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Time/frame: Rewriting the Mirror Stage in Lacan's Anxiety Seminar

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WE ARE EAGER TO CALL ATTENTION to Jacques Lacan's reconsideration of the mirror stage in *Seminar X: Anxiety*, recently published in English for the first time. In *Seminar X*, Lacan was finding a way to fuse his own earlier thinking on childhood development with a fresh analysis of Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny.'" Given that Lacan's influential 1949 essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" can be read as a rewriting of Freud's 1914 essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction," and thus can be understood as part of Lacan's broad project of returning to Freud's original texts, we will suggest that, in the sessions from *Seminar X* spanning late November through late December of 1962, Lacan was returning his own "return to Freud" to Freud. In the process, he was changing its import considerably.

The concepts developed in "The Mirror Stage," which is now an indispensable part of psychoanalytic theory and a staple of introductory courses in literary theory, are known chiefly via Lacan's 1949 essay, which gained new prominence once it was republished in Lacan's epochal *Écrits* in 1966. It is easily "Lacan's most famous theoretical contribution" (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan" sec.2.2) and, even by its first publication, was "a pearl which he had carefully cultured for some thirteen odd years" (Nobus 104).

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Yet Lacan's discussion of the mirror stage thirteen years later in *Seminar X*, three years before its reissue in *Écrits*, is startling and potentially quite significant given how it adds unexpected new affective dimensions to the concept of the mirror and, in the process, offers a disquisition on time.

As Lacan reinterprets his "The Mirror Stage" essay in a new Freudian key, he makes a few pivotal innovations. First, he emphasizes the mirror stage as the imaginary production of a "moment," rendering it more clearly a theory of temporality than of embodiment. Second, he emphasizes the frame around the mirror, rather than the reflective glass, effectively changing the meaning of "stage" in the original essay into a theatrical metaphor rather than a phase. Third, by means of "The 'Uncanny,'" he explores the disquieting mood of the entire process. We suggest that, by taking seriously these innovations in *Seminar X*, we can locate a theory of time at the edges of Lacan's discussion on the mirror stage, one that has not been adequately appreciated within literary studies, by Lacanians or by theorists of time or affect. We say "at the edges" because of the way that Lacan begins to examine the function of frames and framing within the psychic apparatus.¹ Highlighting the anxiety implicit in the mirror stage, Lacan seizes upon the frame around the mirror, which, in its function as a parergon, renders the mirror stage uncanny.² This uncanny register, we argue, produces a time of moments that functions in contrast to clock time.

The time of the mirror stage

Lacan's canonical essay "The Mirror Stage" offers a model of early childhood cognitive development and, more broadly, subject formation. With roots in animal psychology and Gestalt psychology, it imagines the moment in which an infant, who has not yet developed an integrated sense of self nor mastered gross motor skills, begins to recognize their own image with the help of "some prop, human or artificial" (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" 76). Recognizing the image in the mirror as their own, the child, "in a moment of jubilant activity," begins to "take in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in his mind" (76). Leaning toward the

1 Such a gesture is especially significant because Lacan has, at times, been accused of foolishly ignoring issues of framing and of remaining peculiarly silent on the matter of Freud's "The 'Uncanny.'" Derrida, in "The Purveyor of Truth," accuses Lacan of neglecting to see "the framing of the frame" in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," which causes him to miss the proliferation of uncanny doubles that appear in the text.

2 The theory of the frame as a "parergon," as something ambiguously inside and outside of an artwork and thus serving as its supplement, is developed by Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*. See especially pages 37 to 82.

mirror, the child becomes, at least in their own fantasy, an enduring “me” separate from other people; the experience, though, also gives rise to a tension between the child’s self-image and their experience of the body, a tension which is equally enduring. The mirror stage ushers the developing subject into a regime of what Lacan calls imaginary relations (that is, relations based on identification with images) and thus clears the way for their subsequent entry into symbolic systems of language and meaning. For these reasons, the mirror stage marks a turning point in the development of the subject. Implicitly, there is something decidedly uncanny about the mirror stage in the sense that the essay suggests that being or becoming “oneself” depends on an encounter with one’s double. Yet the telos outlined in the essay encourages us to see how this uncanniness can be managed and eventually overcome, if only through alienation.

Jane Gallop, having attempted in vain to track the various iterations of Lacan’s essay between 1931 and 1966, wonders if the concept of the mirror stage, given its perversely complicated publishing history, “is in some way alien to the logic of chronology” (119). Yet “The Mirror Stage” essay frequently employs a rhetoric of before, after, and during, effectively demarcating a normative temporality for the subject. Although it is not normally understood to articulate a theory of time, the essay discusses temporality to the extent that it posits developmental phases: first, the fragmentation attendant to premature birth; next, the Gestalt and the subject’s jubilant assumption of the image; then, the cut of the symbolic—all as prelude to a life in thrall to the signifier. Each phase introduces the next inevitability; a sequence is formed. The language of time prevails throughout, although it never becomes the focus of the essay. Lacan alerts us to how human children are, “for a while,” more dimwitted than chimpanzees, for instance, and promises the reader a glimpse into subjective judgment “prior to its social determination” (“The Mirror Stage” 75–6). He presents the mirror stage not as an ongoing process but as an “act,” an “event” (75), and a “moment” (79), one that “prefigures the alienating destination” (76). Yet the mirror stage also converts this play of *before* and *after* into what it calls a “spatial capture” (77)—a subject “caught up in the lure of spatial identification” (78)—that gains the illusion of “mental permanence” (76). Read in this way, “The Mirror Stage” shows how a sequence of events come to be experienced in spatial terms; at the same time, the mirror stage is, ironically, “experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history” (78).

Yet to read “The Mirror Stage” in this way is to read it against the grain, as a theory of time. Read in such a way, it would seem to offer an account

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of how a subject's *kairos* (that is, the time of moments, here pertaining to developmental phases) becomes adapted into a set of spatial metaphors that lend subjectivity the illusion of permanence; the spatiality conferred upon the subject by this *kairos* can then be retrofitted so that the subject can participate in *chronos* (that is, sequential clock time and the broader symbolic order). To make such a distinction is to read Lacan in light of theorists of time, such as Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, as a way of grasping the complex temporality of subjectivity. While such a reading of "The Mirror Stage" is somewhat unorthodox, we argue it is authorized by Lacan's further work on the mirror stage in *Seminar X*. Seeking to theorize anxiety as affect, Lacan considers the framing and proliferation of anxiety to demonstrate the temporality implicit in the mirror stage concept. In the process, he reinterprets the meaning of both "mirror" and "stage." Anxiety has its own time, one that refuses to connect causes with effects or construct timelines. To present time in such a way, rather than through measured intervals, effectively undoes what we might presume the mirror stage to mean as a theory of early childhood development.

Time becomes *kairos* during the mirror stage because anxiety is, in Lacan's analysis, so closely aligned with lack. During *Seminar X*, Lacan was already deciphering a lack that he believed foundational for the subject; to understand the unsettling presence of this excessive lack, he began to adapt his longstanding symbol of otherness, the notorious *objet petit a*.³ The *objet petit a* is, of course, not an object that one might directly encounter in the world; it is an algebraic symbol—the *a* being an abbreviation of *autre*, or other, and the *petit* used to differentiate it from the big Other, or superego⁴—which is used to represent a lack that serves as the basis of subjectivity and the cause of desire. It is Lacan's way of describing the function of something that cannot otherwise be symbolized: the *objet petit a* is the name for the enjoyment that the subject has renounced in becoming a subject and that continues to provoke the subject in its irretrievability and overbearing proximity. For Lacan, anxiety is the body's signal that we have approached this remnant of our discarded enjoyment too intimately (*Seminar X* 76). Because the *objet petit a* frustrates any attempt to account for it—it is the very name of unsynthesizable excess, the name for a positivized void that can never become "one"—it thwarts any attempt to situate it within time and history (315). Thus, what Lacan had originally seen as a way of thinking about ego projected outward as lack in *Seminar II* had,

3 *Objet petit a*, by Lacan's instructions, is usually left untranslated, though sometimes it has been rendered as either *objet a* or object *a*.

4 See Lacan, *Seminar II* 235–47.

by the early 1960s, become a way of examining the paradoxes of a subject who arises through an overproximity of that lack. In such a context, the mirror stage takes on a new emphasis: it becomes as much a parable of renunciation and perpetual disquietude as of identification, fantasy, and self-deception.

When Lacan returns to “The Mirror Stage” essay in *Seminar X*, he reveals the ways that time and space cannot be separated within subjectivity. He seeks to explain (arguably for the first time) why and how the mirror stage chain of events transpires: “Today the point is to know precisely what allows this signifier to be incarnated” (88). He no longer takes for granted that the phases of the mirror stage would give way to each other. Rather, he emphasizes three aspects of the mirror stage that he claims, perhaps speciously, had been latent there all along: 1. its uncanny moment, which becomes a permanent interruption for the subject in the form of anxiety; 2. the frame of the mirror, rather than the reflective glass itself; and 3. the ways that the first two hidden aspects of the mirror stage confound any possible taxonomy of psychosis and neurosis, which now become internal to one another instead of alternative paths the nascent subject might follow. This last point suggests that the mirror stage hails the subject into a process of viewing that is neither subjective nor objective. It is a process that is always already interrupted, as the subject endures a “cut” in the symbolic even before they can be castrated and subjected to the signifier (76). Psychosis (for instance, schizophrenia) and neurosis (for instance, obsession) become, then, different subjective apprehensions of the frame. “The fantasy is framed,” Lacan explains (73). The frame is constantly there; it is what makes the mirror stage work. Yet it only works by failing. The failure of the mirror stage *is* the mirror stage, Lacan implies: it is how we learn to encounter the limit to our fantasy. Acknowledging that limit enables someone to distinguish between the world and the stage—“stage” now being meant especially in a spatial sense of performance space (for the entertainment of an audience), rather than in the temporal sense of “phase.” Of course, Lacan is backhandedly acknowledging that world and stage may still be inseparable: “all the world’s a stage” lingers implicitly amidst much discussion of world, stage, and Shakespeare in this seminar.

The framing of “The ‘Uncanny’”

Lacan lays the groundwork for this re-assessment of the mirror stage in his lecture on “The ‘Uncanny.’” From Freud’s essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919), the uncanny or its direct translation the unhomely, describes the feeling or atmosphere of that which “arouses dread and horror; equally

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certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general” (219). As Freud continues, it becomes clear that more than being simply a feeling of dread or horror, “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220). It thus has a historical, and by extension temporal, element. Through an analysis of the etymology of the German word of *heimlich* and its opposite, *unheimlich*, Freud reveals the very uncanny nature of the interplay between the two—that which is both familiar and unknown, secret and revealed. A temporality emerges as the *heimlich* converges with the *unheimlich*. In this view, we might recognize why Lacan chose to re-evaluate his theory of the mirror stage through an extended exegesis, spanning two meetings of the seminar, of “The ‘Uncanny,’” rather than via his own “The Mirror Stage” essay directly: the coincidence of the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, as a convergence of opposites, is analogous to the way that lack, in anxiety, becomes overwhelming. By highlighting the uncanny aspects of the mirror stage, Lacan encourages us to see the mirror stage as a matter of affect, which is what will help it become a theory of time. Mladen Dolar, who in his endeavour to show Lacan’s uncanny side extrapolates from his own reading of *Seminar X*, argues that the uncanny emerges as “something brought about by modernity itself”—that is, the uncanny marks a relation between the subject and history as mediated by the intolerable presence of the *objet petit a* (7). But Lacan actually emphasizes the converse: that “the meaning of history” is derived from its uncanny moment, and that the *kairos* of the mirror stage makes the subjective experience of being-historical possible. Lacan reveals “the conjecture between anxiety and its uncanny ambiguity” (*Seminar X* 311). He plumbs those depths by asking us to reimagine the mirror stage and the uncanny in parallel.

In his comments on “The ‘Uncanny,’” Lacan immediately challenges the notion—really, his own previous assertion—that the mirror stage has sequential phases, according to which the subject first endures the mirror stage at the imaginary level before being whisked into castration and the symbolic.⁵ He says: “I don’t believe there have ever been two phases to what I’ve taught. ... I’ve been intimately weaving the interplay between the two registers for a long while now” (*Seminar X* 30). He upbraids his students for not adequately noting certain (hidden) aspects of his essay on “The Mirror Stage”: “haven’t I always insisted on the movement that

5 By “castration,” Lacan means not the literal removal of the male genitals but the way that a subject gives up their claim to sexual enjoyment in order to function within the symbolic systems of meaning that govern human societies.

the infant makes? ... he turns round, I noted, to the one supporting him who's there behind him" (32). It is worth noting that these aspects of the theory are simply not present in "The Mirror Stage" essay, which makes no mention of a visual reference to a parent nor does it stress the simultaneity of the mirror stage's component phases.

Counterfactually, Lacan in *Seminar X* insists that "The Mirror Stage" essay states that the infant straightaway seeks the big Other's ratification of the image that was jubilantly assumed. In this account, the mirror stage is no longer a sequence of events but a visual relay between several points. The mirror stage, apparently, never existed without an immediate reference to the big Other, and yet it continues to defy the symbolic matrices of temporality. It occurs through "a moment" of uncanniness when the mirror no longer seems to look back at us, when the set of relations shifts to a new affectation for the subject. The mirror stage is now only a "stage," Lacan claims, in the theatrical sense: even the word "stage" prompts him to discuss Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at some length, which had been the subject of *Seminar VI*. Yet, ironically, it is only insofar as the mirror stage has become a "stage" in the theatrical sense, rather than a temporal phase, that it acquires a relation to history: "History has always had a character of staging," he explains, because "the stage is the dimension of history" (*Seminar X* 33). Thus, historical existence (that is, the subject's experience of being situated in time) emerges out of an emphatically spatial, rather than temporal, metaphor.

Why and how, we might ask, does this encounter change? The answer appears to be through Lacan's sudden and repeated emphasis on frames. For Lacan, the infant identifies with the image only because there is someone standing, still visibly, outside of the reflected image; the stage functions as such only because its curtains frame the performance space. The important thing to realize, he explains, is that "anxiety is framed" because "a mirror doesn't stretch out to infinity. It has limits. ... I make a point of mentioning the limits of the mirror" (*Seminar X* 72). Because the mirror has a frame, and thus limits, the subject ends up with a nonreciprocal relation to its image and so cannot fully identify with it: the subject sees "from a point located somewhere within the space of the mirror, a point that isn't directly perceivable for him. In other words, I don't necessarily see my eye in the mirror" (72–73). While this would seem to situate the real, *qua* point of the gaze, within the imaginary register,⁶ Lacan insists that the division

6 The link between the imaginary and real would become a central concern for Lacan in his later topological seminars. By "the imaginary," Lacan means a narcissistic register of thought in which we compare ourselves to idealized versions

between imaginary and real is impossible to sustain in this context: the subject confronts a “real image,” so to speak, that gets “realized” and then introjected into the subject and there archived (39).⁷ Where the subject had expected to encounter something that would assuage their anxiety (that is, in Lacanian parlance, the imaginary phallus), they encounter the *objet petit a* instead, an anxiety-causing excess “whose status escapes the status of the object derived from the specular image” (40). The appearance and persistence of this object—an object marking not the subject’s lack, as in castration, but their lack of lack (53)—creates temporal modalities not easily subject to the calendar.

The mirror stage develops new temporalities and becomes historical to the extent that it was, and ever is, shot through with the uncanny. Lacan acknowledges that time is sometimes granted the status of being a “fourth dimension,” and thus could be an extension of space in a new direction (*Seminar X* 87). Yet time, in its capability as a fourth dimension, has “got nothing to do with the time that, in intuition, seems very much to present itself as a ... clash with the real” (87). Here, then, Lacan is laying out two competing temporalities: the symbolic time of measurement (the fourth dimension) and the real time (not necessarily messianic, but intensely personal) of “intuition.” The mirror stage produces intuitive time within the subject just when the subject begins to be pulled into this fourth dimension; its uncanny presence, which afflicts the subject with anxiety, is a marker of “the time that’s involved” (87). Lacan is effectively viewing the mirror stage from its reverse or flip side. Yet this side is, as per the structure of a Möbius strip, coextensive with the mirror stage itself. The flip side of the mirror stage *is* the mirror stage rather than an occluded or repressed part of it.

Lacan is effectively fusing his own “The Mirror Stage” essay with Freud’s “The Uncanny,” as if they were dual accounts of the process of

of ourselves. This is quintessentially the domain of the 1949 essay on “The Mirror Stage.” Here, in *Seminar X*, Lacan is locating an inassimilable point (the viewer’s eye) into the scene; this eye represents “the real,” in Lacan’s terms, because it is the foundation of the mirror scene without becoming registered as part of it. The Lacanian “real” is a traumatic point that cannot be symbolized. The *objet petit a* is an example of such a phenomenon. Lacan would famously expand his commentary on the gaze as an aspect of the real in the following year’s seminar.

7 In contrast to other psychoanalysts, Lacan does not view introjection as the opposite of projection (Ferenczi; Freud) or as a type of incorporation (Klein). Instead, for Lacan, introjection refers to a process of symbolic identification that occurs through signifiers—introjection is always “the introjection of the speech of the other” (*Seminar I* 169).

subject-formation, recto and verso of the same twisted paper. He begins to theorize “a dawning sense of uncanniness which leaves the door open to anxiety” in “the passage from the specular image to the double” (*Seminar X* 88). These, by conventional Lacanian standards, had always been the same thing—what is a specular image, after all, if not one’s double? But Lacan is suddenly interested in how and why the subject begins to doubt that the image in the mirror really is *me*, setting the “stage,” as he calls it, for “the transformation of the object ... that is our correlative in the fantasy” (88). This happens because of an “odd moment” during the mirror stage that drives a wedge between the infant’s identification with the *Gestalt* and the subject’s giving itself over to the Other (88). The uncanny intrudes “when the gaze that appears in the mirror starts not to look at us anymore” (88). The *objet petit a* becomes the only “pure identity marker” (86), precisely because it cannot be symbolized: it is *the object* that the subject is never without. Hence anxiety becomes a permanent feature of neurotic subjectivity, presenting a twist in the subject by which the “specular image” can be inhabited only as a Möbius strip (96). The mirror stage ceases to be Lacan’s myth of how a subject comes to believe in their own bodily unity and instead becomes the story of how a particle of horror insinuates itself into that unity. It is the experience of gnawing dread and terror rather than of narcissistic self-deception. Its product is not the split subject but the anxiety of the subject, which is now (as an affect) anchored in the physicality of the body as a continual process of composing the subject, space, and time. No longer is the mirror stage concerned with the artificial production of a coherent body as “mine”; it is now invested in examining how the subject becomes stapled, through anxiety, to lack, and thus to castration, and thus to the signifier. The subject becomes a function of “not having a specular image” rather than having one (96). “The Mirror Stage” essay is rendered nearly unrecognizable now, “a right glove becoming a left glove” (96)—and yet Lacan continues to pretend that nothing has changed and that “we’re on our home turf here” (87).

It is *the object*
that the subject
is never
without.

Anxiety and fantasy: examples of the framing mechanism

Lacan was able to see new aspects of the mirror stage, and the fantasy of bodily unity that it occasions, because he was in the midst of discovering the structure of anxiety. Unsurprisingly, he dedicates the first section of *Seminar X* to this question, noting that anxiety is “precisely the meeting point” of his previous disquisitions: “you’ll see that the structure of anxiety is not far from it [*fantasy*], for the reason that it’s well and truly the same” thing (3). The conflation of fantasy and anxiety places both concepts as the

“support of [one’s] desire” in relation to the real (27). Later in the seminar, Lacan suggests that fantasy and anxiety emerge only through the encounter with the mirror. The sides of the mirror acting as a frame—an element of the mirror stage that, Lacan insists, has always been there but has received little notice—gives meaning to the scene before any introduction of a symbolic register. In this sense, it gives the mirror stage the attributes of a parergon. The mirror stage receives its frame, Lacan suggests, when one looks through the pane of a window, within the frame of a picture, or from an auditorium to the stage curtains. Such framing mechanisms, Lacan argues, “[allow] for the emergence in the world of that which *may not be said*” (75): in other words, it presents the *objet petit a* as a parergon, and allows for the subject to grasp, without articulating it, the anxiety that it occasions and the fantasy that it supports.

Lacan reveals what “may not be said” through four close readings: of Freud’s Wolf Man case, a picture drawn by a schizophrenic woman, of anxiety and the theatrical stage, and of Freud’s case study of the “young homosexual woman.” Each time, we find that fantasy “stands to be beheld outside” of the limits of various frames (*Seminar X* 73). Even in his dreams, the Wolf Man’s desires and fantasies cannot exist in the same space with him; they are viewed through the framing of the bedroom window to the outside world. Fantasy arrives on the other side of frames, Lacan claims, and has “the same structure you can see in my diagram of the mirror” (73). In the Wolf Man’s dream, hidden behind the framing of the window through which the image of a tree filled with wolves is viewed, “there are always two rods, one of a more or less developed support and one of something that is supported” (73)—a structure that Lacan says is homologous to the parent who, without being mentioned in “The Mirror Stage,” would be holding the infant up to the mirror. This interruption by the frame, which reveals the structure beyond the image, delivers “the fantasy in its most anxiety-provoking mode” (260). The frame, in making possible this fantasy apparatus, cuts off the subject from space and time.

Analyzing a drawing by a schizophrenic patient known as Isabella, Lacan stresses that one’s orientation to the encounter with the frame is both subjective and objective. Isabella has drawn a tree with bare branches, three large eyes down the centre of the trunk, and written beyond the branches: “the formula of her secret, *Io sono sempre vista*. It’s what she’d never been able to say until then. *I am always in view*” (*Seminar X* 73). Again, we have the emergence of the fantasy, of that which may not be said, through the frame of the drawing. What’s more, we experience the picture as mediated by the edges (or frame) of the page: not only is there

“the function of viewing”—of seeing what’s beyond the frame—but also “the fact of being the view” (73), that is, of being the reverse object of the frame. There appears to be an important correlation of the body’s (or, more specifically, the eye’s) orientation toward the frame itself.

The orientation to the frame becomes particularly important in Lacan’s consideration of a theatrical stage as an experience framed by curtains. He had earlier distinguished between the spaces of the world and the stage; he now reopens that question by seeing it through the lesson of Isabella, as a perpetually objective/subjective relation of viewing. The design of a stage is a sort of “mirror stage,” lending itself well to the *unheimlich* and its associated anxiety. The audience, seated in an auditorium facing a stage, feels the dread of anticipation; it is here that the uncanny interrupts the subject’s relation to history and time. As an audience, we are forcibly turned toward the stage and engaged with the action that happens there; this, Lacan states, is a consensual system of relations in which the uncanny moment of anxiety briefly settles over us: “What do we always expect at curtain up, if not this brief moment of anxiety, which quickly passes, but is never lacking ... the moment when the three knocks are sounded and the curtain rises? Without this introductory moment of anxiety, that quickly dies away, nothing would be able take on its value of what will be determined thereafter as tragic or comic” (*Seminar X* 75). The visual representation of the stage offers the most widely accessible consideration of the framing of anxiety. We come to the theatre poised and ready for the viewing of the world and words that can be voiced on the stage in a way they cannot in the world. The play only takes on its meaning, through its narrative and genre, by the framing apparatus of the curtain.

However, as Lacan is careful to outline, it is not so much the expectation or anticipation of what is viewed within the frame that gives rise to anxiety but rather “the sudden appearance of the *Heimliche* within the frame” that creates anxiety (76). It is within this structure that Lacan locates anxiety: “Anxiety is the appearance, within the framing, of what was already there, at much closer quarters, at home, *Heim*” (*Seminar X* 75). Thus, as a result of the way that fantasy emerges through the mirror stage, anxiety is always framed. Lacan teaches us to see the mirror stage as a theatrical production, which accounts for its attendant anxiety. The appearance of anxiety’s object unleashes an uncanny moment within the frame that confronts the subject with their own affect (76).

Following Lacan’s advice, we read these three moments as elaborations of the mirror stage—when we learn to understand its experience as implicitly framed, we can begin to see where its attendant anxiety comes

from. Lacan creates a temporality out of the subject's relation to anxiety; anxiety pulls the subject from *chronos* into *kairos*. Through the physical limits of the frame, the orientation toward the *objet petit a*, and the arrival of an uncanny moment, anxiety functions as a "cut" that breaks the subject free from their experience of time. It is in this sense that anxiety is an affect. Anxiety is not a social or personal feeling rooted in the sequential order of events but rather intrudes through the frame by intensities that affect us. It is precisely the "dimension of the uncanny" that illustrates the affective relation of anxiety through its unearthing of "moments when the object appears," causing an interruption and disruption in the subject (59).

Lacan implicitly provides a final example of how the frame anchors the experience of anxiety as the subject finds a connection to the temporal register. The case he takes up is Freud's "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality," which has recently been the object of some interest within affect studies.⁸ The case reveals the plight of a young woman, who having crossed paths with her father in public while out with her partner chooses to throw herself off a nearby bridge. Here, unlike with the previous three examples discussed, Lacan does not directly refer to the mirror stage. But, as Lacan will so often do, he seems to assemble the elements from the previous three examples into a different situation and leaves the readers/listeners to make the necessary connections for themselves. Although the case study, and Lacan's discussion of it, would seem to have little to do with the mirror stage, we suggest that it begins to take on important aspects of the time/frame construction. The analysis takes place in the second section, "Revision of the Status of the Object," and focuses on the young woman's suicide attempt through the aptly titled "*Passage À L'acte* and Acting-Out: Letting Oneself Drop and Getting Up on the Stage." Although Lacan does not mention frames or framing in his analysis of the scene, he has used the seminar generally to attune us to the unspoken intervention of the frame as a mediating factor in almost any scene. By this point in the seminar, he has already taught us to see how the implicit frame functions to ensure the affectual composition of time, space, and bodies.

There are elements of Freud's analysis in the "Case of Female Homosexuality" that go unmentioned by Lacan, but that are silently important

8 Freud's discussion of the young homosexual woman's case has been important for contemporary affect studies, given Ahmed's contemplation of it in *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed analyzes the young woman's homosexual body as an object that cause displeasure in others (namely, her family) and the orientations it occasions between the young woman, her father, and her lover.

to Lacan's discussion of the case. We notice that, for Freud, much of the analysis of the case revolves around situating the young woman into a set of separate but concurrent timelines: Freud analyses the progress of her Oedipus complex, her childhood sexual development in relation to the births of her siblings, and the sequence of her homosexual relationships ("The Psychogenesis" 153–57). But he situates his analysis of his patient within a narrative frame that concerns the timeline of the analysis itself, seeing any psychoanalysis as the march through "two clearly distinguishable phases" (152). Yet no sooner does Freud call these phases "clearly distinguishable" than he says that "these two phases in the course of the analytic treatment are not always sharply divided from each other" and, indeed, that they become separate "only ... when the resistance obeys certain conditions," which the young woman emphatically has not met (152). Freud, then, is framing the analysis with an assortment of timelines that immediately collapse in the face of the case study, so as to let the frame itself run interference on the normative and normativizing analysis within. Freud admits that: "Linear presentation is not a very adequate means of describing the complicated mental processes going on in different layers of the mind" (160). The part of the case that resists "linear presentation" is precisely the young woman's identification with her mother, which turns her suicide attempt into an act of wish fulfilment on the basis of the mother's refusal to obey the normative demands of *chronos*: the mother was "still a youngish woman, who was evidently unwilling to give up her own claims to attractiveness" (149). The patient, according to Freud, identifies with the part of her mother that resists normative timelines; it is thus in and through her suicide attempt that she expresses her wishful identification with her mother.

At each level—in her suicide attempt, in the process of Freud's analysis, and then in the framing devices used for Freud's narrative of that analysis—we see the affective movement away from *chronos* and toward *kairos*, precisely through the work of the framing mechanisms. Lacan leaves these aspects of the case unremarked upon but highlights other framing mechanisms through which the young woman's *passage à l'acte* further unfolds. He highlights the orientation between the young woman and her father in their passage on the street, as well as the spatial formation between the woman and the bridge. Lacan's account of her suicidal act highlights, implicitly, its function as a mirror stage—that is, a mirror stage reimagined as a theatrical stage to be upended by an encounter with the uncanny. Hence Lacan marks a distinction between, "on the one hand, the *world*, the place where the real bears down, and, on the other hand, the *stage* of

the Other where man as subject has to be constituted, to take up his place as he who bears speech, but only ever in a structure that as truthful as it sets itself out to be, has the structure of fiction” (*Seminar X* 116). In this gap between world as stage (and thus as framed), the woman’s *passage à l’acte* entails a process of viewing that is both objective and subjective. In this sense, it echoes Lacan’s analysis of Isabella’s drawing and especially Isabella’s insistence upon invisible frames. Here too, the scene depends upon a framing mechanism, “which [as] I tried to define in the structure of the fantasy, is not a metaphor. If the frame exists, it’s because space is real” (283). The woman has “framed” her scene as a tableau, deliberately “causing a scene” between herself, her lover, and her family as these vectors of orientation are staged in public. In contrast, the *passage à l’acte* reflects the moment of recognition of one’s own disorientation to surrounding objects—the moment of “being dropped” or “toppl[ing] off the stage, out of the scene” (115). The moment bursts from the frame and allows the departure of the subject as a “passage from the stage to the world” or “an escape from the scene” (116, 115).

The young woman’s *passage à l’acte* thus reveals the significance of the affective encounter with anxiety and its potential to interrupt and disrupt the subject’s temporality. The *passage à l’acte* is “not a message addressed to anyone”; it is a moment when the subject, in her escape from the time and history of the symbolic order, “becomes a pure object” (Evans 141). This is where the subject’s rupture from the symbolic order, her dissolution from time and space, creates new affective temporalities. What had been a set of timelines in Freud’s case study are laid out spatially in Lacan’s reading, and yet that tableau plays out as an introjection of “moments” in the *passage à l’acte*. It is a social version of the mirror stage and partakes of its uncanny *kairos* through its framing apparatuses. In Lacan’s reading of the “Case of Female Homosexuality,” the young woman’s *passage à l’acte* and its resonances becomes an emphasis on time and frames: a consideration of the affective movement of the attempted suicide through fantasy. The act of jumping, of pulling oneself from space and time, is the crux of Lacan’s analysis the case. He certainly does not belabour the framing of this moment or indicate its significance. Rather, he requires us to extrapolate from his earlier examples in the seminar—the mirror stage, the Wolf Man, Isabella, and the stage curtains—to fill in what’s missing, in fact what’s needed, in Freud’s analysis. Reading the woman’s suicide attempt through its framing mechanisms opens a temporal direction of the analysis, illustrating the ways in which the woman’s public staging of

herself—a version of Isabella’s “I am always in view”—becomes expressed through anxiety.

Lacan is pulling the subject from *chronos* into *kairos* and opening a potential site of interactions between the body and the temporality of anxiety through the frame he places around the apparatus. In this sense, the young woman’s experience is a reenactment of the mirror stage, and indicates the negation of subjectivity at the heart of the mirror stage. Anxiety, Lacan shows, mobilizes the body through “a spatial capture” (*Seminar X* 77), typical of the mirror stage, that enables a reframing of temporality. Since anxiety is an affect with a unique framing mechanism, the frame ensures that the subject sustains itself not through acts of illusory spatial consolidation (as in the traditional understanding of the mirror stage) but rather, temporally, “as lost” (153). When we consider the frame that surrounds and makes possible the mirror stage as a parergon, both inside and outside of the scene it encloses, we alter the spatiality of subjectivity. The body can jubilantly, if anxiously, assume its *kairos* as a mode of resisting the symbolic order even as it begins its career as a signifier.

The *kairos* of the mirror stage: subjective time

The frame, as we have seen, lends support for the fantasy in the face of the *objet petit a* and the anxiety it occasions, creating a subjective time of moments that resists the interpellative pull of symbolic clock time. Given the function of this frame discussed in *Seminar X*, Lacan aspires to challenge any history rooted in “the objectivity of science” (86). He prefers “our science,” meaning the science of psychoanalysis, for its ability to grasp the significance of moments as they interfere with attempts at standardizing time (86). As close encounters with the *objet petit a* give rise to anxiety, anxiety develops its own form of *kairos*, which, in finding itself framed, asserts itself independently of clock time. As Lacan explains, “the time that’s involved, at the level at which it is irrealized in a fourth dimension, has got nothing to do with the time that, in intuition, seems very much to present itself as a kind of insurmountable clash with the real” (87). We are caught, then, between a time in conflict with the real and a time that has been “irrealized.” Within and against *chronos*, anxiety appears as “this cut” in the signifier—“its furrow in the real”—that works through moments, rather than sequences, as it presses against and pulls upon the subject by the force-relations of the encounter (76). To understand such a cut, we must learn to see time as a subjective phenomenon rather than one that is measurable in any standardized way. The mirror stage, in this context,

becomes Lacan's myth of how the time of subjectivity comes to assert itself in the face of, and ultimately underneath, symbolic systems.

By "subjective" we mean not merely phenomena perceived by the subject but also phenomena that constitute that perceiving subject. It is a matter of affect, in the sense of its participation in the integral "affectual composition" of a singular body (Seigworth and Gregg 3). Lacan's work in *Seminar X* shows how this second aspect of subjectivity has its own temporality. We believe that this is, or should be, a significant aspect of any psychoanalytic theory of time. Recent Lacanian work on the temporality of psychoanalysis, such as Todd McGowan's work on cinema or Adrian Johnston's analysis of the splitting of the drive in *Time Driven*, tend to emphasize a deeply inhuman drive that pulls the subject out of their own experience and into involuntary forms of repetition. Further, Lee Edelman, despite being an avowed enemy of the future, has praised Lacan for developing a "point of view of the Last Judgment" in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. In his commentary on that seminar, Edelman admires how Lacan adopts

a perspective within which the temporal chain is imagined from the vantage point of its impossible totalization. Such a vision involves the spatialization of time through imaginary closure; it coordinates local occurrences into the unity of an all-encompassing sequence as seen from an atemporal position offering a glimpse of what would otherwise exceed our apprehension. (35)

In Edelman's reading, Lacan valuably allows discrete moments to be assembled at the level of fantasy into sequences, a process that enables us to perceive things from a space beyond our own subjectivity.

We are suggesting, however, that Lacan's work three years later in *Seminar X* reverses many of these gestures or effectively undoes them. Instead, Lacan emphasizes the subjective register of temporal experience. Time becomes subjective because the *objet petit a* is always a ferociously subjective remainder—an excessive byproduct that cannot become part of any unity and that one has always already lost. Its return as anxiety ensures the incoherence of any sequence. Given his new emphasis on this lost object, Lacan's return to the mirror stage represents a radical and unexpected extension of his earlier work establishing the temporality of the drive, to the extent that *Seminar X* might even be said to mark a break with his general thinking. If, then, for Edelman, it is the subject's subjection to the drive that ensures that "the future ... exists only insofar as it is foreseen"

(35), Lacan's work in *Seminar X* suggests that any posited future must confront the remnants of this process, its waste products. That confrontation with the inevitable effects of temporal discontinuity is called anxiety. To think about the disjuncture of time in anxiety is to take seriously the "impossible" aspect of what Edelman sees as "impossible totalization" and accept that the imaginary can never be convincingly sutured.

The subject's history is not what connects them to their present moment or to history writ large; rather, to be present in the here and now requires the occasional confrontation with moments of pastness and futurity that become the basis for any "here" and "now." As Lacan explains, "the problem is one of the signifier's entry into the real and of seeing how the subject is born from this" (*Seminar X* 87). Through this anxious temporality, explains Lacan, we learn to "presentify ourselves to one another, our body" (88). This word "presentify," often associated in Lacanian parlance with anxiety and the mirror stage, has sometimes been glossed as to help the subject pose as a unified body to the other (Ragland 57) or to "make present or actual" (Rose 15). Yet we propose that there is also a temporal dimension to the term—it does those things *in the present* by creating *the present* via a form of retroaction that works through "moments" to fashion the time of its existence. It is an affectual composition, in the sense that time, understood as a symbolic matrix used for making sense of moments, does not precede the formation of the subject. Time is not an "independent variable" separate from "space" or "body" (*Seminar X* 87); rather, time is the subjectivization of space as body. Anxiety produces this body: it is "precisely what allows this signifier to be incarnated" as subject (88). This is why the mirror stage is crucial to this process; it is a theoretical model that, in showing how the subject comes to experience a body as its "own," becomes exposed to, on the one hand, symbolic systems like chronology but, on the other hand, the anxiety that marks the return of the enjoyment sacrificed in the process. The anxiety that the subject feels "in the experience in the mirror" marks a confrontation with uncanny moments that will disturb any attempt to narrativize the subject historically (88). Hence, for Lacan, to theorize anxiety is to theorize the subject and, ultimately, the relation between psyche and the body.

In *Seminar X*, Lacan argues that the body exists in time (in addition to space) because it has emerged, through the anxiety occasioned by the uncanniness of the mirror stage, into subjective "moments" not readily adapted to chronology. That is to say that the *objet petit a*—that glimmer of excessive enjoyment or positivized lack—comes to intervene between the subject and the symbolic demands (such as time) that are placed upon

That
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that subject. Lacan does some subtle but important work in making this formulation. Let us note that what is being produced in this account of the mirror stage is the *objet petit a* rather than the split subject; horrifyingly, it is almost as if the subject were the waste product of the *objet petit a* and not vice versa. The subject “yields” as soon as the object-cause of desire appears (*Seminar X* 312). This is because the subject only emerges through the cut of the signifier, which is what situates the subject in time. Yet that emergence can only happen once the nascent subject has passed through the gauntlet of these anxious “moments” related to its desire, which is what gives this process its relation to *kairos*. Anxiety thus becomes a warning, a signal, of desire: “a demand that doesn’t pertain to any need, which pertains to nothing other than my very Being” (152). In this way, an epistemological problem (the unfortunate separation of space from time) becomes solved ontologically, and it is the task of anxiety to alert us to that. This process, which creates the subject through introjection, paradoxically destroys the subject in the process: “[I]t doesn’t address me as someone here in the present, it addresses me, if you like, ... as lost. It solicits my loss, so that the Other can find itself there again. That’s what anxiety is” (153). This is how the subject becomes “presentified” in their lack.

In an explanation that can be difficult to parse syntactically, Lacan explains that, “Worrying about ... what appears to all of us by way of time, which is held to be something self-evident, can only be translated into the symbolic by an independent variable is simply to commit an error of categorization at the start” (*Seminar X* 87). Lacan points out that it is erroneous to worry that something “independent” gives the subject into the symbolic as time is not something “self-evident” and external to the subject—rather, it is something built into the subject through anxiety. “The same difficulty arises ... with the body,” he suggests, drawing an analogy between bodies and temporality (87). If the body is an illusion produced retroactively through the mirror stage, so too is time. Time is not simply an aspect of the symbolic order into which the subject is delivered through the mirror stage; *chronos* is how the body externalizes the “moments” that make it anxious. Thus, the subject, to become subject to time, must become alien to their own body and accept a fragment of anachronic “ex-sistence” as the cause of their desire.⁹

Hence, in this analysis, anxiety (as affect) helps to produce the subject who can then be subjected to the demands of chronology; yet anxiety (as

⁹ Lacan uses the neologism “ex-sistence” to posit that, because the subject is decentred by the unconscious, not all of what must “be” will register in the symbolic order (see *Écrits* 11; *Seminar XX* 42–43). Lacan confronts the temporal aspects

affect) interrupts the process that it seems to make possible, as it leverages moments that can never be adapted to clock time. Lacan stresses that “this temporal dimension is anxiety and this temporal dimension is the dimension of analysis” (*Seminar X* 153). Psychoanalysis is poised to grasp the time of anxiety because it refuses to connect causes to effects, instead rethinking subjectivity through an abiding commitment to the cause of desire *qua* cut. As Lacan would later explain, the analyst’s discourse addresses the subject as the *objet petit a* itself, producing from its hystericizing of the subject’s discourse a signifying chain that can be referred to the Other (*Seminar XVII* 29, 33). By embodying the cut in the subject’s freely associative speech, the analyst represents time, for the “presentified” subject, through concurrent moments rather than a linear *before* or *after*. Because analysis reveals symptoms, inhibitions, and anxieties to be also “moments”—moments pertaining to one’s experience of the body (that is, the imaginary phallus, the anus, the mouth, the eye)—it renders the affective experience of one’s own body a temporal experience in the mode of *kairos*.

Colette Soler has argued that “anguish [or anxiety] always arises in a structure of temporal discontinuity, ... [and] stops the clock” (27–28).¹⁰ To understand the *kairos* of psychoanalysis, Lacan seems to be suggesting in *Seminar X*, one must re-theorize the subject through the moments of anxiety that upend the comforting illusions of the mirror stage, such as the illusions of similarity and mutual exchange between the subject and the ideal image, and thus any sense of a coherent body or chronology. For Lacan, affect is the measure of a body’s perpetual becoming; anxiety compromises the spatiality of the subject and its preparedness for clock time, even though it operates through a series of discrete developmental phases. The consequences of this re-theorizing of subject through temporalities tied to anxiety are felt when we attempt to situate the subject in time.

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of “ex-sistence” most fully in his unpublished *Seminar XXVI: Topology and Time*, from 1978 to 1979.

10 Soler is responding to Lacan’s concept of anxiety here; her translator Bruce Fink elects to translate Lacan’s and Soler’s *Langoisse* as “anguish,” whereas A.R. Price, the translator of *Seminar X* into English, renders *Langoisse* as “anxiety.”

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