Jacques Lacan
Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism

In March 1945, Christian Zervos asked us to contribute, along with a certain number of writers, to the revival issue of his journal, *Les Cahiers d'Art*, conceived with the aim of filling the space between the figures on its cover, 1940–1944, dates significant for many people, with the illustrious entries which make up its table of contents.

We submitted this article, knowing full well that this would be tantamount to making it immediately unfindable.

May it resound with the right note here where we place it, between the before and the after, even though it demonstrates that the after was kept waiting [*faisait antichambre*] so that the before could assume its place [*pût prendre rang*].*

A Logical Problem

A prison warden has three select prisoners summoned and announces to them the following:

"For reasons I need not make known now, gentlemen, I must set one of you free. In order to decide *whom*, I will entrust the outcome to a test which you will kindly undergo.

"There are three of you present. I have here five discs differing only in color: three white and two black. Without letting you know which I have chosen, I shall fasten one of them to each of you between his shoulders; outside, that is, your direct visual field—any indirect ways of getting a look at the disc being excluded by the absence here of any means of mirroring.

"At that point, you will be left at your leisure to consider your companions and their respective discs, without being allowed, of course, to

communicate amongst yourselves the results of your inspection. Your own interest would, in any case, proscribe such communication, for the first to be able to deduce his own color will be the one to benefit from the dispensatory measure at our disposal.

"His conclusion, moreover, must be founded upon logical and not simply probabilistic reasons. Keeping this in mind, it is to be understood that as soon as one of you is ready to formulate such a conclusion, he should pass through this door so that he may be judged individually on the basis of his respose."

This having been made clear, each of the three subjects is adorned with a white disc, no use being made of the black ones, of which there were, let us recall, but two.

How can the subjects solve the problem?

The Perfect Solution

After having contemplated one another for *a certain time*, the three subjects take *a few steps* together and pass side by side through the doorway. Each of them then separately furnishes a similar response which can be expressed thus:

"I am a white, and here is how I know it: as my companions were whites, I thought that, had I been a black, each of them would have been able to infer the following: 'If I too am a black, the other would have necessarily realized straight away that he was a white and would have left immediately; therefore I am not a black'. And both would have left together, convinced that they were whites. As they did nothing of the kind, I must be a white like them. At that, I made for the door to make my conclusion known."

All three thus exited simultaneously, armed with the same reasons for concluding.

Sophistic Value of this Solution

Can this solution, which presents itself as the most perfect the problem allows, be obtained experimentally? We leave to the initiative of each the task of deciding.

Not that we would go so far as to recommend putting it to the test in real life—though our epoch's antinomian progress has, it seems, for

some time now, been putting such conditions within the grasp of an ever greater number. We fear, indeed, that although only winners are anticipated or foreseen here, the facts diverge too greatly from the theory. Nor are we of the ilk of those recent [Existentialist] philosophers for whom confinement within four walls is but another expedient for attaining the ultimate in human freedom.

But when carried out under the innocent conditions of fiction, the experiment will not disappoint those who still *have* a taste for surprise—we guarantee it. It will perhaps turn out to be of some scientific value to the psychologist, at least if we can trust what seemed to us to result from having tried it with various groups of appropriately chosen, qualified intellectuals: a very particular misunderstanding [*méconnaissance*] on the part of these subjects concerning the reality of others.

Our only interest is in the logical value of the solution presented. We consider it, in effect, to be a remarkable sophism, in the classical sense of the term—i.e. a significant example for the resolution[b] of the forms[c] of a logical function at the historical moment in which the problem raised by these forms presents itself to philosophical examination. Our story's sinister images will certainly prove to be contingent. But lest our sophism seem irrelevant to our times, let it be noted that its bearing the sign of their times in such images is in no way superfluous—which is why we preserve the trappings in which it was brought to our attention one evening by an ingenious host.

We now place ourselves under the auspices of he who sometimes dons the philosopher's garb, and who—ambiguous—is more often to be sought in the comedian's banter, but who is always encountered in the politician's secretive action: the good logician, odious to the world.

Discussion of the Sophism

Every sophism initially presents itself as a logical error, and a first objection to this sophism can be easily formulated. Let us call "A" the real subject who concludes for himself, and "B" and "C" those reflected subjects upon whose conduct A founds his own deduction. One might object that as B's conviction is based on C's expectation, B's confidence must logically dissipate when C stops hesitating: and reciprocally for C with respect to B; both must thus remain indecisive.

Nothing therefore necessitates their reacting in the case that A is a black. Consequently, A cannot deduce that he is a white.

To this it must first be replied that B and C's whole cogitation is *falsely* imputed to them, for the only situation which could motivate it—the fact of seeing a black—is not in effect the true one. What must be discerned here is whether, supposing this situation were the case, it would be *wrong* to impute this logical thought process to them. Not at all, for, according to our hypothesis, it is the fact that neither of them *left first* which allows each to believe he is a white, and their hesitating for but an instant would clearly suffice to reconvince each of them beyond the shadow of a doubt that he is a white. For hesitation is logically excluded for whoever sees two blacks. But it is also excluded in reality in this first step of the deduction, for—as no one finds himself in the presence of a black and a white—there is no way for anyone to leave on the basis of what can be deduced therefrom.

But the objection presents itself more forcibly at the second stage of A's deduction. For if he has every right to come to the conclusion that he is a white (supposing that, had he been a black, the others would not have been long in realizing they were whites and leaving), he must nevertheless go back over it—immediately after having established it—and think it through again; for at the very moment at which he is stirred into action by his conclusion, he sees the others setting off with him.

Before responding to this, let us carefully pose once again the logical terms of the problem. "A" designates each of the subjects, insofar as he himself is on trial and resolves or fails to resolve to conclude about his own case. "B" and "C" are the two others insofar as they are objects of A's reasoning. But while A can correctly impute to the others a thought process which is in fact false (as we have just shown), he can, nevertheless, only take into account B and C's real behavior.

If A, seeing B and C set off with him, wonders again whether they have not in fact seen that he is black, it suffices for him to stop and pose the question again in order to answer it. For he sees that they too have stopped: since each of them is really in the same situation as he, or more aptly stated, *is* A insofar as real—i.e. insofar as he resolves or fails to resolve to conclude about himself—each encounters the same doubt at the same moment as he. Regardless of the reasoning A now imputes to B and C, he will have every right to conclude again that he is a white. For he supposes anew that, had he been a black, B and C

would have had to *continue*; or at the very least, acknowledging their hesitation—which concurs with the preceding argument (here supported by the facts) that makes them wonder whether they are not blacks themselves—they would have had to *set off again before him* (for being a black, he gives their very hesitation its definite import, allowing them to conclude that they are whites). It is because they, seeing that he is in fact a white, do nothing of the kind, that he himself takes the initiative; which is to say that they all head for the door together to declare that they are whites.

But one can still object that, having removed the obstacle in this way, we have not for all that refuted the logical objection—for the same objection turns up with the reiteration of the movement, reproducing in each of the subjects the very same doubt and arrest.

Assuredly, but logical progress must have been made in the interim. For this time A can draw but one unequivocal conclusion from the common cessation of movement: had he been a black, B and C *absolutely should not have stopped*. Their hesitating a second time in concluding that they are whites would be ruled out at this point: a single hesitation in effect suffices for them to demonstrate to each other that certainly neither of them is a black. The fact that B and C have halted again means that A can only be a white. Which is to say that this time the three subjects are fixed in a certainty permitting of no further doubt or objection.

Withstanding the test of critical discussion, the sophism thus maintains all the constraining rigor of a logical process, on condition that one integrates therein the value of the two *suspensive scansions*. This test shows the process of verification in the very act in which each of the subjects manifests that it has led him to his conclusion.

Value of the Suspended Motions in the Process

Is it justifiable to integrate into the sophism the two *suspended motions* which have thus made their appearance? In order to decide, we must examine their role in the solution of the logical problem.

In fact, they take on a role only after the conclusion of the logical process, since the act they suspend evinces this very conclusion. One cannot, therefore, object that they bring into the solution an element external to the logical process itself.

Their role, while crucial to the carrying-out [*pratique*] of the logical process, is not that of experience in the verification of an hypothesis, but rather that of something intrinsic to logical ambiguity.

For at first sight the givens of the problem would seem to break down as follows:

1) Three combinations of the subjects' characteristic attributes are logically possible: two blacks, one white; one black, two whites: or three whites. Once the first combination is ruled out by what all three subjects see, the *question* as to which of the other two is the case remains open. Its answer derives from:

2) The experiential data provided by the suspended motions which amount to signals by which the subjects communicate to each other—in a mode determined by the conditions of the test—what they are forbidden to exchange in an intentional mode, namely what each sees of the other's attribute.

But this is not at all the case, as it would give the logical process a spatialized conception—the same spatialized conception which turns up every time the logical process appears to be erroneous, and which constitutes the only objection to the solubility of the problem.

It is precisely because our sophism will not tolerate a spatialized conception that it presents itself as an aporia for the forms of classical logic, whose "eternal" prestige reflects an infirmity which is, nonetheless, recognized as their own,[1] i.e. these forms never furnish us anything which cannot already *be seen at a single stroke* [*d'un seul coup*].

In complete opposition to this, the coming into play as signifiers of the phenomena contested here makes the temporal, not spatial, structure of the logical process prevail. What the *suspended motions* disclose is not what the subjects see, but rather what they have found out positively about *what they do not see*: the appearance of the black discs. That which constitutes these suspended motions as signifying is not their direction, but rather their interruption [*temps d'arrêt*].[d] Their crucial value is not that of a binary choice between two inertly[2] juxtaposed combinations—rendered incomplete by the visual exclusion of the third—but rather of a verificatory movement instituted by a logical process in which a subject transforms the three possible combinations into three *times of possibility*.

This is also why, while *a single* signal should suffice for the sole choice imposed by the first erroneous interpretation, *two* scansions are

necessary for the verification[e] of the two lapses implied by the second, and only valid, interpretation.

Far from being experiential data external to the logical process, the *suspended motions* are so necessary to it that only experience can make the logical process here lack the synchronicity implied by the suspended motions as produced by a purely logical subject; only experience can make their function in the verification process founder.

The suspended motions represent nothing, in effect, but levels of degradation in which necessity engenders an increasing order of temporal instances[f] which are registered within the logical process so as to be integrated into its conclusion.

This can be seen in the logical determination of the *interruptions* they constitute, this determination—whether logician's objection or subject's doubt—revealing itself at each moment as the subjective unfolding of a temporal instance, or more aptly stated, as the slipping away (*fuite*)[g] of the subject within a formal exigency.

These temporal instances, constitutive of the process of the sophism, permit us to recognize therein a true logical movement. This process calls for an examination of the quality of its times.

The Modulation of Time in the Sophism's Movement: the Instant of the Glance, the Time for Comprehending and the Moment of Concluding

One can isolate in the sophism three *evidential moments* whose logical values prove to be different and of increasing order. To lay out the chronological succession of the three moments would amount once again to spatializing them through a formalism which tends to reduce discourse to an alignment of signs. To show that the instance of time presents itself in a different *mode* in each of these moments would be to preserve their hierarchy, revealing therein a tonal discontinuity essential to their value. But to discern (*saisir*)[h] in the temporal *modulation* the very function by which each of these moments, in its passage to the sequential one, is reabsorbed therein, the last moment which absorbs them alone remaining, would be to restore their real succession and truly understand their genesis in the logical movement. That is what we will attempt, starting from as rigorous a formulation as possible of these evidential moments.

I) *Being opposite two blacks, one knows that one is a white.*
We have here a *logical exclusion* which gives the movement its basis. The fact that this logical exclusion is anterior to the movement, i.e. that we can assume it to be clear to the subjects *with* the givens of the problem—givens which forbid a three-black combination—is independent of the dramatic contingency which isolates the prefatory statement of these givens. Expressing it in the form *two blacks::one white*, we see the *instantaneousness* of its evidence—its lightning-flash time, so to speak, being equal to zero.

But, from the outset, its formulation is already modulated by the subjectivization, however impersonal, which takes form here in the "one knows that . . .", and by the propositional conjunction which constitutes less a formal hypothesis than a still indeterminate matrix; we can put it in the following consequent form which linguists term *protasis* and *apodosis*: "Being . . . , *only then* does one know that one is. . . ."

An instance of time digs a hole in the interval so that the pre-given [*le donné*] of the *protasis*, "opposite two blacks", changes into the given [*la donnée*] of the *apodosis*, "one is a white", *the instant of the glance* being necessary for this to occur. Into the logical equivalence of the two terms: "two blacks::one white", temporal modulation introduces a form which, in this second moment, crystallizes into an authentic hypothesis; for it aims then at the real unknown of the problem, namely the attribute of which the subject himself is unaware. In this step, the subject encounters the next logical combination, and—being the only one to whom the attribute "black" can be assigned—is able, in the first phase of the logical movement, to formulate the following evidence:

II) *Were I a black, the two whites I see would waste no time realizing they are whites.*
We have here an *intuition* by which the subject *objectifies* something more than the factual givens offered him by the sight of the two whites. A certain time defines itself (in the two senses of taking on meaning and finding its limit) by its end, an end at once goal and term. For the two whites in the situation of seeing a white and a black, this time is *the time for comprehending*, each of the whites finding the key to his own problem in the inertia of his *semblable* [counterpart][i]. The evidence of this moment presupposes the duration of a *time of meditation* that each of the two whites must ascertain in the other, and that the subject manifests in the terms he attributes to their lips, as though they

were emblazoned on a pennant: "Had I been a black, he would have left without waiting an instant. If he stays to meditate, it is because I am a white."

But how can we measure the limit of this time whose meaning has been thus objectified? The time for comprehending can be reduced to the instant of the glance, but this instant can include all the time needed for comprehending. The objectivity of this time thus vacillates with its limit. Its meaning subsists solely in the form it engenders of subjects who are *undefined except by their reciprocity*, and whose action is suspended by mutual causality in a time which gives way under the very return of the intuition objectified by the subject. It is through this temporal modulation that, with the second phase of the logical movement, the way is opened which leads to the following evidence:

III) *I hasten to declare myself white, so that these whites, whom I consider in this way, do not precede me in recognizing themselves for what they are.*

We have here the *assertion about oneself* through which the subject concludes the logical movement in the making of a *judgement*. The very return of the movement of comprehending, before [*sous*] which the temporal instance that objectively sustains it has vacillated, continues on in the subject in reflection. This instance reemerges for him therein in the subjective mode of a *time of lagging behind* the others [*un temps de retard sur les autres*] in that very movement, logically presenting itself as the urgency of the *moment of concluding*. More strictly speaking, its evidence is revealed in a subjective penumbra as the growing illumination of a fringe at the edge of the eclipse that the objectivity of the *time for comprehending* undergoes in reflection.

It seems to the subject that the time required for the two whites to understand the situation in which they are faced with a white and a black does not logically differ from the time it took him to understand it himself, since this situation is but his own hypothesis. But if his hypothesis is correct—if, that is, the two whites actually see a black—they do not have to make an assumption about it, and will thus precede him by the beat [*temps de battement*][k] he misses in having to formulate this very hypothesis. It is thus the *moment of concluding* that he is a white; should he allow himself to be beaten to this conclusion by his counterparts, he *will no longer be able to determine* whether he is a black or not. Having surpassed the *time for comprehending the moment of concluding*, it is *the moment of concluding the time for comprehending*. Otherwise this time would lose its meaning.

It is not, therefore, because of some dramatic contingency, the seriousness of the stakes, or the competitiveness of the game, that time presses; it is owing to the urgency of the logical movement that the subject *precipitates* both his judgement and his departure ("precipitates" in the etymological sense of the verb: headlong), establishing the modulation in which temporal tension is reversed in a move to action [*tendance à l'acte*] manifesting to the others that the subject has concluded. But let us stop at this point at which the subject arrives in his assertion at a truth which will be submitted to the test of doubt, but which he will be incapable of verifying unless he first attains it as a certainty. *Temporal tension* culminates here since, as we have already seen, it is the process [*déroulement*] of its release [*détente*] which will scand[l] the test of its logical necessity. What is the logical value of this conclusive assertion? That is what we shall now try to bring out in the logical movement in which this conclusive assertion is verified.

Temporal Tension in the Subjective Assertion and its Value Manifested in the Demonstration of the Sophism

The logical value of the third evidential moment, formulated in the assertion by which the subject concludes his logical movement, seems to us to deserve deeper exploration. It reveals, in effect, a form proper to an *assertive logic*, and we must indicate to which original *relations* this assertive logic can be applied.

Progressing from the propositional relations of the first two moments, *apodosis* and *hypothesis*, the conjunction manifested here builds up to a *motivation* of the conclusion, "*so that there will not be*" (a lagging behind engendering error), in which the ontological form of *anxiety*, curiously reflected in the grammatically equivalent expression "*for fear that*" (the lagging behind might engender error), seems to emerge.

This form is undoubtedly related to the logical originality of the subject of the assertion; that is why we characterize it as *subjective assertion*, the logical subject here being but the *personal* form of the knowing subject who can only be expressed by "*I*". Otherwise stated, the judgement which concludes the sophism can only be borne by a subject who has formulated the assertion about himself, and cannot be

imputed to him unreservedly by anyone else—unlike the relation of the *impersonal* and *undefined reciprocal* subjects of the first two moments who are essentially transitive, since the personal subject of the logical movement takes them on [*les assume*] at each of these moments.

The reference to these two subjects highlights the logical value of the subject of the assertion. The former, expressed in the "*one*" of the "*one knows that*", provides but the general form of the noetic subject: he can as easily be god, table or washbasin. The latter, expressed in "*the two whites*" who must recognize "*one another*", introduces the form of *the other as such*, i.e. as pure reciprocity, since the one can only recognize himself in the other, and only discover his own attribute in the equivalence of their respective times. The "*I*", subject of the conclusive assertion, is isolated from the other, that is, from the relation of reciprocity, by a logical *beat* [*battement de temps*]. This movement of the "*I*"'s logical genesis through a decanting of its own logical time largely parallels its psychological birth. Just as, let us recall, the psychological "I" emerges [*se dégage*] from an indeterminate specular transitivism, assisted by an awakened jealous tendency, the "*I*" in question here defines itself through a subjectification of *competition* with the other, in the function of logical time. As such, the "I" in question seems to provide the essential logical form (rather than what is called the existential form) of the psychological "*I*".[3]

The essentially subjective ("*assertive*", in our terminology) value of the sophism's conclusion is attested to by the uncertainty in which an observer (e.g. the prison warden overseeing the game) would be suspended, given the three subjects' simultaneous departure, in deciding whether any of them has correctly deduced the attribute he bears. For the subject has seized in the moment of concluding that he is a white due to the *subjective* evidence of a *time-lag* which presses him on towards the exit, but even if he has not seized it, the objective evidence constituted by the others' departure leads him to act no differently: he leaves in step with them, convinced, however, that he is a black. All the observer can foresee is that if one of the three declares at the inquiry that he is a black, having hastened to follow the other two, he will be the only one to do so in these terms.

The assertive judgement finally manifests itself here in an *act*. Modern thought has shown that every judgement is essentially an act, and the dramatic contingencies here merely isolate this act in the subjects' departing movement. One could imagine other means of expression

for this act of concluding. What makes this act so remarkable in the subjective assertion demonstrated by the sophism is that it anticipates its own certitude owing to the temporal tension with which it is subjectively charged; that, based on this very anticipation, its certitude is verified in a logical precipitation determined by the discharge of this tension—so that in the end the conclusion is no longer grounded on anything but completely objectified temporal instances; and that the assertion is desubjectified to the utmost. As is demonstrated by what follows.

First of all, we witness the reappearance of the *objective time* of the initial intuition of the movement which, as though sucked up between the instant of its beginning and the haste of its end, had seemed to burst like a bubble. Doubt exfoliates the subjective certitude of the *moment of concluding*, objective time condensing here like a nucleus in the interval of the first *suspended motion*, *and* manifesting to the subject its limit in the *time for comprehending* that, for the two others, the *instant of the glance* has passed and that the *moment of concluding* has returned.

While doubt has, since Descartes, been integrated into the value of judgement, it should certainly be noted that—for the form of assertion studied here—the latter's value depends less upon the doubt which suspends the assertion than on the *anticipated certainty* which first introduced it.

But in order to understand the function of this doubt for the subject of the assertion, let us consider the objective value of the first suspension for the observer whose attention we have already drawn to the subjects' overall motion. Though it may have been impossible up until this point to judge what any of them had concluded, we find that each of them manifests uncertainty about his conclusion, but will have it confirmed without fail if it was correct, rectified—perhaps—if it was erroneous.

If any one of them is subjectively able, in effect to make the first move, but then stops, it is because he begins to doubt whether he has really grasped the *moment of concluding* that he is a white—but he will immediately grasp it anew as he has already experienced it subjectively. If, on the contrary, he lets the others precede him and, in so doing, convince him that he is a black, he cannot doubt whether he has grasped the moment of concluding precisely because he has not *subjectively appropriated* it (and in effect he can even find in the others'

new initiative logical confirmation of his belief that he differs from them). If he stops, it is because he subordinates his own conclusion so thoroughly to that which manifests the others' conclusion that he immediately suspends his own when they seem to suspend theirs; thus he doubts whether he is a black until they again show him the way, or he himself discovers it, concluding this time that he's a black or that he's a white—perhaps incorrectly, perhaps correctly—the point remaining impenetrable to everyone other than himself.

But the logical descent continues on towards the second temporal suspension. Each of the subjects, having reappropriated the subjective certitude of the *moment of concluding*, can once again throw it into question. It is now sustained, however, by the already accomplished objectification of the *time for comprehending*, and its being thrown into question lasts but the *instant of the glance*; for the mere fact that this hesitation is not the others' first but rather their second, suffices to put an end to his own hesitation as soon as he perceives theirs, immediately indicating to him as it does that he is certainly not a black.

The subjective time of the *moment of concluding* is at last objectified here. This is proven by the fact that, even if any one of the subjects had not yet grasped it, it would nevertheless impose itself upon him now; for this subject who would have concluded the first scansion by following the two others, convinced that he was a black, would now—because of the present second scansion—be constrained to reverse his judgement.

With the termination of the logical assembling of the two suspended motions in the act in which they reach completion, the sophism's assertion of certitude is *desubjectified to the utmost*. As is shown by the fact that according to our observer, assuming he finds the suspended motions to be sychronic for the three subjects, all three of them will indubitably declare themselves white at the inquiry.

Lastly, one can point out that at this same moment, if each subject can express, in the *subjective assertion* which has given him a certainty as the sophism's conclusion, the certainty he has finally verified—stating it in these terms:

"*I hastened to conclude that I was a white, because otherwise they should have preceded me in reciprocally recognizing themselves to be whites (and had I given them the time to do so, they would, because of that very fact, have led me astray)*"

—he can also express this certainty, in its *verification* which has been *desubjectified* to the utmost in the logical movement, in the following terms:

"*One must know that one is a white when the others have hesitated twice in leaving.*"

In its first form, this conclusion can be advanced as unquestioned by a subject once he has constituted the sophism's logical movement, but can as such only be assumed personally by him; whereas in its second form, it requires the logical descent verifying the sophism to be consummated by all the subjects, though remaining applicable by any one of them to each of the others. It is not even ruled out that one, but only one, of the subjects might reach this second form without constituting the logical movement of the sophism, having simply followed its verification as manifested by the other two.

The Truth of the Sophism as Temporalized Reference of Oneself to Another: Anticipating Subjective Assertion as the Fundamental Form of a Collective Logic

The truth of the sophism thus only comes to be verified through its *presumption*, so to speak, in the assertion it constitutes. Its truth turns out to depend upon a tendency which aims at the truth—a notion that would be a logical paradox were it not reducible to the temporal tension which determines the moment of concluding.

Truth manifests itself in this form as preceding error and advancing solely in the act that engenders its certainty; error, conversely, manifests itself as being confirmed in its inertia, correcting itself only with difficulty in following truth's conquering initiative.

But to what sort of relation does such a logical form respond? To a form of objectification engendered by the logical form in its movement, namely the reference of an "*I*" to the common measure of reciprocal subjects, or otherwise stated, of others as such, that is, insofar as they are others for one another. This common measure is provided by a certain *time for comprehending* which proves to be an essential function of the logical relationship of reciprocity. This reference of the "*I*"

to others as such must, in each critical moment, be temporalized in order to dialectically reduce the *moment of concluding the time for comprehending* so as to last but the *instant of the glance.*

Only the slightest disparity need appear in the logical term "*others*" for it to become clear how much the truth for all depends upon the rigor of each; that truth—if reached by only some—can engender, if not confirm, error in the others; and, moreover, that if in this race to the truth one is but alone, even though not all may get to the truth [*toucher au vrai*], still no one can get there but by means of the others.

These forms obviously find easy application in bridge table and diplomatic strategy, as well as in the handling of the "complex" in psychoanalytic practice.

Here, however, we would like to indicate their contribution to the logical notion of collectivity.

Tres faciunt collegium, as the adage goes, and the *collectivity* is already integrally represented in the sophism, since the collectivity is defined as a group formed by the reciprocal relations of a definite number of individuals—unlike the *generality* defined as a class abstractly including an indefinite number of individuals.

But it suffices to extend the sophism's proof by recurrence to see that it can be logically applied to an unlimited number of subjects,[4] it being posited that the attribute "negative" can only come into play in the case of a number equal to the number of subjects minus one.[5] But temporal objectification is more difficult to conceptualize as the collectivity grows, seeming to pose an obstacle to a *collective logic* with which one could complete classical logic.

We will nevertheless show what such a logic would have to furnish, faced with the inadequacy one senses in an assertion such as "I am a man," couched in whatever form of classical logic and derived as the conclusion from whatever premises one likes (e.g. "man is a rational animal", etc.).

This assertion assuredly appears closer to its true value when presented as the conclusion of the form here demonstrated of anticipating subjective assertion:

1) A man knows what is not a man;

2) Men recognize themselves amongst themselves to be men;

3) I declare myself to be a man for fear of being convinced by men that I am not a man.

This constitutes a movement which provides the logical form of all

"human" assimilation, precisely insofar as it posits itself as assimilative of a barbarism, but which nonetheless reserves the essential determination of the "*I*". . . .[6]

Translated by Bruce Fink
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Lacan's Footnotes

1) This infirmity applies no less to the minds formed by this tradition, as is evidenced by the following note we received from one intellect—however adventurous in other fields—after a soirée at which the discussion of our fecund sophism had provoked a veritable confusional panic amongst the select intellects of an intimate circle. Despite its opening words, the note bears the traces of a laborious restatement of the problem.

> "My dear Lacan, a hasty note to direct your attention to a new difficulty: the reasoning admitted yesterday is not truly conclusive, for none of the three possible states—000, 00●, or 0●●—is reducible to any of the others (appearances notwithstanding): only the last is decisive.
>
> "Consequence: when A assumes he is black, neither B nor C can leave, for they cannot deduce from their behavior whether they are black or white: for if one of them is black, the other leaves; and if instead the first is white, the other leaves anyway, because the first does not do so (and vice-versa). If A assumes he is white, B and C cannot leave in this case either. The upshot being that, here too, A cannot deduce the color of his disc from the others' behavior."

Our contradictor—in *seeing* the case too clearly—thus remains blind to the fact that it is not the others' departure, but rather their waiting, which determines the subject's judgement. And in order to hastily refute us, he allows himself to overlook what we are trying to demonstrate: the function of haste in logic.

2) "Irreducibles," as the contradictor in the above footnote put it.

3) Thus the "*I*", the third form of the subject of enunciation in logic, is here still the "first person," but also the only and last. For the grammatical second person is related to another function of language. As for the grammatical third person, it is only alleged: it is a demonstrative, equally applicable to the field of the enunciated and to everything distinguishable therein.

4) Here is the example for four subjects, four white discs and three black ones:

A thinks that, if he were a black, any one of the others—B, C or D—could surmise concerning the two others that, if he himself were black, they would

waste no time realizing they are whites. Thus one of the others—B, C or D—would quickly have to conclude that he himself is white, which does not happen. When A realizes that, if they—B, C and D—see that he is a black, they have the advantage over him of not having to make a supposition about it, he hurries to conclude that he is a white.

But don't they all leave at the same time as he? A, in doubt, stops; and the others too. But if they all stop, what does this mean? Either they stop because they fall prey to the same doubt as A, and A can thus race off again without worry. Or it's that A is a black, and that one of the others (B, C or D) has been led to wonder whether the departure of the other two does not in fact signify that he is a black, and to realize that their stopping does not necessarily imply he is white—since either can still wonder for an instant whether he's not black. Which would allow him <B, C or D> to posit that they should both start up again before him if he is a black, and to start up again himself from this waiting in vain, assured of being what he is, i.e. white. Why don't B, C and D do it? Well if they don't, then I will, says A. So they all start up again.

Second stop. Assuming I am black, A says to himself, it must now dawn upon one of the others—B, C or D—that, if he were a black, he could not impute to the two others this further hesitation; therefore he is white. B, C and D should thus start up again before him [A]. Failing which, A starts up again, and all the others with him.

Third stop. But all of them should know by now that they are whites if I am truly black, A says to himself. If they stop, then. . . .

And the certainty is verified in three *suspensive scansions.*

5) Concerning the condition of this minus one in the attribute, cf. the psychoanalytic function of the One-extra [*l'Un-en-plus*] in the subject of psychoanalysis, p. 480 in *Ecrits*, Seuil, 1966. [The reference here is to Lacan's "Situation of Psychoanalysis and Training of the Psychoanalyst in 1956," an article yet to be translated into English.]

6) The reader who continues on in this collection [the French edition of the *Ecrits*] is advised to return to this reference to the collective, constituting the end of the present article, in order to situate what Freud produced in the field of collective psychology [*Massenpsychologie und Ichanalyse*, 1920 (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*)]: the collective is nothing but the subject of the individual.

Translators' Notes

a) A reference, at least in part, to the placing of this particular article in the body of the original French version of the *Ecrits*, Seuil, 1966.

b) "Resolution" should probably be understood here in the sense in which it is used at times in physics: the act of breaking down or transforming something into its component parts, e.g. the resolution of a beam of white light into its various constituent wavelengths.

c) "Forms" here refers to the different types of reasoning cataloged and examined in classical logic; at certain other points in the text, it designates modes of reasoning in general.

d) *Temps d'arrêt* literally means "stopping time", or "time of immobility", emphasizing the length or duration of the halt, standstill, or stop as well as the stopping, suspending or interrupting itself. "Interruption" should thus be understood here as the *duration* of a disruption, as an *intermission* lasting a certain (though unspecified) amount of time.

e) "Verification" should probably be understood here in the sense of "confirmation."

f) We have opted to slightly extend the meaning of the English "instance" to correspond more closely to Freud's *Instanz* and Lacan's *instance*, rather than resort to the usual term "agency" (used to categorize the id, ego and superego). Throughout this article, "instance" should be understood in the sense of a power, agency or authority (as when we speak of a court of the first instance), and of an *insistent*, urgent force, activity of intervention; it also conveys a note of instantaneousness. (We have never used it here in the sense of a particular example or case of something.) "Agency", the term adopted by Alan Sheridan in his translations of Lacan's work (cf. *Ecrits: A Selection*, Norton, N.Y., 1977), in no way conveys the *insistance* so important to Lacan's meaning here, and would mislead one in substantifying or personifying time's roles here.

g) *Fuite* means "flight" as well as the slipping or leaking away, fading or aphanisis (of something).

h) *Saisir* can be translated as to grasp, seize, understand, realize, etc. We have most often translated it as "grasp", "seize" or "appropriate", but the reader should keep all of these meanings in mind as he or she comes across these terms in the text.

i) *Le donné* (the French equivalent, first used by Bergson, for the German *Gegeben*), is a phenomenological term denoting that which is immediately present to the mind before the mind acts upon it, that which is not constructed, inferred, or hypothetical. It is often rendered in English as "given", but in order to bring out its connection with *la donnée*, usually translated as "data" or "given" (as in the "the givens of the problem"), we have reserved "pregiven" for *le donné* and "given" for *la donnée*. As *le donné* does not necessarily imply that subsequent intellection or construction will take place, the "pre" of "pregiven" should not be thought to be necessarily indicative of temporal antecedence. (David Carr, in his translation of Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, [Northwestern U. Press, Evanston, 1970], translates *Gegeben* as "pregiven").

j) "Fellow man" obviously cannot render the connotation of resemblance irrestibly evoked by Lacan's *semblable* (the former adequately translating the

French "*prochain*" which Lacan avoids throughout this article). We have thus preferred to revive the now obsolete English "semblable" found, for example in *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene II, Line 124: "his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more".

k) While Lacan accentuates here an *action*, a sort of blinking or beat(ing) of time itself, four paragraphs further on Lacan uses the expression *temps de battement*, emphasizing the temporal component, the *duration*.

l) We introduce here an as yet non-existent verb form corresponding to the noun "scansion" (: "The action or the art of scanning verse; the division of verse into metrical feet; also an example of them."—*OED*), which we define as follows: to punctuate, divide or cut up into parts, discrete units, etc. The French verb "*scander*" plays quite an important part in Lacanian discourse, as does the noun form "*scansion*"—cf. p. 19 of our translation where we extend the meaning of the English (scansion) to denote a temporal cut or suspension.

Bruce Fink

Notes on Temporal Tension

The logic developed by Lacan in dealing with the three prisoner problem (outlined in his article "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty", *Ecrits*, 1966) can be applied to a myriad of situations in which time plays a determining role, and others in which the instance of time seems conspicuously lacking. For the conceptual tools he hews in that context allow us to approach subjects such as castration, identification, and angst, to link his temporal logic to later logical operations known as alienation, separation, and foreclosure, and to situate clinical types in accordance with the range of strategies adoptable in handling temporal tension. We will only be able to briefly touch upon a few of these points here.

As laid out in his 1946 essay, temporal tension is generated by a situation in which subjects have to *identify* themselves at one pole or another of a *binary* opposition: black or white in the context of the "game" itself, male or female in the example Lacan provides at the end of the article. According to Lacan, the constraints of the situation (along with the desire ascribed to them to be released/freed) are such that the subjects are *forced* to *subjectivize* something, to come to a *decision*, to rule out one choice in favor of another.

Let us summarily define Lacanian alienation as the condition of someone confronted with an either/or choice, the two "alternatives" being the subject (or the subject's being) and the Other (as locus of language). This condition implies, however, what is really a forced choice entailing their fading (or "aphanisis") as subjects. The prisoners' black/white forced choice—forced in the sense that they can but conclude *correctly* that they are white (that they are what they in fact are[1])—leads to their alienation in language. Lest the *linguistic* nature of their alienation seem opaque, consider Lacan's claim that time takes

Letter On Logical Time

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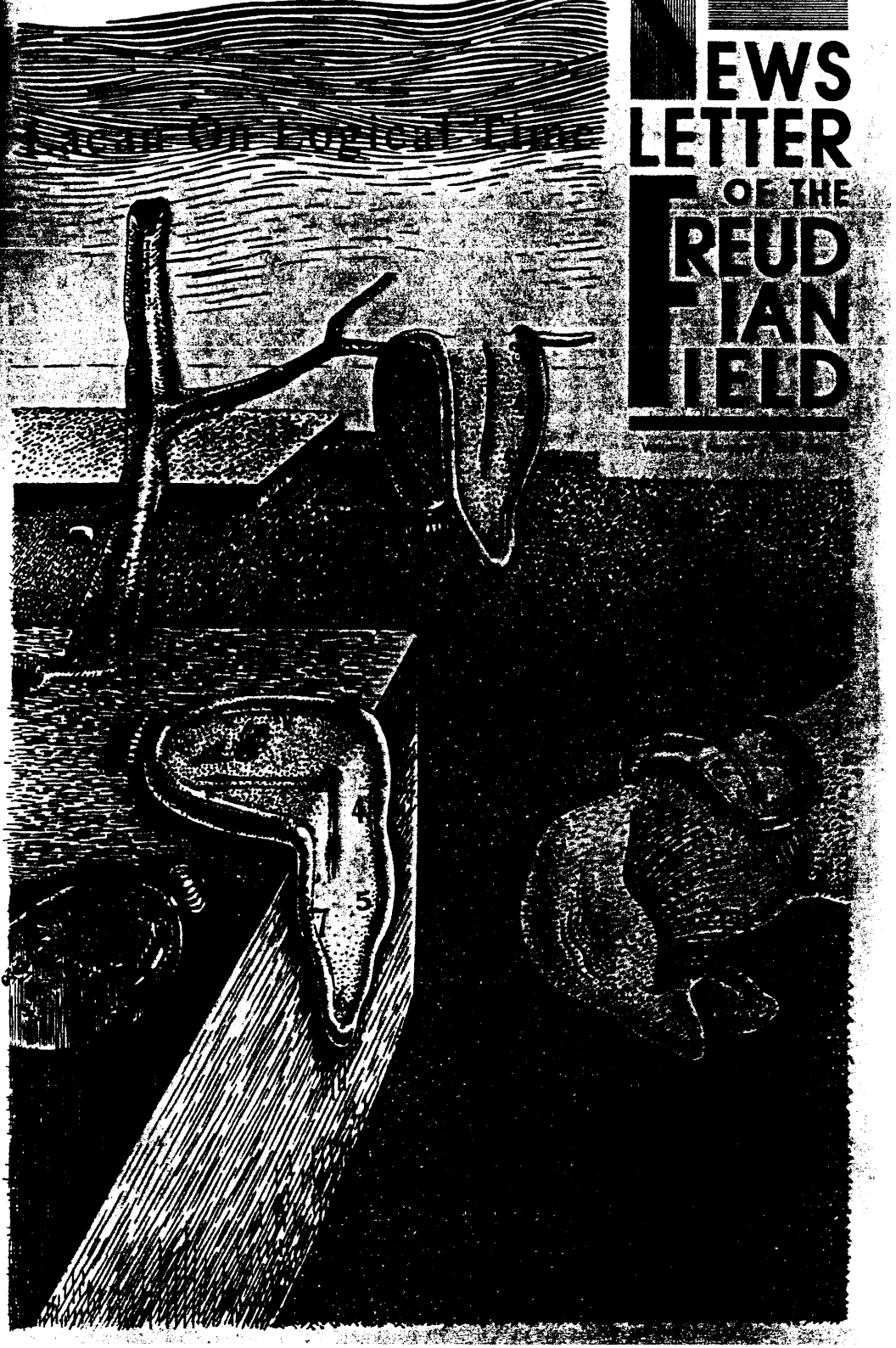

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