

Fucking (and) Time:
Toward a Lacanian Understanding of Temporality

Not long into the examination of the death drive that occupies the final chapter of *What is Sex?*, Alenka Zupančič remarks that on the question of the relationship between human beings and finitude, “there is no doubt that Lacan belongs to the post-Kantian perspective as formulated by Heidegger” (88). In next to no time, however, she qualifies this claim, noting that “[t]he shift (and with it a very important difference with respect to Heidegger) occurs at another point, and the simplest way to formulate it is perhaps the following: the structural place occupied, in Heidegger, by *death* (as the very mode of human finitude that grounds specifically human immortality), becomes with Lacan the real of enjoyment, *jouissance*”; in contrast to Heidegger’s thought, Zupančič explains, for Lacan “it is not simply our attitude toward (the possibility of) death that opens up the space of the specifically human dimension [...] rather, it is the fact that we are situated within an (unsought) portion of enjoyment that makes different attitudes toward death possible to begin with” (88-89). On the basis of this divergence, Zupančič embarks on a dazzling explication of the significant repercussions that Lacan’s position has on the general project of ontological inquiry.

Rigorously comparing and contrasting the French psychoanalyst’s understanding of the death drive with Freud and Deleuze’s commentaries on the same, as well as with Badiou’s notion of the Event, Zupančič argues two co-constitutive theses: on the one hand, “Lacan’s gesture [...] consists in introducing a short circuit of the epistemological and ontological levels (of knowledge and being) in the form of their joint/common negativity (lack of knowledge falls into a lack of being) – and the concept of the subject (as subject of the unconscious) is situated at this

precise juncture” (123); at the same time, “the unconscious is not a *realm* of being; the unconscious ‘exists’ because there is a crack in being out of which comes whatever discursive (ontological) consistency there is. And the production of a new signifier puts us at the point of this ‘beginning’ – which is not a beginning in time, but a beginning as a point in the structure where things are being generated” (126). While these conceptually-dense claims merit closer consideration in their specificity, one cannot help but wonder about what is noticeably absent from Zupančič’s treatment of Lacan’s alteration to Heidegger’s formulation of the relationship between being and time in *Being and Time*: namely, the ramifications that Lacan’s intervention into Heidegger’s thinking has *for Heidegger’s thought* – and particularly, for Heidegger’s theorization of *time*. Such an inquiry – in the form of a much closer examination of the relationship between Heidegger’s *Sein zum Tode* and the Lacanian death drive than Zupančič offers – allows one to detect, within Lacan’s theorization of the unconscious, a truly radical understanding of temporality, which discloses precisely what is lacking in Heidegger’s concept of time.

If it is to be honest, and if it is to be at all enlightening, any such inquiry must begin with a recognition of the profound affinities between Lacan’s thought and Heidegger’s – affinities which certainly appear to be elective. Heidegger is cited by name no fewer than nine times (and in seven distinct texts) in the *Écrits*; “Dasein,” meanwhile, appears on three occasions, including once in his “Seminar on the Purloined Letter” – which also contains “a term [...] *ex-sistence*, which was first introduced into French in translations of Heidegger’s work [...] as a translation for the Greek *ekstasis* and the German *Ekstase*” (*Écrits* 767), according to a helpful translator’s endnote. Such an enumeration, however, can at best be taken as an indication of the *magnitude* of

Heidegger's influence on Lacan; in order to understand the *character* of this influence, one must also consider the uses to which Lacan puts such references. Of these, the most relevant to the topic at hand comes from "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in which Lacan remarks that

the death instinct essentially expresses the limit of the subject's historical function. This limit is death – not as the possible end date of the individual's life, nor as the subject's empirical certainty, but, as Heidegger puts it, as that 'possibility which is the subject's ownmost, which is unconditional, unsurpassable, certain, and as such indeterminable' – the subject being understood as defined by his historicity. (261-262).

Lacan appears, in these lines, to all-but-assimilate the idea of the death drive to Heidegger's understanding of death – and, particularly, to the relationship between Heidegger's understanding of death and Heidegger's understanding of the nature of temporality. Yet this is not all (or rather, this is not-all), for Lacan goes on to situate this conception of death as the horizon of meaning bounding the symbolic order: "When we want to get at what was before the serial games of speech in the subject and what is prior to the birth of symbols," he writes, "we find it in death, from which his existence derives all the meaning it has" (263). For Lacan, this bounding "reveals in speech a center that is outside of language," leading him to propose that "a torus, insofar as a torus' peripheral exteriority and central exteriority constitute but one single region [...]" represents the endless circularity of the dialectical process that occurs when the subject achieves his solitude, whether in the vital ambiguity of immediate desire or in the full assumption of his being-toward-death" (263-64). On the basis of the congruence that Lacan here identifies between the structure of subjectification wrought by desire and the topology of a subject's being-toward-death, the displacement of "being-toward-death" by "being-toward-*jouissance*" that Zupančič identifies as the critical locus of Lacan's divergence from Heidegger would appear to be a distinction without a difference.

This appearance fades, however, in light of the objection that Lacan raises in the next paragraph of the same essay. There, he remarks that “we can simultaneously see that the dialectic is not individual,” before asking “how could he who knows nothing of the dialectic that engages him in a symbolic movement with so many lives possibly make his being the axis of those lives?” Lacan thus indicates that although *death* may be “that ‘possibility which is the subject's ownmost, which is unconditional, unsurpassable, certain, and as such indeterminable’ – the subject being understood as defined by his historicity,” *being-toward-death* is a function of the fact that the subject is constituted by some Other, whose “being” can be transformed into “the axis of [other’s] lives.” In short, one subject’s being *constitutes* another subject’s time.

This complication is, in its way, what underlies Zupančič’s assertion that “death as such, in itself, does not yet involve the possibility of a ‘dramatic’ relationship to itself; this relationship becomes dramatic only when *jouissance* intervenes” (89). In order to see how this is so, it is helpful to recall Lacan’s comments in the “Seminar on the Purloined Letter,” in which he asserts outright that “*the unconscious is the Other’s discourse*” (*Écrits* 10), leading to what he calls “the notion of the *inmixing of subjects*.” Lacan’s point here is absolutely crucial: Insofar as the ecstatic subject is so by virtue of its being the subject of *jouissance*, its ecstasy is a function of its eccentricity – which is to say, the fact that it is centered around a locus external to itself.

Thus, to the extent that Zupančič is correct that what Lacan adds to Heidegger’s ontological framework is precisely a robust account of the unconscious, it is all but tautological to conclude that this corrective both arises from and results in a more complete account of the relationship between the speaking subject and the discourse of the Other, as that which structures and determines the course of the desire through which the speaking subject encounters the world.

This accords with Lacan's own presentation of the genesis and operation of the partial drives, which Zupančić notes are essentially expressions or manifestations of the death drive. As Lacan explains in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*:

What is at issue in the drive is finally revealed [...] the course of the drive is the only form of transgression that is permitted to the subject in relation to the pleasure principle. The subject will realize that his desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the *jouissance* of the other—in so far as the other intervenes, he will realize that there is a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle. (183-84)

In other words, desire, which is born of a double lack – the lack in the Other that calls forth the Other's desire, and that lack in the subject at precisely the point where its own being emerges in and as its discontinuity with that desire – manifests a phantasmatic projection of the subject's genesis as a negation of negation. Thus, while Lacan may maintain, as noted previously, that “the death instinct essentially expresses the limit of the subject's historical function” – which is to say, “death [...] as Heidegger puts it, as that ‘possibility which is the subject's ownmost, which is unconditional, unsurpassable, certain, and as such indeterminable’” – the death drive *itself* is far from being a function of the subject's “ownmost” being, but rather is set into motion as a consequence of the subject's intersubjective formation. The subject, one might say, *realizes its finitude* as a function of its animating lack, the “pulsion” (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, 162) of the discourse of the Other.

Of course, “realizing one's finitude” can be understood in (at least) two senses: as the recognition of one's mortality that constitutes Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode*, but also as *that which brings one's finitude into the Real* – which is to say, as *that which temporalizes*. These two senses are intimately (or extimately) related, but it is only by separating and redoubling them that one can see the ways in which Lacan's insistent reminder that *Dasein must be understood as the subject of the unconscious* radically revises Heidegger's theorization of temporality.

In order to understand the nature of this revision, it is necessary first to gloss Heidegger's understanding of temporality. In "The Concept of Time," a lecture delivered shortly before the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger provides a condensed explanation of the latter text's fundamental contention that one must understand "temporality as the meaning of the Being of Dasein's totality" (*Being and Time* 426). Heidegger's lecture predicates this claim on observation that "[t]he self-interpretation of Dasein which towers over every other statement of certainty and authenticity is its interpretation with respect to its death, the *indeterminate certainty of its ownmost possibility of being at an end*" (*The Concept of Time* 11). Subsequently, he defines being-toward-death as "*Dasein's running ahead to its past, to an extreme possibility of itself that stands before it in certainty and utter indeterminacy*" (12). This past impends as precisely the susceptibility to *becoming-past* that the subject undergoes in "passing away"; thus, Heidegger explains, "this past is able to place Dasein, amid the glory of its everydayness, into uncanniness. In so far as it holds before Dasein its most extreme possibility, running ahead is the fundamental way in which the interpretation of Dasein is carried through" (13). Because this means that "in running ahead Dasein *is* its future, in such a way that in this being futural it comes back to its past and present," Heidegger concludes that "Dasein, conceived in its most extreme possibility of Being, *is time itself*, not *in* time. Being futural as we have characterized it is, as the authentic 'how' of being temporal, that way of Being of Dasein in which and out of which it gives itself its time" (13-14). Thus, for Heidegger, being-toward-death *constitutes* time for Dasein, rather than being a *consequence* of the relationship between Dasein and a temporality external to its being.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger expands this claim in a formulation that brings it into conjunction with Lacan's thinking of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, by noting

that “*temporality is the primordial ‘outside of itself’ in and for itself*. We therefore call the phenomena of the future, the character of having been, and the present, the ‘*ecstases*’ of temporality. Temporality is not, prior to this, an entity which first emerges from *itself*; its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstases” (*Écrits* 377). One need only compare this to Zupančić’s observation that in psychoanalysis, the partial drives, insofar as they manifest the death drive, “do not – even temporarily – *change* life’s fundamental goal (death), they simply introduce a *temporality* into it” (96), to see that Lacan’s thinking of the unconscious intersects Heidegger’s thinking of *Sein zum Tode* as constitutive of temporality for the subject.

Before exploring the implications of this intersection, one must first recognize that its existence reveals the structural incompleteness of Heidegger’s formulation of being-toward-death. As Lilian Alweiss explains, with respect to thinking time, “the novelty of Heidegger’s position is that he shows that time does not find its meaning in eternity but that time finds its meaning in death” (Alweiss 118), because “we humans never experience eternity as such [...] the only viewpoint which is at our disposal is the temporal one ... Indeed, Heidegger goes so far as to assert that ‘*Time itself* is meaningless; time is temporal’” (121). Thus, Alweiss explains, being-towards-death cannot be predicated on a grasping of death as such, but only as an orientation toward a limit. “We live our not-yet – that is to say, our end – and it is because our life is defined by death that we have an understanding of a limit and thus time” (122), she explains. “It is the certainty of death, the certainty of finitude, that opens up possibilities, and thus time. Possibilities and time are constitutively determined through finitude. Time ‘is’ only because we are mortal [...] in itself, apart from humans, it is nothing.” Time is thus produced by our finitude.

Yet Alweiss notes that, insofar as death in the Heideggerean sense neither be understood through the deaths of others, nor experienced firsthand by Dasein except as an impending (but never actualized) possibility, then “time can no longer be understood in view of an end but only in view of something infinitely impending of which we know nothing” (127). Thus, while “initially Heidegger implores us to reconsider the meaning of time by questioning whether eternity, as a point of departure, is ever at our disposal [... w]e now have come to see that this approach itself renders suspect the aspiration to understand the meaning of time through death. For death, like eternity, is never at our disposal.” It thus seems that Heidegger’s account of being-towards-death as the guarantor of the integral unity of Dasein *as* the process of temporalizing – that is, of death as something *belonging to Dasein’s being*, rather than as *being Dasein’s Other* – is itself centered around a lack.

The space of this lack is, of course, the site of the Lacanian unconscious. Insofar as Alweiss has shown that death cannot be seen to belong to Dasein any more than does eternity, Heidegger’s presentation of being-toward-death as “the coming in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself” (*Being and Time* 373) is rendered nonsensical. What Dasein orients toward in being-toward-death *cannot be* itself, but can only be its Other; what this Other is, however, is less than clear. Heidegger is emphatic that “if death as experienced in Others is what we are enjoined to take as the theme for our analysis of Dasein’s end and totality, this cannot give us, either ontically or ontologically, what it presumes to give” (283), because “this would by no means let us grasp the way-to-be which we would then have in mind – namely, coming to an end.” Thus, the Other does not furnish Dasein with an understanding of finitude *by dying*; it is not toward the death of Others that being-towards-death

points. If, however, one considers Heidegger definition of Dasein's death as "the possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there" (294) alongside his assertion that Dasein's being (and thus Dasein's ability-to-be-there) *is* temporality, then the Otherness-to-Being toward which *Sein zum Tode* orients *is not death but rather atemporality* – not the internal limit of (its) existence toward which Dasein stretches itself along by temporalizing, so much as the timeless *insistence* (one might say) of temporalization's other at the very heart of the process of existing by which we make time.

Indeed, in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan makes clear that with the discovery of the unconscious, "Freud brought the border between object and being that seemed to mark the limits of science within its ambit" (*Écrits* 438), noting that "this is the symptom of and prelude to a reexamination of man's situation in the midst of beings [*dans l'étant*] as all the postulates of knowledge have heretofore assumed it to be – but please don't be content to classify the fact that I am saying so as a case of Heideggerianism, even prefixed by a 'neo- [...]'. Thus, Lacan makes explicit that his thinking is in dialogue with Heidegger's, and no less explicit that this dialogue comes in the form of a corrective. Furthermore, he makes clear that this corrective is concerned with "the radical heteronomy that Freud's discovery shows gaping within man" (436); that is, with the fact that there is some Other "to whom I am more attached than to myself [*moi*], since, at the most assented to heart of my identity to myself, he pulls the strings," whose "presence can only be understood in an alterity raised to the second power, which already situates him in a mediating position in relation to my own splitting from myself, as if from a semblable" – an intersubjective process through which is created "the beyond in which the recognition of desire is tied to the desire for recognition." The intervention of the

Other into an impossible form of Being as pure self-consciousness creates the subject of the unconscious *as* a gap that desire eternally seeks to fill.

But what *is* desire? According to Lacan, “the enigmas that desire [...] poses [...] are based on no other derangement of instinct than the fact that it is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the *desire for something else*. Hence its ‘perverse’ fixation at the very point of the signifying chain at which the screen-memory is immobilized and the fascinating image of the fetish becomes frozen” (431). Thus, he concludes, “there is no other way to conceive of the indestructibility of unconscious desire [...but as] a kind of memory, comparable to what goes by that name in our modern thinking-machines (which are based on an electronic realization of signifying composition), that the chain is found which *insists* by reproducing itself in the transference, and which is the chain of a dead desire.”

Something strange indeed happens when these assertions are carefully parsed; namely, the unconscious becomes identified with a timeless inward persistence, or *insistence*, of signifiers; an *arrest* of the signifying chain (“the screen-memory is immobilized and the fascinating image of the fetish becomes frozen”), *causing* desire to “eternally extend” out toward some unreachable object – but with this move into extensivity, this immobility is temporalized, becoming “caught in the rails of metonymy [...] the *desire for something else*.” Insofar as Lacan chooses to “designate as metonymy the first aspect of the actual field the signifier constitutes, so that meaning may assume a place there” (421), then what he elsewhere calls “the manifestly constitutive vector of the Freudian field of experience – that is, what is known as desire” (549) can be nothing other than the process of temporalizing that Heidegger identifies with Dasein’s

being as such – reconceptualized as a consequence of subject’s projection of the discourse of the Other, the eternal inscription (or *inscription as eternal*) of which constitutes the unconscious.

Indeed, Lacan all but says as much in “Logical Time and the Assertion of an Anticipated Certainty” – a title in which the presence in the title of no fewer than four major Heideggerean signifiers cannot be accidental. Because the article itself is conceptually dense, it is useful to consider the distillation of its argument that Lacan offers in “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”:

[M]athematics can symbolize another kind of time, notably the intersubjective time that structures human action [...] The author of these lines has attempted to demonstrate in the logic of a sophism the temporal mainsprings through which human action, insofar as it is coordinated with the other's action, finds in the scansion of its hesitations the advent of its certainty; and, in the decision that concludes it, gives the other's action—which it now includes—its direction [*sens*] to come, along with its sanction regarding the past. I demonstrate there that it is the certainty anticipated by the subject in the “time for understanding” which—through the haste that precipitates the “moment of concluding”—determines the other's decision that makes the subject's own movement an error or truth. This example indicates how the mathematical formalization that inspired Boolean logic, and even set theory, can bring to the science of human action the structure of intersubjective time that psychoanalytic conjecture needs to ensure its own rigor. (*Écrits* 237-38)

This summary makes explicit the nature of Lacan’s intervention into Heideggerean thought – namely, that if “[t]he self-interpretation of Dasein which towers over every other statement of certainty and authenticity is its interpretation with respect to its death, the *indeterminate certainty of its ownmost possibility of being at an end*,” as Heidegger claims, this self-interpretation is not a function of being-toward-death as “*Dasein's running ahead to its past, to an extreme possibility of itself that stands before it in certainty and utter indeterminacy*,” but rather of “the intersubjective time that structures human action” – which is to say, as the temporalization wrought by the unconscious in the form of desire’s metonymy. In short, desire *makes existence temporal* by drawing it out of itself toward its Other.

While such a reading may at first appear tenuous, it is powerfully supported by a closer examination of Lacan’s argument in “Logical Time.” In explaining that what drives each

individual actor in the logical puzzle under consideration to make their conclusion, he notes that each subject's own "time for comprehending" (169) – that is, the internal process of interpreting the discourse of the other players by way of which the subject arrives at his understanding of how the other players see him (in other words, "the process by which the discourse of the Other specifies the subject to itself as the subject that it is," or, more briefly "subjectivity") – creates a disjuncture between its temporality and those of its Others *precisely because* "they do not have to make an assumption" about how they see him, "and will thus precede him by the beat [*temps de battement*] he misses in having to formulate this very hypothesis," which is to say, *precisely because the signifiers through which he constitutes his self-understanding encounter him not as a subject, but as another signifier.*

Therefore, Lacan argues, "the reference of an "I" to the common measure of the reciprocal subject, or otherwise stated, of others as such [...] must, in each critical moment, be temporalized in order to dialectically reduce the *moment of concluding the time for comprehending* to last but the *instant of the glance*" (173). Each subject "builds up to a *motivation* of the conclusion 'so that there will not be' (a lagging behind that engenders error), in which the ontological form of anxiety, curiously reflected in the grammatically equivalent expression 'for fear that' (the lagging behind might engender error), seems to emerge" (169-170).

Thus, Lacan explains, it is

not because of some dramatic contingency, the seriousness of the stakes, or the competitiveness of the game, that time presses; it is owing to [*sous*] the urgency of the logical movement that the subject *precipitates* both his judgment and his departure ("precipitates" in the etymological sense of the verb: headlong), establishing the modulation in which temporal tension is reversed in a move to action [*tendance a L'acte*] manifesting to the others that the subject has concluded. *Temporal tension* culminates here since, as we already know, it is the sequential steps of its release that will scend the test of its logical necessity. [...] What makes this act 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; 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 instances, and the assertion is desubjectified to the utmost. (169-170)

In other words, Lacan argues that the discourse of the Other – which is to say, the unconscious – *produces* within the subject a “temporal tension” which the subject “discharges” by temporalizing itself, thereby *generating* “objectified temporal instances” that can serve as a “common measure” for the “reciprocal subject.”¹

This formulation of temporality clearly resonates with Freud’s declaration in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, of his belief that “the course taken by mental events [...] is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension, that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure” (7); indeed, Zupančić herself quotes these lines to illustrate Freud’s conception of

life as a disturbance and temporary postponement of what appears as a kind of metaphysical pleasure (homeostasis) of the inanimate. Life/the reality principle is a postponement of death, and of the pleasure principle implied in it. The pleasure principle is synonymous with the death drive, which remains—in spite of detours and temporary postponements—the fundamental goal/principle of life. ...There is a direct, *point-by-point mapping* that could be made between the two, between the pleasure principle and the death drive (tendency to return to the inanimate) as present in all life. And just as instincts of self-preservation are not the opposite of the death drive but only its inherent detours, the reality principle is not opposed to the pleasure principle, but functions as its circuitous prolongation. (98)

If Zupančić is correct, however, that Lacan mounts “a vigorous rejection of the thesis according to which the pleasure principle, conceived as the principle of ‘lowering tension,’ constitutes a fundamental, primary principle” (110), then it cannot be the case that this entails a choice to “reject the possibility of relating the death drive to a homeostatic tendency (‘return to the

¹ Lacan makes clear that this understanding of temporalization as an intersubjective process is applicable not only to the logical puzzle around which his article is based, but indeed undergirds the entirety of human temporality. Thus, Lacan concludes his essay by generating, from its conceptualization of temporality, the general schema: “(1) A man knows what is not a man; (2) Men recognize themselves among themselves as men; (3) I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man” (174), and concludes that “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.’”

inanimate’); instead, the death drive can be understood as the constant pulsion of “temporal tension” within the unconscious, which the pleasure principle “discharges” by temporalizing, or discharges as time in the form of progression.

Such a formulation, indeed, allows one to read Lacan’s claim, cited by Zupančić, that “[o]ne cannot exist except in the figure of a sack, a sack with a hole. Nothing is One which doesn’t come from this sack, or go into it” (...*Ou Pire* 147) as a version of Heidegger’s assertion that “[a]s an entity for which its Being is an issue, Dasein *utilizes itself* primarily *for itself*, whether it does so explicitly or not [...] In utilizing itself for the sake of itself, Dasein ‘uses itself up.’ In using itself up, Dasein uses itself – that is to say, its time” (*Being and Time* 381). The difference between the two, of course, is that Lacan believes that what the subject “uses up” is not itself, but precisely that Other which enters and exits the subject as temporality through the hole in the sack that is the opening and closing of the unconscious. This reading, however, only makes sense if one makes a truly radical critical leap – namely, identifying the Lacanian unconscious with *time as such*; that is to say, with a timeless Whole lacking only that hole left in it by the falling-away into subjectivity (and therefore temporality) of the signifier displaced (and replaced) by the subject-as-subject. In other words, the unconscious would be the site of an eternity constituted by the subject’s subtraction therefrom – the subject as “minus-one” – which is thus set out of joint into an infinite recombinatory whirl for as long as the subject is subject rather than signifier, which is to say, for the span of the subject’s temporal existence.

This identification, indeed, is supported throughout Lacan’s writings. In “The Freudian Unconscious and Ours,” Lacan not only notes that “the combinatory operation, functioning spontaneously, of itself, in a presubjective way – it is this linguistic structure that gives its status

to the unconscious” (*Écrits* 20-21), but also goes on to argue that “[i]f you keep hold of this initial structure [...] you will see that, more radically, it is in the dimension of synchrony that you must situate the unconscious – at the level of a being, but in the sense that it can spread over everything” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 26). Similarly temporal language echoes throughout his elaboration of “the fundamental distinction between signifier and signified” (*Écrits* 345) in that section of “The Freudian Thing” bearing the heading “The Thing’s Order” – a heading which could also serve, one observes, as a definition of temporality. There, he explains that “[t]he first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the material of language,” while “the second network, that of the signified, is the diachronic set of concretely pronounced discourses, which historically affects the first network, just as the structure of the first governs the pathways of the second,” because “what dominates here is the unity of signification, which turns out to never come down to a pure indication of reality [*reel*], but always refers to another signification.” In this schema, *diachrony* – Saussure’s term for development over time – takes the form of “pronounced discourses” indicating a “unity of signification” *over time* which is thereby detached from “reality” by virtue of its metonymy; these temporalized articulations, however, *emerge* from “the *synchronic* structure of the material of language.” In other words, temporality is projected from the atemporality of the unconscious, which is timeless as a language, but the eternity of which cannot stop leaking out from the hole in the Whole that is the subject.

Furthermore, thinking the unconscious as time *as such* allows one to better understand the strange temporality of the Lacanian definition of the Event – Zupančić explains that, for Lacan, “[a]n Event occurs when something ‘stops not being written,’ as he puts it in *Seminar XX*” (134) – as well as *his* assertion, in “The Symbolic, The Imaginary, and The Real,” that “[t]he

question of the temporal constitution of human action is inseparable from that of the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary” (*Names of the Father* 30) because “as soon as the symbolic is involved [...] the temporal element must be considered” (29).

In “Psychoanalysis and its Teaching,” Lacan develops this thought further, remarking that “[i]f man must truly find lodging in a ‘milieu’ that has just as much a right to our consideration as the edges of reality [*réel*] wrongly presumed to be the only ones that generate experience, Freud's discovery shows us that the milieu of symbolism is consistent enough” (*Écrits* 371) to provide an ontological basis of this sort, because the unconscious, the discourse of the Other as a timeless totality lacking only the subject *as such*, “attaches each of us to a scrap of discourse that is more alive than his very life [...] and] having been unable to proffer this scrap of discourse from our throats, each of us is condemned to make himself into its living alphabet to trace out its fatal line.” The same logic surfaces again in Lacan’s “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation,” in the argument that “the subject has to arise from the given state of the signifiers that cover him [*le recouvrent*] in an Other which is their transcendental locus; he thus constitutes himself in an existence in which the manifestly constitutive vector of the Freudian field of experience—that is, what is known as desire—is possible” (*Écrits* 549), because “the signifier is the only thing in the world that can underpin the coexistence—constituted by disorder (synchronically)—of elements among which the most indestructible order ever to be deployed subsists (diachronically)” (552).

For a final example – although Lacan’s signifiers swirl endlessly around this topic – one might consider Lacan’s remarks in “In Memory of Ernest Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism” that “all the symbols Jones' study highlights [...] are points of the subject's umbilication in the

cuts made by the signifier, the most fundamental of them being the *Urverdrangung* [primal repression] that Freud always emphasized—namely, the subject's reduplication brought on by discourse, though that reduplication remains masked by the multiplication of what it evokes as entities [*e'tant*]” (*Écrits* 597). Thus, although

it is with images that captivate his eros as a living individual that the subject manages to ensure his implication in the signifying sequence.[...] his desire's implication in the signifier takes a narcissistic form. But it is not the connections of need, from which these images are detached, that sustain their perpetuated impact; rather, it is the articulated sequence in which they are inscribed that structures their insistence as signifying. [... W]hat happens in the extreme case is that desire finds its fantasmatic prop in what is called a defense on the part of the subject when he is confronted with a partner who is taken as a signifier of completed devouring. (Weigh my terms carefully here.)

Indeed, one might conceive of primary repression, for Lacan, as acting precisely upon the “loss of” timelessness that accompanies (or rather, consists of) the subject’s entry into language and the metonymy of the symbolic order – both when it begins to speak itself, and beforehand, by way of the discourse of the Other.

Marie Jaanus’s essay on “The Demontage of the Drive,” in *Reading Seminar XI*, accords closely with such an interpretation. Early in her essay, Jaanus cites Lacan’s claim that ““the Freudian project has caused the whole world to reenter us, has definitely put it back in its place, that is to say, in our body, and nowhere else” (120), which can be read either as an assertion that the world we inhabit is in fact constituted by our processes of habitation, or that embodiment is the only possible site at which the subject can hope to encounter a “whole world,” even as the fact of its embodiment necessarily excludes the subject from participation in that totality; from there, she notes that drive “is as radical an alteration of instinct as a montage is of the pieces of reality from which it is composed” (122), a formulation that only serves to underscore the temporalizing function of the drive – a function that emerges from the fact, Jaanus argues, that every subject becomes a subject by way of “castration by language” (125) – an operation

eminently compatible with the understanding of the unconscious that this paper has been advancing.

But what is “castration by language?” Jaanus explains that upon entering into the symbolic order (that is, being constituted as a subject), “[t]his ‘primal separation’ effects something real, a death, which has to occur, in order that something exist outside the structure so that the symbolization of substances becomes possible. It is a trauma not of meaning and meaninglessness as language is, but a trauma of being and non-being, ultimately of immortality and mortality [...]” As such, she argues, “[r]eality is structured on the rejected object *a*, the something (a piece of our own being) relegated to non-being. That loss (in separation) produces simultaneously the object *a* (the real) and reality,” but “as this primal castration occurs before the institution of language and the imaginary proper, this unique object is pre-linguistic and pre-specular (neither symbolic nor imaginary) [...] It remains the unobjectified object, the non-represented object, the pre-object, or the abject, unseen, unheard, unsmelled. It is that part of jouissance that can never be spoken” (127). However, she explains, “[t]hese fallen partial objects [...] were once themselves part of a totality that Lacan calls the lamella. The lamella is libido persisting without sexuality. It is immortal, self-subsisting life” (131). Therefore, Jaanus concludes, “[r]eal, eternal life and our wholeness are behind us, and they can never be recuperated except through death [...] The loss of the various objects *a* is [...] a repetition of our original fall from immortality into mortality [...] each object *a* is a reminder or remnant of the greater totality of which we were once a part” (131-132).

There is much to unpack in these lines, but one might begin by hearing how they clarify the temporality of Lacan’s assertion, in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” that

“neurosis is a question that being raises for the subject ‘from where he was before the subject came into the world’ (this subordinate clause is the very expression Freud uses in explaining the Oedipus complex to little Hans). At stake here is the being that appears in a split second in the emptiness of the verb ‘to be’ and, as I said, this being raises its question for the subject” (*Écrits* 432). The unconscious, in these lines, marks the insistence within the subject of a world whose wholeness is not fractured by the subject’s declination via language into temporal being. From this point, one might look back at Lacan’s assertion, immediately after his explicit invocation of Heideggerian being-toward-death that inaugurated this discussion, that “[w]hen we want to get at what was before the serial games of speech in the subject and what is prior to the birth of symbols, we find it in death, from which his existence derives all the meaning it has” (*Écrits* 263). By situating death “before” speech and “prior to the birth” of symbolization, Lacan makes clear that the death toward which the death drive drives is *not* the ever-impending “possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there” that the subject experiences, but rather the atemporal non-being that brackets the subject’s subjectivity on both ends.

Here, Lacan acknowledges, in a way that Heidegger does not, the full importance of Heidegger’s own admission that “death [...] taken formally [...] is just *one* of the ends by which Dasein’s totality is closed round. The other ‘end’, however, is the ‘beginning,’ the ‘birth.’ Only that entity which is ‘between’ birth and death presents the whole which we have been seeking” (*Being and Time* 425). Therefore, Heidegger argues, Dasein

stretches *itself* along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along. The ‘between’ which relates to birth and death already lies *in the Being* of Dasein. On the other hand, it is by no means the case that Dasein “is” actual in a point of time, and that, apart from this, it is “surrounded” by the non-actuality of its birth and death. Understood existentially, birth is not and never is something past in the sense of something no longer present-at-hand; and death is just as far from having the kind of Being of something still outstanding, not yet present-at-hand but coming along. Factual Dasein exists as born; and, as born, it is already dying, in the sense of Being-towards-death. As long as Dasein factually exists, both the “ends” and their

“between” *are* [...] Thrownness and that Being towards death in which one either flees it or anticipates it, form a unity; and in this unity birth and death are “connected” in a manner characteristic of Dasein. (426-427)

These lines of Heidegger’s, despite their resemblance to what this paper has heretofore identified as Lacan’s corrective to Heidegger, in fact reveal the essence of that corrective. Because Heidegger has been “seeking” a “whole” or totality of *Dasein*, he makes no attempt no account for the hole *in* Dasein that is the unconscious, nor can he conceptualize Dasein’s temporalizing as the function of its being a *gap in eternity*. To the extent that he gestures in this direction, he does so through the concepts of “thrownness” and “mood” – which are, it becomes clear, the closest that he can come to characterizing human experience *without the concept of the unconscious*.²

What, in the end, is one to make of the dialogue thus drawn between Heidegger and Lacan? In thinking the unconscious as *time as such*, Lacan is able to fill in the gap at the heart of Heidegger’s thinking of temporality – namely, his inability to fully explain the mechanisms by which the subject temporalizes – even if he fills it *with a gap*. One also arrives at a thinking of the death drive, and its relation to the pleasure principle, that bridges the gap between the Freudian and Lacanian death drives, by thinking subjectivization as the dynamization of the inanimate. Here, however, “the inanimate” becomes identified with the Real, as that impossible eternal totality brought into insistence by the subject’s negation therefrom; the Real is the whole

² It is possible to mount a compelling reading of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that takes Lacan’s text as a systematic response to Heidegger’s attempt “to give a temporal Interpretation of the items of [Dasein-as-temporality’s] structure, taking them each singly: understanding, state-of-mind, falling, and discourse” (*Being and Time* 384-85), by reconstituting each term in properly intersubjective fashion, with the assistance of a concept of the unconscious and without Heidegger’s insistence on thinking the subject as a totality. While actually mounting such a reading is, unfortunately, outside of the scope of this paper, its plausibility is powerfully suggested by Lacan’s casual assimilation of the concept of hermeneutics to the discourse of psychoanalysis: “A lot of fuss is made nowadays about what is called hermeneutics [...] Now, what is hermeneutics, if it is not to read, in the succession of man’s mutations, the progress of the signs according to which he constitutes his history, the progress of his history – a history that may also, at the fringes, extend into less definite times?” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 153).

which we can neither see nor speak, because we are at once a part of, and apart from it. Finally, sexuality takes on its full significance in Lacan's thought, as the way that we, as humans, make time, and make eternity, by making and endlessly repeating our finite selves as a mode of relating to the Other – suggesting that, insofar as the sexual relation does not exist, this is because filling each others' holes can never really make us whole, because subjectivity is itself an attempt to fill the hole in the timeless Real torn by subjectivization. Thus, the “auto-eroticism” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 179) of the drives ultimately expresses the our desire *to make ourselves desired*; that is, to make ourselves temporal, such that our finitude can provide the grounds for our enjoyment of the world, before we, ourselves, dissolve back into a Real about which nothing can be said, because it knows nothing of the differences upon which language depends, and which the symbolic order returns to us as time.

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