

Time in Psychoanalysis: Some Contradictory Aspects by André Green (2002) translated by Andrew Weller. London: Free Association Books. ISBN-10: 1853435511. ISBN-13: 978-1853435515. \$44.00

Published originally under the title *La Diachronie en psychanalyse* (Editions de Minuit, 2002) this book may be considered one of the major psychoanalytic treatments of time. In conception, it is a work inscribed in the French tradition and sets out to restore the fundamental complexity of Freud's theory of time which, in the author's view, psychoanalysis has abandoned by returning to a linear conception of time. The title should not go unnoticed. Green could have chosen the French *temps* as it is a word with a number of distinct meanings that in English or German, for example, are expressed with different words. But he opted for a title that not only situates his study within an historical perspective (*dia chronos*), in contrast to synchrony (*sun chronos*), but also within linguistics and philosophy. *Diachronie* (diachrony) being a term used by de Saussure, Barthes and, of course, Lacan. Green identifies a number of the different theories of time in Freud's works including a developmental point of view (the libido theory), involving fixations and regressions; the process of retroaction; dreams as a form of indirect recollection; the timelessness of the unconscious; the function played by primal fantasies in categorising experience; and the repetition compulsion. Taken together, he considers these form a complex theory of temporality, a genuine diachronic heterogeneity, justifying its description as fragmented time. Here 'its parts are in a state of tension with each other...there exists, not so much synergy, as difficulties of harmonisation between its component parts, and even antagonism.' (p. 25).

André Green [1927-2012] will probably be known to many readers of the journal. But it may be helpful to say something about his life and work in general for those less familiar with him. Originally inspired by Henri Ey, he later followed Lacan's seminars for seven years. After completing his analytic training, he became a member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society (SPP) and was its President from 1986 to 1989, and from 1975 to 1977

Vice-President of the International Psychoanalytical Association. Gradually he moved away from Lacan and finally broke with him completely in 1970 by criticising his concept of the signifier for what he considered its neglect of affect. In Etchegoyen's words, by doing so, he replaced the SPP defensive approach towards Lacanism with a direct theoretical confrontation. Green pointed out that whereas Lacan said that the unconscious is structured like a language '...when you read Freud, it is obvious that this proposition doesn't work for a minute. Freud very clearly opposes the unconscious (which he says is constituted by thing-presentations and nothing else) to the pre-conscious. What is related to language can only belong to the pre-conscious'. On Green's assessment of Lacan see the fascinating interview with Sergio Benvenuto (1995-96)¹.

Two threads permeate Green's writings. On one hand, the relevance of the paternal derived from Lacan's work and on the other, the concern with the maternal connected, in different ways, with the work of Winnicott and Bion. As well as his theory of time, according to Rosine Perelberg's summary (2015)², major themes in his work are centred on a theory of affects, a theory of representation and of language, the work of the negative (with its constellation of concepts such as the dead mother, death narcissism, white psychosis and negative hallucination), narcissism and borderline states, the objectalising function, and 'thirdness', the thing that emerges between the analyst and the analysand. In addition, he produced a body of work on applied psychoanalysis. According to Green, the aim of the psychoanalytic process is not so much to make something conscious, as to recognise the unconscious. 'Green suggests that in certain schools of thought, where the analysis is restricted to the interpretation of transference, there is a limitation of the analytic task that is prejudicial to the freedom and spontaneity of discourse, and represents a return to suggestion. He considered that all the material in an analysis contains elements belonging to different temporal dimension[s]'. Green conceives of two types of time. The first is concerned with 'fact'; the second, with 'the regression afforded by sleep'. The latter, which ignores the

¹ Benvenuto, S. (1995-96). Conversation held in Green's office in Paris, 17.5.94. Published in *Journal of European Psychoanalysis* 2: (<http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/against-lacanismo-a-conversation-with-andre-green/>).

² Perelberg, R. (2015): <https://psychoanalysis.org.uk/authors-and-theorists/andr%C3%A9-green>

passage of time is not a regression to a reconstituted past, which would bring one back to linearity but a regression to outdated means of expression and to images (Reed 2016)³. Considering the hypothesis of the timelessness of the unconscious, ‘nothing more than the timelessness of its traces and of its cathexes, endowed with mobility, is already present here. This means that the psychic apparatus is caught in the double vectorisation tending towards the future, now towards the past, in the pure present of dreaming, when the flow of excitations which should lead them from thought to action is impossible’ (p. 11). And he specifically rails against Lacan’s use of the variable duration of sessions (p.48).

However, Green’s view of time is not without its critics. Goldberg, for example, is highly critical of the abstract quality of Green’s text, devoid of examples that could lead to improved clinical practices⁴. To do this, ‘case vignettes and elaborate clinical examples are required. Green’s book, in contrast, eschews case material and provides instead a few brief examples to illustrate his theoretical notions. As a result, *Time in Psychoanalysis* is so abstract that in reading this volume I continually needed to remind myself that the material Green is discussing concerns the living processes of supposedly real people, as well as interactions between real people’. Goldberg also thinks that Green fails to take sufficient account of earlier psychoanalytic studies on time.

If he had he might have recognized the indispensable existential notion about human suffering - that supposedly psychoanalysis has been designed to address - that there are three ontological disturbances: guilt (past); shame (present); anticipatory anxiety (future). Guilt is experienced as behavior already chosen and committed; what is unclear is when the sufferer will deal with the guilt. Shame is felt as the loss of the safe and familiar; time seems frozen, endless; with no place to hide and contain one’s vulnerable feelings. The sufferer feels engulfed by the prospect that the pervasive shame will remain everlasting. Anticipatory anxiety is teleological - the sufferer’s sense of purpose is obsessed with

³ Reed, (2016). *Refracted Time: André Green on Freud’s Temporal Theory* *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 36 (5): 398-407.

⁴ Goldberg, C. (2002): <https://www.apadivisions.org/division-39/publications/reviews/time-contradictory>

what he or she regards as decisive-to-be moments in the future.

Goldberg 2002: 56

Overall these criticism seems to this reviewer not to be entirely unreasonable.

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