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Before it knows, after it speaks: Lacan and the time of the subject

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the question of time in Lacan's work from several points of view: logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty; retroactive temporality and Lacan's future anterior; the temporality of the signifier, including sequence, scansion and nomination; and the clinical temporalisation of desire in neurosis and analysis. The central point is that time in Lacan should not be treated as a single doctrine. Rather, it designates a series of temporal operations through which speech, history and desire become subjectively effective. By tracing their development across Lacan's return to Freud, his theory of the signifier and his reflections on analytic practice, the paper clarifies why time is central to Lacan's account of the subject and why analytic intervention is inseparable from the question of timing.

KEYWORDS

Lacan; subject; time

Introduction

For psychoanalysis, time is never merely the neutral container in which psychic events unfold. It appears in the duration of treatment, the recurrence of symptoms, the belated force of childhood scenes, the difficult work of remembering, and the analytic moment in which something is heard precisely because speech has been cut, suspended, or returned from elsewhere. Yet in Lacan's work, time is at once everywhere and difficult to isolate. One reason for this difficulty is historical. Lacan's return to Freud has often been read through the primacy of structural linguistics, where the synchronic order of the signifier appears to take precedence over diachronic development (de Saussure 1916). Another reason is clinical. Lacan's name remains closely associated with the variable-length session, a technical innovation too often reduced either to institutional controversy or to the caricature of the "short session". Between these two tendencies, time risks being absorbed into structure on one side and narrowed into technique on the other. What disappears is the more important question of how time functions in Lacan's account of the subject.

This paper begins from the opposite premise: time is a privileged route through which Lacan's theory of the subject, the signifier, desire, and analytic practice can be clarified.

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From the early essay on "Logical Time" to the later seminars, Lacan repeatedly returns to temporal problems, even when time is not named as the explicit object of inquiry (Lacan 1945, 1958–1959, 1964a). The aim of this paper is not to extract from Lacan a unified doctrine of time. There is no single concept called "Lacanian time" that can be applied uniformly. Lacan gives us instead a series of temporal operations: anticipation, retroaction, scansion, delay, haste, suspension, repetition, and the future anterior. These operations name the ways in which the subject is produced through a discordance between what has happened, what is being said and what is awaited.

If Lacan's teaching is organised by a return to Freud, his thinking on time must also be understood as a return to a problem already present in Freud's work. Freud famously argues that unconscious processes are not ordered by temporal succession in the manner of conscious processes (Freud 1915). Yet his clinical discoveries repeatedly depend upon temporal complexity. Screen memories are retrospective formations rather than preserved fragments of childhood (Freud 1899). Repetition brings the past into the present without making it identical to what once occurred (Freud 1914). Analytic construction gives form to a past that becomes effective through reconstruction (Freud 1937). Later psychoanalytic writing has developed this fractured temporality in several directions. Green (2002) argues that psychic life is marked by heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory temporalities. Birksted-Breen (2003) shows that *après-coup* requires a double temporality, in which a later event gives new psychic value to what came before, while the earlier scene continues to exert pressure on the present. More recent work has explored elasticity, reverberation and the negotiation of different temporalities within the session (Bronstein 2024; Weiss 2025).

Lacan's distinctive contribution is to relocate this problem within the structure of the signifier and the subject's relation to the Other. For Lacan, the unconscious appears timeless only when time is equated with chronological sequence, conscious dating, or objective duration. Once time is approached through retroaction, punctuation, anticipation, and symbolic inscription, the unconscious is profoundly temporal. Existing studies have clarified important parts of this field: logical time and trans-subjective reasoning (Fink 1996; Hook 2013), scansion and variable session length (Hook 2023; Pietrusza and Hook 2016), and the broader registers of time in Lacan's work (Wang 2019). The present paper takes these contributions as a point of departure while adopting a more pedagogical approach. It follows four sites in Lacan's teaching where the temporal problem becomes especially visible: the prisoner sophism of logical time; retroactive temporality and Lacan's future anterior; the temporal structure of the signifier; and the clinical temporalisation of desire and analysis. Taken together, these sites serve as successive points of entry into Lacan's temporal operations and show why they matter for psychoanalytic thought.

Logical time: anticipation, certainty and the act

Lacan's essay on logical time offers one of the clearest points of entry into his treatment of temporality. The essay stages its problem through a puzzle, almost a parlour game. The terms are well known: three prisoners are shown five discs – three white and two black – and each is assigned one disc. Each prisoner can see the discs of the other two, though never his own; each is promised freedom if he can deduce his own colour on

logical, rather than probabilistic, grounds. Since all three have in fact been given white discs, the solution depends not simply on what each sees, but on what each supposes the others would have done under different conditions (Lacan 1945, 162–165).

At first sight this seems to be a deduction exercise. Lacan's concern, however, lies elsewhere. The puzzle allows him to show that there are situations in which certainty is achieved through anticipation rather than through the completed accumulation of evidence. If a prisoner saw two black discs, he would know immediately that his must be white, since only two black discs exist. Lacan calls this the instant of the glance. In the actual case, each prisoner sees two white discs and must reason by supposition: if I were black, the others would eventually be able to infer that they are white; since they do not leave after a sufficient pause, I too must be white. Certainty therefore depends on the temporality of the others' hesitation.

The sequence is important because each prisoner must use two kinds of evidence. The first is visual: each sees two white discs. The second is temporal: each observes that the others have not departed. The absence of departure is not a neutral delay. It becomes evidence only because each prisoner can imagine what the others would have done if the distribution of discs were different. In this way Lacan transforms a puzzle about colours into a lesson about subjectivity. The subject's conclusion depends on the presumed reasoning of others, and that reasoning becomes visible only through time. This is why Lacan insists on the value of the "two suspensive scansions" (Lacan 1945, 165). Rather than functioning as mere durations of thought – such as the time one objectively spends working through a mathematical problem – the pauses here form part of the reasoning itself. They allow the subject to transform possible combinations into temporal positions. Instead of asking which arrangement of discs is present, each prisoner must ask: what must the others have understood, and when must they have understood it, if my hypothesis were true?

In ordinary chronology, one first thinks, then knows, then acts. Logical time disturbs this sequence. The subject acts before full certainty has been externally secured. The act at once expresses certainty and produces the conditions under which certainty can be verified. This is why the prisoner's movement towards the door creates a further complication. When one prisoner begins to leave, he sees the others moving too. The movement that seemed to settle the problem briefly reopens it: perhaps they are leaving because they see that he is black. Lacan's point is that certainty in logical time is not a static possession. It is constituted through a temporal movement in which the subject must assume a conclusion while the field that supports it is still moving.

In the short introductory note added when the text was placed in the *Écrits*, Lacan says that the essay should resound "between the before and the after" (Lacan 1945, 161). The phrase is useful pedagogically because it shows that logical time is neither simple succession nor pure simultaneity. A later moment gives an earlier moment its place. The prisoner who concludes is named A, while B and C are the others on whose delay A relies; yet each prisoner occupies the position of A from his own standpoint and the position of B or C for the others. Hook (2013) therefore reads the sophism as trans-subjective: the prisoners do not communicate psychologically, but each act is mediated by what each supposes the others suppose.

The most paradoxical element of the essay is haste. In ordinary language, haste suggests impatience, error, or insufficient reflection. For Lacan, haste is the form taken

by logical necessity when certainty cannot simply be awaited. The subject must conclude before the others precede him; otherwise, their act will no longer show whether he has understood or merely followed. If the subject waits too long, he loses the possibility of assuming the conclusion as his own. Lacan calls the conclusion reached by each prisoner an "anticipated certainty" (Lacan 1945, 171). One declares oneself in advance of complete verification, and this anticipatory declaration allows verification to occur. Fink's account of logical time in terms of subjective precipitation captures this movement well: the subject is precipitated in the act, rather than waiting behind the act as its already formed author (Fink 1996).

A critical reading should nevertheless avoid turning Lacan's sophism into a universal psychology of decision-making. Lacan himself acknowledges that experimental practice may diverge from theoretical construction and that real subjects may misrecognise the reality of others (Lacan 1945, 163). Logical time is a formalisation rather than an empirical generalisation, yet it remains conceptually and clinically informative. Lacan is showing that subjectivity cannot be reduced to the gradual accumulation of information. There are moments when the subject comes into being through a cut, an interruption, or a decision that cannot be fully guaranteed in advance. The analysand who waits for complete knowledge before speaking, deciding, separating, or recognising something of his desire may wait indefinitely.

Retroactive temporality: Nachträglichkeit and the deferred constitution of meaning

Psychoanalysis complicates the ordinary assumption that an event first occurs, receives its meaning at the moment of occurrence, and then produces later effects. A scene, a word, a parental gesture, or a childhood encounter may be carried forward without yet having the value it will later acquire. Freud gives this problem an early formulation when he writes: "We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by deferred action" (Freud 1895, 356). In "Screen Memories", Freud studies memories whose vividness and apparent triviality suggest that something else has been organised through them (Freud 1899). In the Wolf Man case, the primal scene is likewise treated less as a simple datum than as a scene reconstructed through later development, dream, symptom and analysis (Freud 1918). According to Bistoen et al. (2014), Freud's concept of Nachträglichkeit gives psychoanalysis a way of thinking delayed traumatic reactions without reducing them either to the objective severity of an event or to subjective invention. What matters is not an event sealed at the moment of occurrence, but the later psychic inscription through which that event becomes operative (Eickhoff 2006).

Lacan enters this Freudian problem by shifting the emphasis from development to signification. Nachträglichkeit is not only the way a later psychic stage gives new meaning to an earlier impression. It also reveals how signifiers work. A signifier does not receive its meaning at the instant of its isolated appearance. It receives its value through its place in a chain, and often from a point that comes later. In *Seminar I*, Lacan gives a clear formulation of this topic. "History is not the past", he says. "History is the past in so far as it is historicised in the present – historicised in the present because it was lived in the past" (Lacan 1953–1954, 12). In distinguishing history from the past, Lacan is separating occurrence from the symbolic operation through which

occurrence becomes part of a subject's history. In analysis, Lacan places the stress "more on the side of reconstruction than on that of reliving" (Lacan 1953–1954, 14), and insists that the analytic movement proceeds "from the future to the past" (Lacan 1953–1954, 157). The analysand speaks from a present orientated towards a possible future: a transformation, an interpretation, a different relation to desire, a different way of inhabiting the symptom. It is from the possibility of such a future that the past can be reorganised. The past becomes analysable because the subject is no longer identical with the position from which that past was first lived.

Seminar II extends the point in a more explicitly structural direction. Lacan remarks that when a new symbolic order appears, it creates its own perspective within the past: what is new seems to have been there from the beginning (Lacan 1954–1955, 5). This is familiar at the level of ordinary life. A diagnosis can make earlier bodily sensations appear as signs. A declaration of love can make previous encounters seem destined. A political revolution can make scattered gestures appear as the prehistory of an uprising. Psychoanalysis adds that the subject's own identity is formed through this temporal operation. Once a signifier arrives, it reorganises the past to which it now seems always to have belonged.

In "Function and Field", Lacan's distinction between reality and truth gives this argument a clinical edge (Lacan 1953, 213). Reality may name what can be verified, dated or corrected. Truth, in analysis, concerns the position from which a subject speaks and the signifying relations that make an event consequential. A fact may be verified and still remain psychically inert; a memory may be inaccurate in detail and yet reveal the organisation of desire. The truth produced in analysis lies in the reordering of contingencies, such that the subject can hear in them the structure of a destiny that, though never predetermined, has come to bear necessity.

The grammatical form of this necessity is the future anterior. Lacan writes that what is realised in my history is the "future anterior" of what I will have been, given what I am becoming (Lacan 1953, 247). The subject is not simply what it was, nor what it is, nor what it chooses itself to be in an empty future. It becomes legible retroactively, but this retroaction is orientated by anticipation. Hook (2023) rightly treats the future anterior as especially useful for thinking the analytic situation: the analysand speaks not only from what has happened, but from the position of what he or she may come to have been. A patient who says "I was always abandoned" may be articulating an autobiographical conviction; in analysis, however, the force of the sentence depends on where it is spoken from, to whom it is addressed and what future relation to abandonment it may make possible. The analytic question is therefore not only "What happened first?" but also "From what later position is this earlier event now being spoken?" In developing retroactive temporality, Lacan shows that the past is articulated through speech, from a later point, under the pressure of a possible future.

Temporal structure of the signifier: sequence, scansion and nomination

As Lacan embeds the dimension of the symbolic in his understanding of history, memory, and Nachträglichkeit, the argument now shifts from the time of history to the time of language. This separation is pedagogical rather than absolute, because for Lacan psychic history itself becomes history only through symbolic articulation. Still, it is

useful to ask how the signifier is temporal in its own structure. A signifier is not complete in itself. It belongs to a sequence, and the sequence has to take time.

Lacan states this directly in *Seminar III*, where he insists that discourse must have a "direction in time" (Lacan 1955–1956, 54) and defines discourse as a "signifying temporal chain" (Lacan 1955–1956, 155). The phrase is important because it refuses two common reductions. Discourse is not merely a container of meanings, as if words were stored in a mental cabinet and then retrieved. Nor is it a pure structure outside time, even though Lacan is often associated with structuralism. Many secondary readings of Lacan rightly emphasise the primacy of the signifier (Dor 1998; Evans 1996; Fink 1995). Yet they can sometimes leave the Symbolic sounding more spatial than temporal: a structure, an order, a place. Lacan's Symbolic is a movement of differences because signifiers arrive one after another. The signifier does not float in an empty synchrony. It has to pass through succession.

Here Lacan is close to Saussure, whose principle of the linearity of the signifier argues that the linguistic signifier unfolds in time, one sound following another (de Saussure 1916). Lacan accepts this but gives it a psychoanalytic consequence. The subject does not command the whole sentence in advance. It speaks, and is spoken, through a chain whose meaning is not yet secure. The temporal vector of language is therefore both irreversible and retroactive. It is irreversible because signifiers must be articulated in an order. "Obviously 2 followed by 1 is not the same thing as 1 followed by 2" (Lacan 1956–1957, 226–227). A word that has been uttered cannot simply be restored to the position of being unuttered. Even silence after a word is no longer the same silence as before it. Yet meaning also turns back on the sequence. A later signifier can determine what earlier words will have meant. Lacan would later describe this as "the core of a reversion time", visible in "the retroactive effect of meaning in sentences", where meaning requires "the last word of a sentence to be sealed" (Lacan 1964b, 711).

Consider a simple example. If someone begins, "I never said that … ", the phrase remains open. It may become a denial, confession, joke, accusation or displacement depending on what follows. The first words do not yet contain their final meaning; they solicit it. This is why Lacan's account of the signifier is so useful for psychoanalytic listening. The analyst listens not only for content but for the temporal arrangement through which content becomes sayable: the hesitation before a name, the repetition of a phrase, the sudden change of tense, the word that arrives too early or too late, the point at which the sentence breaks off before securing itself.

This brings us to scansion. If the signifying chain unfolds in time, it does not unfold as a smooth continuum. It advances by breaks. Lacan formulates this in *Seminar IX*:

> Why has the signifier in its corporeal, that is to say vocal, incarnation always been presented to us as essentially discontinuous? We had therefore no need of surface: discontinuity constitutes it. The interruption in the successive forms part of its structure. (Lacan 1961–1962, 224)

A stream may move, but the signifier requires segmentation. Without a break between elements, there would be no signifying unit. Sound would dissolve into noise, perception into flux, speech into undifferentiated vocal material. The signifier is therefore temporal not only because it follows a sequence, but because it is cut out of succession.

Jakobson's account of language through selection and combination helps situate Lacan's move (Jakobson 1971). The syntagmatic chain depends on combination,

contiguity and the linking of elements across sequence. Lacan takes this linguistic insight into psychoanalysis by reading desire and the unconscious through metonymy and displacement. Scansion adds what a purely combinatory model might miss. The chain is not only a linking of elements; it is also a series of cuts. A signifier can be joined to another only because it is not fused with it. Continuity depends upon discontinuity.

Scansion is often discussed in relation to the Lacanian session, especially the analyst's use of punctuation, suspension, or interruption. Hook (2023) makes this accessible by treating punctuation and scansion as ways of drawing attention to the analysand's speech and disrupting defensive narrative continuity. Pietrusza and Hook (2016) similarly show that the variable-length session is not simply a shortening of treatment time but an intervention into the temporal organisation of speech. Alfandary (2017) adds an important nuance by recalling that scansion is originally a prosodic concept; it concerns rhythm, stress, division and the poetic organisation of speech. These readings help prevent a caricature of scansion as the analyst's dramatic cut. Not every interruption is analytic. A premature cut may merely frustrate, humiliate, or reinforce the analysand's imaginary relation to the analyst's power. A cut has value only when it allows a signifier to be heard in its differential force.

An analyst may stop a session after a particular phrase, repeat a word, or allow a silence to remain. The intervention isolates a signifier at the point where it can resonate differently. It prevents speech from being absorbed too quickly into the analysand's familiar narrative continuity. Something is allowed to stand because it has been separated rather than explained. The cut gives the signifier time; but it does so only when the cut follows the logic of the speech rather than the analyst's wish to display mastery over duration.

The third aspect of Lacan's symbolic time is nomination. If sequence and scansion explain how signifiers produce meaning, naming shows how the symbolic order stabilises reality itself. In *Seminar II*, Lacan states that "the name is the time of the object" (Lacan 1954–1955, 169). Perception gives momentary appearances: objects appear, vanish, alter their angle, or become confused with desire. The name allows the object to subsist across absence. This is not a crude form of linguistic idealism. Lacan is not saying that material objects exist only because they are named. He points more directly to the human dimension of existence: an object becomes more than a passing perception when it can be called, recalled, replaced, missed, promised, inherited, prohibited, or desired under a name. Naming gives the object a temporal consistency. It can be absent and still operative; lost and still structure desire; dead and still command fidelity; forgotten and still return.

The same logic applies to the subject. A subject is held across time by names, kinship terms, diagnoses, insults, ideals, identifications, and master-signifiers. A name can stabilise; it can also imprison. It can give continuity; it can also impose a destiny. This is where the argument returns to the future anterior of the previous section. The subject becomes what it will have been because signifiers endure beyond the moment in which they are first received. A name spoken in childhood may later become the organising point of a life; a phrase once heard may acquire the force of a command; an identification may appear to have always been true only after it has been symbolically assumed. Nomination is therefore more than one linguistic operation among others. It is one of the ways symbolic time enters the body and history of the subject.

Taken together, these points show that the Symbolic for Lacan is not an atemporal structure into which time is later introduced. It is itself a temporalising structure. It makes sequence possible, and it makes sequence unstable through retroaction. It allows continuity, but only through discontinuity. It stabilises objects through names, but only by separating them from immediate presence. This is why Lacan's theory of the signifier belongs at the centre of any account of Lacanian time. Without it, logical time would remain a formal puzzle, and Nachträglichkeit would remain a theory of memory. With it, we can see how time is not merely what language represents but also what language produces.

Clinical timing: desire, neurosis and analytic practice

Lacan's theory of time also clarifies the temporality of symptoms and analytic practice. To conceptualise neurosis only in terms of repressed ideas or behavioural repetitions is to miss a central temporal dimension. For Lacan, neurosis is also a disturbance in the subject's relation to the time of desire. The desired object is not simply present and available. It is too early, too late, already lost, postponed until tomorrow, or encountered only when the subject is not ready to meet it.

Seminar VI prepares this point by linking the present to speech. "The present", Lacan says, "is the moment at which I am speaking, and nothing else"; even "the ABCs of temporality require the structure of language" (Lacan 1958–1959, 294). The present is not a natural immediacy into which desire could comfortably enter. It is produced through saying, and saying is already caught in the field of the Other. To speak is to locate oneself in relation to a symbolic field that precedes one, receives one's words, and may or may not return them as meaningful. The neurotic difficulty with time is therefore not simply that the subject miscalculates when to act. The subject expects the moment of desire to be guaranteed by the Other, and this expectation makes the present structurally unstable.

Lacan distinguishes neurosis from perversion at precisely this point. In the passage under discussion, perversion is described as located in space: it "suspends some sort of essential relationship to time – it is not strictly speaking atemporal, but lies outside of time". Neurosis, by contrast, is grounded in "the relationship of the subject to time", which is "the very basis of the subject's relations to his object at the level of fantasy" (Lacan 1958–1959, 315). The object of desire is sought in a "moment of truth" that is always "an hour ahead of schedule or an hour behind" (Lacan 1958–1959, 315). It promises to reveal the truth of desire to the subject, but only by failing to coincide with the subject's present. If it appears before the subject is ready, it is unbearable; if it comes after the subject has waited too long, it is already lost. Neurosis is therefore at once a drama of repression and a drama of the impossible present.

Lacan articulates this impossibility differently in obsession and hysteria. The major function of desire in the obsessional consists "in keeping at bay and awaiting the hour of the desired encounter" (Lacan 1958–1959, 295). The obsessional can sustain his relation to desire only by "putting off or deferring until later his commitment to a true relationship involving desire" (Lacan 1958–1959, 428). This helps explain why obsessional time so often appears as planning, postponement, preparation, and moral bookkeeping. One may seem extremely active, yet this activity functions as a way of avoiding the act.

Lacan captures this feature when he jokingly remarks that the obsessional is always busy "packing his bags": "He gathers his bags, he forgets some of them or he checks them at the baggage checkroom, but they amount to nothing more than luggage for a trip he will never take" (Lacan 1958–1959, 459).

Hysteria, by contrast, is described by Lacan as founded on unsatisfied desire. Here he adds a specifically temporal formulation: the hysteric always repeats "something that came too soon", a "fundamental unreadiness" initially present in trauma (Lacan 1958–1959, 315). Something arrives before it can be subjectively assumed, not because the clock is early, but because the subject has been summoned into the Other's desire before possessing a signifier adequate to locate itself there. The hysteric's unsatisfied desire is therefore not a simple refusal of satisfaction. It is a way of keeping open the question of what the Other wants, and of preventing any object from closing that question too quickly.

These formulations are useful for teaching because they prevent obsession and hysteria from being reduced to behavioural portraits. The obsessional is not simply cautious, and the hysteric is not simply dissatisfied. Each structure organises desire through time. Lacan's reading of Hamlet gives a compact illustration of this clinical temporality. Unlike Jones's classical Oedipal interpretation, in which Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because Claudius has realised Hamlet's own unconscious wish, Lacan shifts the emphasis to Hamlet's dependence on the mother's desire and, more broadly, on the desire of the Other (Jones 1910). Hamlet is not simply a man who delays and hesitates. He is a subject waiting for the Other's time. Lacan states this without ambiguity: "Hamlet is always tributary to the other's time, and this is true right up until the end of the play" (Lacan 1958–1959, 315). When Hamlet encounters Claudius at prayer, the act seems available. Claudius is unprotected, exposed, vulnerable. Yet Hamlet stops, "because it is not the right time"; it is "not the other's time" (Lacan 1958–1959, 316).

Hamlet lacks a guaranteed symbolic moment. He cannot act when the time is merely his own. Yet when he does act, he acts precipitously, as in the killing of Polonius behind the arras. Hamlet therefore seems to embody both sides of neurotic time: his temporality oscillates between postponement and precipitation. He is either not ready or already thrown into action by an event beyond his decision. For Lacan, this seemingly paradoxical pattern can be explained by a common principle and a shared tragedy. Hamlet is always operating on the Other's time, but "this is merely a mirage", because "there is no guarantor of the dimension of truth that is founded by the signifier" (Lacan 1958–1959, 324). The Other does not possess the clock that would authorise the act. There is no final instance that can say: now your desire is legitimate, now your action is fully guaranteed, now the moment has come without remainder. Here we encounter the reverse side of the prisoner in Lacan's logical time puzzle: a subject who, instead of leaping forward into anticipated certainty, waits forever for the Other to give him a time that only his own act could have produced.

The temporal structure of neurosis also reframes the time of analysis. One cannot transform neurotic time simply by telling the subject to "act now", because this would install the analyst as a new Other whose time the subject must obey. Analysis instead gives the neurotic relation to time a place where it can repeat, become legible, and perhaps be transformed. Freud's account of transference already implies this: what is not remembered is repeated in the analytic relation, and working-through requires time because the patient must encounter the repetition in the present rather than merely accept an explanation of the past (Freud 1914). Lacan radicalises this point when he says that

"transference is the very concept of analysis, because it is the time of analysis" (Lacan 1953–1954, 286).

In reading this argument, Lewis (2005) suggests that transference cannot be adequately understood through clock time or developmental chronology; it depends on the temporality of subject formation and on the way punctuation in the session can reorganise the analysand's relation to the Other. Pietrusza and Hook (2016) make a related clinical point in their discussion of scansion and the variable-length session: analytic timing is less a manipulation of duration than an intervention into the subject's transferential expectation. The analyst's waiting, cutting, or silence matters only insofar as it touches the temporal logic by which the subject organises desire. The analysand waits for the analyst's word, resists it, anticipates it, demands it, postpones it, repeats old positions through it. The obsessional may make the session into one more preparation for the journey never taken. The hysteric may make the analyst the one whose desire must be kept alive, provoked, and unsatisfied. In both cases, the analytic relation does not stand outside neurotic time. It becomes the site where neurotic time can be heard.

Lacan's early technical remark remains one of the clearest: analysis contains a "time-for-understanding", and one must sometimes "wait as long as it takes for the subject to realize the dimension at stake on the plane of the symbol" (Lacan 1953–1954, 285–286). Waiting here is an active analytic discipline. It sustains the conditions in which the subject may come to recognise his or her own relation to desire, rather than receiving the time of the act from outside.

Conclusion

Time in Lacan is not a discrete topic to be extracted from his work and placed beside language, desire, or the clinic as one theme among others. It is one of the forms through which these other concepts become intelligible. Building upon Freud's investigation of temporal multiplicity, Lacan reopens the question of time by asking how human beings are constituted through discordant temporal relations. The subject does not first exist and then enter time. It is produced through temporal operations: it anticipates before it knows, understands only after a signifier has arrived, discovers its past through later symbolic inscription, and confronts desire at moments that are never simply present.

The movement of this paper has therefore been deliberately cumulative. Logical time first showed that certainty is not always the result of completed knowledge. Haste is not the enemy of logic but the moment at which logic becomes subjective. Nachträglichkeit then displaced the problem from decision to history. The past becomes historical only through later symbolic realisation, so that the subject lives in the tense of the future anterior. The temporality of the signifier then made this retroactive logic more precise. Meaning appears in sequence, but it is fixed only through scansion, punctuation, discontinuity, and the later arrival of another signifier. Finally, the discussion of desire and neurosis showed that clinical suffering often takes the form of a failed relation to the moment: the obsessional postpones, the hysteric repeats a "too soon", and Hamlet waits for a time the Other cannot give. What emerges from these different moments is not a single doctrine of Lacanian time, but a coherent field of temporal problems. Lacan gives us time as a structure of subjectivation. The Lacanian subject is defined by language, history and

desire. But more specifically, it is defined by the temporality of language; by the fact that history is always being reconstructed from a later point; and by the impossibility of coinciding with the time of desire.

For contemporary psychoanalytic thinking, the value of Lacan's account lies in its capacity to clarify why timing, belatedness, repetition and punctuation matter clinically. Psychoanalysis does not merely take place in time; it works on time. It alters the subject's relation to what has been, what returns, what is awaited, and what can be assumed without guarantee. The analyst's intervention matters both because of what is said and because of when it is said. If the Lacanian subject is never fully contemporary with itself, analytic time names the field in which a subject may cease waiting for a final guarantee and begin to assume the consequences of its own speech.

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Patient anonymisation

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