

# Transience and Lack of Being

Khafiz Kerimov<sup>1</sup>

*American University in Bulgaria*

## Abstract

The essay aims at reading Freud's essay "On Transience" through the prism of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. The claim of the essay is that transience results from the subject's inability to ensnare the present in its actuality. On account of the unbridgeable gap between the subject's supposed initial perception and its symbolization, the world is present to the subject only insofar as it already belongs to the past. It follows that the subject can neither achieve coalescence with itself nor discover the world around him in a complete fashion. What is lost in the symbolized present is either fantasized in the past or anticipated in the future. In Lacan's perspective, these fantasies are never fulfilled: the actual present is utterly impossible in the discursive reality of the human subject. In this way, the Lacanian thesis that every drive is a death drive is reaffirmed in this essay: since there is nothing outside the symbolic order for Lacan, the present in its actuality can only be associated with the death of the subject. Furthermore, the essay argues that the present as such is nothing other than an impossible event of temporal being which is, however, essential for the constitution of time.

## Introduction

Sigmund Freud's (1997) little known essay titled "On Transience (Vergänglichkeit)" records a conversation with a "young but already famous poet" and his "taciturn friend" who may have been the poet Rainer Maria Rilke and his friend Lou Andreas-Salome. An otherwise joyous summer walk in the countryside is shadowed by the young poet's gloomy thoughts on decay. Freud (1997) writes:

The poet admired the beauty of the scene around us but felt no joy in it. He was disturbed by the thought that all this beauty was fated to extinction, that it would vanish when winter came, like all human beauty and all the beauty and splendor that men have created or may create. All that he would otherwise have loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the transience which was its doom. (p. 176)

Freud provides a psychoanalytic explanation for the young poet's inability to enjoy the summer blossom. Freud's argument in this respect is largely in tune with the main theses

---

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Khafiz Kerimov, E-mail: [ktk100@aubg.bg](mailto:ktk100@aubg.bg)

of his famous “Mourning and Melancholia.” Mourning is the painful process of the detachment of libido from its objects once they are lost or destroyed. The transience of things makes future mourning inevitable. In this sense, the young poet’s disturbance by the ineluctable decay of the beautiful is nothing else but simultaneously a preventative mourning and an anticipatory renunciation of what is not destined to last.

Although the proneness to extinction of all things is undisputable, Freud does not share the poet’s pessimistic view on the nature of transience. For Freud (1997), the thought that “the transience of beauty should interfere with our joy in it” (p. 177) is incomprehensible. Since “[l]imitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment,” the impermanence of things should only lend them on that account more charm (Freud, 1997, p. 177). And yet this argument fails to alter the young poet’s melancholic state. Toward the end of his essay Freud reduces the poet’s mourning to the pre-war malaise. However, another explanation for the poet’s distress is also possible.

This essay aims at developing an alternative reading of transience by way of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. The claim of the essay is that transience results from the existence of an infinitesimal yet unbridgeable temporal gap between the moment of the subject’s initial perception of the world and the point of its symbolization. At the heart of transience, thus, lies the fact that the world is present to the subject only insofar as the world already belongs to the past. The feeling of transience has its origins in the insistent slippage of the present into the past and, thus, its utter inaccessibility. Furthermore, this essay maintains that the inaccessibility of the present in its actuality is that which initiates the subject’s lack-of-being. In this connection, the subject’s lack-of-being predicates itself upon the fundamental impossibility of the actual present. However, since there is nothing outside the symbolic order for Lacan, the actual present can only be associated with the death of the subject. The essay concludes with the revindication of the Lacanian thesis that every drive is a death drive.

### ***The Lacking Present***

Perhaps, what is most disturbing about things around us, especially, the beautiful objects to which our libido attaches itself, is not that they are destined to become absent, but that we somehow cannot even enjoy them in their presence. That the beauty of the scene around him will inevitably fade away with the coming of winter may not be, in fact, of primary concern for Freud’s young companion. After all, as Freud rightfully notes, “each time [nature’s beauty] is destroyed by winter it comes again next year, so that in relation to the length of our lives it can in fact be regarded as eternal” (Freud, 1997, p. 177). Rather, the poet feels pain in his inability to appreciate the joyous objects around at the very present moment. More precisely, it is as if each object is not only historically transient but also evanescent at each instant of time. The beautiful escapes Freud’s young friend because of the very passage of time. It follows that the permanent evanescence of things precedes their “historical” transience. The past and the future appear on the horizon only insofar as the subject fails to come to terms with his libidinal desires in the present. What Freud’s young friend cannot appreciate at this moment due to transience, he hopes to enjoy at a certain point in the future or believes to have enjoyed at a certain point in the past. Initially, the young poet’s melancholic state is caused by the mourning over the irremediable transience of each and every instant of time spent at the beautiful summer scene. Then, the anticipatory mourning over the beauty doomed to perish enters the scene.

Freud's approach to temporality in psychoanalysis can be summarized in the word *Nachträglichkeit* ("afterwardness" or "deferred action"). Since Freud's ambiguous use of *Nachträglichkeit* results in a possibility of more than one interpretation of this concept, here I insist on the late hermeneutic conception of *Nachträglichkeit*. Freud is perplexed by the observation that in neurosis a traumatic event occurring before the age of puberty only takes its toll on the subject already in puberty. It follows that it is not the experiences themselves which act traumatically but their resurgence in the memory of the mature individual. One reads in "The Project": "Here we have 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" (Freud, 1966b, p. 356). Hereby the traumatic potential of a childhood trauma can only be actualized once the subject acquires the capacity for reacting to this trauma. What is necessary for a revival of a trauma is a distressing yet mature encounter with sexuality. It is through this encounter that traumatic memories find their deliverance: "no hysterical symptom can arise from a real experience alone, but that in every case the memory of earlier experiences awakened in association to it plays a part in causing the symptom" (Freud, 1966a, p. 197). From this perspective, memory is not impermeable, on the contrary, it is continually reconstructed in the light of present experiences and desires. The subject can project the impressions, ideas, knowledge and fantasies acquired in the course of its life onto its childhood memories and, thus, effectively change their content and meaning. Consequently, traumas are not excavated in a pristine fashion from the hidden depths of the past, but constructed in the present in a retroactive manner. The crucial point not to miss here is that the meaning of each memory trace results solely from the simultaneous presence of other memory traces. A hermeneutic reading of *Nachträglichkeit* implies exactly this reciprocal relationship between the event in the past and its later signification.

Jacques Lacan (2012a) situates Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* in relation to language: "Freudian concepts take on their full meaning when oriented in a field of language and ordered in relation to the function of speech" (p. 205). For Lacan, the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, or *après-coup*, captures the logic of signification by highlighting its non-linear temporal character. Each new signifier retroactively alters the meaning of the previous ones. Meaning as such is produced by this very movement backward and forward of signification (Lacan, 2012a, p. 253). As Slavoj Žižek (1989) puts it: "As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformation of the signifier's network" (p. 56). Likewise, Dylan Evans (1996) writes: "present events affect past events a posteriori, since the past exists in the psyche only as a set of memories which are constantly being reworked and reinterpreted in the light of present experience" (p. 209). This is precisely the meaning of the phrase Jacques Lacan (1991) utters at the very beginning of his first Seminar: "History is not the past. History is the past in so far as it is historicized in the present" (p. 12).

It follows that the process of signification is structured by the movements of retroaction and anticipation. Each and every signifier is necessarily in the state of anticipation of more signifiers to come. In other words, at no instant of time the signifier is complete and self-sufficient: the signifier always needs a supplement. Accordingly, the incompleteness of the signifier in the present introduces the dimension of temporality proper. What is lacking in the incomplete present is fantasized in the bygone past or anticipated in the oncoming future. Freud argues that the young poet is unable to enjoy the beautiful

summer scene because he is worried about its impermanence. However, Freud's companion is, perhaps, also disturbed by the evanescence of things around him insofar as he fails to enjoy them in the present. It is, once again, the incompleteness of the present that makes the poet desire the absolute duration of the beautiful objects and anticipate the future so vehemently. What renders the present incomplete so as to perpetually defer its enjoyment onto the future? The answer to this question will also reveal the aspect of the young poet's wistfulness at the transience of things unnoticed by Freud.

### ***The Unattainable Instant***

In "The Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism" Lacan (2012b) distinguishes between three evidential moments of the logical time: the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending and the moment for concluding. He (2012b) notes that "each of these moments in its passage to next is resorbed therein" (p. 167). Concerning the instant of the glance and the time for comprehending, Ed Pluth and Dominiek Hoens (2009) write: "The instant of the glance lasts as long as it takes to notice what is given in the situation [...] The time for comprehending lasts as long as it takes to make a line of reasoning" (p. 183). Finally, the moment for concluding is the ascertainment of the previously made inference about the given situation. Apart from the distinction between these three concepts, two relations are assumed: first, the supersession of the initial gaze by the rational assessment of the situation and, second, the suppression of all doubt at the moment of conclusion. The notion of the instant of the gaze, however, proves to be problematic here. Having the status of an inaugural gaze, the instant of the glance is supposed to be that which puts in place an experience for the subject to process. Yet, precisely as an inaugural gaze proper, the instant of the glance necessarily escapes the subject's subjectivity. The subject as a subject of the signifier only emerges with the second evidential moment, the time for understanding. What endows the subject with subjectivity is the moment of understanding, that is to say, the rational digestion of the instant of the glance and its inscription in the synchronous network of the signifiers. Bruce Fink (1995b) writes pertinently: "To come to consciousness a perception must pass through the filter of the symbolic order or Other" (p. 226). The Other installs an infinitesimal yet unbridgeable gap between the moment of the inaugural gaze and its symbolization. To formulate it differently, the Other never assumes present modality. On the contrary, it only appears as stretching into the past or the future. The instant of the glance is an evidential moment unlike others. At each instant of time the inaugural glance is perceived later than its immediate occurrence and posited as having existed earlier than its actual perception. Once again, the phenomenon of the instant's belatedness in relation to itself can be summarized in the term *Nachträglichkeit*.

Taking place at an interval between the first two evidential moments, namely, the instant of the glance and the time for understanding, the subject of the signifier becomes coterminous with the inaugural glance's non-coincidence with itself. As a signifier, the initial perception becomes perpetually caught up in the state of absence in relation to itself. As Lacan (2012a) puts it: "Through the word – which is already a presence made of absence – absence itself comes to be named..." (p. 228). The symbolized event becomes inaccessible to the subject precisely because it is symbolized and, thus, absent. Essentially, each and every event is for the subject a missed encounter. In other words, the presence of the world takes place in the absence of the subject.

What follows is that the passage of time, the incessant making-past of the present, is the direct result of the inscription of events into the signifying chain. In this connection, time/language bars our access to the the present in its actuality and, thus, assumes the role of the fundamental prohibition. Since every inaugural gaze is necessarily digested by the Other and time never stands still, the subject always fails to get hold of the present. The world is present to the subject only insofar as the world already belongs to the past. Thus, what is conventionally understood as the present is, in effect, already the reproduction of the past. The historically privileged modality of time, the present, hereby becomes displaced leaving the Lacanian subject outside the parameter of the supposed temporal center. In a sense, the present tense becomes the excluded center of Lacanian time. The inaccessibility of the present brings it close to the notion of the Real. Otherwise stated, the impossible inaugural glance becomes, at one and the same time, the moment of impossible jouissance and the Real as a missed encounter. Jacques Lacan (1992) writes in his Seminar VII:

We are, in fact, led to the point where we accept the formula that without a transgression there is no access to jouissance, and [...] that that is precisely the function of the Law. Transgression in the direction of jouissance only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law. (p. 177)

For the instant of the glance is rendered inaccessible by the Other, the subject necessarily fails to coincide with its own inaugural gaze. Consequently, the subject is prevented from attaining presence with itself. Being *nachträglich* in relation to itself, the Lacanian subject becomes alienated not only in language but also in time. To use Kant's vocabulary, the gap separating the determining I (the "I think" of transcendental apperception) and the determinable I (the empirical I, the I as object) is a temporal one. That is to say, the only way I can reflect upon myself is through rendering myself temporally other than myself. By the same token, the experience of oneself is always a return to that which is presently otherwise. In this respect, Žižek (1992) suggests: "the self-positing I remains forever a presupposition, something that is never posited as such, present in the transparency of an actual I" (p. 87). Due to its reliance on the Other, the subject is only present in its absence. In other words, the Lacanian subject never appears as such. Fink (1995a) summarizes this in a very fair way: "Lacan never pinpoints the subject's chronological appearance on the scene: he or she is always either about to arrive – is on the verge of arriving – or will have already arrived by some later moment in time" (p. 63). In regard to this "that-has-been" component of the subject, Lacan (2012a) invokes Heidegger: "In Heideggerian language [...] remembering constitute[s] the subject as *gewesend* – that is, as being the one who has thus been" (p. 212). In Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962) we find the notion explicated as follows: *Dasein* (the subject) exists in its insistent coming back to its ownmost "been" (p. 326). At this point, the Lacanian notion of *manque à être* acquires a new dimension. At the heart of the subject's *manque à être* lies the fundamental impossibility of the actuality present. By its very nature, the actuality the inaugural glance is impossible for the subject to ensnare. The subject is, thus, barred from the actual present in the most literal sense. In simpler terms, the subject literally never is, rather, it is either that which has been or that which will have been. The present becomes

accessible to the subject only insofar as it is symbolized, that is, incomplete and carrying absence within itself. Necessarily being either too late or too early in relation to itself, the subject never corresponds with its own being, with its own advent into presence.

### ***Time and Desire***

As Lacan (1995) formulates it in “The Position of Unconscious”: “As an effect of language, in that he is born of this original split, the subject translates a signifying synchrony into this primordial temporal pulsation that is the constitutive fading of his identification” (p. 265). The true position of the Lacanian subject is between its doomed attempts to assume self-presence and its mortification in the Other. What sustains the subject in this impossible pursuit is desire. As Lacan (1988) puts, “the subject manifests himself in his gap, namely, in that which causes his desire” (p. 16). Hereby the instant of the glance represents for the subject the object-cause of its desire, the objet petit a, the moment of inexpressible jouissance. The instant of the glance as objet petit a is an impossible moment of the subject’s co-presence with the Real of the event.

In Seminar XI Lacan (1981) formulates objet petit a in the following way:

The objet a is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack. (p. 103)

In Seminar VII Lacan (1992) describes das Ding (which is identical to an objet a) as “a lost object, but paradoxically an object that was never there in the first place to be lost” (p. 58). It follows that signification as such is articulated around the illusion of attaining the elusive bits of Real, the elusive inaugural gaze. The transformation of the event into signifiers involves a catastrophic loss of jouissance and, for this reason, renders the event incomplete. In this respect, what the subject desires is a co-presence with the taking place of the world, with its own advent into being. The subject desires a stoppage of time or being outside time.

To come back to Freud’s “On Transience,” the desire for being outside of time lies at the heart of Freud’s young companion’s wistfulness at the passing of time and the inevitability of decay. The young poet clearly feels that nothing stays present to him even for a second, that nothing is ever present. As was already said, the transience of each perception predicates itself upon the unceasing making-past of the present by the Other. Time does not let itself be halted. The young poet is confronted with the rapid slippage of the present into the past whereby presence as such is only experienced as absence. For this reason, the Freud’s companion is captured by the feelings of nostalgia and mourning at one and the same time. On the one hand, he mourns over the perpetual loss of the present, on the other hand, he is nostalgic about the present insofar as it always already belongs to the past.

The Real *jouissance* of the scene around the young poet is forever lost at the very moment the poet himself comes into being as a conscious subject. And yet the *jouissance* of the inaugural gaze is never lost completely. On the contrary, it constitutes a necessary remainder of the functioning of the signifying mechanism, something that makes the subject conscious of the lost *jouissance*. That is to say, something perpetually escapes the young poet's perceptions simultaneously bruising him and making him crave for more. Maintaining a distinction between reproduction and repetition, Lacan argues that the psyche reproduces what is symbolized and repeats what cannot be symbolized, what it stumbles upon. That is to say, whereas reproduction is a dreary succession of the identical, repetition is always new and different failure of symbolization. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, repetition aims at that which "interrupts the consistency of the field of our constructions of reality, of the object of identification, by embodying the repressed *jouissance*, the destabilizing part of nature excluded from its harmonious symbolization" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 56). In the final account, the young poet's hopeless revolt against the evanescence of things comes down to a never-ending attempt to assume that which cannot be symbolized. But every such attempt fails thereby causing the insistence of the attempt to become the subject's very being. The perpetual *aphanisis* of the subject is constitutive of the dialectics of desire: the subject is nothing other but an impossible pursuit of the actuality of the present. The young poet's perpetual failure to enjoy the beautiful summer scene opens up into the future in, as Verhaeghe (2002) puts it, "[a] perpetual opening and closing of a gap in which something fails to be realized" (p. 139). However, paradoxically, the young poet's pursuit of *jouissance*, of being, only causes the further unfolding of the signifying chain. In turn, the extension of the chain into the future necessarily displaces the present into the past seeming to cause the poet's loss of *jouissance* in the first place. At this point, the present, the future and the past assume together a relationship of impossible mutual implication whereby the perpetual unwrapping of the signifying chain becomes both the cause of the subject's lack-of-being and the ever-failing solution to it.

In this connection, the young poet's melancholia testifies to the irremediable incompleteness of any symbolization and the intractability of the Lacanian Real. As was already suggested, temporal desire aims at compensating for precisely the self-deficiency of the symbolized and non-actual present. Hereby the impossible *jouissance* is perpetually postponed and the imperishability of the beautiful is sought. If anticipation is one way for the subject to come to terms with the catastrophic loss of *jouissance* involved in the symbolization of the inaugural gaze, then nostalgia is another. The incompleteness of the present implicates the past resulting in the feeling of nostalgia. That is to say, through nostalgia the subject simultaneously becomes aware of the experience of the loss and attempts to make up for it. With the aim of clarifying the relationship between nostalgia and *jouissance*, let us refer to Sean Homer's (2005) discussion of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. Concerning photography, Homer (2005) writes: "[P]hotography can never deny its past, that the thing existed and was there in front of the camera, but that real is lost the moment the photograph itself comes into being" (p. 93). In a sense, the lens of the camera becomes a vanishing mediator between the Real and the Symbolic. The camera misses the encounter with the Real of the inaugural gaze at the very moment it captures it. What is sacrificed to the camera is the instant of the glance *qua objet petit a*. When one looks at a photograph, one senses precisely this recalcitrance of the instant at which it was captured, one feels that something is lacking. As Homer (2005) maintains, "[the photograph is] the encounter with the 'that-has-been' essence of photography, the intractability of the real" (p. 93). Following Barthes, Homer identifies the feeling of the

photograph's failure to coincide with its real referent as the feeling of punctum. A residue of the intractable Real, the punctum becomes the "showing the Real" through its very failure to deliver this Real. The punctum is what is in the photograph more and other than the photograph, namely, the objet petit a. "Barthes' detail [the punctum] that pricks us, bruises us and disrupts the studium (the symbolic) of the photograph," Homer (2005) adds, "is that fleeting glimpse, or encounter with the real as objet petit a" (p. 94). The photograph is a missed encounter with the Real par excellence. And memory-traces are exactly like the images contained by the photographic plate. Once again, the photograph is a missed encounter with the present that, nonetheless, always preserves a certain residue of this encounter, the punctum, thereby inciting the feeling of nostalgia in the subject.

The universally familiar feeling of the supremacy of the past pleasures to the present ones can be, in fact, explicated through the notion of the punctum, as well. More precisely, the punctum accounts for that vague and poetical quality which is only given to things by time. In a sense, the events acquire something more to them once they start belonging to the past. This is the point Søren Kierkegaard (1983) makes in *Repetition*: every attempt to resuscitate some pleasant past experience necessarily results in a disappointment (p. 227). Essentially being identical to the Lacanian anticipation, every such attempt strives to ensnare the lost poetry of the past in the future. Of course, at the heart of Kierkegaard's pessimistic account of memory lies the desire for the inaccessible actual present.

What endows the past with a special charm is the belief that that which is lacking in the present, namely, jouissance, was acquired back then. The crucial point not to miss, however, is that this enjoyment was not attained during those moments either. The present becomes desirable only through being lost and never prior to the loss. Hereby the very pleasure of nostalgia lies in the displeasure of only being able to access the present as inaccessible. Consequently, the function of the punctum is to render prohibited what is originally impossible. As was mentioned earlier, the condition sine qua non of the object-cause of desire is its inaccessibility: a sufficient attraction in relation to das Ding only emerges whereby an unbridgeable distance is acquired from it. Žižek (1989) describes this in the following way:

The sublime object [das Ding] is an object which cannot be approached too closely: if we get too near it, it loses its sublime features and becomes an ordinary vulgar object – it can persist only in an interspace, in an intermediate state, viewed from a certain perspective, half-seen. (p. 170)

Furthermore, Žižek (1993) writes:

The paradox (and perhaps the very function of the prohibition as such) consists of course in the fact that, as soon as it is conceived as prohibited, the real impossible

changes into something possible, i.e. into something that cannot be reached, not because of its inherent impossibility but simply because access to it is hindered by the external barrier of a prohibition. (p. 116)

In this light, prohibition serves to resolve the deadlock between the Symbolic and the Real. More accurately, it serves to suture the intrinsically aporetic nature of the Symbolic which gives rise to the irruptions of the Real. Since the elimination of the inconsistencies in the Other is impracticable, its fundamentally aporetic nature is concealed by an *objet petit a* which persuades us that the impossible is really just the prohibited possible and, thus, can hypothetically be captured. The Other is lacking, so we bring the quasi-imaginary Real to the field of our imagination to mitigate this lack. In this regard, Yannis Stavrakakis (1999) contends:

If we speak about the signified it is only because we like to believe in its existence. It is a belief crucial for our construction of reality as a coherent, 'objective' whole; a belief in something that guarantees the validity of our knowledge, sustaining the fantasy of an *adaequatio* between language and the world. (p. 23)

Being in and through the Other is sustained by the illusion of attaining the impalpable Real, but this illusion is itself the effect of the signifying process. The illusory signified that veils the Real lack in the Other as the piece of the "domesticated" Real is, indeed, the *objet petit a*. Herein lies the Lacanian logic of the veil: covering sustains the sense that there is something substantial being covered, while, in truth, no such thing is present behind the veil. Where one anticipates protruding presence, there is always only disappointing lack.

The Lacanian notion of time assumes here its paradoxical character. Certainly, there would be no time without consciousness to symbolize and conserve its passage. That is to say, the very idea of time is impossible without the preservation of past events in the memory of the subject as signifiers. Yet, the events that necessitate preservation as such are always inapproachable. The Lacanian notion of time is organized around the present as an impossible negative event which grounds and disturbs the Symbolic at one and the same time. Once again, the present tense is the excluded center of the temporal unfolding, something that does not have positive existence.

In the Lacanian perspective, the paradox of *Vergänglichkeit* is irresolvable. The illusion that there is something beyond the slippage of time, the a-temporal reality of the actual present, is, thus, a purely reflexive one. In the a-temporal reality the subject would coalesce with itself which is a sheer impossibility for Lacan. One reads in Seminar XX:

How is one to return, if not on the basis of a peculiar (special) discourse, to a prediscursive reality? That is the dream [...] But it is also what must be considered

mythical. There's no such thing as prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse. (Lacan, 1988, p. 32)

At this point, the Lacanian perspective on time stands in manifest contrast to the Freudian one. For Freud (1991b), the a-temporal thing-in-itself exists positively beyond the field of human representation: "Reference to time is bound up [...] with the work of the system Cs" (p. 191). Similarly, Freud (1991a) suggests that "discontinuous method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs. lies at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time" (p. 434). Freud (1966b) argues that the external world is undifferentiated masses of energy without quality and nothing else (p. 308). For Lacan, on the other hand, the thing-in-itself is only a mythical construction accounting for the distortions in the symbolic order and the aporias of time. Here, the Lacanian discourse is in tune with Hegel's reformulation/critique of Kant's thing-in-itself. Žižek (1989) summarizes Hegel's reproach of Kant in the following way: "Precisely when we determine the Thing as a transcendent surplus beyond what can be represented, we determine it on the basis of the field of representation" (p. 204). He (1989) adds: "Hegel's position is [...] that there is nothing beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation" (p. 204). It follows that the actual present is only possible with the signifying chain coming to its ultimate ending. However, since there is nothing beyond the field of representations for Lacan, the a-temporal reality outside the Symbolic only coincides with the reality of the dead subject. At this junction, the Lacanian formula "every drive is a death drive" assumes its full meaning. For the Lacanian split subject there is only actual present after death.

## Conclusion

This essay has highlighted how the universally familiar feeling of transience results from the subject's inability to confront the present in its actuality. On account of the infinitesimal delay between the subject's supposed initial perception and its symbolization, the actual present is absolutely inaccessible. As a result, the subject can neither achieve coalescence with itself nor discover the world around him in a complete fashion. The loss felt in the symbolized present is either nostalgized in the past or fantasized as compensated for by the future. In Lacan's perspective, these fantasies are never fulfilled: the actual present is utterly impossible in the discursive reality of the human subject. Since there is nothing outside the field of representation for Lacan, the present is unattainable for the subject except in its death. In this paper, the present as such is presented as the impossible event of temporal unfolding which is, however, essential for the constitution of time. The present instant qua Real is the absent cause of time: something that we only discover through its effects, something that does not precede its effects.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sean Homer for his assistance with this article. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer and the editors of *Language and Psychoanalysis* for their help in the preparation of the article.

## **Biography**

Khafiz Kerimov is currently finishing his BA in philosophy and international relations at the American University in Bulgaria.

## References

- Evans, D. (1996). *An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell. (Original work published 1927)
- Fink, B. (1995). *The Lacanian subject: Between language and jouissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fink, B. (1995). The real cause of repetition. In R. Feldstein, B. Fink & M. Jaanus (Eds.), *Reading seminar XI: Lacan's four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (pp. 223-232). New York, NY: SUNY Press.
- Freud, S. (1966). The aetiology of hysteria. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *Early psycho-analytic Publications* (Vol. 3) (pp. 159-188). (J. Strachey, Trans.). London, UK: The Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1896)
- Freud, S. (1966). The project for scientific psychology. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *Pre-psycho-analytic publications and unpublished drafts* (Vol. 1) (pp. 283-398). (J. Strachey, Trans.). London, UK: The Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1895)
- Freud, S. (1991). A note upon the 'mystic writing-pad'." In J. Strachey (Ed.), *On metapsychology* (Vol. 11) (pp. 427-434). (J. Strachey, Trans.). London, UK: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1925)
- Freud, S. (1991). The unconscious. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *On metapsychology* (Vol. 11) (pp. 167-222). (J. Strachey, Trans.). London, UK: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1915)
- Freud, S. (1997). On transience. In W. Hamacher & D. Wellbery (Eds.), *Writings in art and literature* (pp. 176-179). (J. Strachey, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1916)
- Homer, S. (2005). *Jacques Lacan*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1983). Repetition. In H. Hong & E. Hong (Eds.), *Kierkegaard's writing VI: fear and trembling/repetition* (pp. 125-232). (H. Hong & E. Hong, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1843)
- Lacan, J. (1981). Seminar XI: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. J.-A. Miller. (Ed.). (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (Original work published 1973)
- Lacan, J. (1988). Seminar XX: Encore. *On feminine sexuality. The limits of love and knowledge*. J.-A. Miller. (Ed.). (B. Fink, Trans.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1975)
- Lacan, J. (1991). *Seminar I: Freud's papers on technique*. J.-A. Miller. (Ed.). (J. Forrester, Trans.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1975)
- Lacan, J. (1992). *Seminar VII: The ethics of psychoanalysis*. J.-A. Miller. (Ed.). (D. Porter, Trans.). London, UK: Tavistock/Routledge. (Original work published 1986)
- Lacan, J. (1995). *The position of unconscious*. (B. Fink, Trans.). In R. Feldstein, B. Fink & M. Jaanus (Eds.), *Reading seminar XI: Lacan's four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (pp. 259-282). New York, NY: SUNY Press.
- Lacan, J. (2012). *The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis*. In B. Fink (Ed.), *Écrits* (pp. 197-268). (B. Fink, Trans.). London, UK: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1966)
- Lacan, J. (2012). *Logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty*. In B. Fink (Ed.), *Écrits* (pp. 161-175). (B. Fink, Trans.). London, UK: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1966)

- Pluth, E., & Hoens, D. (2009). What if the Other is stupid? Badiou and Lacan on 'logical time'. In P. Hallward (Ed.), *Think again: Alain Badiou and the future of philosophy* (pp. 182-190). London, UK: Continuum.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (1999). *Lacan and the political*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Verhaeghe, P. (2002). Lacan's answer to the classical mind/body deadlock: retracing Freud's beyond. In S. Barnard & B. Fink (Eds.), *Reading seminar XX: Lacan's major work on love, knowledge, and feminine sexuality* (pp. 109-140). New York, UK: SUNY Press.
- Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. London, UK: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (1992). *Enjoy your symptom: Jacques Lacan in hollywood and out*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the negative: Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology*. Durham, UK: Duke University Press.