Zeno's paradoxes of motion, reported by Aristotle in the *Physics*, are generally viewed through the optic of Plato's *Parmenides*, in which Zeno is explicitly identified as a follower of Parmenides, and his paradoxes of multiplicity taken as so many arguments for the One and against the many.¹ But ever since the paradoxes were considered by Aristotle to be definitively refuted by his counterarguments to spurious understandings of the internal structure of motion, they have continued to exert upon philosophers a certain fascination.² What is curious is that whether they approach the paradoxes in the manner of Russell with a view, following Aristotle, to solve them, or in that of Žižek with a view, following Plato, to bring to display their intrinsic

¹ Plato, *Parmenides* 127e-128c.
² Joe Sachs, in his translation of and commentary on the *Physics*, provides this designation of Book VI, where Aristotle deals with the question of the continuity of motion and such attendant issues as the infinite divisibility of time and spatial magnitude. Subsequent references to Aristotle's *Physics* will be to Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
intelligibility and, therefore, their necessary insolubility, in trying their own hand at dealing with them, they make known a lot more about themselves than about the paradoxes themselves. With this in mind, I will take Bertrand Russell’s and Slavoj Žižek’s contrastive approaches to Zeno’s paradoxes into account, to illustrate what might be broadly termed the analytic and psychoanalytic approaches to the question of time – which is all well since, underpinning Russell’s and Žižek’s radically divergent approaches to the paradoxes of motion, are ideas they separately hold concerning temporality that invite reflection on the relation between philosophy and psychoanalysis. Now since an analytics of Russell’s and Žižek’s readings of the paradoxes necessarily assumes Aristotle’s construal of and responses to the paradoxes, it is to them that we first turn.

³The paradoxes are generally called “the dichotomy” or “bisection” (Russell refers to it as “the race course”), “the Achilles”, “the arrow”, and “the stadium.” The first is the paradox of the impossibility of traversing a certain distance because to do so requires the traversal of an infinite series of halfway points. The second, a variation of the first, is that of the impossibility of Achilles catching up with the tortoise, which had started to move first, since Achilles would first have to reach the starting-point of the tortoise, which has always already departed from it. The third consists of the paradox that if a flying arrow, at any moment in its flight, is at rest where it is, then motion is impossible — a flying arrow is standing still. The fourth paradox begins with three equal, stationary rows of bodies of equal magnitude in a stadium. Two of the rows (rows B and C) move at the same speed but in opposite directions; the third row (row A) remains stationary. Once the two moving rows have passed each other, the first body in row C will have passed the entire row B but only half of row A, hence the conclusion, “half the time is equal to its own double” (240a2) given that “the time for each to pass each body is equal.” (420a13)

The fourth paradox is the most difficult to grasp, not because it presents the most inextricable difficulty, but because it appears to be the least paradoxical. Since the time it takes to pass a moving and a stationary object is not the same, the premise that “the time for each to pass each body is equal” is obviously false. One only gleans the paradox through Aristotle’s refutation of it, and presented in this way (i.e., in the context of Aristotle’s solution to the paradox), whatever force the paradox might originally have had is lost and the paradox seems nothing more than an uninteresting failure on Zeno’s part to take the difference in the velocity of objects into account.

Although Russell gives the stadium a reasonably substantial treatment, Žižek’s treatment of it, in comparison to his reading of the other three paradoxes, seems rather forced and unsatisfactory. Because of the difficulty of reconstructing the stadium paradox, I shall limit my discussion to the first three paradoxes.
Aristotle on the Paradoxes: The Mutually Determining Relation Between Time and Space

In Physics VI, Aristotle, speaking of infinity in the context of the internal structure of motion, first mentions Zeno’s dichotomy paradox and proceeds to refute it. His refutation basically consists in (i) asserting the unity and mutual interdependence of the continuity and infinity of time and spatial magnitude, and (ii) clarifying Zeno’s equivocal use of infinity by distinguishing two senses or directions of infinity, namely, infinity of extension and infinity of divisibility, such that an infinitely divisible magnitude, traversable in a likewise infinitely divisible time, can nevertheless be traversed — since it is a finite (a definite) magnitude — in a finite time:

If time is continuous, so also is magnitude, so long as a half is gone through in half the time, or simply less in less time; for there will be the same divisions of the time and of the magnitude. And if one of the two is infinite, so too is the other, and in the way the one is, so too is the other, as, if the time is infinite at its ends, the length is too at its ends, but if the time is infinite by division, the length is too by division, or if the time is infinite in both ways, the magnitude is too in both ways.

And for this reason, Zeno’s argument is false, since it assumes the impossibility of going through what is infinite or of touching each of infinitely many things in a finite time. For length and time, and generally every continuous thing, are called infinite in two ways, either by way of division or at the ends. Things infinite by reason of amount, then, do not admit of being touched in a finite time, but those infinite by way of division do admit of it, since time itself is also infinite in that way. So it turns out that a thing goes through the infinite in an infinite, and not in a finite, time, and touches infinitely many things in infinitely many times, and not in a limited number.⁴

As arguments in support of the Parmenedian One and against multiplicity and motion, Zeno’s paradoxes may be seen as exercises designed to shake the apparently indubitable certainty not just of common opinion (doxa), but of common experience. The paradoxes are meant to transform experience to the status of mere opinion, by

⁴Aristotle, Physics 233a15-33.
presenting thought with an impasse, an insoluble enigma.

What could be more contrary to experience than to judge motion to be impossible? From what standpoint does one make this judgment? In what epistemic “region” do these paradoxes operate? They operate neither in a purely empirical nor a purely logical realm. To experience the vertigo of the paradoxical, say, in the dichotomy paradox, one imagines oneself traversing half the distance, and then half the remaining distance, and so on and so forth, never reaching one’s destination. It is not merely imagination at work, however, the way it is at play in memory, for instance. Rather, structuring the imaginative work is the logical demand that the halfway point be traversed before one reaches the terminus.

What this mental exercise effects — thus producing the paradoxical effect — is the wrenching apart, the drifting of time and space from their mutual determination. In a way, this is not a precise way of putting it. It is not that space and time are considered separately, but that their unity is configured differently. In the dichotomy paradox, time “follows” the infinite succession of divisions of magnitude — the progression of divisions “lengthens” the time of traversal of the spatial magnitude that remains the same. What in “real time” would be infinitely fast, immeasurable time, becomes — as one imagines the infinite succession of divisions — infinitely slow. We then end up with “two times,” corresponding to Aristotle’s distinction between the two senses of infinity — that of extension (or infinity by addition) and divisibility. The same operation produces the paradoxical effect in the Achilles.

5] A. Faris notes significant differences between Zeno’s paradoxes of motion and of plurality, one of which is that while the paradoxes of motion “are concerned with particular things or persons: an object in motion, a faster and a slower runner, a flying arrow, objects in a stadium,” the paradoxes of plurality are by contrast “about unexemplified abstractions.” J.A. Faris, The Paradoxes of Zeno (Aldershot, England and Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury, 1996), pp. 118-119.

6] Of the former, Aristotle denies that there is an actually infinite magnitude. However, he does affirm infinite divisibility, but only as a potential rather than an actual infinite: “Now being is said of what is potentially or of what is in complete activity, and there is an infinite by addition or by division. And that there is no magnitude actually infinite has been said, but there is magnitude that is infinite by division; for it is not difficult to refute indivisible lines. What is left, then, is that the infinite is as potentiality.” (Phys., 206a14-19)
In the *arrow*, the disturbance of the mutual determination of time and space is effected by a "fusion" (or confusion) of time and space. The flying arrow is "perceived" to stand still because, as Aristotle argues, being at specific points in space in the course of a continuous motion is confused with *being at rest* which, properly speaking, consists in a *persistence through time* in a specific position. In other words, one imaginatively arrests the motion of the arrow by abstracting persistence from the temporal flow and conceiving of it purely spatially. Another way of expressing this is that the third paradox gives the *now*, the instant, a spatial dimension, or more precisely, the atemporality (temporally represented as persistence) of a spatial magnitude, instead of conceiving of the instant as a pure limit demarcating temporal magnitudes within the temporal flow.

In reconfiguring the relation between space and time, Zeno's paradoxes exploit, and in the process bring to light, the mutually constituting difference between time and space — the spacing of time, the temporalization of space. Aristotle's response to the paradoxes is to reinstate the consistency of the realm of experience, the unity and mutual determination of time and space embodied in motion,\(^7\) by displacing the disruption introduced by the paradoxes into this mutually constituting difference, into the difference between the two directions of infinity ("either by way of division or at the ends"\(^8\)) — either from the perspective of the *bounded* and infinitely divisible magnitude, or from the perspective of the *limit*. What first appears as a distinction between two kinds of infinite turns out to be a variation of the opposition between the infinite and the finite. Aristotle's solution to the paradoxes of motion is to delineate the boundary between the perspectives of the finite and the infinite and to make sure that one does not equivocate and surreptitiously cross over from one perspective to the other. Aristotle insists that — to avoid the indigestion that results from the effort to unravel Zeno's paradoxes\(^9\) — one should consider motion and the time and (spatial) magnitude in which it occurs, from within one and only one perspective at a time (that of the finite, or

\(^7\)Note that for Aristotle, there is no absolute (i.e., empty) space and time. Space is derivative of bodies and time is dependent upon motion, which in turn, presupposes bodies with spatial magnitude.


infinite):

Things infinite by reason of amount, then, do not admit of being touched in a finite time, but those infinite by way of division do admit of it, since time itself is also infinite in that way. So it turns out that a thing goes through the infinite in an infinite time, and not in a finite time, and touches infinitely many things in infinitely many times, and not in a limited number.

And so it is not possible either to go through the infinite in a finite time or through the finite in an infinite time, but if the time is infinite, the magnitude will be infinite too, and if the magnitude also the time.\(^{10}\)

This delineation of the two perspectives is but a form of the fundamental Pythagorean opposition between the principles of the limit and the unlimited. Aristotle uses this opposition to articulate (i) the relation between time (which, being continuous, is infinitely divisible — the unlimited) and the now (the limit that marks off what has passed and what is yet to come), and (ii) the relation between a continuous spatial magnitude and the limits that mark off a finite distance (the starting and end points of a specific motion).

Aristotle defines the continuous as “those things of which the extremities are one.”\(^{11}\) To say that the ultimate elements of the continuous are indivisible would be to say that these elements are without parts. But if, for the whole to be continuous, the extremities of parts have to be one, then for there to be a continuity between them, the indivisible parts would have to coincide totally, “touch[ing] whole to whole.”\(^{12}\) In this case, the continuous collapses into an indivisible whole without parts. Continuity therefore requires both the infinite and the finite, both infinite divisibility into parts and the indivisibility of the limit.

For time to be continuous, it would have to be infinitely divisible—that is to say, time would have to be divisible into infinitely divisible

\(^{10}\)Aristotle, Phys. 233a28-233b2, italics mine.
\(^{11}\)Aristotle, Phys. 231a21.
\(^{12}\)Aristotle, Phys. 231b4.
segments of time and not into indivisible instants. Since for two (temporal) segments to be continuous, the final boundary of one and the beginning of the other should be one (and not merely contiguous),
the now, the shared boundary of continuous segments, has to be indivisible. For if the now were to have parts, if it were to possess a magnitude, then there would be a certain period intervening between the two segments, which would then no longer be continuous. If it is indivisible, it is only because the now is that which divides time into past and future. As such, it has no magnitude; it is not a part of time. Rather, the now is the limit that makes the demarcation of finite temporal magnitudes possible. For if, like time (which is necessarily “extended”), it were infinitely divisible, there would be no past or future, everything would “contract” to the now, or, alternatively, the now would engulf all times. Or if time were to be constituted by a series of nows, time would have to be conceived as discontinuous. There would be no “moving” beyond the now, and motion, as Zeno’s third paradox suggests, would be stalled in immobility. According to Aristotle, Zeno’s mistake in regard to the third paradox consists in that he “takes time to be composed of nows…”
In a way, Zeno is right — if time were composed of nows, “the flying arrow stands still.” No motion is possible in the now, for the now would in a sense be every time (we are always in the now) and therefore no particular time — a temporal “nowhere.” Paradoxically, then, for Aristotle, for time to flow, the now must not exist.

Russell: the Unimportance of Time

If one were to dwell upon the paradoxical nature of the disappearance of the now, one would find oneself at the doorstep of Kant’s first two antinomies, compelled to confront the suspicion that Aristotle’s solution to the paradoxes of motion might very well be merely displaced by the problem of reconciling the contradictory and yet mutually inextricable demands of the finite and the infinite. Rather than taking the vacillation between the perspectives of the

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13Aristotle, Phys. 231a20ff.
14Aristotle, Phys. 239b33.
15Aristotle, Phys. 239b32.
finite and the infinite (both in the large, as in the first antinomy on
the infinity or boundedness of space and time, and in the small, as
in the second antinomy on the infinite divisibility of composites or
the ultimate simplicity of their parts) as the harmonizing of opposed
but complementary principles, Kant takes this vacillation as indicating
reason's unavoidable conflict with itself. Kant's appropriation of the
paradoxes consists in showing that what constitutes the paradoxes
of motion is the impossibility of answering the question whether the
universe is finite or infinite in a non-contradictory way.

In Our Knowledge of the External World, Russell approaches Zeno's
paradoxes through the lens of Kant's first two antinomies which,
on Russell's interpretation, uses the notion of infinity to "discredit
the world of sense." Russell argues that since neither side of both
antinomies is empirically verifiable, to dissolve the antinomies and
hence, to "rescue the world of sense, it is enough to destroy the proof
of one of the two" sides of each antinomy. Dealing with the first
antinomy regarding the boundedness or infinity of time and space,
Russell addresses only the part of the antinomy about time, claiming
that the part about space relies on that about time. Although Russell's
criticisms of the antinomy are multiple, the two crucial and related
aspects of his response to the antinomy that I wish to attend to are the
following: Russell (i) disengages the conception of infinity from the
process of "successive synthesis," which is essentially temporal, and (ii)
proposes an alternative conception of infinity in terms of classes:

To begin with, it is a mistake to define the infinity of a series as
'impossibility of completion by successive synthesis.' The notion of
infinity, as we shall see in the next lecture, is primarily a property
of classes, and only derivatively applicable to series; classes which
are infinite are given all at once by the defining property of their

16Bertrand Russell, Our Knowledge of the External World (Chicago: Open Court
17Ibid., p. 160.
18Kant explicitly states, however, that the significance of the antinomies for the
critique of pure reason consists precisely in the fact that reason is not able to dissolve
them simply by disproving or proving only one side of it. Any victory that one side
might gain is merely temporary — until reason turns to the arguments for the other
side, at which point, the other side gains, for the moment, the upper hand. Immanuel
Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A422-3/B450-1.
members, so that there is no question of ‘completion’ or of ‘successive synthesis.’ And the word ‘synthesis,’ by suggesting the mental activity of synthesizing, introduces, more or less, surreptitiously, that reference to mind by which all Kant’s philosophy was infected.\textsuperscript{19}

It is not only the infinite that Russell rids of the antinomical by abstracting its conception from synthesis, thus conceiving of it atemporally; continuity, which is the subject of the second antinomy, is conceptualized by Russell in a similar way. To the question why it is that Kant refuses to admit that space could be made up, not of spaces, but of points, “if the antithesis could only be avoided by assuming points,”\textsuperscript{20} Russell suggests the following explanation:

But there is also another ground for his opinion, which is more relevant to our present topic. This is the ground derived from infinite divisibility. A space may be halved, and then halved again, and so on \textit{ad infinitum}, and at every stage of the process the parts are still spaces, not points. In order to reach points by such a method, it would be necessary to come to the end of an unending process, which is impossible. But just as an infinite class can be given all at once by its defining concept, though it cannot be reached by successive enumeration, so an infinite set of points can be given all at once as making up a line or area or volume, though they can never be reached by the process of successive division.\textsuperscript{21}

It is essentially by appealing to the notions of the \textit{infinite class} and the \textit{compact series}\textsuperscript{22} developed by modern mathematics that Russell proposes to solve Zeno’s paradoxes. Russell conceptualizes continuity by appealing to the mathematical notion of the compact series in which

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Our Knowledge of the External World}, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{22}Russell notes that although mathematicians would reserve the technical sense of \textit{continuous} to high degrees of continuity, \textit{compactness}, which designates the lowest degree of continuity, suffices for articulating a philosophical conception of continuity. Russell, p. 138.

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“no two terms are consecutive, but between any two there are others.”

Just as the “defining property” of members infinite in number allows
the conceptualization of an infinite class without resorting to the
enumeration of its members, in the case of the continuous, the limit
which makes it possible to think of the infinite points as being “given
all at once” is the definite “line or area or volume” encompassing “an
infinite set of points” which “can never be reached by the process of
successive division.”

Russell’s distinction between the infinity of elements encompassed
and therefore given all at once by a determinate definition or
some spatial or temporal magnitude and the infinity of successive
enumeration seems very close to Aristotle’s own distinction between
the infinity by division — which is intensively infinite, but finite at the
ends — and infinity by addition (or enumeration). There is a radical
difference, however, between Aristotle’s articulation of continuity
in terms of infinite divisibility and Russell’s account of continuity as
compactness. The emphasis of Aristotle (as well as of the antithesis
of Kant’s second antinomy), who insists that points are not, strictly
speaking, parts of lines, is upon the idea that between any two points
marking off a certain magnitude, there is always a magnitude that can
be further divided. Russell, on the other hand, seeking to reconcile the
existence of points as ultimate elements of a line with the infinity of
points constituting a finite magnitude (and thus dissolve the second
antinomy), focuses on the points rather than on the magnitude between
points. For Russell, “segments” between any two points is conceived of
not as divisible magnitudes (which are irreducible to indivisible points)
but as a compact series of points — a series of points none of which are
next to each other.

Russell interprets Zeno’s paradoxes not only as generally making
the Parmenidean claim “that plurality is a delusion” but specifically
as a “polemic... directed against the view that space and time consists
of points and instants” and as an argument for the view “that spaces
and times are really indivisible.” If one presupposes that space and

23Ibid.
24Ibid., p. 163.
25One cannot help but wonder whether this conception of continuity — in terms
elements which are constantly drifting, so to speak, pushed apart by intervening
elements — is any less paradoxical than the paradoxes it is aimed at solving.
time consist of points and instants and combines this presupposition with the infinite divisibility of finite magnitudes, Russell takes Zeno's arguments to be "perfectly valid." Russell outlines three possible solutions to the paradoxes of motion which taken as a polemic against the conception of time and space as composed of points and instances:

We may therefore escape from his paradoxes either by maintaining that, though space and time do consist of points and instants, the number of them in any finite interval is infinite; or by denying that space and time consist of points and instants at all; or lastly, by denying the reality of space and time altogether. Against the second alternative, associated by Russell with Bergson's phenomenological view of motion as an indivisible continuity, Russell asserts the divisibility of motion into a compact series of instantaneous states. Although he is able to refute the Bergsonian objection to what Bergson calls the "cinematographic representation of reality" (the reduction of continuity to points and instances) on physiological and psychological grounds, showing that the Bergsonian position is inconsistent with experience, the Parmenidean solution to the paradoxes (the third alternative) can only be rejected if one is also able to provide a positive logical conception of the continuity of an infinite series of points and instances.

On Russell's reading, the fact that "we cannot deny that there are fractions" should be sufficient to dispense with the second and third alternatives. However, since the first alternative has been deemed contradictory, Zeno is left with one of two remaining possibilities and chooses the Parmenidean position "denying the reality of space and time altogether." What prevents Zeno from taking the first solution is the failure to articulate an intelligible conception of infinity — a failure which, for Russell, has been overcome by modern mathematics.

27Ibid.
28Ibid., p. 183.
30Our Knowledge of the External World, 179.
31Ibid., p. 145.
32Ibid., p. 184.
33Ibid., p. 183.
Russell argues that the first way out of the paradoxes is opened up by the admission of infinite numbers:

But, as we saw, the difficulties can also be met if infinite numbers are admissible. And on grounds which are independent of space and time, infinite numbers, and series in which no two terms are consecutive, must in any case be admitted. Consider, for example, all the fractions less than 1, arranged in order of magnitude. Between any two of them, there are others, for example, the arithmetical mean of the two. Thus no two fractions are consecutive, and the total number of them is infinite. It will be found that much of what Zeno says as regards the series of points on a line can be equally well applied to the series of fractions. And we cannot deny that there are fractions, so that two of the above ways of escape are closed to us.\textsuperscript{34}

By appealing to the conception of the infinite class, i.e., a \textit{whole set} with \textit{infinite} members, say, the set of “all the fractions less than 1,” and by articulating the relation of the “first infinite number” to the series of finite numbers, Russell—in reference to the first two paradoxes, the \textit{dichotomy} and the \textit{Achilles}—is making it possible to affirm both an infinite series of intermediate points (halfway points, in the case of the \textit{dichotomy}) and a point \textit{beyond} the infinite series, in effect making it possible for the runner to reach his destination:

If it is assumed that the first infinite number is reached by a succession of small steps, it is easy to show that it is self-contradictory. The first infinite number is, in fact, beyond the whole unending series of finite numbers. ‘But,’ it will be said, ‘there cannot be anything beyond the whole of an unending series.’ This, we may point out, is the very principle upon which Zeno relies in the arguments of the racecourse and the Achilles. Take the race-course: there is the moment when the runner still has half his distance to run, then the moment when he still has a quarter, then

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 184.
when he still has an eighth, and so on in a strictly unending series. Beyond the whole of this series is the moment when he reaches the goal. Thus there certainly can be something beyond the whole of an unending series.\(^{35}\)

In distinguishing the two orders from each other, the totality of an unending series and the order beyond this unending series, Russell is arguing that it is possible to conceive of an unending series \textit{as a whole}, in effect disengaging the “existence of a collection, or even \textit{the} knowledge and reasoning concerning it”\(^{36}\) from the enumeration of its members — or in Kantian terms, from the “successive synthesis.”\(^{37}\)

If we were to contrast Russell’s conceptualization of infinity and continuity with Aristotle’s treatment of these in the course of refuting the paradoxes of motion, we could say that whereas Aristotle dispels the paradoxical effect by restoring the mutual determination of time and space, Russell’s response to the paradoxes is to abstract the conceptualization of the infinity and continuity of both temporal and spatial magnitudes from the temporal synthesis of the temporal and spatial manifold. In other words, Russell’s response to the paradoxes of motion is to conceptualize motion as an atemporal series — or, more precisely, \textit{set} — of compactly ordered states (rendered either as instants or points).

When Russell accuses Kant of “infecting” his philosophy with subjectivism — “that reference to mind”\(^ {38} \) — by including the successive synthesis of a series in his conception of infinity, he is in effect, opposing Kant’s view of the necessity of schematization in conceptualization. (If we were to insist, however, following Kant, that even such an atemporal conceptualization of the continuity of motion — as a compact set of infinite members — were not exempt from

\(^{35}\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 186.\)

\(^{36}\textit{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 187.\)

\(^{37}\textit{It may be argued, in defense of Kant, that although Russell may be correct in saying that “an infinite class — [in this case, the infinite points in a line] — can be given all at once by its defining concept, though it cannot be reached by successive enumeration” (Russell,163), it is not clear that the very \textit{infinity} of the points can be conceived apart from the synthesis of successive divisions, a synthesis which at some point one certainly decides to suspend and extrapolate to infinity, but one which one nevertheless has to undergo.}\)

\(^{38}\textit{Our Knowledge of the External World}, \ p. \ 161.\)
some form of schematization, we would have to characterize Russell’s representation of infinity and continuity as being primarily spatial.\textsuperscript{39)} However, to say that Russell rejects the necessity of schematization in the conception of objects of thought is not to say that imagination — in which Kant locates the process of schematization — has no place in Russell’s conception of cognition and, in particular, of philosophical (that is to say, logical) thinking. For Russell, imagination may act as barriers or aids to philosophical advancements: certain habits of the imagination can hinder the solution of philosophical problems; and the emancipation of one’s abstract imagination from the constraints of habitual ways of thinking may provide new possibilities for illuminating a problem. Russell repeatedly urges his readers to take note of their resistance to a logical solution to a problem due simply to the fact that their habit of thought prevents them from imagining an alternative solution. For instance, when presenting the mathematical theory of continuity and defending it against Bergsonian objections, Russell speaks of the difficulty in accepting the theory based not on logical grounds but to a “feeling...which suggests that points and instants...can only give a jerky motion, a succession of different immobilities, not the smooth transitions with which the senses have made us familiar.”\textsuperscript{40}

In the following passage, Russell contrasts “modern logic” with the logic of the “classical tradition” on the question of the relation between logical reasoning and hypotheses which are plausible on empirical grounds — on the question, in other words, of the relation between logical possibility and empirical reality:

Modern logic... has the effect of enlarging our abstract imagination, and providing an infinite number of possible

\textsuperscript{39}It is interesting to note that Quine, another philosopher from the analytic tradition, makes a similar move of representing time spatially in order to deal with the difficulties posed by Zeno’s paradoxes: “Zeno’s paradoxes, if they can be made initially puzzling, become less so when time is looked upon as space-like. Typical ones consist essentially in dividing a finite distance into infinitely many parts and arguing that infinite time must be consumed in traversing them all. Seeing time in the image of space helps us appreciate that infinitely many periods of time can just as well add up to a finite period as can a finite distance be divided into infinitely many components of distances.” Willard Van Orman Quine, \textit{Word and Object} (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), p. 172.

\textsuperscript{40}Our Knowledge of the External World, p. 136.
hypotheses to be applied in the analysis of any complex fact. In this respect it is the exact opposite of the logic practiced by the classical tradition. In that logic, hypotheses which seem *prima facie* possible are professedly proved impossible, and it is decreed in advance that reality must have a certain special character. In modern logic, on the contrary, while the *prima facie* hypotheses as a rule remain admissible, others, which only logic would have suggested, are added to our stock, and are very often found to be indispensable if a right analysis of the facts is to be obtained. The old logic put thought in fetters, while the new logic gives it wings.⁴¹

For Russell, it is precisely in giving thought its wings that the new logic allows thought to keep its feet on the ground of experience, giving thought the means with which to battle what Russell calls the mystical temptation to discredit the world of sense in favor of the Parmenidean One.

Even if Russell acknowledges the psychological necessity of habituating oneself in a certain way of thinking, of "enlarging" one's "abstract imagination" as demanded by a certain logical theory, the realm of affectivity — of familiarity, of "intimacy",⁴² of feeling and desire — remains extrinsic to the properly logical domain. It is only as an auxiliary requirement to the properly philosophical activity of logical analysis that Russell recognizes an affective aspect of thought and the importance of addressing this affective aspect of philosophical thinking.

Desires and aversions may affect or even determine what one finds to be a tenable solution to a philosophical problem. But desire itself does not — or shall we say *ought* not — infect the content of the philosophical problem in consideration. Because desire is associated with the sense of time, it is not surprising to find — even as Russell encourages us to enlarge our abstract imagination and to habituate us to a certain way of thinking about space and time — that he should propose to conceptualize these in a detemporalized way. The

⁴¹Ibid., p. 68.
⁴²Ibid., p. 136.
schematization that Russell urges us to adopt regarding temporal and spatial continuity and infinity, is one that suspends temporal, if not spatial, schematization.

The seeming paradox of rendering the reality of time — of "vindicating physics and the world of sense" against the Parmenidean verdict of the unreality of the world of multiplicity and change — by banishing time from one’s thinking, is justified by Russell by appealing to the distinction between the practical and theoretical perspectives:

The contention that time is unreal and that the world of sense is illusory must, I think, be regarded as based upon fallacious reasoning. Nevertheless, there is some sense — easier to feel than to state — in which time is an unimportant and superficial characteristic of reality. Past and future must be acknowledged to be as real as the present, and a certain emancipation from slavery to time is essential to philosophic thought. The importance of time is rather practical than theoretical, rather in relation to our desires than in relation to truth. A truer image of the world, I think, is obtained by picturing things as entering into the stream of time from an eternal world outside, than from a view which regards time as the devouring tyrant of all that is. Both in thought and in feeling, to realize the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom. But unimportance is not unreality; and therefore what we shall have to say about Zeno’s arguments in support of Parmenides must be mainly critical.⁴⁴

The importance of time derives from the practical standpoint; from the theoretical perspective, time, though unimportant, is nevertheless, real. Though time is a real object of thought, it is methodologically unimportant. One could thus attain a “truer image of the world... by picturing things as entering into... time from an eternal world outside.” Russell would, therefore, rescue the reality of the temporal world by a method that would suspend time. What determines the

⁴³Ibid., p. 162.
⁴⁴Ibid., p. 171.
methodological irrelevance of time is the more fundamental distinction between the theoretical and the practical and the designation of the former as what properly constitutes the philosophical. As we now turn to Žižek for a psychoanalytic response to Zeno’s paradoxes, we shall see that what is at stake in the contrast between Russell’s analytic and Žižek’s psychoanalytic approaches to the paradoxes of motion is precisely the question of philosophy’s relation to the practical, to the domain of desire.

*Time’s Double Register: From the Time of Motion to the Time of Desire*

In *Physics* IV, 11, Aristotle defines time as the “number of motion fitting along the before-and-after.” To speak of time as the measure of motion is to give time a derivative status. It is not to be thought of, as Russell puts it, as a “stream” into which things “enter” from an “eternal world outside.” But time has a derivative status not only in relation to motion but also in relation to consciousness, in particular, to an awareness of change:

> [W]henever we ourselves are not changing at all in our thinking, or are unaware of our changing, it does not seem to us that time has happened, as when those people wake up who are said in stories in Sardinia to sleep among the heroes. For they join together the earlier now and the later now and make them one, taking out the in-between on account of being unconscious. Then just as if the now were not other, but were one and the same, there would be no time, so also when we are unaware of its being other, there does not seem to be an in-between time. But if not supposing time to be happens to us sometimes, whenever we do not mark off any change but the soul seems to remain in a state that is one and indivisible, while whenever we do perceive and mark it off, we then say that time has happened, it is clear that without motion and change, time is not.  


Although in this passage, Aristotle certainly places the accent on motion and change rather than on the awareness of motion and change as that which is necessary for time to be, the reference to the possibility of being unaware of the passage of time due to some lapse in one's awareness of change nevertheless complicates the relation between time and motion by introducing the element of subjectivity in the account of time. The subjective aspect of time's relation to motion is underscored by Aristotle's statement that the awareness of motion constitutive of the awareness of time need not even be of an external but may well be of an internal change in the soul:

For we perceive time together with motion, and even if it were dark and we experienced nothing through the body, but a certain motion were present in the soul, immediately, a certain time would seem to happen along with it.\textsuperscript{47}

The ambiguity regarding whether it is motion or the awareness of motion that constitutes time (or perhaps merely the awareness of time) brings to light two intertwined differential relations of time with regard to space: On one hand, in relation to the physical world, time has a mutually determining relation with space, a relation that is embodied in motion traversing space within some temporal interval. On the other hand, time has a differing relation with space insofar as time is experienced as internal (and thus associated with the subjective) and space as external (and associated with the objective).\textsuperscript{48} It is insofar as time is associated with subjectivity that it is located within the practical register, the domain of desire. There is an interesting passage in Aristotle's \textit{De Anima} III, 10, in the chapter where Aristotle elaborates on desire as a cause of motion. It is a parenthetical remark in which Aristotle says that reason and desire can only come into conflict in living beings with a sense of time:

Now since desires may arise which are contrary to each other, and this takes place whenever reason and desire are

\textsuperscript{47}Aristotle, \textit{Phys.} 219a3-6.

\textsuperscript{48}To turn, once more, to Kant, as \textit{a priori} forms of intuition, space functions as the form of outer sense and time, of inner sense.
contrary to each other and arise [in animals which] have a sense of time (for the intellect bids us to resist for the sake of the future but desire [bids us to pursue] for the sake of the present, and what is pleasurable now may appear to be pleasurable without qualification and good without qualification because one may not look to the future), there can be [only] one mover in kind, the appetitive [part] qua appetitive, while the first mover in all cases is the object of desire (for this causes motion by being thought or imagined and is not in motion), but numerically [there can be] many movers. 49

What makes this passage immensely interesting is the way in which it makes us ask what this “sense of time” consists in and what the relation is between this sense of time and desire. To speak to the second question first, Aristotle says that conflicts of desire presupposes the possession of a sense of time. Presumably, what Aristotle means here by a sense of time is an awareness of temporal succession, in particular, an awareness of the difference between present and future, an awareness that is presupposed by the conflict between reason and desire, each of which is governed by a different temporal modality. Reason “resists” desire “for the sake of the future,” whereas desire seeks its immediate gratification. Whereas desire is blind to future consequences of giving in to itself, reason anticipates future regrets (possibly heralded by past failures) should it be overpowered by desire, and envisions for itself—bolstering its claims against desire—a deferred, but not foregone, gratification.

Turning now to the first question, one can see that articulated in terms of conflict and resistance, the “sense of time” implicated in the conflict of desires cannot be conceived simply as a succession of “nows” or simply in terms of duration and change. The future for the sake of which reason resists desire does not flow from the present in which desire gives in to itself. Rather, structured around conflicting desires, the present and future are caught in an agonistic relation.

Desire creates a fissure in the temporal flow.

Might we not suggest, then, that rather than the conflicting desires presupposing a "sense of time" construed in terms of succession and duration, that it is precisely the conflict of desires — or, as Aristotle insists, the conflict between reason and desire — that constitutes the "sense of time"? This alternative construal of this passage from *De Anima* suggests that the differing of past and present and future is opened up by the gap between desire and its gratification.\(^{50}\) In this suggestive, albeit brief, passage from *De Anima*, literally Aristotle's psychological work, time is approached in the practical rather than the theoretical register. It is in this register, in relation to desire rather than to the physics of motion, that Žižek, following Lacan, deals with the question of time in his reading of the paradoxes of motion.

**Žižek: the Paradoxes as the Staging of Desire**

In reading Zeno's paradoxes from the point of view of desire, Žižek, following Lacan, looks at the paradoxes anamorphically, looking at them "awry," as Žižek would put it, rather than directly, from a metaphysical standpoint. The shift from the direct to the anamorphic perspective involves more than the shift from the theoretical to the practical register, from the register of objective thought to subjective desire; rather, it consists in shifting from a perspective that views desire as extrinsic to knowledge and reality to one that is able to see the phantasmatic nature not just of reality but of desire. According to the direct perspective, one has to be objective in order to see something as it really is and avoid distortions owing to one's subjective desires. For Žižek, however, the distorting effect of the anamorphic perspective aims precisely at what the objective gaze excludes, allowing one to see what would otherwise be invisible from the direct standpoint. By looking awry, one gains access to the objet petit a — that is to say, one is able to see the nothing, the surplus object, which is the object cause

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\(^{50}\) In Freudian terms, we might think of this gap between desire and its gratification as the tension between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. In a later section of this paper, this suggestion regarding the relation of the conflict between the demands of pleasure and of reality to the constitution of time will be pursued, but in a slightly different way, namely, in terms of the origination of time in the alternation between the phantasmatic internal realm and the external realm of reality.
of desire.

To view Zeno’s paradoxes of motion directly would be to read the paradoxes as “exemplary cases of pure, hollow, artificial logomachy, contrived logical trifling attempting to prove an obvious absurdity, something that goes against our most elementary experience.” 51 In other words, in regarding them literally, one treats the paradoxes — whether one takes them seriously or not — as essentially meaning nothing in so far as “our most elementary experience” is concerned. To look at them awry, on the other hand, would be to regard them as stagings of the nature of desire.

Žižek’s approach to Zeno’s paradoxes is radically different from Aristotle’s or Russell’s in that it consists in affirming the insolubility of the paradoxes rather than in finding a way out of the logical impasses that they present. Rather than refuting the paradoxes, Žižek discloses their intrinsic intelligibility by locating them within their proper topology — namely, the libidinal rather than the physical or metaphysical and theoretical. Žižek identifies the “domain in which Zeno’s paradoxes are fully valid” as “the domain of the subject’s impossible relation to the object-cause of its desire, the domain of the drive that circulates endlessly around it.” 52 At first glance, it seems that in delineating this domain in which the paradoxes make perfect sense, so to speak, Žižek, like Russell, is maintaining the boundary between the domain of desire and the domain of metaphysics, in which Zeno (and the philosophical tradition) situates the paradoxes. However, by saying that the paradoxes that purport to be about motion and questions about the infinity and continuity of space and time are really about the subject’s impossible relation to desire, Žižek is putting into question the very capacity of philosophy to recognize the relation of its own knowledge with its desire. Žižek’s reading of the paradoxes interrogates the supposedly firm delineation between knowledge and desire, between the theoretical and the practical. To say that the libidinal economy is the proper topos of Zeno’s paradoxes is not simply to say that the paradoxes are made intelligible by being located in the libidinal economy; more importantly, it is to say that it is desire that


52 Ibid., p. 6.
generates the paradoxes of motion. The point is not only that in the realm of desire, objects are unattainable; rather, it is desire itself that renders objects unattainable.

Žižek’s anamorphic reading of the paradoxes begins by taking recourse in the mediation of Milner’s interpretation\textsuperscript{53} of the paradoxes, according to which, the paradoxes “originally referred to literary commonplaces.”\textsuperscript{54} Žižek in turn identifies these literary references with typical dream experiences. In Žižek’s reading of the Achilles, instead of taking it at face value as a paradox of motion, Žižek casts a sideways glance at the paradox from the perspective of its allusion to a scene in the Iliad, a scene which he takes to be a variation of the familiar “dream paradox of a continuous approach to an object that nevertheless preserves a constant distance”:

[I]ts original literary reference is the following lines from the Iliad: ‘As in a dream, the pursuer never succeeds in catching up with the fugitive whom he is after, and the fugitive likewise cannot ever clearly escape his pursuer; so Achilles that day did not succeed in attaining Hector, and Hector was not able to escape him definitely.’ What we have here is thus the relation of the subject to the object experienced by every one of us in a dream: the subject, faster than the object, gets closer and closer to it and yet can never attain it—the dream paradox of a continuous approach to an object that nevertheless preserves a constant distance. The crucial feature of this inaccessibility of the object was nicely indicated by Lacan when he stressed that the point is not that Achilles could not overtake Hector (or

\textsuperscript{53}Žižek cites the following text: Jean-Claude Milner, Détections fictives (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1985), pp. 45-71.
\textsuperscript{54}Looking Awry, p. 3.
the tortoise) — since he is faster than Hector, he can easily leave him behind — but rather that he cannot attain him: Hector is too fast or too slow.... The libidinal economy of the case of Achilles and the tortoise is here made clear: the paradox stages the relation of the subject to the object-cause of its desire, which can never be attained. The object-cause is always missed; all we can do is encircle it. In short, the topology of this paradox of Zeno is the paradoxical topology of the object of desire that eludes our grasp no matter what we do to attain it.  

In the case of the arrow, Milner identifies “a scene from the Odyssey... in which Heracles is continually shooting arrows from his bows” as the relevant literary allusion being made in the paradox. In this scene, Heracles “completes the act again and again, but...the arrow remains motionless.” Žižek furthers Milner’s analysis by referring this scene back to the “well-known dream experience of ‘moving immobility’” wherein “in spite of all our frenetic activity, we are stuck in the same place.”

Because in the Odyssey, as Milner points out, this scene occurs in “the infernal world in which Odysseus encounters a series of suffering figures — among them Tantalus and Sisyphus — condemned to repeat the same act indefinitely;” Žižek, following Milner, takes the reference to Heracles’s motionless arrows to be making a further allusion to Sisyphus’s absurd task of continually pushing a stone to the top of a hill where it begins to roll down again. Milner argues that it is Sisyphus’

56Looking Awry, p. 4.
57Ibid., p. 5.
58Ibid.
uncompletable task that serves as the "literary model" for Zeno’s dichotomy paradox: "we never can cover a given distance X, because, to do so, we must first cover half this distance, and to cover half, we must cover a quarter of it, and so on, ad infinitum." In this reading of the paradoxes, the arrow and the dichotomy (and we might add, the Achilles, which is very similar to the dichotomy) are merely two sides of the same paradox: what on the side of the object is represented as the constantly retreating goal is on the side of the subject represented as the moving immobility of the constant, useless pursuit of the object of desire. For Žižek, these paradoxes stage "the Lacanian distinction between [the drive's] aim and its goal:

The goal is the final destination, while the aim is what we intend to do, i.e., the way itself. Lacan's point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit. Therein consists the paradox of Sisyphus: once he reaches his goal, he experiences the fact that the real aim of his activity is the way itself, the alternation of ascent and descent.

But how do the paradoxes stage desire's relation to the objet a? In Žižek's reading, how is the paradoxical effect produced? It may be the case that to one familiar with Zeno's literary allusions, these allusions prevent the outright dismissal of the paradoxes as mere sophisms. However, in order for an allusion to gain its significance as an allusion,

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59Ibid.

60Žižek reads the fourth paradox, the stadium, in terms of the embodiment of the object of surplus enjoyment: "Where do we encounter the same paradoxical experience of an increase in the libidinal impact of an object whenever attempts are made to diminish and destroy it? Consider the way the figure of the Jews functioned in Nazi discourse: the more they were exterminated, eliminated, the fewer their numbers, the more dangerous their remainder became, as if their threat grew in proportion to their diminution in reality. This is again an exemplary case of the subject's relation to the horrifying object that embodies its surplus enjoyment: the more we fight against it, the more its power over us grows." Looking Awry, p. 6.

61Ibid., p. 5.
it is not sufficient for it to be recognized. An allusion has to be "read back" into the text, woven into the present context for it to function as an allusion. It is from this standpoint between the direct perspective of the literal meaning and the sideways look (which superstition tells us is the way to see ghosts) at the mythical and phantasmatic subtexts that the paradoxes are to be read. The vertiginous effect of paradox is produced when the realm of the dream and myth — representatives of the hidden logic of desire — is fused with the realm of physical motion. To be caught up by the paradoxes, one would have to take the indeterminate position between the dream world and physical reality and somehow consent to view reality — the reality of multiplicity and motion, the world of time and space — as if it were a dream. But to consent thus is already in a way to concede — or at least begin to concede — the Parmenidean conclusion that life is indeed just a dream. (We might say that on this reading, the force of Zeno’s paradoxes consists precisely in the fact that as soon as one is caught in the dreamlike world of the paradoxes, one has already unwittingly confirmed the conclusion the paradoxes are designed to prove.)

The philosophical tradition reads this "life is but a dream" as a metaphysical judgment about the impossibility of the many and as an ontological affirmation of the One. One may, however, look at this very same statement awry from the psychoanalytic standpoint and read it as saying that life is indeed a dream, but one from which one cannot wake up, because the dreaming is life itself. Rather than affirming a non-phantasmatic realm — the realm of the One — by denying the reality of the phenomenal world, psychoanalysis makes of the dream the unrecognized support, the "fantasy framework," of our waking life:

[I]t is only in the dream that we come close to the real awakening—that is, to the Real of our desire. When Lacan says that the last support of what we call ‘reality’ is a fantasy, this is definitely not to be understood in the sense of ‘life is just a dream’, ‘what we call reality is just an illusion,’ and so forth...

The Lacanian thesis, on the contrary, that there is always a hard kernel, a leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring. The difference between Lacan and ‘naïve realism’ is that for
Lacan, the only point at which we approach this hard kernel of the Real is indeed the dream. When we awaken into reality after a dream, we usually say to ourselves, 'it was just a dream,' thereby blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, wakening reality we are nothing but a consciousness of this dream. It is only in the dream that we approached the fantasy framework which determines our activity, our mode of acting in reality itself.\textsuperscript{62}

In Žižek's reading, the relation between the philosophical paradox and the literary allusion, between text and subtext, undergoes a reversal: the subtext takes over the interpretation of the paradox, such that the explicitly metaphysical level, the paradox at first glance, serves only as a screen for the real paradox about desire, the way the manifest content of a dream serves as a screen for the latent dream thought.

There is a further sense in which Žižek's reading of Zeno's paradox parallels the structure of dream-analysis: just as dream interpretation concerns itself not only with the latent dream-thought disguised by the manifest content but, more importantly, with the \textit{dream-work} which is revealed by the very distortion undergone by the latent dream-thought as it is reworked into the manifest dream, so Žižek's reading of Zeno's paradoxes does not stop at uncovering the hidden paradox within the manifest paradox, but concerns itself with uncovering the impulse to mask this latent paradox with the manifest one.

\textit{The Paradoxes as Symptoms: the Psychoanalyst's Critique of Philosophy}

At this deeper level of Žižek's analysis of the paradoxes, the level of the unmasking of the operation that masks the paradox of desire with the paradox of motion, we find Žižek's reading of Zeno's paradoxes passing on to a critique of philosophy. Žižek reads the paradoxes of Zeno as being produced — in the manner of a symptom — by the rejection of the realm of the subject's impossible relation to its desire. In other words, what supports the paradoxes of motion, opening up

and sustaining their enigma, is not so much the paradox of desire hidden beneath its surface as the very rejection — or more precisely, the encryption — of the paradox of desire. For Žižek, the rejection of the *objet petit a*, the object-cause of the endlessly circulating drive, is constitutive not only of the paradoxes in question, but of philosophy itself, which the paradoxes serve to support:

[T]here is a certain domain in which Zeno's paradoxes are fully valid: the domain of the subject's impossible relation to the object-cause of its desire, the domain of the drive that circulates endlessly around it. This is, however, the very domain Zeno is obliged to exclude as 'impossible' in order that the reign of the philosophical One can establish itself. That is, the exclusion of the real of the drive and the object around which it circulates is constitutive of philosophy as such, which is why Zeno's paradoxes, by means of which he tries to prove the impossibility and consequently the non-existence of movement and multitude, are the reverse of the assertion of One, the immovable Being, in Parmenides, the first proper philosopher. Perhaps we can now understand what Lacan meant when he said that the object small *a* is 'what philosophical reflection lacks in order to locate itself, i.e., to ascertain its nullity.'

For Žižek, proving "the impossibility and consequently the non-existence of movement and multitude" is but a screen for the core philosophic impulse to exclude "the real of the drive and the object around which it circulates" for the sake of founding the "reign of the philosophical One." Philosophy's goal of unifying the field of intelligibility and of grounding the totality of being absolutely comes at the price not, as Zeno seems to have construed it, of forsaking what it "knows" empirically (consigning it to the sphere of mere semblance) in order to attain "true being" and "true knowledge," but rather, at the price of failing to recognize the lack — the *objet petit a* — that founds its own desire for the One.

This Lacanian critique of philosophy consists in something subtler

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63*Looking Awry*, p. 6.

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than the charge that philosophy excludes desire from reason — it would take no more than an appeal to the Platonic Eros to refute this claim. It consists, rather, in the charge that philosophy excludes “the category of the impossible”64 from the domain of desire, and specifically, from its understanding of its own desire, and that furthermore, this misrecognition, the exclusion of the objet petit a, is constitutive of philosophy as such. In saying that “the object small a is ‘what philosophical reflection lacks in order to locate itself, i.e., to ascertain its nullity,” Lacan is saying that the philosopher’s desire for Truth is intrinsically a desire for the impossible, that the very impossibility of this desire propels the desire for it, and that it is the very desire for Truth that institutes this impossibility. In other words, the philosopher would not desire the Truth if it were not impossible and the Truth would not be impossible if the philosopher were not to desire it. For psychoanalysis, there is no Truth without desire. The philosopher, in a way, knows this. The philosopher knows himself to be not the possessor but the lover of truth. The philosopher recognizes himself in the desire for truth. The psychoanalyst, however, reads this desire as a lure that philosophy sets for itself, a lure that weaves a field of intelligibility organized around a kernel of non-meaning — the real, the accident of being that resists symbolization.

In accepting the insolubility of the paradoxes — not just as paradoxes of motion, but specifically as paradoxes of desire — Žižek may be said to be subjecting the paradoxes to an operation of containment. The philosopher, having subjected his dream — i.e., the paradoxes of his own impossible desire for Truth — to analysis, may still be unable to solve the paradoxes, but now, through the intervention of the psychoanalyst, he at least knows that these are insoluble. Moreover, though this may offer him little consolation, he now knows that he himself is the cause — and cannot help but be — of his own discontent.

To persist in solving the paradox, say, as Russell does, is akin to an analysand desiring to be definitively done with his symptoms and thus to attain happiness. Whereas to accept Žižek’s solution is like traversing the fantasy of a final cure — the fantasy of the fulfillment of

one’s desire — and accepting the ineluctability of the impossibility of one’s desire.

In other words, in subjecting Zeno’s paradoxes to the method of dream interpretation, that is, in treating philosophy’s paradoxes as symptoms, as wayward effects of an absence of meaning, that have to be seen obliquely as masking as well as revealing their own cause, rather than as conundrums to be confronted directly, Zeno is in effect supplanting metaphysics with psychoanalysis. One could say that in confronting the truth of its desire rather than suspending or misrecognizing it in order to persist in its — to use Nietzsche’s term, will to truth — metaphysics becomes psychoanalysis. Lacan explicitly acknowledges the psychoanalyst’s assumption of what traditionally is the philosopher’s function in *Encore* (*Seminar XX*), in the session entitled “Knowledge and Truth”:

> Indeed, the analyst, of all [those whose] orders of discourse are sustained currently...is the one who, by putting object *a* in the place of semblance, is in the best position to do what should rightfully (*juste*) be done, namely, to investigate the status of truth as knowledge.65

In introducing *objet a* into the question of knowledge, Lacan is reconstituting the relation between the subject and the object, between the knower and the known, inserting in this relation the impossibility of attainment, not by setting the object at an infinite distance from the subject, but rather, by subverting the very status of the subject as possessor of knowledge:

> ‘What is it that knows?’ Do we realize that it is the Other? — such as I posited it at the outset, as a locus in which the signifier is posited....The status of knowledge implies as such that there already is knowledge, that it is in the Other, and that it is to be acquired (*à prendre*). That is why it is related to learning.66

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In relation to the *Other*, the subject is but a "signifier...posited" within the field of signification — a subject of speech, a speaking subject. Lacan's subject is not wholly reducible to subject-positions; at the core of the speaking subject is the failure of the subject to signify itself. In the following passage, Žižek articulates the Lacanian conception of the subject in relation to "the failure of its representation:"\(^67\)

Our predominant idea of the subject is, in Lacanian terms, that of the 'subject of the signified', the active agent, the bearer of some signification who is trying to express itself in language. Lacan's starting point is, of course, that symbolic representation always distorts the subject, that it is always a displacement, a failure — that the subject cannot find a signifier which would be 'his own', that he is always saying too little or too much: in short, *something other* than what he wanted or intended to say.

The usual conclusion from this would be that the subject is some kind of interior richness of meaning which always exceeds is symbolic articulation....The Lacanian thesis is the opposite: the surplus of signification masks a fundamental lack. The subject of the signifier is precisely this lack, this impossibility of finding a signifier which would be 'its own': *the failure of its representation is its positive condition*. The subject tries to articulate itself in a signifying representation; the representation fails; instead of richness we have a lack, and this void opened by the failure is the subject of the signifier. To put it paradoxically: the subject of the signifier is a retroactive effect of the failure of its own representation; that is why the failure of representation is the only way to represent it adequately.\(^68\)

Organized around a negative kernel, a lack, the subject is constituted as a split subject, and as such, is constituted as a desiring subject — a being which allows itself to be captured by the lure of the desire for wholeness. Seduced by and seducing the other of its desire, the subject

\(^{67}\)Sublime Object, p. 175.  
\(^{68}\)Ibid.
sends oneself to the other, so to speak, even as it seeks oneself in the other, never gaining oneself in the other, never gaining the other of its desire. In desire, Lacan says, “The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see.” 69 In this way, Lacan is “putting object a in the place of semblance.” In the notion of the split subject, Lacan is reinterpreting philosophy's fundamental question, the question of being and appearance by locating the question of semblance and of truth within the register of desire.

In Seminar XI, Lacan distinguishes his conception of the split within semblance as constituted by desire from the gap between representation and the thing represented as posited by reflexive consciousness:

What is at issue here is not the philosophical problem of representation. From that point of view, when I am presented with a representation, I assure myself that I know quite a lot about it, I assure myself as a consciousness that knows that it is only representation, and that there is, beyond, the thing, the thing itself. Behind the phenomenon, there is the noumenon, for example....

In my opinion, it is not in this dialectic between the surface and that which is beyond that things are suspended. For my part, I set out from the fact that there is something that establishes a fracture, a bi-partition, a splitting of the being to which the being accommodates itself, even in the natural world.70

Lacan is right to dissociate the fissure in the subject organized around the objet petit a from the Kantian problem of representation. Nevertheless, Lacan perhaps too hastily dismisses the homology between the Kantian gap between phenomenon and noumenon and the “fracture,” the “bi-partition,” the “splitting,” which in Lacan’s account is the “positive condition” of subjectivity.

One may be tempted to interpret the Kantian “phenomenon” as relating to the noumenon as a representation, in the manner of a reproduction, of an original thing — a thing which however

70Ibid., p. 106.
inaccessible, one may be assured is there. However, one only has to
attend to the step beyond the phenomenon toward the thing-in-itself
in order to detect the affinity between Lacan (and Freud) and Kant.
In seeking the condition of possibility of the understanding, Kant is
addressing the question of the ground of representationality itself and
finds himself at its very limit — that is to say, at the point where the
idea of a ground of representation, the “original” from which is derived
the representation, is both necessary and impossible. That the origin
is both essential to and precluded from representation is expressed in
the ambiguity, which Kant expressly acknowledges, in what we call the
real, in what we consider “outside us”:

Every outer perception therefore immediately proves
something real in space, or rather is itself the real; to
that extent, empirical realism is beyond doubt, i.e., to
our outer intuitions there corresponds something real in
space. Of course space itself with all its appearances, as
representations, is only in me; but in this space the real, or
the material of all objects of outer intuition is nevertheless
really given, independently of all invention; and it is also
impossible that in this space anything outside us (in the
transcendental sense) should be given, since space itself is
nothing apart from our sensibility. Thus the strictest idealist
cannot demand that one prove that the object outside us (in
the strict sense) corresponds to our perception. For if there
were such a thing, then it still could not be represented and
intuited outside us, because this would presuppose space;
and reality in space, as mere representation, is nothing
other than perception itself. The real in outer appearance
is thus actual in perception, and cannot be actual in any
other way.\(^{71}\)

Just as, for Lacan, the split in the subject is located in “the failure
of its representation,” so for Kant, the gap between phenomenon and
noumenon — the gap that renders the “real in outer appearance”
(what is “outside us”) real only as representations, as only in us and not

\(^{71}\)Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A375-376.
given as outside us in the transcendental sense—may be understood as articulating the very limit of the concept of representation. Kant's transcendental idealism is an attempt to resolve the ineliminable ambiguity in the status of representations: on one hand, the very concept of representation contains the difference between it and the represented (what is "outside us"), but on the other hand, in being irreducibly "in us," the object of representation recedes, not for being beyond the representation, but precisely insofar as it is "too close," so to speak, too much "in us" that one finds nothing beyond it. This sliding between the "in us" and "outside us" not only makes reality ambiguous; it also marks an irreducible rupture in the subject that the reflexivity of consciousness cannot suture. If anything, it is reflection that exacerbates the fissure — the more consciousness reflects upon itself, the more ambiguous its so-called grasp of reality appears. Subject to the same problem of representation as external reality, the transcendental reality of the I eludes the grasp of consciousness, leaving consciousness to synthesize and represent to itself only the phenomenal I.

A fundamental difference between the Kantian gap between the phenomenal field and its (negative) transcendental support and the psychoanalytic fissure in the desiring subject is that whereas the former is generated by a theoretical demand of reason to search for the conditions of possibility of the understanding, psychoanalysis locates the fissure in the desiring subject concretely in the experience of the gap — the paradigmatic unbridgeable gap — between waking and sleeping. Psychoanalysis begins at the edge of consciousness — on the precarious ground of the memory of the dream.

"Putting object a in the place of semblance" — in other words, supplanting philosophy with psychoanalysis in questioning the status of knowledge — involves radicalizing the critique of representation by seriously taking the literally phantasmatic nature of representations into account, that is to say, by asking what dreams have to do with our representation and knowledge of the real, rather than excluding and opposing the dream (what is paradigmatically "in us") from the real (what despite its ambiguity is conceived as "outside us"). To put "object a in the place of semblance" is thus, in a way, to extend the scope of the Critique of Pure Reason to the realm of the unconscious, disturbing, in the process, the strict delineation of the boundary separating the domain of pure and practical reason, of knowledge and of desire. Looking awry
at the phenomenon/noumenon distinction, the distinction between the dream which is life and the real that resists symbolization, one might say that what Lacan calls the Kantian problem of representation prefigures the psychoanalytic problem of the interpretation of dreams. Whereas Kantian philosophy arrives at the elusiveness of the subject through the failure of reflexive consciousness to grasp itself without mediation, psychoanalysis comes upon the split subject at the point where one asks oneself these primal questions—Where am I when I sleep? Who am I who dreams? Who am I in the dream?

It can perhaps be said that the split subject is an inheritance of psychoanalysis from philosophy. Might we not say that psychoanalysis is what we reach once the philosopher’s commitment to intelligibility and the search for its ground is radicalized by seeking the ground of knowledge in the unconscious? Might we not suggest that philosophy becomes psychoanalysis once the unconscious becomes subject to reason’s demand for unification? a unification that can only be attempted from the theorizing position of the analyst — from the position, in other words, of the psychoanalytic philosopher?

The Discontinuity of Perception and the Paradoxical Temporality of Desire

To say that the psychoanalyst takes up the philosopher’s theorizing position is not to say, however, that the Lacanian psychoanalyst is reducible to the figure of the philosopher, the lover of wisdom. The analyst distinguishes himself from the philosopher by suspending the teleology of its desire. In place of the Platonic eros that seeks being beyond semblance, the Lacanian desire grounds meaning in the retroactive constitution of meaning. For Lacan, Žižek explains, “the effect of meaning is always produced backwards, après coup”72:

This therefore is the fundamental Lacanian thesis concerning the relation between signifier and signified: instead of the linear, immanent, necessary progression according to which meaning unfolds itself from an initial kernel, we have a radically contingent process of retroactive

production of meaning.\textsuperscript{73}

This is to say that the time of meaning, the retroactive constitution of a symbolic order around the \textit{tuchic}, the inassimilable chance encounter with the real, is essentially paradoxical — it is a time that runs backwards, or more precisely, it is a time in which the past — and its return in its effects — is constituted retroactively, from the future. This paradoxical time is modeled upon the temporality of the symptom and the return of the repressed:

The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is therefore, paradoxically: From the future. Symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but construed retroactively — the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning.\textsuperscript{74}

Thus, contrary to Russell, for whom the "importance of time is rather practical than theoretical, rather in relation to our desires than in relation to truth," for Lacanian psychoanalysis, truth not only cannot be posited apart from considerations of temporality, but moreover, cannot be posited apart from this paradoxical time. The time of the retroactive constitution of meaning that is organized around the Real (which may be "located" only negatively as "a traumatic place which causes a series of failures\textsuperscript{75}"), the time circulating around the very "impossibility of its [the Real's] inscription" within the symbolic order,\textsuperscript{76} is the time of desire which circulates endlessly around an absence, a fault in the subject, the \textit{objet petit a}.

Žižek's Lacanian reading of the paradoxes thematizes the time of desire as the time of the missed encounter. The \textit{Achilles} which, for Žižek, serves as a central metaphor for the Lacanian category of the impossible, is the paradigmatic paradox of the missed encounter:

\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 55-56.
\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Ibid.}
In the Lacanian perspective, the object as real is then, in the final analysis, just a certain limit: we can overtake it, leave it behind us, but we cannot reach it. That is the Lacanian reading of the classic paradox of Achilles and the tortoise: Achilles can of course overtake her, but he cannot reach her, catch up with her. It is like the old Brechtian paradox of happiness from the Threepenny Opera: you must not run too desperately for happiness, because if you do you might overtake it and happiness will always remain behind you... That is the Lacanian Real: a certain limit which is always missed—we always come too early or too late.\textsuperscript{77}

The time of the missed encounter is structured not along the lines of progression of a series of instants but by repetition. The image that governs it is not primarily that of traversal from here to there, not the passing from before to after or the passing away of time to an irretrievable past and the arrival of what is not yet, but that of oscillation, of repetition and return, of alternation between contact with presence and its interruption.

In “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad,’”\textsuperscript{78} where Freud seeks a solution to the puzzle of reconciling in one mental apparatus the contradictory demands of memory and perception,\textsuperscript{79} Freud speculates about the origin of time in this manner. He suggests that the concept of time originates in the alternation between the outside and the inside, between the reception of stimuli by the mental apparatus and its withdrawal from them:

So long as that system [Pcpt.-Cs.] is cathexed in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied

\textsuperscript{77}Sublime Object, p. 173.


\textsuperscript{79}In order to fulfill the function of retention of impressions, memory requires an apparatus that would resist modification by further excitations. Perception, on the other hand, requires an apparatus that would constantly be receptive to new excitations — a blank slate that may be continually written on, on the condition, of course that it always stays blank.
by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemonic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill. It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers, through the medium of the system Pcpt.-Cs., towards the external world and hastily withdraws them as soon as they have sampled the excitations coming from it. Thus the interruptions, which in the case of the Mystic Pad have an external origin, were attributed by my hypothesis to the discontinuity in the current of innervation; and the actual breaking of contact which occurs in the Mystic Pad was replaced in my theory by the periodic non-excitability of the perceptual system. I further had a suspicion that this discontinuous method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs. lies at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time.  

In this speculation offered by Freud about the origin of time, the alternation between perception and non-excitability is governed by the logic of homeostasis, of regulating the level of excitations experienced by the mental apparatus. Time in this account is governed by the pleasure principle. However, the Lacanian time of desire, the time of the missed encounter, cannot be conceived under the rule of the pleasure principle. Thought in terms of homeostasis, we might even say patterned after the circadian rhythm, the departure and return of day and night, the oscillation between inner and outer does not yet constitute the time of desire. What constitutes the time of the missed encounter is the oscillation between lack and excess, between the two impossibles — the impossible as unrealizable and the impossible because real.  

It is beyond the pleasure principle, in desire’s approach to the real in which desire finds its limit that we are able to articulate the time of desire.

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80 General Psychological Theory, p. 212. Italics mine.

81 The real is impossible in the sense that it is not possible. And it is thus not only in the logical or semantic sense of the im-possible negating the possible, but in the sense that the reality misses possibility — what exists either exceeds or falls short of the possible, evoking either horror or disappointment, but never the satisfaction of an expectation.
In order to appreciate the truly radical significance of Freud's speculation about the origin of time, it has to be situated not within the bounds of the pleasure principle but beyond it. To do so, one has to attend to the discontinuity of the "method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs." to which Freud attributes the origin of the conception of time. When time is viewed in Aristotelian fashion in terms of motion and change, the continuity of both the spatial medium and of time itself is presupposed, as well as the unity of the substance that underlies the change. However, viewing time from the perspective of discontinuity may well yield time in a different aspect.

For Russell, whose attention is fixed upon the object of consciousness and whose concern lies in bridging the gap between the world of physics and the world of sense, the discontinuity of perception indicates a limit to the scope of what is empirically known. The continuity of change — and of space and time in which change happens — is for Russell an assumption rather than a part of experience. Nevertheless, Russell concedes that in view of the fact that "the assumption of continuity is... successfully made in physics," the intermediate states in a series of perceived aspects of a changing thing must be included in the logical definition of a thing even if such states are unobserved.\(^{82}\) Similarly, in proposing a logically constructed account of time based on what is empirically given, namely, sets of events ordered according to simultaneity and succession,\(^{83}\) Russell admits compactness into his definition of time despite the fact that the compactness of the time-series is not given to perception, though he does so only hypothetically:

\[\text{...the series of instants will be compact if, given any two events of which one wholly precedes the other, there are events wholly after the one and simultaneous with something wholly before the other. Whether this is the case or not, is an empirical question; but if it is not, there is no reason to expect the time-series to be compact.}^{84}\]

In granting continuity a merely hypothetical status, Russell is

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\(^{82}\) *Our Knowledge of the External World*, pp. 114-115.


recognizing the limit imposed by the discontinuity of perception upon empirical givenness; nevertheless, by admitting the usefulness of such a hypothesis and, on that basis, providing a logical—if hypothetical — support for the possibility of continuity, Russell is preserving a conception of time within a perspective that privileges continuity (unobserved this may be) over the discontinuity of perception.

For Russell, the discontinuity of perception denotes an absence of perception. As such, it limits the knower's access to an empirically verifiable feature of time; it is not, however, as Freud suggests rather cryptically, productive of the concept of time. The psychoanalyst, on the other hand, sees in the interruption of perception not merely the absence of contact with the external world, but the alternation between the conscious perceptual system and the unconscious mnemonic system (one could say by way of simplification, between the waking and dreaming states). Thus, for the psychoanalyst, the discontinuity of perception signals a fissure in the subject, a fundamental disunity that cannot be bridged and overcome by the reflexivity of consciousness. In falling asleep and awakening, one has the recurring experience of slipping through one's own fingers, of not attaining oneself. One experiences this sense of the unattainability of the self, the sense of being lost to oneself, not only in losing oneself to the unconscious when one sleeps and dreams, but also — and perhaps more acutely — in seeking to gain a foothold in the unconscious by grasping at its traces: dreams and parapraxes, the impediments, as Lacan would say, upon which consciousness stumbles. Because the interpretation of dreams has as its material only traces reconstructed always already from the side of wakefulness, these traces preserve their impenetrability, a kernel that does not yield itself to being uncovered, such that any "discovery" that one might make in interpreting these traces is only a rediscovery of a mark left upon these traces by one's own interpretation. In the end, the only guarantee that consciousness has indeed come upon — although not attained — the unconscious is the fact that it stumbles, that it fails, that it is interrupted by something other from which it is unable to recover itself:

Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious.
There, something other demands to be realized—which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as the discovery....

Now, as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing a dimension of loss.

To resort to a metaphor, drawn from mythology, we have, in Eurydice twice lost, the most potent image we can find of the relation between Orpheus the analyst and the unconscious.\(^{85}\)

Lacan's metaphor of Orpheus losing Eurydice twice to the netherworld may be broadened to characterize not only the relation of the analyst to the unconscious but also the relation of consciousness to the unconscious in general. It is only in the sphere of oscillation between the radically discontinuous realms of consciousness and the unconscious that one can begin to make sense of the paradoxical intelligibility of retroactive constitution, according to which what is discovered is always only rediscovered, and furthermore, always already fading. Because the periodic interruption of perception signifies not merely the lapping of consciousness to the preconscious, but a radical fissure between consciousness and the unconscious, the time that originates from this periodic interruption cannot be interpreted—as Freud suggests in "The Mystic Writing-Pad"—from the perspective of homeostasis of need and satisfaction, but from the perspective of transgression, of going beyond the limit of the pleasure principle and of straining towards the impossible. From the perspective of discontinuity and transgression, we come to see the elusiveness of the *now* as signifying the impossibility of attaining the object of one's desire, the "dimension of loss"—an irre recuperable loss—around which desire endlessly circulates. In other words, the elusive *now* functions as the stumbling block to a homeostatic conception of temporality. As soon as one attempts to make of the *now* an *always*—or even a *once again*—one finds oneself already caught up in the lure of desire, the lure of the impossible.

It is because Freud’s grandson’s game of fort-da is not to be interpreted from the perspective of homeostasis but from that of transgression that the compulsion to repeat (which announces the death drive) is not reducible to remembrance. In what Lacan calls “the optimistic days of catharsis,” analysis sought to overcome trauma by recovering it in remembrance. But, as Lacan points out, “what Freud showed when he made his next steps... was that nothing can be grasped, destroyed, or burnt, except in a symbolic way, as one says, in effigie, in absentia.”\(^{86}\) This means that whereas remembrance is aimed at the recovery and reproduction of an origin, repetition is structured around the impossibility of return, and as such, is always oriented beyond. Repetition is repetition of the same, but of the same insofar as it is unattainable. Because of this, repetition is, paradoxically enough, oriented toward the new.\(^{87}\) This accounts for the enigmatic pleasure that children (but not just children) take in play. Why does the repetition of play not result in boredom? What constitutes the link between repetition and play? What is it that sustains repetition, even of the unpleasurable? It is precisely because what repetition seeks to capture is that which has always already been missed that repetition does not exhaust itself. What fuels repetition is inexhaustible longing. This longing is inexhaustible because it is the desire for the impossible — namely, the recuperation of the missed encounter, a loss, which is constituted retroactively by the very desire to regain it.

In radicalizing Freud’s suggestion about the origin of the concept of time by interpreting the discontinuity of perception in terms of transgression rather than homeostasis, we find that the time inaugurated by the oscillation between the unconscious mnemonic and conscious perceptive systems is the time of the retroactive constitution of meaning around the missed encounter with the real—the time of desire.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., p. 50.

\(^{87}\) As Kierkegaard puts it—although there certainly is a world of difference between Kierkegaard and Lacan—“Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward.” Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, Repetition, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 131.
Russell and Žižek on Time and Paradox

In their treatment of Zeno's paradoxes, both Russell and Žižek reject the Parmenidean One and affirm the world of multiplicity and change. However, their approaches to the paradoxes differ fundamentally in the way each construes the relation between the theoretical and the practical, between the realm of knowledge and of desire and in the way in which time is conceptualized and located within the theoretical-practical divide.

Russell affirms the reality of time but relegates time to the practical sphere, denying its significance "in relation to truth." 88 Although he does not go as far as the Parmenidean in denying the reality of time, he remains fundamentally sympathetic to the Parmenidean intuition that "there is some sense... in which time is an unimportant and superficial characteristic of reality" and that "a certain emancipation from slavery to time is essential to philosophic thought." By claiming that a "truer image of the world... is obtained by picturing things as entering into the stream of time from an eternal world outside, than from a view which regards time as the devouring tyrant of all that is," 89 Russell is offering what he takes to be a properly philosophical view of time without the distorting effects of desire — a conception of time from an ideal standpoint beyond time. Viewed as a receptacle for things entering it from an eternal world, time is stripped of its relation to subjectivity. In Russell's conception of time in which "past and future must be acknowledged to be as real as the present," the stream of time does not seem to flow; time is conceived rather as a totality, a set of ordered events bearing no relation to the subject's relation to absence, loss, and desire.

This conception of time as a given totality independent of a successive synthesis allows Russell to reject the antinomical interpretation of Zeno's paradoxes of motion and to offer a solution to the difficulties of conceptualizing infinity and continuity.

For Žižek, on the other hand, the question of knowledge cannot be posed without asking the question of the knower's desire. Žižek would agree with Russell that time is significant "in relation to our desires"

88 Our Knowledge of the External World, p. 171.
89 Ibid.
but would contest Russell's claim that time has no significance in relation to truth. For psychoanalytic theory, the subject of knowledge is at the same time the subject of desire. Underlying this intertwining of the theoretical and the libidinal is a radically temporal conception of subjectivity and of the constitution of meaning and, conversely, a conception of time that is essentially rooted in the subject.90

In recognizing not just the importance of time as an object of its theoretical speculation but also the irreducible temporality of its own *praxis* — that is to say, in recognizing that the analyst himself is caught up in the temporal structure of retroactive constitution — psychoanalysis locates itself in relation to the paradoxical in a radically different way than Russell would locate himself in relation to the antinomical. Whereas Russell sidesteps the Kantian antinomies by excluding the successive—i.e., temporal—synthesis from the conception of a totality in order to *dissolve* the paradoxes of motion, Žižek approaches the paradoxes not in order to dissolve them, but rather to elucidate the way in which the philosopher's desire for truth is organized around the very impossibility of this desire. In reading Zeno's paradoxes anamorphically, we can say that what Žižek is staging in the libidinal sphere is simply what in the theoretical domain is called the antinomical: reason's conflict with itself.

That Russell excludes desire from philosophy does not imply, however, that he is unable to acknowledge the category of the impossible in his philosophy in some way. Expressed, not surprisingly, in the theoretical register in terms of the limits to knowledge, a hint of this recognition of the impossible can be found in the following passage, where Russell denies the possibility of a total skepticism:

The philosophic scrutiny, therefore, though sceptical in regard to every detail, is not skeptical as regards the whole. That is to say, its criticism of details will only be based upon their relation to other details, not upon some external criterion which can be applied to all the details equally. The reason for this abstention from universal criticism is not any dogmatic confidence, but its exact opposite; it is not

90One can even say, following Freud's speculation in "The Mystic Writing-Pad," that time is rooted in the very constitution of subjectivity.
that common knowledge must be true, but that we possess no radically different kind of knowledge derived from some other source.⁹¹

Russell’s pragmatic reliance upon common knowledge is not a manifestation of a naïve confidence in the givenness of the world to knowledge, but a modest avowal of the limits of philosophy. It reveals a certain tact before that which lies beyond knowledge, that which, as the psychoanalyst would say, resists symbolization.

⁹¹*Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 74.