

Timelessness and Temporalisation of the Unconscious. Tracing Freud's Theory of Time*

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Abstrakt Odkrycie beczasowości nieświadomego jest jednym z niewielu fragmentów teorii psychoanalitycznej, które nigdy nie zostały systematycznie opracowane przez samego Freuda, mimo że wielokrotnie przedstawiał je on jako dezyderat badań psychoanalitycznych. Uwagi Freuda dotyczące beczasowości wskazują na następujące problemy: (1) związek między psychologią a filozofią czasu, zwłaszcza estetyką transcendentalną Kanta; (2) psychogeneza świadomości czasu jako antycypowanego powtórzenia minionych spełnień życzenia w nieświadomej fantazji; (3) czasowa niezmiennosc i nieład nieświadomych procesów umysłowych konceptualizowanych zarówno w zachowaniu, jak i retroakcji; oraz (4) implikacje beczasowości nieświadomego dla praktyki psychoanalitycznej torującej drogę nadziei. Opierając się na krótkich komentarzach Freuda dotyczących beczasowości i jego bardziej szczegółowych rozważaniach na temat zjawisk, które mają jawne i ukryte znaczenie dla teoretyzacji czasu, wyjaśniam i rekonstruuje zasadnicze idee Freuda na temat czasie

w odniesieniu do tych czterech problemów. W ten sposób pokazuję, że badanie beczasowości nieświadomego oraz sposobów i środków temporalizacji świadomości ma kluczowe znaczenie dla teorii i praktyki psychoanalitycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Freud, nieświadome, beczasowość, zachowanie, retroaktywność, Kant, estetyka transcendentalna

Abstract The discovery of the timelessness of the unconscious is one of the few fragments of psychoanalytic theory that never underwent a systematic elaboration by Freud himself even though he repeatedly stated it as a desideratum of psychoanalytic research. Freud's outlines concerning timelessness point towards the following problems: (1) the relation between psychology and philosophy of time, especially Kant's transcendental aesthetics; (2) the psychogenesis of time consciousness as anticipated repetition of past wish fulfilments in unconscious phantasy; (3) the temporal unchangeability and disorder of unconscious mental

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doktorant w Graduate School of Social Research w Warszawie i na Uniwersytecie w Kolonii, gdzie kończy rozprawę dotyczącą fenomenologii ucieleśniania i psychoanalitycznej teorii seksualności. Jest certyfikowanym psychoonkologiem i przechodził szkolenie analityczne. Pracuje jako asystent badawczy w centrum medycyny paliatywnej przy Szpitalu Uniwersyteckim w Kolonii.

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processes as conceptualised in both preservation and retroaction; and (4) the implications of the timelessness of the unconscious for psychoanalytic practice concerning the facilitation of hope. Drawing upon Freud's brief comments concerning timelessness and his more thorough discussions of phenomena that have explicit and implicit relevance to a theorisation of time, I clarify and reconstruct the general lines of Freud's

thoughts about time in reference to the four identified problems. I thereby show that the study of the timelessness of the unconscious and the ways and means of the temporalisation of consciousness are of central interest to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Keywords: Freud, unconscious, timelessness, retroaction, Kant, transcendental aesthetic

Das ist der Sinn von allem, was einst war,
daß es nicht bleibt mit seiner ganzen Schwere,
daß es zu unserm Wesen wiederkehre,
in uns verwoben, tief und wunderbar.

Rainer Maria Rilke

■ Introduction

Just as Freud's interest in mental processes is predominantly an interest in their latency – i.e., in the unconscious – his interest in time is especially directed towards a mode of its suspension which he calls “timelessness.” He introduces a brief discussion of timelessness in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with caution, stating that “[a]t this point I shall venture to touch for a moment upon a subject which would merit the most exhaustive treatment”¹. He then goes on to say:

As a result of certain psycho-analytic discoveries, we are today in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are “necessary forms of thought.” We have learned that unconscious mental processes are in themselves “timeless.” This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them. [...] On the other hand, our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* [Perception-Consciousness] and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working².

Freud closes this cryptic digression on the note that “I know that these remarks must sound very obscure, but I must limit myself to these hints”³. Indeed,

¹ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. II, London, p. 28.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

the discovery of the timelessness of the unconscious is one of the few enigmatic fragments of psychoanalytic theory that never underwent a systematic elaboration by Freud himself, although it is thematised in all stages of his work⁴. As I will show in what follows, Freud himself ascribed a great deal of significance to his thoughts on time, while admitting that he was never able to flesh them out systematically. Thus, in a sense, by turning our attention to this part of Freud's work, we are truly addressing a gap in the primary literature. Regarding his reservations on tackling questions pertaining to the theory of time, Freud commented towards the end of his life in a letter to Marie Bonaparte dated November 12, 1938:

What concerns time, I had not fully communicated my ideas to you. Nor to anyone else. A certain shyness about my subjective tendency to concede too much to phantasy in scientific research has always kept me at bay⁵.

Hence – unfortunately – Freud's explications on his theory of time are not exhaustive and we cannot say with certainty what Freud ultimately thought thereabout. On the other hand, we may also assume that Freud considered what little he wrote on the subject to be ascertained despite his reservations. Moreover, throughout his work there are repeated discussions of phenomena that have explicit and implicit relevance to a theorisation of time⁶. In the following, I shall consult several of these discussions in order to reconstruct major tenets of Freud's psychoanalytic account of time and timelessness. However, theorising the atemporality of the unconscious is stated by Freud not only as a desideratum of psychoanalytic research but is explicitly stated to await "consideration in philosophical thought"⁷, marking a discovery that Freud openly presents as an invitation of philosophy into psychoanalysis.

The outlines of a time-theoretical program of psychoanalysis that we can find in Freud⁸ sketch out his thoughts concerning the discovery of the timelessness of the unconscious and, related to this, the following problems:

- (1) the relation between psychology and philosophy of time,
- (2) the psychogenesis of time consciousness,
- (3) the temporal unchangeability and disorder of unconscious mental processes, and
- (4) implications of the timelessness of the unconscious for psychoanalytic practice.

In my investigation of the timelessness of the unconscious and the problems associated therewith, I will focus on the work of Sigmund Freud and will

⁴ See C. Hanly, *A problem with Freud's idea of the timelessness of the unconscious*, in: L.G. Fiorini, J. Canestri (eds.), *The Experience of Time: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, London 2009, p. 21–34.

⁵ Freud S., *Briefe 1873–1939*, E. Freud, L. Freud (eds.), Frankfurt a. M. 1980, p. 470–471.

⁶ See H.W. Loewald, *Das Zeiterleben*, „Psyche“ 1974, 28(12), p. 1054.

⁷ S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, p. 74.

assemble and reconstruct his central statements regarding these problems, showing that: (1) Freud undermines the results of Kant's transcendental aesthetic because he discovers that not all mental processes are organised by linear time; (2) Freud is committed to a notion of circular time insofar as he hypothesises temporalisation to occur as the anticipated repetition of past wish fulfillments in unconscious phantasy; (3) Freud gives clinical evidence for how past experiences shape present experiences (preservation) but can be reworked by new experiences (retroaction), thus opening the horizon of futurity; and (4) Freud gestures towards the timelessness of the unconscious as an ally in analytic practice which the analyst can recruit to help the analysand imagine a life worth living.

■ 1. Concerning philosophical and psychological aspects of the study of time consciousness

When Freud speaks of the “Kantian theorem that time and space are «necessary forms of thought»⁹ or of the “philosophical theorem that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts”¹⁰, he is referring to Kant's transcendental aesthetic of the 1781/1787 *Critique of Pure Reason (KrV)*. The terminological negligence with which Freud quotes Kant – calling space and time “forms of thought” rather than “forms of intuition” – may, as Laplanche attests, strike one as a “debased, ready-made Kantianism such as was in currency towards the end of the 19th century”¹¹. Freud is loosely referring here to what Kant called the pure forms of intuition (and not the categories of understanding or the schematism that connects both). In this regard, therefore, it will be helpful to briefly recall Kant's theory in order to understand what Freud is endeavouring to oppose in his own theory.

Kant obtains the pure forms of intuition by first abstracting from cognition the conceptual-discursive faculty of understanding, and in a second step removing from the remaining sensuality everything empirical. He thus uncovers outer sense (space) and inner sense (time) as the two forms of pure intuition¹² that, as such, are necessary conditions of the way in which appearances can give themselves to consciousness¹³. Kant's transcendental aesthetic of time (*KrV*, B 47-58) holds that time is not a simple abstraction of experience (i.e., an empirical concept), but rather one of the very conditions of the possibility of experience itself. It is not a general concept either, but a pure form of intuition; a given and infinite quantity; an irrevocable representation (*KrV*, B 47-48). These

⁸ See S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; idem, *The Unconscious*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, p. 187; idem, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

⁹ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28.

¹⁰ S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

¹¹ J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, in: idem, *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, trans. M. Stanton, J. Fletcher (ed.), London 1992, p. 164.

¹² See O. Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Grundlegung der modernen Philosophie*, München 2004, p. 86-87.

¹³ See H.E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven-London 2004, p. 130; L. Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism: A commentary of the Transcendental Aesthetic*, Toronto-Buffalo-London 1995, p. 25.

determinations are all analogues of Kant's analysis of space (*KrV*, B 37–46). In contrast to space (the immediate form of outer sense), time is the immediate “form of inner sense” (*KrV*, B 49); and thus, indirectly also the form of all external appearances since fundamentally “all representations [...] belong to the inner state” (*KrV*, B 50). From his analysis, Kant concludes that time has empirical reality and objective validity for all possible and actual experiences (*KrV*, B 52). But instead of absolute reality, time merely has transcendental ideality, meaning that it does not exist independently but only with respect to the subjective conditions of intuition. In Kant's view, without such these subjective conditions, time is not even conceivable (*ibidem*).

In summary, according to Kant's theorem of the pure forms of intuition, every representation must necessarily be situated in time: both outer and inner experience is always already subject to time; and therefore, human consciousness is never atemporal. Freud thus recapitulates Kant's thesis quite aptly when underscoring the necessity of the Kantian mind to be temporalised in order to have experience at all.¹⁴

In addition to his references to the pure forms of intuition, Freud also uses Kant's term *Zeitvorstellung* several times. Strachey translates *Zeitvorstellung* as “idea of time”¹⁵ and “concept of time”¹⁶; although “representation of time” would be more faithful to the German *Vorstellung*, Latin *repraesentatio*. The term is never explicated in Freud's work, and he seems to adopt it affirmatively from Kant. In Kant, representation (*Vorstellung*) is the most general name for the intentional relation between consciousness and objects (*KrV* B 376–377)¹⁷. The representation of time thus states the experiential ‘being represented (imagined, posited) in time’ of the intentional objects of consciousness. Accordingly, in the same sense, Freud also speaks of the “reference to time”¹⁸ when discussing the *Zeitvorstellung*.¹⁹ What does it mean, though, for experience to be represented in time? According to Kant, the following conditions pertain to the representation of time: time (in contrast to space) is one-dimensional; “different times are not simultaneous, but successive” (*KrV*, B 47). Consequently, past, present, and future are understood as neatly distinct sections of time (*ibidem*). Furthermore, Kant affirms the “infinite of time” (*KrV*, B 48), meaning that all specific time intervals are included within the boundless “original representation time” (*ibidem*). The representation of time also encompasses the circumstance that change is possible only through and in time (*ibidem*). Kant explains that “the time in which we place these representations [...] already contains relations of succession, of simultaneity, and of that which is simultaneous with succession (of that which persists)” (*KrV*, B 67). Moreover, as already mentioned,

¹⁴ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28; *idem*, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74. I hold this view against Hanly, who accuses Freud of not grasping Kant's theorem correctly in substance due to his terminological negligence, see C. Hanly, *A problem with Freud's idea*, p. 25–26.

¹⁵ See e.g., S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28; *idem*, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

¹⁶ See S. Freud, *A Note upon the «Mystic Writing-Pad»*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, p. 231.

¹⁷ See O. Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 81.

¹⁸ See S. Freud, *The Unconscious*, p. 187.

¹⁹ When, on occasion, Freud speaks about the “abstract idea of time,” *idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28 [emphasis added – T.D.], he seems to allude to the **concept** of time (rather than time **experience**). Against Kant (*KrV*, B 46), Freud seems to be committed to a theory of empirical concept formation apropos the concept of time which he hypothesises is reflectively “**derived** from the method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*,” *idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28 [emphasis added – T.D.]. Interestingly, this view is somewhat close to the account of the idea of time put forth by John Locke, see *idem*, *Essay*, II 14 §§3–4.

“all appearances in general, i.e., all objects of the senses, are in time, and necessarily stand in the relations of time” (*KrV*, B 51).

If we summarise these points, Kant’s account of the representation of time entails firstly – as we have seen before – that experience is necessarily extended in time. Moreover, time is neatly divided into past, present, and future intervals of an underlying infinity. In time, appearances are ordered according to succession, simultaneity, and duration. Only in time is change possible.

In (unspoken) agreement with Kant’s account of the representation of time, Freud emphasises the moments of change and temporal order against Kant’s transcendental aesthetic. This is because change and order are precisely those moments that are elaborated differently in Freud’s time-theoretical thought. Freud discovers that the unconscious is a field of experience that is neither subject to change through time, nor temporally ordered. Rather, through the mechanisms of the unconscious, time is thrown out of kilter in conscious experience. Kant’s thesis that all experience is governed by the linear representation of time in the sense described above is thus undermined such that Freud presents the phenomenon of the timelessness of the unconscious as a challenge to Kant’s transcendental aesthetic. This, of course, would be an attack on Kant only if Kant were to acknowledge that it makes sense to conceive of experience as unconscious. However, that would run against Kant’s assertion that all possible experience must upon reflection reveal itself to be accompanied by the “I think,” i.e., must potentially be indexed with what we might call “mineness” (*KrV*, B 131–132). According to Freud, this is precisely not the case in unconscious experience even upon reflection, for the unconscious is that which is not acknowledged as one’s own²⁰. In this regard, the awaited “philosophical consideration” of the timelessness of the unconscious entails that one should not identify “psyche” and “conscious experience,” foregrounding a critique that Freud levelled against philosophy numerous on numerous occasions²¹.

What are we to make of this divergence between Freud’s psychoanalysis and Kant’s transcendental idealism? As we know, Kant’s investigation of time is a transcendental-philosophical discussion of the conditions of possibility of sensory perception; whereas Freud’s project is predominantly that of an empirical psychology. In this capacity, transcendental philosophy lies beyond his reach. Freud’s attack on Kantianism simply misses its target if we take it to level empirical research against transcendental investigation²². On the other hand, the current of meta-psychological thought in Freud’s work is very much occupied with questions concerning the conditions of possibility of psychic life, even if they are never stated explicitly as transcendental problems. For our

²⁰ See S. Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. II, p. 300.

²¹ See e.g., S. Freud, *A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XII, p. 260; idem, *The Unconscious*, p. 167; idem, *Introductory Lessons to Psycho-Analysis*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XV, p. 21–22.

²² See G. Böhme, *Kants Theorie der Gegenstandskonstitution*, in: idem, *Philosophieren mit Kant: Zur Rekonstruktion der Kantischen Erkenntnis- und Wissenschaftstheorie*, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, p. 118.

immediate purposes, it suffices to point out these differences in terms of levels of interpretation. If we are to further explore Freud's theory of time within its own psychoanalytic horizon, we do not have to aver to either empirical or transcendental aspects. But whenever we ambition to apply Freud's thought in the philosophical debate, we should seek to clarify in what capacity we choose to read his contributions.

Another clarification concerns the distinction between time consciousness and world time. Kant considers time as a pure form of intuition and not as an absolute reality. Laplanche sees in this a disengagement of "the philosophy of time [...] from the problem of cosmological time"²³ and holds as its result "that [subjective] temporality becomes independent of [objective – *T.D.*] time"²⁴. Because this is so, the experience of time can be legitimately discussed as subjective time consciousness without committing to metaphysical statements about the ontological status of world time; or even accounting for (supposed) facts thereabout. In other words, if we discover that subjective time consciousness does not run according to time as measured by instruments, this in itself does not undermine the legitimacy of our analysis. Quite the contrary. Insofar as time consciousness is a subjective experience, for reasons of principle it cannot be explained by the objectivist approaches of physics or chronobiology. This position is also held in psychoanalytic scholarship²⁵ and is consistent with Freud's own approach, which is concerned with time in consciousness and the unconscious rather than clocks and watches. This further means that we should reject all objections that seek to correct Kant or Freud with Newton or with Einstein²⁶. It also means that adequate research into time experience must differentiate between time consciousness and world time – where this distinction is not made, we run the risk of getting confused by equivocations and fail to investigate the relevant phenomena.²⁷ In the following, I therefore take psychoanalysis to primarily investigate subjective time (un)consciousness and not to be occupied with claims about objective world time.

■ 2. The psychogenesis of time consciousness

Freud's suggestion that the representation of time is linked to the working of the perceptual system²⁸ is most fully developed in the *Note upon the «Mystic Writing-Pad»*.²⁹ There Freud discusses an economic principle that he considers to be the foundation of the origin of the representation of time:

²³ J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 162.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ See H.W. Loewald, *Das Zeiterleben*, p. 1058; A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse: Zersplitterte Zeit*, „Psyche“ 2003, 57(9), p. 795.

²⁶ See e.g., C. Hanly, *A problem with Freud's idea*, p. 26.

²⁷ This fallacy is committed for instance by James Alexander, see idem, *Die Zeit und der metapsychologische Begriff der Anpassung*, „Psyche“ 1967, 21(9), p. 693.

²⁸ See S. Freud, *The Unconscious*, p. 187; idem, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 28; idem, *Negation*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, p. 238.

My theory was that cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system *Pcpt.-Cs.* So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemonic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill. [...] I further had a suspicion that this discontinuous method of functioning of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* lies at the bottom of the concept of time.²⁹

Contrary to the popular view that perception is a continuous process correlated with the continuous inflow of sense data, Freud describes perception periodically “like a light ceaselessly turning off and on”³⁰. This discontinuity corresponds to the insight that the subject is not merely passively receptive towards external and internal experiences, but unconsciously selects between those impressions (and phantasmata) that may enter consciousness as tolerable and those that are harmful and must therefore be defended against. This finds expression in Freud’s model of perception through the assumption that “the perceptual apparatus of our mind”³¹ consists of two layers: of the “surface which receives the stimuli”³² and of the “external protective shield against stimuli whose task it is to diminish the strength of excitations coming in”³³. The protective shield keeps the subject from being overwhelmed by stimuli; it is, as it were, Freud’s explanation for why not every experience is a traumatic experience³⁴. The periods of innervation and the accompanying periods of perception underlie, in a way that is not specified here by Freud, the origin of the representation of time. Time thus conceived is a succession of periodic innervations that are synthesised into duration.

To make sense of the psychogenesis of time consciousness alluded to herein, I propose to follow up on two of Freud’s own hints. First, as cathexis always designates the libidinal cathexis of objects, in taking the economic perspective we are gestured towards the importance of object relations. We are thus led to consider the intersubjective dimension of the psychogenesis of time consciousness. Secondly, the role of perception for the psychogenesis of time can be elucidated in its function as a precondition for memory. “A trace is left in our psychical apparatus of the perceptions which impinge upon us,” Freud already contended in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, which “we may describe as a «memory-trace»”³⁵. Following the agreement in the psychoanalytic literature that there is a condition of timelessness in intrauterine life that is replaced with temporalised experience in the early life of the newborn³⁶, I will outline a brief

²⁹ S. Freud, *A Note upon the «Mystic Writing-Pad»*, p. 231. Bonaparte applies this theory to explain the timelessness of dreamless sleep through the withdrawal of cathexes (eadem, *Time and the Unconscious*, „International Journal of Psychoanalysis” 1940, 21, p. 467, fn. 18) – an application that may well be seen as a time-theoretic complement to Freud’s reflections on protection against stimuli and withdrawal of innervations during sleep, see S. Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. I, p. 337; idem, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. I, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. IV, p. 23.

³⁰ J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 164.

³¹ See S. Freud, *A Note upon the «Mystic Writing-Pad»*, p. 230.

³² See *ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*; see also S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 26–28.

³⁴ See *Ibidem*, p. 29.

³⁵ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. V, p. 538.

³⁶ See G. Schmithüsen, «Die Zeit steht still in rasender Eile». Eine psychoanalytische Einzelfallstudie zu frühem Trauma und Zeiterleben, „Psyche” 2004, 58(4), p. 297.

developmental narrative that begins with the pressure of the drive and results in the origin of time experience.³⁷ The guiding hypothesis of this narrative is that the emergence from timelessness and thus the temporalisation of experience is tied to the prerequisite that an experience of lack or tension is met with the experience of a need-satisfying or tension-reducing object relationship³⁸.

As deficient beings (*Mängelwesen*) who cannot satisfy most of their needs themselves, infants depend on caregivers to work towards bringing about situations in which the infants' needs are met with satisfaction. "The child's first choice of an object, which derives from its need for help,"³⁹ thus depends on the caregiver properly nursing the infant in the first place. Because the infant's most basic needs such as hunger are originally satisfied only in interaction with their caregivers, the pressure even of the drive of self-preservation is always already enmeshed in object relations: hunger and love are intertwined, as it were, in the infant's "first and most vital activity, his sucking at his mother's breast, or at substitutes for it"⁴⁰. If the infant, being fed, experiences sufficient satisfaction, this experience is accompanied with the inscription of a mnemonic sediment that Freud calls a memory-trace. A memory-trace is not yet a memory in the full sense, but it forms the precursor of what may one day become a proper memory. On such traces, memories manifest in the mode of conscious and deliberate retrieval, but also in unconsciously motivated forms of acting-out⁴¹, dreaming⁴², or phantasising⁴³. If the infant is assailed by hunger on another occasion but lacks the nursing presence of the object, the memory-trace of the earlier experience of satisfaction can be drawn upon. In this situation, the experience of lack, the absence of the object, and the memory-trace of an earlier satisfaction come together to awaken phantasy: "The first wishing seems to have been a hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction"⁴⁴. Because the object longed for is not physically present, it is phantasised into presence by the hallucinating child – and with the object, a phantasy of the satisfaction of the need is summoned⁴⁵. Against the background of repeated experiences of satisfaction, the increasing ability to remember satisfaction, to project this memory into the future, and thus to anticipate satisfaction, develops as an internal response to lack⁴⁶. Thus, the earliest representation of time that becomes tangible in this scenario is the anticipation of past experience being repeated in the future⁴⁷. Linking absence with presence is here as elsewhere an achievement of phantasy: memory, perception, and anticipation are knotted together in phantasy in such a way that the unfolding of present, past, and future becomes possible therefrom⁴⁸.

It is obvious that we are not dealing here with the linear progression of time (past → present → future) that the Kantian theory accounts for. Rather, we find

³⁷ In contrast to Schmithüsen (ibidem, p. 297–298), and following Freud, I concede a bigger role to phantasy for the psychogenesis of time consciousness in my reconstruction of his (i.e., Schmithüsen's) concise account.

³⁸ See ibidem.

³⁹ S. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XI, p. 47.

⁴⁰ Idem, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. VII, p. 181.

⁴¹ See S. Freud, *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. VII, p. 119; idem, *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XII, p. 150.

⁴² See idem, *From the History of an infantile Neurosis*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XVII, p. 51.

⁴³ See idem, *Screen Memories*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. III, p. 318.

⁴⁴ Idem, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 598.

⁴⁵ See ibidem, p. 130.

⁴⁶ See G. Schmithüsen, «Die Zeit steht still in rasender Eile», p. 297.

⁴⁷ See ibidem.

⁴⁸ See S. Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. IX, p. 147–148.

that from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the infant is originally introduced into time in the sequence “present → past → future”⁴⁹. Originary time experience has a cycling (or even, insofar as it strives forward, a spiralling) movement, tying the past back to the present and then anticipating it as repeated in the future⁵⁰.

What about linear time, though? Are we to ignore this mode of temporality because it does not correspond to the psychoanalytic experience; because it is nothing for which psychoanalysis is primarily accountable?⁵¹ If we maintain that it makes sense, even if only secondarily, to speak of time experience as linear, and if we further demand that psychoanalysis must indeed elucidate how subjects position themselves in linear time, then we might take up some cues given by Bonaparte. While discussing the developmental tasks of the child, Bonaparte observes that “it marks an important date in his young life when he has learned to understand the language spoken by watches and clocks”⁵² for it is the relentless mechanism of the clock, among others, that regulates play- and bedtime⁵³. If we pursue this line, the question of temporalisation is expanded to include the operations of the reality principle and secondary processes. I believe this indeed to be the direction that points to a psychoanalytic engagement with linear time. However, as the focus of this paper is on the workings of the unconscious and thus on the workings of the pleasure principle and the primary processes, I will not follow this thread any further at this juncture. Instead, I will turn back to the mnemonic sedimentation of past experiences as memory-traces and move on to the problems which concern the temporal unchangeability of the unconscious and its time-ignorant (dis)order.

■ 3. The temporal unchangeability and disorder of unconscious mental processes

In his transcendental aesthetic, Kant emphasises that change is possible only through and in the representation of time (*KrV*, B 48). Likewise, common sense believes all empirical Being to undergo change as time passes until it ultimately perishes. In the unconscious, however, Freud finds that “no alteration in its mental process is produced by the passage of time”⁵⁴. Already in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud held the view that unconscious wishes always remain active, that they are indestructible: “In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten”⁵⁵. He returns to this motif in a footnote added in 1907 to the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where, for the first time, Freud coins the “timelessness” of the unconscious:

⁴⁹ See J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 177.

⁵⁰ See G. Schmithüsen, «Die Zeit steht still in rasender Eile», p. 297; A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 790; R.-P. Warsitz, *Der Raum des Sprechens und die Zeit der Deutung im psychoanalytischen Prozess*, „Psyche“ 2006, 60(1), p. 7.

⁵¹ See H.W. Loewald, *Das Zeiterleben*, p. 1059.

⁵² M. Bonaparte, *Time and the Unconscious*, p. 428.

⁵³ See *ibidem*.

⁵⁴ S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 577.

It is highly probable that there is no question at all of there being any direct function of time in forgetting. — In the case of repressed memory-traces it can be demonstrated that they undergo no alteration even in the course of the longest period of time. The unconscious is quite timeless. The most important as well as the strangest characteristic of psychical fixation is that all impressions are preserved, not only in the same form in which they were first received, but also in all the forms which they have adopted in their further developments. This is a state of affairs which cannot be illustrated by comparison with another sphere [emphasis added – T.D.].⁵⁶

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, this phenomenon is discussed within “the more general problem of preservation in the sphere of the mind”⁵⁷. Freud adds here that an unconscious fixation “can once more be brought to light” if regression goes back far enough⁵⁸. Thus, in the timelessness of the unconscious, we encounter a uniquely psychoanalytic discovery. Thus, it will be instructive here to look more closely at the preservation of past impressions in the unconscious next.

To outline what phenomena Freud conceptualised as fixation and regression, it is helpful to discuss psychosexual development. In his theory of sexuality, Freud did not have the complete developmental history of the subject in mind, rather he traced a developmental pattern from the mouth to the genitals or from breastfeeding to sexual relations⁵⁹. He was interested in the fixations that can take place at specific stages, as well as regressions to previously fixated erogenous zones⁶⁰. Like a cocked bow in which the arrow remains motionless although it is charged with an energy that will send it flying as soon as the inhibition is lifted, an unconscious fixation of libido restrains a quantity of energy from action until, under appropriate conditions, it is disinhibited and energises regression⁶¹. Over the course of psychosexual development, pleasure initially organises itself through attachment to certain features of the object⁶². In this process, critical life events or even the conservative character of libido itself can lead to fixations⁶³. The linked representations can thereby sink into the unconscious, where – and this is the crucial point regarding preservation – they unchangingly persist. What is at stake in this context of early sexual development is the prototype of repression itself, so called primal repression that lays out the pattern for all consecutive acts of repression⁶⁴.

If we apply the concepts of fixation and regression, keeping in mind that fixation prepares the position for regression, we can explain why the subject remains attached to its archaic forms of satisfaction, object choice, and experiential

⁵⁶ Idem, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. VI, p. 274–5, fn. 1. Bonaparte, referencing *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (see S. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XX, p. 142, fn. 1), argues that Freud has retreated from the assumption that unconscious processes are not subject to change (see M. Bonaparte, *Time and the Unconscious*, p. 439). She is mistaken, as in the passage she cites, Freud speaks of changes in conscious drive vicissitudes, not in unconscious desire. In the same passage, he even insists “that the old, repressed wishes must still be present in the unconscious since we still find their derivatives, the symptoms, in operation” (S. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, p. 142, fn. 1).

⁵⁷ Idem, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XXI, p. 69.

⁵⁸ See *ibidem*.

⁵⁹ See S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 197–200.

⁶⁰ See *ibidem*, p. 155–160, 242–243; A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 796.

⁶¹ See J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, D. Lagache (ed.), London 1988, p. 162.

⁶² See S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 222–230.

⁶³ See idem, *From the History of an infantile Neurosis*, p. 115–116.

⁶⁴ See idem, *Repression*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, p. 148.

types even at a later stage. In its temporal aspect,⁶⁵ regression denotes the process by which the subject, in its thinking, feeling, willing, and acting, returns to developmental stages that have already been passed; it thereby relives the past in the present.⁶⁶ Metaphorically speaking: taken together, fixation and regression capture the notion that the ethereal butterfly was once a voracious caterpillar. And they add that the caterpillar, living on in the butterfly, is ready to return at any time, as “the primitive stages can always be re-established; the primitive mind is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable.”⁶⁷ By exerting its influence, the unconscious transports the subject, as it were, to the past, with fixations acting as the anchors for regression in this peculiar kind of time travel.

Let us illustrate this state of affairs with a clinical example. The founding text of psychoanalysis, the preliminary communication *On the psychical mechanism of hysterical phenomena*, presents one of the first formulations of preservation and thus of the timelessness of the unconscious:

We may reverse the dictum “cessante causa cessat effectus” [...] and conclude from these observations that the determining process continues to operate in some way or other for years – not indirectly, through a chain of intermediate causal links, but as a directly releasing cause.⁶⁸

This passage culminates in the famous aphorism that “[h]ysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.”⁶⁹ In the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud reports the case of Cäcilie M., on which he foregrounds the phenomenon of preservation and the way in which “an old memory suddenly broke in upon her clear and tangible and with all the freshness of a new sensation”⁷⁰. Among Cäcilie’s manifold symptoms, I would like to emphasise one in particular. At the age of fifteen, the incident occurred in Cäcilie’s life that she was looked at so piercingly by her strict and watchful grandmother “that it had gone right into her brain” (*ibid.*, 180). This gaze was coupled with a “penetrating pain in her forehead between her eyes, which lasted for weeks”⁷¹. In psychoanalysis with Freud – “after nearly thirty years”⁷² – Cäcilie was able to reproduce this pain, which, Freud assumes, must have been preserved unconsciously the whole time. The mystery of this symptom and its resolution remained guiding for Freud’s understanding of the atemporality of the unconscious from the beginning to the end of his work. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, we read in connection with the assertion that in the unconscious nothing is past or forgotten: “A humiliation that was experienced thirty years ago acts exactly like a fresh one throughout the thirty years, as

⁶⁵ For the distinction between topographical, temporal, and formal regression, see S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 548. For the distinction within temporal regression between the object of regression, regression as related to libidinal stages and regression in the development of the ego, see *idem*, *Introductory Lessons to Psycho-Analysis*, p. 341–343.

⁶⁶ In this way, regression is also operative in transference, although transference is not exhausted in regression: in transference, additionally to the transposition of the past into the present, a shift from the original object of regression to the analyst takes place, thus designating a related but distinct phenomenon, see J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 461.

⁶⁷ S. Freud, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, p. 286. What is described here on the level of the individual subject, is extended to the whole of humanity under the headings of “primal phantasies” (seduction, castration, primal scene) and “phylogenetic inheritance” whose function is to order and classify the variations of individual experience on the level of the species, see A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 798.

⁶⁸ S. Freud, J. Breuer, *On the Psychical Mechanism*

soon as it has obtained access to the unconscious sources of emotion”⁷³. In the *New Introductory Lectures*, we read that repressed experiences “are virtually immortal; after the passage of decades they behave as though they had just occurred”⁷⁴. Repressed, unconscious representations are thus not only imperishable, but they also ceaselessly strive to reappear in consciousness: therein lies the return of the repressed⁷⁵. In this way, unconscious representations show themselves to be impervious to the passing of objective time. The case of Cäcilie gives example of how a decades-old humiliation can have the experiential character of a present impression. Two lessons can be learned from Cäcilie’s case: neither does time heal all wounds, nor do forcefulness and liveliness of dynamically unconscious thoughts fade with the passing of time.



If in the unconscious nothing is past or forgotten, then this has implications for the possibilities of remembrance:

Theoretically every earlier state of the mnemonic content could thus be restored to memory again, even if its elements have long ago exchanged all their original connections for more recent ones.⁷⁶

The optimism of Freud’s pioneering days as an analyst found expression in the conviction “that [his] patients knew everything that was of any pathogenic significance and that it was only a question of obliging them to communicate it”⁷⁷. This view gives way in the late work to the disillusioned contention that a complete recovery of memories is impossible⁷⁸. A middle position can be taken if one (following Freud) also grants a mnemonic function to such retrievals of memory-traces that are not memories in the strictest sense, such as dreams and phantasies, thereby accounting for the fact that the analysand can communicate that which is of pathogenic significance; but also for the circumstance that some things are unspeakable. This ambivalent status is occupied by neurotic symptoms that act as ways of remembering, which draw upon what is unconsciously preserved and bring the phenomenon of retroaction (*Nachträglichkeit*) to the fore.⁷⁹ Retroaction, as Freud conceived it, is a special temporal figure, corresponding grammatically to the future perfect wherein the past ‘will have come to pass’ only in the future⁸⁰.

Let us illustrate this, too, with a clinical example: the case of Emma from the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* demonstrates the temporality of retroaction. The symptoms for which Freud treated Emma included “a compulsion of not being able to go into shops alone”⁸¹. When asked about this, Emma recalled visiting

of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. II, p. 7). Regardless that the law of inertia refutes the *cessante-causa-cessat-effectus*-theorem (‘if the cause ceases, the effect too must cease’), Freud makes it clear here that a concept of causality taken from the natural sciences does not apply to the phenomena he describes.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ S. Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 70, fn. 1.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 578.

⁷⁴ Idem, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

⁷⁵ See J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 398–399.

⁷⁶ S. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p. 275, fn. 1.

⁷⁷ Idem, *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 110.

⁷⁸ See idem, *Constructions in Analysis* (1937), in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, p. 259–260; A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 789.

⁷⁹ Alternatively, this mode of temporality can be illustrated with recourse to the phenomenon of screen memories, see S. Freud, *Screen Memories* (1899), in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. III, p. 303–322; S. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p. 43–52 and U. Hock, *Die Zeit des Erinnerns*, „Psyche” 2003, 57(9).

⁸⁰ See U. Hock, *Die Zeit des Erinnerns*, p. 836.

a shop at the age of twelve (shortly after puberty), and that she was sexually attracted to one of the two male shop-assistants who worked there. Upon entering the store, the shop-assistants started laughing at Emma's clothes and she "ran away in some kind of affect of fright"⁸². Freud reports that further investigation unearthed a second memory of an older scene. At the age of eight (before puberty) Emma had bought sweets in a small shop on her own, i.e., unaccompanied. Grinningly, the shopkeeper sexually assaulted Emma on this occasion; "the shopkeeper had grabbed at her genitals through her clothes"⁸³. This happened again on a second visit to the shop despite the initial assault. Emma now "reproached herself for having gone there the second time, as though she had wanted in that way to provoke the assault."⁸⁴

Through the second scene, the first scene is rendered intelligible. Emma was able to identify an association between the two: "the laughing of the shop-assistants had reminded her of the grin with which the shopkeeper had accompanied his assault."⁸⁵ Unconsciously, this revived her memory of the assault by the shopkeeper. The point is that once Emma had gone through puberty, the memory aroused something that "it was certainly not able to at the time, a sexual release, which was transformed into anxiety."⁸⁶ However, we are not only dealing here with Emma running away in fear of a repetition of the 'shopkeeper scene' in the 'shop-assistants scene' – this is brought to light through Freud's analysis. Emma's fear is also related to her own desire (her sexual attraction towards one of the shop-assistants) and not only to the fear of an external danger. What happens in time experience through retroaction is "the case of a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered."⁸⁷ Freud therefore gives us the formula that "[w]e invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by deferred action [i.e., retroaction]."⁸⁸

The theorem of retroaction not only traces details of neurotic symptom formation, but also states that past experiences can be reworked by new experiences. This is the case, for example, in psychoanalytic treatment. Retroactively, past experiences gain a new (or first) meaning, and thus another psychic relevance. The psychoanalytic study of time uncovers styles of how one event comes forth from another that can no longer be adequately described within a model of linear time or accounted for in causal-genetic explanatory models of causes necessitating effects.⁸⁹ Retroaction puts history on the scale anew and uncovers the secrets of the past in the light of the knowledge of the present. It is not yet decided what will have been a person's history and an important part

⁸¹ See S. Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. I, p. 353.

⁸² See *ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 354.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*. Beyond demonstrating the temporality of retroaction, Emma's case thus also is an account of how a victim of sexual abuse internalises guilt even though she is not responsible for the assault.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 356; see also p. 359.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 356.

⁸⁹ Even those psychoanalysts who agree that linear time does not provide an adequate model for the description of psychoanalytic experience find it difficult to abandon causal-genetic explanatory models, see J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 111; J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 163–164; A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 793, 810. I believe this to be expressive of psychoanalysis lacking a foundation in a theory of science that could liberate it from inappropriate borrowings from positivism and naturalism. A foundation of psychoanalysis beyond causal-genetic explanatory models in phenomenology is proposed by Brudzińska, see J. Brudzińska, *Depth Phenomenology of the Emotive Dynamic and the Psychoanalytic Experience*, in: *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically* (Phaenomenologica 199),

of what psychoanalysis undertakes is just that: re-constructing what life we will have lived.

■ 4. Implications of the timelessness of the unconscious for psychoanalytic practice

In the *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud states that “the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment rests to no small extent”⁹⁰ on temporalising fixations that are timelessly preserved in the unconscious: if such fixations are recognized as belonging to the past, they can be deprived of their cathexes and thereby of their pathogenic effects. A corresponding outline of what psychoanalysis is supposed to achieve is given in the discussion of timelessness in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

This is precisely the point at which psychotherapy has to intervene. Its task is to make it possible for the unconscious processes to be dealt with finally and be forgotten. For the fading of memories and the emotional weakness of impressions which are no longer recent, which we are inclined to regard as self-evident and to explain as a primary effect of time upon mental memory-traces, are in reality secondary modifications which are only brought about by laborious work [emphasis added – T.D.]⁹¹.

Contrary to popular belief, psychoanalysis according to Freud is not some kind of either vindictive or nostalgic clinging to either the grievances or the blisses of the past; it is not concerned with rescuing the past from oblivion. On the contrary, in all its efforts to facilitate remembrance, it tries to make forgetting possible. Insofar as the (neurotic) symptom is a mnemonic symbol⁹², the resolution of the symptom amounts to a kind of forgetting – a case of what Freud later called ‘working through’.⁹³ Reik pointedly states that the function of memory (*Gedächtnis*) is to preserve impressions, whereas remembrance (*Erinnerung*) aims at their dissolution: memory is conservative, remembrance is destructive⁹⁴. A more recent proposal for the therapeutic use of Freud’s theory of temporality is put forth by Laplanche, who proposes translation and de-translation over fixation and forgetting. Accordingly, he suggests that psychoanalytic interpretation is not a translation but a “de-translation,” i.e., the undoing of symptomatic translations⁹⁵. Interpretation aims at a temporal movement that isolates significant sections of the subject’s present or past and aims at a less

D. Lohmar, J. Brudzińska (eds.), Dordrecht 2012, p. 23–52.

⁹⁰ S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 74.

⁹¹ Idem, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 578.

⁹² See idem, *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence (An Attempt at a Psychological Theory of Acquired Hysteria, of many Phobias and Obsessions and of certain Hallucinatory Psychoses)*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. III, p. 49.

⁹³ See idem, *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*. We should keep in mind, though, that the ideal of fully forgetting (see S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 2, p. 578) is dialectically complementary to the ideal of fully remembering (idem, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* p. 275, fn. 1) and likewise as impossible (idem, *Constructions in Analysis*, p. 259–60). There are experiences – ecstatic, fearful, and traumatic – that are not to be forgotten and never to be remembered, around which our memory narrative is structured. Only for the sake of what cannot be forgotten or remembered, we forget and remember anything at all.

⁹⁴ See T. Reik, *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung*, in: idem, *Hören mit dem Dritten Ohr: Die innere Erfahrung eines Psychoanalytikers*, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, p. 416,

⁹⁵ See J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 170.

symptomatic synthesis in a retranslation⁹⁶. Understood this way, the symptom is not something that must simply be made to disappear. Rather, it is the subject's attempt at self-cure, the subject's way of trying to endure – with whatever resources are at their disposal – the conflicts that they must work through. In terms of its temporality, the symptom is a condensation of past, present, and future moments that compromise with each other, whereby the subject “endlessly demands a translation.”⁹⁷

Phantasy gives birth to time as an anticipation of past wish-fulfillments and hallucinates the experience of future satisfaction already in the present. The unconscious preserves the past in the present in compulsive repetition, whereas retroaction allows for a reshaping of the past in the temporal mode of “it will have been.” These are all ways in which the timelessness of the unconscious throws time out of kilter in consciousness. But what is the timelessness of the unconscious itself? We find a cue towards solving this riddle in Bonaparte's classic study *Time and the Unconscious* where she points out several times that in the speech of the unconscious we listen to the eternal song of Eros⁹⁸. Following this line, Green suggests that the timelessness of the unconscious is a reservoir of life, hope, and illusion that helps to make life bearable⁹⁹. That the unconscious is timeless means that the memory-traces inscribed in the unconscious through experiences of satisfaction, fulfilment, and happiness remain with us and give us a capacity to hope and to desire as we go through life. Because the memory-traces of our desires are never extinguished and are always potentially active, their possibility of being revived never fades. Desire, wishes, and phantasies, insofar as they are unconscious, are inexhaustible¹⁰⁰. The unconscious is forever young (which is a kind of fixation) and stubbornly believes in the promise of a life worth living. Taking this tendency toward illusion not as a deficit to be overcome, but as one, and even the only, access to the world, was Winnicott's great achievement: “Phantasy is more primary than reality, and the enrichment of phantasy with the world's riches depends on the experience of illusion.”¹⁰¹ In this respect, the work of unconscious formations is not only the repression of conflict, but also the preservation of those sediments of experience that allow us to anticipate a more liveable variant of our existence that does not cling to the past but wants to overcome it: each symptom carries within it a vision of a better life.¹⁰²

Timelessness is the radical openness to temporalisation. It is true that consciousness must always already be temporalised to be ‘consciousness proper’ and the un-lived potentials of our unconscious fixations must indeed be relocated in time so as to become potentials for our conscious waking life. However, it

⁹⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 178.

⁹⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 174.

⁹⁸ See M. Bonaparte, *Time and the Unconscious*, p. 427, 429, 435.

⁹⁹ See A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 807.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ D. Winnicott, *Group Influences and the Maladjusted Child: The School Aspect*, in: *item, The Family and Individual Development*, London 1965, p. 153.

¹⁰² Consider in this regard, how what Freud called the “critical activity of the ego (*Ichkritik*)” operates in melancholia (see *idem*, *Mourning and Melancholia*, in: J. Strachey et al. (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XIV, p. 248–249): devaluing itself instead of the lost object, the melancholic subject acts out a protest against having been mistreated that was impossible to be levelled against the object before it was lost. This involves considerable suffering on part of the melancholic subject, but that is only one side of the story. We should be attentive that here, too, we listen to a voice fighting for its right to integrity, to not being mistreated – even if it tragically misses its target and reproaches itself rather than the lost object.

is false that time consciousness is exhausted in the linear arrow of time. One of the more imaginative capacities of human subjects is to relate to their personal history not only as a closed-off past that determines them into all futures, but to actively shape history as the narrators of their own story, as translators of their experience into languages that are more bearable and less restrictive¹⁰³. If psychoanalytic treatment is confronted with the timelessness of the unconscious, if even prolonged therapy does not yield any positive effect, Freud recommends to the analyst “that by submitting on a single occasion to the timelessness of the unconscious he will be brought nearer to vanquishing it in the end”¹⁰⁴. Unimpressed by the past, indifferent to the passing of time, the analyst should remain stubbornly optimistic about the real possibility that life is worth living.

The pain of a wasted life is partly a phantom and phantasy pain: not merely a pain of past happiness, but also a pain of opportunities not yet seized, of feelings not yet experienced, and of unredeemed longing. As subjects of a timeless unconscious, it is never already too late for us. Desires, phantasies, and longings keep the future open; allowing us to compensate for and overcome the failures of the past. To be sure, the timelessness of the unconscious cannot stop us from ageing, and very early on our bodies are older than our unconscious minds, for we age every day, no matter how old we are¹⁰⁵. But with the last time as with the first, every person falls in love “forever and ever” whenever they do fall in love¹⁰⁶. That is to say: we cannot but experience love *sub specie aeternitatis* because as does time, so too desires, love, and longings relentlessly well up from beyond time, from the unconscious sources of temporalisation.

■ Conclusion

The timelessness of the unconscious which Freud first approached as a curiosity in the study of hysterical phenomena was subsequently incorporated into the theory of repression, fixation, and regression; and ultimately occupies an important role in psychoanalytic treatment: its therapeutic effect takes place in a transition from timelessness to temporality. The present study shows that the discussion of the timelessness of the unconscious and the ways and means of its temporalisation are of central interest to both psychoanalytic theory and practice. Thus, they are far from being merely an obscure or marginal footnote-problem, even if Freud himself discussed them mostly as such.

The present paper has further attempted to elucidate the problem of timelessness in terms of Freud’s invitation of philosophy into psychoanalysis. Insofar

¹⁰³ See J. Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation*, p. 176.

¹⁰⁴ S. Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, p. 10–11.

¹⁰⁵ See A. Green, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 807.

¹⁰⁶ See M. Bonaparte, *Time and the Unconscious*, p. 434.

as Freud seeks discourse with Kant, we can say that Freud and Kant agree in principle that consciousness is always temporalised. Both recognise the representation of time for conscious experience. The difference between them both is that for Kant, time is a linear arrow pointing from past to future, while Freud observes far more winding trajectories through time. To evaluate Freud's musings about the transcendental aesthetic, it remains to be probed whether Freud is better understood as an empirical or transcendental thinker in his philosophical and meta-psychological contributions.

The present collection of the fragments of a psychoanalytic theory of time cannot be said to be complete. By focusing on the timelessness of the unconscious, I had to limit the scope of the topics treated. Especially regarding the ways in which values, norms, and ideals (as well as the superego) are signposts in time is omitted in my study, while other important topics, e.g., repetition, have received only scant attention. Starting from the phenomenon of repetition, different pathologies of time experience should also be investigated.¹⁰⁷ The significance of time regarding the duration of treatment too remains underexplored, and the question of the psychological meaning of mortality and immortality has been bracketed. In order not to blow this study out of proportion, the investigation of these problems must be resumed elsewhere.

¹⁰⁷ Examples include the compulsion to repeat which Green calls a denial of time (idem, *Zeitlichkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, p. 808), the freezing of time in melancholic pathologies (see S. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, p. 255; G. Schmithüsen, «Die Zeit steht still in rasender Eile»), and the loss of the sense of time which was already described by Pierre Janet (idem, *L'Evolution de la Memoire et de la notion du Temps*, Paris 1928, p. 50–51) and which Bonaparte psychoanalytically diagnoses as a psychotic symptom (eadem, *Time and the Unconscious*, p. 443).

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