dreams and his speech. We ask our analysand to engage in free association and to establish his own connections between the signifiers and to produce his own singular meaning and interpretation of the manifestations of the unconscious. This aspect of the practice was well established, as Freud had elaborated it sufficiently. Lacan’s innovation is that not only dictionaries are out of context in analysis. In an analogous way, we also cannot rely on clocks and calendars to determine and measure the time in analysis. To reach at the particularity and singularity of the subject, time should be handled, and the analyst should mark the subject’s moments of appearance or try to provoke them. The efficiency of the intervention of the psychoanalyst depends on minding the time all the time. That means to mind the position from which comes the subject’s enunciation, to reveal the relation with the other, to find the origin of his points of view, to be aware of the identifications of the subject and of his rhythm in shifting between the various identifications and positions.

Though the Ucs does not recognise time, the psychoanalytical session does operate with time. When the analyst makes essential manoeuvres with time, he goes against the illusion of the Subject Supposed to Know, which appears always as past and as background knowledge. Analytic operation goes against spacesalization of time and makes the effort to liberate the subject from the constraints of the space of the Other.

Thus, the analyst must handle the time deciding on the moment to end a session obeying the considerations of the singular temporality of the Subject of the Unconscious.

Lacan's article: *The logical time and the assertion of an anticipated assurance. A new sophism*. 1945, studies the structure of the relation of the subject with his community. In this article Lacan demonstrates how the human subject and the human society depend on each other to constitute themselves. Language is the ground of this mutual dependency and reveals a structure of time which manifests itself in a very peculiar manner. It is not composed of past, present and future. It is composed of: The instant to see, the time to understand and the moment to conclude and to act. At the very moment that a communication by speech is established between two living beings (could have been two primates), they both become human beings as they agreed on the meaning of a certain sound. The link which is established between the two has the effect of transforming them into subjects. Once they emerge as two subjects, language appears as a code and an order, together with the illusionary effect that it has already been in the field prior to the two subjects who came to exercise it and give it life. It seems that the two new subjects only unfold a sense that was previously implicated or folded in some other hidden place. This is the way the Other emerges and is manifested as a Subject Supposed to Know, or the subject supposed to knowledge. Thus, the exercise of language immediately generates a past which transcends the two beings who use it and reveals a structure and an order which seem to have existed from immemorial times, just inert and waiting for somebody to animate it. Both time and the *locus* (space) of language as an order, surpass and exceed the here and now of the two subjects, they gain an infinite extension towards the past and we see here a manifestation of the inversed causality described by Freud as *Nachträglichkeit*, *Après Coup*, deferred action.

Lacan says that the Other in its' broadest sense is the language. He speaks of the field of the Other, a *locus*; thus he uses terms of space to define it. The Other in each local situation gains substance in the social organisation which lends body to an explicit and implicit order that governs any human organisation. When we put things this way, language with its order and codes of regulation would always be regarded by the subject as an unmemorable past, thus, it requires constant innovations.

The history of Lacan's *Sophism* is a good example of the logic of the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*. The action of the subject created the past in this inverted causation. The *après coup* proves that the "after" gave the "before" the possibility to take its place, in space. Lacan's words are: "May it resound with the right note here where I am placing it, between the before and the after, even if it demonstrates that the after was kept waiting (*faisant antichambre*) so that the before could assume its own place (*pût prendre rang*)"

It is only later in the development of his theory that one could realise the fundamental importance of the sophism in Lacan's elaborations. The meaning of the text unfolds itself unto the logic of the temporality of the reversed causation. All the knowledge that came afterwards defines the meaning of the signifier that appeared in those early years of Lacan's thought. While, Freud had discovered this causal reversed relation in the connection between the trauma and the symptom (3), Lacan made it an operative temporality.

The history of the signifier "Logical time" is the history of the subject Lacan as he made his subjective assertion in an individual battle to get a recognition for his truth. Lacan's logical time is logical opposing to the chronological time of analysis built into I.P.A.'s regulations. He wanted to show that it is not the structure of the clock which should regulate and determine the intervention of the psychoanalyst. In psychoanalysis one must be aware of a very specific structure of the subject and his relation to the Other, this structure is commanded by a specific temporality. When time becomes an operator, we are aiming at the

structure of the subject and its three registers: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, or at the three instances of Freud's topological model. Lacan denounced that the international psychoanalytic association had lost the view of the field in which an analyst operates and thus it strayed away from its due course losing the possibility to use time as a fundamental and efficient tool of the psychoanalytic discourse. In fact, the manoeuvres with time is at the foundation to the ethics of psychoanalysis.

The sophism demonstrates that the structure of the relation between the subject and the Other, is supported by a tension, and Lacan emphasises that it is a temporal tension. His approach starts with the future tense, the time at which the subject aims. When the subject acts he would always be "ahead of his time", ahead of the others, but the paradox is that if he does not act, he stays behind and loses the chance to liberate himself from the constraints of the Other. There is no possibility for a subject 'to be in time' he can only act in time in order to "become" with time. Lacan says in many ways that the verb 'to be' does not apply to the subject, he can only act in time. Thus, the relationship which involves the subject with the Other generate the tenses past and future. As I said in the start the very term "tense" which denotes the past, present and future, brings out the tension of time. The subject is the transitory present; the fleeting present which constantly becomes past in the future.

In the *Sophism*, the subject's access to the Other passes through the imaginary mirroring (reflection) in another subject. The subject speculates what the others do. The course of becoming starts with the mechanism of projection in space. Only after the space is established on the line between the two bodies, the third dimension of space manifest itself as language. This third dimension creates the background and establishes the field of language against which the two subjects are set off. It is like a silence that has been disturbed by a loud sound. We only perceive the silence after the noise had erupted. The illusion is that language has discovered a past existent knowledge is inherent to its function.

Once language appears as a structure, it articulates one subject with the other in a tense relation through various phases. These are the different stations on the subject's route, when he strives to gain a place in the space of the Other through his relations with the others. Time constantly drives the subject and even after he had ascended to the space of the Other, time would carry on and he would separate and differentiate himself as singular subject, different from the others. In Lacan's terms in seminar XI: After he alienates himself to the signifiers and the laws that govern the Other, he would be propelled further by time to separate as different. It is time that unifies the various local positions and spatial phases that the subject traverses and motivates him to pursue. Hence, we can understand the famous phases of the drive's fixations: oral, anal and genital, as the various stages in which the subject props himself in relation to the other and the Other.

Lacan chooses to privilege the tension, among the components of time. In his view the urgency and the haste are the two essential aspects of time. This perspective of time meets Freud (2001/1915). at the point where he said that "the characteristic of exercising pressure is common to all drives; it is, in fact, their very essence; every drive is a piece of activity". This pressure as the motor factor of the drive is chosen by Freud as the first element amongst the four which he assembles in the conceptualisation of the drive. Consequently, I feel free to say that time for Lacan, and drive for Freud, occupy the same place and the same function in the structure of the subject. Condensing Freud with Lacan we can formulate that it is the temporal pressure of the drive which creates the haste and pushes the subject to act.

Lacan had to create two terms to deal with Freud's discovery of the unconscious. He uses the concept of the Other to denote language itself as the treasure of signifiers and their structure, and he uses the term the Subject of the unconscious to denote the active agent which reveals himself as an event, appearing between the signifiers as a lightening.

The analyst is there to grasp these evanescent and fleeting appearances of the subject and to provoke them by means of the handling of time. By, cutting, punctuating or interpreting the speech of the analysand he either points to the instant it appeared, recognising him, or stimulates his appearance.

The first and subtle indication Lacan gives us in the text of the sophism to Freud's first model of the psychical apparatus, the first topic, is given by the use he makes of the term "instances" to denote his three terms. He speaks of the three instances of time: the instant to see, the time to understand and the moment to act. The term "instances" was used by Freud to denote the elements of his mental apparatus in the famous passage from the *Interpretations of Dreams*: He says:

Accordingly, we will picture the mental apparatus as a compound instrument, to the components of which we will give the name of ('agencies') instances ...or 'systems'. It is to be anticipated, in the next place that these systems may perhaps stand in a regular spatial relation to one another, in the same kind of way in which the various systems of lens in a telescope are arranged behind one another. Strictly speaking, there is no need for the hypothesis that the psychical systems are actually arranged in a spatial order. It would be sufficient if a fixed order were established by the fact that in a given psychical process the excitation passes through the systems in a particular *temporal* sequence. (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 536.)

With Lacan's three components of the logical time: the instant to see, the time to understand, and the moment to conclude, it seems that he is describing in temporal terms the apparatus which Freud designs in the spatial dimension. They are the temporal sequence Freud mentions. Lacan advances in the direction that Freud himself pointed and contemplates the mental apparatus in a temporal perspective. From this point of view the *instant to see*, correlates to the sensory perceptive end at the entrance to the apparatus, the *moment to conclude* which is the moment to act, designates the motor end, the outlet of the energetic charge and the time to understand corresponds to the unconscious instances. The unconscious is situated between the two ends that together compose the place where the perceptions are elaborated, before the subject decides to act.

The Sophism

We will now turn to Lacan's text to see the early origins of his ideas on time. But first, I will entertain you with a tale that is the source of Lacan's allegory of the three prisoners.

The story was told by Malba Tahan, a fictitious Persian scholar. He was the pen name of the Brazilian mathematician and author Júlio César de Mello e Souza (1895-1974). This tale is to be found in his book: *The Man Who Counted: A Collection of Mathematical Adventures* (1993).

The book presents in a form of a romance the adventures and the mathematical exploits of an imaginary Persian mathematician from the 13th century. Chapter 31 tells the story of the beautiful princess Dahizé and how she chose her groom among the three rival suitors.

She was daughter of the king Cassim called the "indecisive". This king was afraid that if he chose one of her suitors, the other two would become his enemies. So, he asks her to decide. The princess said she would marry the most intelligent. Thus, the king called his five wise counsellors and instructed them to submit the three suitors to a rigorous test. The three pass the vast test of knowledge equally well. The counsellors return to the king and announce that they could not find any artefact which would allow them to decide who is the most intelligent of the three.

Given that science failed, the king consulted a dervish famous for his magic, and occultism. The dervish said he only knew one way to decide. It was the test of the five discs. The dervish showed the three young men five equal discs of which three were white and two were black. The eyes of the three princes were closed with a band. The dervish took three discs at random and hang them on the backs of the three. Then he said: each of you have a disk on his back. The one who will discover the colour of his own disc, will be announced the winner and will marry the princess. The first to be interrogated would be able to see the discs of the other two, the second would be allowed to see the disc of the last one and the last one will have to formulate his answer without being able to see anything. You will have to justify your answer logically to prove it was not decided by sheer chance.

Camozã was the first. He saw the other two discs and still could not say with certainty which was his own colour. The king announced to the other two the first had failed. The second volunteered, and he also could not give the right answer. Soon after the king announced the failure of the second, Aradim, the third, with his eyes still closed declared the right colour of his own disc. His rigorous reasoning allowed him to resolve with certainty the problem and say that his disc is white.

His reasoning was the following: the first prince could see two discs before he answered and still missed because he could not yet have certainty. Had he seen two black discs he would not have missed. As he missed, he did not see two black discs. He either saw two white discs or one white and one black.

As to the second prince: he either saw a white disc or a black one. In the second case if he would have seen one black, this second prince would have found the answer that he is white. As it was already clear, given that the first prince failed, that the hypothesis of two blacks was removed. So, had he seen black on the third, he would have been able to conclude with certainty that he is the white. But he also failed. If he remained doubting and could only guess, it is because he did not see any black, and he saw on me, the third, a white disc. Thus, I am white.

In this tale the mathematician includes a certain chronological sequence, as the three princes are summoned to give their reasoning one after the other. Lacan changes here and eliminates the chronological sequence of the three and substitutes them by two logical temporal suspensions because he wants to put the emphasis on the constitution of the field of the Other articulated with the constitution of the particular subject as a structural and logical problem.

The sophistication Lacan introduces which turn this logical problem into The Sophism :

Lacan, in his article, (1945/1966) borrows the structure of this story to construct his logical time. Instead of three young man who compete over a desired object, the beautiful princess, Lacan places three prisoners who should compete for their subjective liberty. While the objective of the three princes in the original story is the object, the objective in Lacan's story is the subject himself who seeks liberation from the prison of the Other.

Lacan crafts a different scene and entitles it as a sophism because he abolishes the sequence of the three young men. It is not one after the other that the prisoners are exposed to the scene, it is simultaneously. Each of them would reason like the third prince and this proceeding reveals how does time operate in logic even when a chronological sequence is eliminated. If they insert in their reasoning two temporal suspension, they reach the correct conclusion and display the proper structure of the subject.

He tells us the following story: The chief of the prison invites three prisoners and tells them that he is going to set free one of them. He will choose the one who will be the first to solve the logical exercise he puts to them. He shows them five discs, three of which

are white and the other two are black. He fastens one disc to the back of each prisoner, in such a manner that each prisoner can see the other two discs and cannot see his own disc. He asks them to deduce, in a logical procedure, the colour each of them has on his own back. When he fastens the discs, he only uses the three white ones. The prisoners are not allowed to speak to each other, and they don't have a mirror.

The perfect logical solution is the following: after a certain interval of time the three come forward together. Each of them gives separately the same answer based on the following logical proceeding:

1. It is common knowledge that there are only two black discs.
2. When a prisoner sees two white discs he can calculate, that it is still possible that he himself could be the only black.

3. Now he must think as if he were in the place of each one of the other two. He would assume the reasoning of the other in the following terms: in the hypothetical scene where he himself is black, each one of the other two would see one black and one white. If that were the case, it would give each of these two the possibility to conclude, that they are white. And why: The first hesitation had already put in evidence that there are no two black discs because nobody stepped forward immediately. Thus, in the view of one black, one could infer that he himself is necessarily white and could advance to the door. If again, nobody has advanced, and there is another suspension and hesitation, it is because nobody sees a black disk, and thus I am white.

This way the three would come out at the same time and for the same reasons, following the same logical steps. The simultaneity and the resemblance in the reasoning which drive the three to act together prove that they all follow the same logic inscribed in the field of the Other. Lacan emphasises the "together". They all participate in the same logic and use the same language.

He is concerned with the transformation, the passages from one subjective position to the other, and the interruptions of each position. The personal rhythm of the movement between positions vary from one subject to the other, but the logical transforming passages which compose the structure of the subject, are the same for all.

The sophistication of the solution of his riddle was to jump from the space into time.

The sophistic quality of the solution resides in surmounting the disadvantage of the given situation, using some calculations. The situation is a scene which takes place in the dimension of space. There are not enough facts given to perception for the prisoners to infer the colour of their own disks. The colour is the metaphor for the problem of identity of the subject. The space of the Other does not contain a ready and given signifier to identify the subject. The perception of the scene in the space only provides the prisoners with the colour of the disks of their companions and with their actions.

However, they have at their disposal a previous knowledge, which the chief of the prison had given them: there were three white disks and only two black ones. They can use this knowledge to make calculation and obtain facts which the perception does not provide. If they would figure up the three possible compositions between the three white discs and the two black ones, they could produce in their minds some of the missing facts. The previous knowledge functions here as a general knowledge or a language that all have in common. It is literally a: "common place". What everybody knows, what is common knowledge function as the language itself. Articulating this previous knowledge with the two given facts their perception provides, they can calculate or elaborate some missing data, which is a signifier that the perception does not provide and that the knowledge does not contain.

They must act now to demonstrate that they are certain of their conclusion and sustain this common ground. The one who would not act immediately would be led to an error.

If the dimension of space given to perception does not contain data concerning the identity of the subject, the identity of the subject is hidden in the dimension of time which is an enigma. The subject will have to produce the missing data by his own acts.

Identity and liberty

We could translate this allegory to meta-psychological terms. The constant excess of the drive's energy explains where lies the Other ignorance, the signifier that it lacks. The structure of language fails to supply space in form of signifiers to accommodate this excess of energy that drives the subject. The subject is obliged to act on his own risk, construct a new place for himself in the Other and produce his own identity with his own signifier, he starts by mirroring in the others and duplicating them, but then he must act on his own. Here lies the liberty of the subject. Liberty consists of the possibility the subject has, to be the one who decides and defines who he is. It is the liberty to construct his own place in the society, and to occupy a space that is properly his because he had created it. This liberty can only be exercised by the mechanism of sublimation. The sublime space is not a transcendental place external to space. The subject does not go into an outer space, Lacan says, using his famous aphorism: there is no Other of the Other. To make a place appropriate to him, the subject's own property, it must be generated as his own novelty. His new signifier would extend the space of the Other without leaving it. In this sense, to transcend the space means to integrate time into space. Space will trans-form itself to "comprehend" (include and understand) the subject's new construction, of his own subjective truth.

The moment to conclude a session is in the hands of the analyst, and it is his responsibility to interfere in order to cause a movement and a change in the position of the subject. The moment the subject finds his own place in the first signifier that marks him and act upon it, is the moment the analyst concludes his analysis

Lacan formulates it in *Function and field of the speech and language in psychoanalysis*, justifying his own haste to produce this fundamental paper:

(...) in an exemplary sophism involving intersubjective time, I have shown the function of haste in logical precipitation, where truth finds its unsurpassable condition.

Nothing created appears without urgency; nothing in urgency fails to surpass itself in speech (Lacan, 1953/1966, p. 201).

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Notes:

- (1) *Apund* Reprint. Bronne, Imago Mundi Gérard Monfort, 1988.
- (2) Since 1891, Freud insisted on the fact that the psychic apparatus is constructed after birth in its ‘association’ to another subject who is already somebody who dominates the function of symbolic language.
- (3) Lacan finds in Heidegger resources to conceive time in an inverted direction

Citação/Citation: Wine, N. (2021). *The Variable Session*. Trivium: Estudos Interdisciplinares (Ano XIII, Ed.2), pp. 78-91.

Recebido em: 04/07/2021
Aprovado em: 11/08/2021