

Time: Logic and Sentiment

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Translated by Megan Williams

"I have been very sad since my grandmother died." Concerned to situate this event in time, I asked when this decease took place, only to immediately hear the response: "Recently a long time ago".

This brief exchange being repeated several times during the course of the interviews which followed, it acquired for me the value of a little playlet, of which the comic effect seemed to respond to the inadequacy of the question posed.

Probably nothing more was to be heard in this than the fact that this saying made an event of the death of her grandmother for this woman.

The liberty that she seemed to allow herself in the face of the imperatives of logical order, to which alphabetisation submits speaking beings from a young age, had left me perplexed. Only more recently, this "recently long ago"—a singular figure of style, at the same time ellipsis and antithesis, as well as holophrase—finished in the end sounding like a sentence in the style of Novarina¹: "recently (says the pain I suffer) long ago (say you, You who live in time)".

Now, what was this intervention other than the call of, and the reminder of, time; that is to say, of discourse?

To live in time: is this not the property of every speaking subject, since time, as Kant claimed, before being a given of experience, is an a priori form of our understanding? It is an anteriority of logic in relation to the lived; the universality of the category, which no one escapes. Thus there would not be, properly speaking, any 'outside time' for the speaking body. Nevertheless, the analytic experience is indeed one of an always-present insistence on that which remains, unchanged, on which time would have no hold (?).

One thus perceives the pertinence of this remark of Lacan: "The time function", he says, talking about repetition, "is here of a logical order, and linked to a putting into signifying form of the real". To live in time is to lend oneself to this putting into form. It is the case in analysis. Whatever the real with which the subject has to do, the analytic rule submits him to the task of his putting it into signifying form; of his submission to the time of discourse. From this we conclude that the brusque, sudden appearances in the course of an analysis are not so much those of a sentiment of time, but rather of a sudden consciousness of its existence.

The sentiment of time of which the poets speak is that of time which passes. It is a frequently melancholic sentiment, imprinted with regrets and reproaches, or sometimes rather tainted with anguish. It always supposes anticipation, retroaction, recollection; in other words, the structure of Freudian memory. Therefore we have to distinguish this sentiment, which certainly renders

¹ Valère Novarina, contemporary Parisian dramatic author.

present time, from occasions of the realisation of time in which the effect of desire is evident. Think of those moments where there suddenly appears the idea of a term, often under the figure of death. "If I have to die, it would be better to wake up", says an analysand lost in hypochondriacal fears. Then it comes to him, as an enlightenment: "This loss of time, the neurosis!". For another, coming out of a grave illness, after long years of analysis, this is formulated under the pressing wish to "move on..." (?) the haste of passage to the act, we would say, of cutting short the jouissance of the symptom. The sudden presence of desire, for which, as Blanchot said, "Doing outdoes being".

The analytic discourse which, to profane eyes, seems to snap its fingers at time, in fact introduces the subject to taking account of it; a taking account which constitutes, moreover, the condition of possibility for living in one's time. How to manage it? By the detour of one's submission to the time of the subject, a time which alone determines the uncompressible duration of its course. That this duration cannot be anticipated does not mean that the analyst ignores it. It is even to the contrary. Provided he grasps the logical structure in which he himself is caught up: in other words, to locate the instants of seeing, to respect the time for comprehending and to recognise the moments of concluding which do not happen without him.