

death and desire

psychoanalytic

theory

in Lacan's

return

to Freud

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We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably, we remain. By slow degrees our sickness, and dizziness, and horror, become merged in a cloud of unnameable feeling. By gradations, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genius in the Arabian Nights. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius, or any demon of a tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. And this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do we now most vividly desire it.

—Edgar Allen Poe, “The Imp of the Perverse”

The Enigma of the “Death Drive”

Men do not always take their great thinkers seriously, even when they profess most to admire them.

—Sigmund Freud

Freud’s theory of *der Todestrieb*, translated by James Strachey as the “death instinct,” is arguably the darkest and most stubborn riddle posed by the legacy of psychoanalysis.¹ Jean Laplanche has remarked that “*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which in 1920 . . . introduces the death drive, remains the most fascinating and baffling text in the entire Freudian *corpus*”²:

If life . . . is regarded as materially present at the frontiers of the psyche, death’s entry on the Freudian scene is far more enigmatic. In the beginning, like all modalities of the negative, it is radically excluded from the field of the unconscious. Then suddenly in 1920, it emerges at the center of the system as one of the two fundamental forces—and perhaps even as the only primordial force—in the heart of the psyche, of living beings, and of matter itself. [Death becomes] the soul of conflict, an elemental force of strife, which from then on is in the forefront of Freud’s most theoretical formulations.³

As Laplanche indicates, Freud’s hypothesis of the death drive was of central importance during his last years. Unlike so many of Freud’s basic ideas, however, the death drive has not found a significant place in the popular diffusion of the psychoanalytic perspective. Not infrequently, expositions of psychoanalysis omit it altogether. In comparison with other key psychoanalytic concepts—the unconscious, repression, the agencies of id, ego, and superego—Freud’s supposition of a self-destructive drive has suffered positive neglect. Precisely to that extent we may be led to ask how adequately it has been understood. What did Freud mean by positing a drive toward death? How did the concept of the death drive function in the totality of the psychoanalytic

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theory? What has it meant to psychoanalytic theory since Freud? What can it mean for us today? The intention of this book is to raise these questions on the level of a theoretical inquiry and to indicate the direction of an answer.

Freud's Most Daring Hypothesis

Let us briefly recall the problem to which Freud's theory of the death drive provided a solution. From the inception of psychoanalysis in the 1890s and throughout the two and a half decades that followed, Freud conceived the psychic apparatus as a homeostatic system invested with quantities of energy and regulated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.⁴ Operating in this way according to a "pleasure principle," the system seeks to release the tension of accumulated excitations and to promote an equilibrium of psychic energies. Evacuation or at least constancy and stability of energy were taken to be the basic aims of psychic life. The pleasure principle was therefore tantamount to a "constancy principle" (*SE*, 18:9). The reality principle, under the operation of which tensions might be tolerated for a time in order to be more satisfactorily discharged later on, qualified the functioning of the pleasure principle but in no way departed from its basic logic. By 1920, however, the assumption of the pleasure principle and the view of psychic functioning that followed from it could no longer satisfactorily account for a number of observations made in clinical practice. In a number of instances, the psychic system appeared to behave precisely contrary to expectation, deliberately reintroducing or increasing energetic tensions. The evidence fell into four main categories. First, there were cases of recurrent traumatic dreams. Observed particularly in victims of war neuroses, the repetition of traumatic experiences in dreams and memories failed to tally with Freud's earlier view, itself an expression of the pleasure principle, that dreams represent the fulfillment of wishes. Why, if pleasure is the aim of psychic life, should specifically painful, traumatizing experiences be repeated? Second, Freud remarked upon the repetitive games of children in which a painful loss is symbolically reexperienced. A child left alone by his mother was seen to re-create the painful drama of the mother's disappearance by alternately throwing a spool over the edge of his bed, retrieving it, and casting it away again. Once more, the question was why the experience of an unpleasurable loss was repeated rather than repressed. Third, there was the problem of masochism, which, for obvious reasons, challenged the notion that mental life is governed

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simply by the pursuit of pleasure. In the case of the masochist, pleasure and pain seemed to be intertwined in a particularly striking and puzzling way. Lastly, Freud brought forward evidence specific to the analytic process itself, namely, the tendency of patients to obstruct the treatment by effectively re-creating, with the analyst, their most painful losses and disappointments. The search for the motive of these self-defeating behaviors, or "negative therapeutic reactions," touched upon one of the most fundamental challenges faced by psychoanalysis, that of explaining the apparently self-inflicted character of all neurotic suffering.

Taken together, the traumatic dreams of the war neurotic, the presence/absence game of the child abandoned by its mother, the joy taken by the masochist in his own mistreatment, and the so-called negative therapeutic reaction indicated an order of satisfaction "beyond the pleasure principle," a paradoxical pleasure in pain. The evidence pointed Freud to what he could only call "mysterious masochistic trends of the ego" (*SE*, 18:14). The repetitive, even compulsively repetitive character of these phenomena led Freud to suspect the operation of a fundamental instinctual force. Alongside the homeostatic principle of pleasure there must exist a second basic principle, a destabilizing, disruptive force that tends not toward equilibrium and harmony but toward conflict and disintegration. In addition to the life drives, there must exist a primordial drive toward death. In his very late essay on "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," Freud summarized the main thrust of his argument:

If we take into consideration the whole picture made up by the phenomena of masochism immanent in so many people, the negative therapeutic reaction and the sense of guilt found in so many neurotics, we shall no longer be able to adhere to the belief that mental events are exclusively governed by the desire for pleasure. These phenomena are unmistakable indications of the presence of a power in mental life which we call the instinct of aggression or of destruction according to its aims, and which we trace back to the original death instinct of living matter. (*SE*, 23:243)

The Theoretical Value of the Death Drive

It is difficult to overstate the strangeness and radicality of Freud's death-drive hypothesis. It amounts to saying that the true goal of living is dying and that the life-course of all organisms must be regarded as only a circuitous route to death. Shocking as this conclusion appeared,

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even to its author, the hypothesis of the death drive served to account for clinical observations that otherwise remained inexplicable. But in addition, and perhaps even more significantly, the idea appealed to Freud on purely theoretical grounds. First and foremost, the opposition between the life and death drives allowed Freud to reassert a fundamental dualism in the aftermath of his studies on narcissism.⁵ The theory of narcissism, which supposed a differential investment of libido between the ego and its objects, seemed to lend support to the instinctual monism of Jung and his followers. The new theory of life-and-death instincts reexpressed Freud's deeply held dualist sensibility as it installed conflict in the heart of the psychical process, indeed, in the very substance of organic material itself. Freud insisted that "only by the concurrent or mutually opposing action of the two primal instincts—Eros and the death instinct—never by one or the other alone, can we explain the rich multiplicity of the phenomena of life" (*SE*, 23:243).

Although he maintained a cautious skepticism concerning his revised outlook, Freud valued the elegance and simplicity of the new theory. "To my mind," he said, the hypotheses of the life and death instincts "are far more serviceable from a theoretical standpoint than any other possible ones; they provide that simplification, without either ignoring or doing violence to the facts, for which we strive in scientific work" (*SE*, 22:119). Despite the tireless fidelity to the details of observation that has made Freud an intellectual hero, even among many who disagree with his conclusions, Freud's scientific spirit retained a decidedly philosophical bent. Metapsychology, as he hinted in a letter to Fliess and reiterated in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, was Freud's answer to metaphysics.⁶ The theory of the death drive was the highwater mark of Freud's speculative urge. In one of his late essays, Freud enthusiastically compared his view of the life and death instincts with the Empedoclean principles of *philia* and *neikos*. He claimed to be "all the more pleased when not long ago I came upon this theory of mine in the writings of one of the great thinkers of ancient Greece. I am very ready to give up the prestige of originality for the sake of such a confirmation" (*SE*, 23:244).

After 1920, Freud's commitment to his most controversial hypothesis was reinforced by the fact that the death drive came to play a key role in resolving several specific problems plaguing psychoanalytic theory. Primary among them were the origins of human aggressiveness and the nature and function of the superego. With respect to the former, although it was far from the case that Freud failed to recognize the importance of aggression in human affairs prior to 1920, there

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can be little doubt that, after that time and with the theory of the destructive drive in hand, he felt more confident in approaching the subject and in surveying it theoretically. In the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he asked himself, "Why have we ourselves needed such a long time before we decided to recognize an aggressive instinct? Why did we hesitate to make use, on behalf of our theory, of facts which were obvious and familiar to everyone?" (SE, 22:103). In fact, Freud's rhetorical question bears directly on certain points in the history of the psychoanalytic movement. Freud resisted the idea of an aggressive instinct when it was introduced in 1908 by Alfred Adler. In 1912, Sabina Spielrein posited a specifically self-destructive instinct in her paper "Destruction as the Cause of Becoming," but again Freud refused to accept it.⁷ Only with the working out of his own approach in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* did Freud settle on a definitive view of the problem of aggression. Only then did he resolve the difficult question of sadism and masochism that had always oriented his thinking about human aggression. It became clear that although masochism and sadism are intimately bound up with one another, masochism is the more primary impulse. Sadism is to be conceived as a turning outward of a more primitive masochistic tendency. This view led Freud to the revolutionary thesis that all aggression and destructiveness in human beings is, according to its original nature, self-destructiveness. This means that human aggressiveness is to be understood neither as a reaction of self-defense nor as a result of an innately brutish disposition, but rather as an expression of an internal conflict of the individual human being with itself. Freud consistently maintained these views throughout the last period of his life, emphasizing them in *The Ego and the Id*, the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*.

Just as the theory of the death drive contributed to a new understanding of aggressivity, it also shed new light on the activity of the superego and the feelings of guilt produced by it. As an attempt to understand neurotic behavior, psychoanalysis was centrally concerned from its very beginnings with the question of the motive force behind the experience of guilt. It was in answer to this question that Freud offered another of his most speculative hypotheses: the supposition of an inherited predisposition to guilt. *Totem and Taboo* traced the existence of an inborn propensity to guilt back to the murder of the primal father by the fraternal band of sons. It was an idea that exerted an enduring hold on Freud's imagination, even after the theory of the superego was introduced with the 1923 publication of *The Ego and the Id*. As late as 1933 he remarked in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that

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"the superego has no motive that we know of for ill-treating the ego, with which it is intimately bound up; but genetic influence, which leads to the survival of what is past and has been surmounted, makes itself felt" (*SE*, 21:125). With the introduction theory of the death drive, however, a new avenue of approach opened up. If human aggressiveness could be shown to derive from a fundamental aggressiveness of the individual against itself, then the self-inflicted sufferings of the neurotic became understandable in a new way. The motive force behind the hostility of the superego could be assigned to its participation with the death drive. The punitiveness of the superego, most remarkable in obsession and melancholia, could be attributed to its containing "a pure culture of the death instinct" (*SE*, 19:53).

Repudiation of Freud's Idea

However mysterious a notion in itself, there can be no doubt as to the pivotal importance of the death drive in the theoretical constructions of Freud's maturity. "In the series of Freud's metapsychological writings," James Strachey observes, "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* may be regarded as introducing the final phase of his views."⁸ Despite occasional hesitations, Freud became increasingly convinced of the fundamental value of his most speculative construction. "When, originally, I had this idea," he confided to Robert Fliess, "I thought to myself: this is something altogether erroneous, or something very important. . . . Well, lately I have found myself more inclined toward the second alternative."⁹ Thirteen years after the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud reaffirmed his faith in the basic correctness of the death-drive theory, relying on the duality of life and death to frame his most sweeping conception of the nature and progress of human civilization. "To begin with," he admitted, "it was only tentatively that I put forward the views I have developed here, but in the course of time they have gained such a hold on me that I can no longer think in any other way" (*SE*, 23:119). J.-B. Pontalis has summarily remarked that "the theme of death is as basic to Freudian psychoanalysis as is the theme of sexuality. I even believe that the latter has been widely put forward so as to cover up the former."¹⁰

The dialectic of life and death represented the culmination of Freud's effort to conceptualize his experience and guided his thinking throughout the last third of his intellectual life. The notion of the death drive was thus the veritable keystone of Freud's most mature and far-reaching theoretical synthesis. But to the degree that we more

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fully appreciate its importance to Freud and its central function in the final elaboration of his theory it can only strike us as more astonishing that the death drive was almost unanimously repudiated by his early followers. Ernest Jones remarked on the singular unpopularity of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

The book . . . is noteworthy in being the only one of Freud's which has received little acceptance on the part of his followers. Thus of the fifty or so papers that have since been directed to the topic one observes that in the first decade only half supported Freud's theory, in the second decade only a third, and in the last decade, none at all.¹¹

"I am well aware," Freud himself complained, "that the dualistic theory according to which an instinct of death or of destruction or aggression claims equal rights as a partner with Eros as manifested in the libido, has found little sympathy and has not really been accepted even among psychoanalysts" (*SE*, 23:244). Ernest Becker, although not himself a psychoanalyst, has pronounced what can be taken as the majority view both inside and outside the analytic community: "Freud's tortuous formulations on the death instinct can now securely be relegated to the dust bin of history."¹²

The speculative tenor of the death drive that seems to have appealed to Freud, especially in his last years, was an important factor in the negative reception of his idea. Due in part to Freud's own influence, psychoanalysis has always measured itself against the ideal of practical, empirical work and evidences a certain uneasiness about theory-spinning (in spite of—or precisely because of—the fact that the psychoanalytic field can be opened up only on the basis of the purely theoretical construct of the unconscious). It is not surprising, then, that many of Freud's followers judged the death drive to be a fanciful excess of theorizing, unjustified by the facts. David Rapaport characterized it as "a speculative excursion which does not seem to be an integral part of the [psychoanalytic] theory."¹³ Kenneth Colby concluded that "the postulation of a death instinct we now know was based on a misapplication of physical principles to living organisms. Today it is only an interesting part of psychoanalytic history."¹⁴

Otto Rank similarly accused Freud of allowing speculation to outrun the evidence, although for Rank the problem lay not so much in any discrepancy between the idea of the death drive and the rest of the psychoanalytic theory but rather in the way Freud seemed to distort the issue of death to make it compatible with his general paradigm of

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wish-fulfillment. In Rank's view, the death drive seemed to be an instance of the sort of shoddy theorizing that Freud himself mocked by evoking Heine's image of the philosopher patching up the holes in the universe with the tatters of his nightshirt. According to Rank,

even when he stumbled upon the inescapable death problem, [Freud] sought to give a new meaning to that also in harmony with the wish, since he spoke of death instinct instead of death fear. The fear itself he had meantime disposed of elsewhere. . . . [He] made the general fear into a special sexual fear (castration fear). . . . If one had held to the phenomena, it would have been impossible to understand how a discussion of the death impulse could neglect the universal and fundamental death fear to such an extent.¹⁵

Rank's criticism reflects another attitude that, although not always directly expressed, certainly motivated profound hostility to Freud's theory. The idea that every organism is destined to die for internal reasons, that death and destruction are the aims of a basic principle, perhaps the most basic principle of all life, violated the canons of common sense and religious belief even more than it offended scientific rationality.¹⁶ The death drive was the weightiest expression of Freud's much-touted pessimism and was no doubt especially disturbing to members of a profession devoted to the task of healing. Indeed, there seems to be something not only absurd but deeply and almost naturally repugnant about Freud's claim that "the aim of all life is death" (*SE*, 18:38). Given this spontaneous resistance to such an idea, it is not surprising to find among Freud's biographers ample assurances that his supposition of an ineluctable drive toward death cannot be taken as a result of scientific research but must be interpreted as an expression of bitter personal experience. In this view, it was not the evidence of psychoanalysis but rather the dark spectacle of the First World War, the recent deaths of his son and daughter, and increasing concern for his own mortality that led Freud to the death drive. Thus Henri Ellenberger has remarked that "Freud's concept of the death instinct can be best understood against the background of the preoccupation with death shared by a number of his eminent contemporaries: biologists, psychologists, and existential philosophers."¹⁷ Paul Roazen reports that "an unusual number of elderly analysts . . . thought Freud's cancer preceded his theory of the death instinct."¹⁸ For his part, however, Freud anticipated and tried to combat allegations that his reflections on the death drive were motivated by personal losses. He wrote to Max Eitingon in July of 1920: "The

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'Beyond' is finally finished. You will be able to certify that it was half finished when Sophie was alive and flourishing."¹⁹

The most popular form of distortion to which Freud's position has been submitted can be similarly interpreted as a turning away from the most distressing aspect of his hypothesis. According to a common view, we need not worry ourselves about a specifically self-annihilating drive. We need only recognize the natural tendency in human beings toward aggressivity and destructiveness. This view is invited by distinguishing between theoretical and clinical contexts of discussion. On the clinical level, it is held, there is no need to invoke the complexities of the dual instinct theory. As Edward Bibring puts it:

Instincts of life and death are not psychologically perceptible as such; they are biological instincts whose existence is required by hypothesis alone. That being so, it follows that, strictly speaking, the theory of the primal instincts is a concept which ought only to be adduced in a theoretical context and not in discussion of a clinical or empirical nature. In them, the idea of aggressive and destructive instincts will suffice to account for all the facts before us.²⁰

The repudiation of the death-drive hypothesis presents a striking and nearly unique exception to the otherwise conspicuous and enduring authority of Freud. Indeed, in many circles the theory of the death drive remains one of the great embarrassments of psychoanalysis. We can be only more deeply intrigued that this exception concerns a point of theory that Freud himself held to be of capital importance. But the question of the death drive poses an enigma of more than merely political or historical significance. It demands a basic decision. We are led to ask whether the theory of the *Todestrieb* was simply a misguided speculative excess, the error of which Freud's followers saw better than the master himself, or whether, on the contrary, it really did constitute the crowning discovery of psychoanalysis, as Freud himself believed, and that its almost universal repudiation must therefore be seen to involve a fundamental and widely shared misunderstanding of Freud's teaching.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of posterity's judgment on Freud's theory of the death drive has been the near silencing of the question itself. In fact, most treatments of the problem have amounted to a side-stepping of it. Denounced as misconceived biology or denigrated as a speculative flight of fancy, the meaning and function of Freud's hypothesis in the larger framework of his theory is not taken into account. Dismissed as fodder for biographers or trimmed

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down to an assertion of simple brutishness, the theory of the death drive is robbed of its power to challenge our basic assumptions. Unless we are willing to dismiss Freud's own estimate of the critical importance of his idea as easily as his interpreters have dismissed the idea itself, we must recognize in the death drive a question worth raising again.

Re-Posing the Question of the Death Drive

Freud's theory of the death drive, although rejected by many, has always found some supporters. In the early days, the theory was embraced by Eitingon, Ferenczi, and, for a time, Franz Alexander. More notably, it was taken over and reworked by Melanie Klein and her school. Over the past forty years, however, the most significant treatment of Freud's most unpopular conception has been the work of a renegade French analyst named Jacques Lacan. Lacan does more than reemphasize Freud's notion of the death drive, he re-installs it at the very center of psychoanalytic theory. "To ignore the death instinct in [Freud's] doctrine," he insists, "is to misunderstand that doctrine completely" (*E:S*, 301). Lacan characterizes *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as the "pivotal point" in the evolution of Freud's thought (*S.II*, 165). In that work is announced "the culminating point of Freud's doctrine . . . that death instinct whose enigma Freud propounded for us at the height of his experience" (*E:S*, 101). To give Freud's conception of death its due, it must be seen to imply the lineaments of the entire psychoanalytic discovery. For Lacan, life and death are the terms *par excellence* of the Freudian dialectic: "When we get to the root of this life, behind the drama of the passage into existence, we find nothing besides life conjoined to death. That is where the Freudian dialectic leads us" (*S.II*, 232).

Lacan insists that the death drive is not merely an unthinkable conundrum. "The death instinct isn't an admission of impotence, it isn't a coming to a halt before an irreducible, an ineffable last thing, it is a concept" (*S.II*, 70). But, further, it is not merely one concept among others. Perhaps more than any other point in the Freudian theory, it is with respect to the death drive that Lacan's innovation is rightly called a "return to Freud." What makes the death-drive theory so important is its pivotal position in the structured totality of the psychoanalytic theory. For Lacan, the death drive is the key to understanding the topography of id, ego, and superego upon which Freud based the final and most complete elaboration of his theory:

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Beyond the Pleasure Principle . . . is the work of Freud that most of those who authorize themselves with the title of psychoanalyst don't hesitate to reject as a superfluous, even chance, speculation . . . insofar as the supreme antinomy which results from it, the *death instinct*, becomes unthinkable for them.

It is difficult, however, to take as a mere sideshow, still less as a mistake, of the Freudian doctrine, the work which is precisely the prelude to the new topography represented by the terms *ego*, *id*, and *super-ego* that has become as prevalent in its theoretical usage as in its popular diffusion.²¹

Lacan insists that the death drive be understood in its original radicality. Freud was not simply concerned to expose a general tendency toward aggressivity and destructiveness in human beings. The thrust of Freud's idea was to conceive of a force of *self*-destructiveness, a primordial aggressivity *toward oneself*, from which aggressivity toward others is ultimately derived. To fail to see that it is one's own death that is at stake in the death drive is to miss the point entirely. Such was the typical error of the ego psychologists, as Jean Laplanche has pointed out in a passage that might well have been written by Lacan himself:

For these authors, for a Fenichel, the situation is fundamentally the same. In every case, there is a refusal of the essential thesis of Freud which affirms that the death drive is in the first instance turned, not toward the outside (as aggressivity), but toward the subject, that it is radically not a drive *to murder*, but a drive *to suicide* or *to kill oneself*.²²

Lacan returns to the death drive but not without reappropriating it in a distinctive way. Lacan finds in the death drive a privileged point at which the system of psychoanalytic concepts remains open to question:

Contrary to the dogmatism that is sometimes imputed to us, we know that this system [of psychoanalytic concepts] remains open both as a whole and in several of its articulations.

These gaps seem to focus on the enigmatic signification that Freud expressed in the term *death instinct*, which, rather like the figure of the Sphinx, reveals the aporia that confronted this great mind in the most profound attempt so far made to formulate an experience of man in the register of biology (*E:S*, 8).

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According to Lacan, the problem of the death drive opens psychoanalysis to question and, ultimately, to reformulation. But what sort of reformulation is announced here? The answer is not immediately easy to determine. The question of the death drive in Lacan will take us to the heart of his theoretical innovations insofar as he links the meaning of death in psychoanalysis to the faculty of speech and language, on the one hand, and to the fate of desire, on the other. In this way, two of the prime themes of Lacan's thought, language and desire, can be seen to intersect in his treatment of the death drive. The question, one that will occupy us throughout this book, remains: How are language, desire, and death related?

The most recognizable feature of Lacan's rereading of psychoanalysis is his insistence that the essential meaning of the psychoanalytic discovery concerns the role of language in the functioning of the unconscious. "What the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious," Lacan maintains, "is the whole structure of language" (*E:S*, 147). As he puts it in the well-known formula that stands like the sign over the door of the Lacanian school, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (*E:S*, 243). And indeed, it is instructive to take up once again the early texts of Freud in which the foundations of psychoanalysis were established—*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*—and reread them in the light of Lacan's thesis. One cannot fail to be struck by the fact that over and over again the phenomena of the unconscious—dreams, slips, jokes, symptoms—are traced back to essentially verbal mechanisms, plays of words, and phonemic concatenations. The remarkable thing is that Freud so masterfully discerned the operation of essentially linguistic mechanisms, although he remained ignorant of the new science of language pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure and his followers. In Lacan's view, the concepts of structural linguistics, developed during Freud's lifetime but unavailable to him through "an accident of history," offer an ideal framework for theoretically rendering the psychoanalytic experience.²³ Lacking them, Freud modeled much of his theory on analogies to nineteenth-century physics and biology. Nevertheless, for Lacan Freud's true discovery concerned the function of the linguistic signifier in the unconscious:

If what Freud discovered and rediscovered with a perpetually increasing sense of shock has a meaning, it is that the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindnesses, in their end and in their fate, their innate gifts and social acquisitions notwithstanding, without regard

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for character or sex, and that, willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier.²⁴

From the vantage point of mainstream psychoanalysis, Lacan's formulation readily appears an unlikely one. The common conception of Freud's discovery, far from suggesting an identity between the unconscious and language, tends to define them as mutually exclusive. As Jean Laplanche has pointed out, "the Freudian unconscious and the language of the linguists are in such radical *opposition* to each other that a term for term transposition of their properties and laws may properly be regarded as a paradoxical undertaking."²⁵ But if there is some paradox in linking language to the unconscious, how much greater is the difficulty of associating language with a drive toward death and destruction! Oriented by the role of the signifier, Lacan locates the meaning of the death drive in a function of language. "I have demonstrated," he offers, "the profound relationship uniting the notion of the death instinct to the problems of speech" (*E:S*, 101):

From the approach we have indicated, the reader should recognize in the metaphor of the return to the inanimate (which Freud attaches to every living body) that margin beyond life that language gives to the human being by virtue of the fact that he speaks. (*E:S*, 301)

For Lacan, the death drive can be understood only against the background of the matrix of linguistic signifiers that he calls the "symbolic order":

The death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order. . . . The symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental—a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realized. (*S.II*, 326)

The challenge of interpreting Lacan is to make sense of passages like these, passages that bristle with multiple perplexities. What is "that margin beyond life" of which he speaks? How and why is it associated with language? How are we to locate the thematics of language and death along the axis of "non-being and insisting to be"?

Lacan links the death drive to the function of speech and language but also, and equally improbably, to the nature and destiny of human desire. For Lacan, the issue of the death drive bears upon the essential

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concern of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of unconscious desire. "[Freud] questioned life as to its meaning," Lacan poses, "and not to say that it has none . . . but to say that it has only one meaning, that in which desire is borne by death" (*E:S*, 277). "The function of desire must remain in a fundamental relation with death" (*S.VII*, 351). What does "desire" mean here? The sheer ubiquity of "desire" in Lacan's discourse signals its importance for his thinking. Even a brief encounter with Lacan's text serves to alert us to the very privileged status of the word in Lacan's vocabulary. Yet it is not easy to determine precisely its correspondence to Freud's terminology nor does Lacan offer a limpid definition. Left deliberately unspecified in its meaning, the word not unfrequently assumes an aura of almost mystical significance.²⁶ By linking death to desire, Lacan seems merely to compound one mystery with another.

Interpreting Lacan

There can be no doubt about the importance of Lacan's interpretation of the Freudian death instinct. Lacan faces us with the disturbing possibility that the most readily recognizable and widely influential part of psychoanalytic theory—the triad of psychical agencies; id, ego, and superego—is based upon and is only fully understandable in terms of the most maligned and misunderstood part of the theory: the hypothesis of the death drive. Lacan thus takes the notion of the death drive to be a key point, perhaps *the* key point, for grasping the essential import of the psychoanalytic discovery. Further, he challenges us with the task of re-conceiving the meaning of the death drive and of unconscious processes in general according to a new paradigm: that of the unconscious structured like a language. The main task of this essay is to make sense of Lacan's treatment of this crucial point. But before we can evaluate Lacan's contribution to the enigma of the death drive it must be acknowledged that Lacan poses something of an enigma in himself.

Despite the importance he attributes to it, Lacan nowhere devotes to the death drive a sustained discussion in which his position might be unambiguously grasped. Gathering together the many, but often brief and cryptic, references to the topic is equally disappointing. It is exceedingly difficult to discern in such a collection the main lines of a coherent theory. In reading Lacan, the experience of being unable to lay hold of a readily comprehensible "position" is not the exception, however, but the rule. And such, it seems, is Lacan's intention. Lacan

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clearly discourages his reader from expecting of him anything like a traditionally structured "theory." "My *Écrits*," he warns, "are unsuitable for a thesis, particularly for an academic thesis: they are antithetical by nature: one either takes what they formulate or one leaves them."²⁷ As Anika Lemaire has put it:

Lacan claims, therefore, not to have put forward any "theories." His "utterances" or "writings," seeds scattered among the thorns of traditional philosophy and psychology, in no way lend themselves to anything resembling a closure. . . .

For Lacan, then, any attempt to unify his scattered statements into a whole runs the risk of making erroneous interpolations.²⁸

For all its brilliance and evocative power, Lacan's text remains stubbornly resistant to ready comprehension. The style of Lacan's discourse, first of all a spoken discourse, heard by those attending his famous seminar before appearing in print, is notoriously difficult. Jeffrey Mehlman has described it well as "Mallarmean in hermetic density, Swiftian in aggressive virulence, Freudian in analytic acumen."²⁹ Not surprisingly, Lacan has been accused of exercising a willful obscurantism that conceals a lack of rigor behind the dense foliage of a precious and overweighted style. François Roustang has charged that understanding Lacan becomes a viciously never-ending and all-consuming labor:

The work becomes infinite, thanks on the one hand to the obscurity of the discourse, for one would like to understand what has been intentionally rendered incomprehensible, thanks on the other hand to the very vague links [Lacan makes] to [other] disciplines, for one can never discover the relations which exist only on a metaphorical plane. It is necessary that the work be infinite, in order to absorb all one's energy in an effort to understand, leaving nothing for critique.³⁰

The difficulty of Lacan's style is not wholly unintentional. Convinced that the curative effect of analysis does not consist in *explaining* the patient's symptoms and life history, convinced, that is, that the analyst's effort to *understand* the patient only impedes the emergence of the unconscious within the transference and that what is effective in analysis concerns something beyond the capacity of the analyst to explain, Lacan's discourse is calculated to frustrate facile understanding. His aim in part is to replicate for his readers and listeners something of

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the essential opacity and disconnectedness of the analytic experience. Often what is required of the reader in the encounter with Lacan's dense and recalcitrant discourse, as with that of the discourse of the patient in analysis, is less an effort to clarify and systematize than a sort of unknowing mindfulness. We are called upon less to close over the gaps and discontinuities in the discourse than to remain attentive to its very lack of coherence, allowing its breaches and disalignments to become the jumping-off points for new movements of thought. Lacan says of himself:

I am not surprised that my discourse can cause a certain margin of misunderstanding. . . . [I]t is with an express intention, absolutely deliberate, that I pursue this discourse in a way that offers you the occasion of not completely understanding it. This margin allows that for you who say that you follow me, which is to say that you remain in a problematic position, a door is always left open toward a progressive rectification.³¹

In more than one way, then, Lacan's discourse resists systematic conception. The attempt to present a coherent account of his teaching is therefore a chancy undertaking, and perhaps especially so with regard to the concept of the death drive. The death drive seems to be the locus of theoretical obscurity *par excellence*. Nevertheless, I will argue that there is far broader and deeper coherence in Lacan's thought than may at first appear. This essay is an attempt to demonstrate some of that coherence with special reference to the problem of the death drive.³² Do I remain true to Lacan? I will quote extensively from Lacan's text and will try to acknowledge those points at which I clearly depart from him. In the end, perhaps, I will be judged to have departed from Lacan through the door he "left open toward a progressive rectification." My aim, however, is not to provide a comprehensive account of Lacan's work, but to traverse his thought obliquely along the lines of a specific concept.³³ In doing so, I hope to reveal in a limited way some aspects of the structure of his thinking, but, more important, I hope to show that the value of Lacan's innovations for reading the text of Freud. I will take seriously Lacan's claim to "return to Freud." My effort must finally be considered an explication of Lacan's work less for its own sake than for the light it sheds on a concept we find in Freud.

Reference to Freud is not only the goal of my analysis but also a guide for interpreting Lacan. Lacan was fond of reminding would-be "Lacanian" that he, Lacan, strove only to be a "Freudian." As his

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discussions of Freud's texts so powerfully demonstrate, Lacan's genius consisted not merely in bringing to psychoanalysis the concepts of structural linguistics, *gestalt* psychology, or philosophy, but doing it in a way that allows us to experience Freud's great cases as if for the first time.³⁴ Lacan was first and last a *reader* of Freud. "I must note," he remarked with pointed irony, "that in order to handle any Freudian concept, reading Freud cannot be considered superfluous, even for those concepts that are homonyms of current notions" (*E:S*. 38). Consistent with this advice, it will be helpful to keep the text of Freud very clearly in view. It will be necessary during the course of this essay to locate, painstakingly, the origin and function of the death drive in Freud's theory. Only by determining its point of emergence in the unfolding of Freud's thought, by understanding the nature of the questions to which it provided an answer, and by discerning its linkages with other key concepts and problematics can we clarify how Lacan makes new sense of it.

Lacan's claim to remain faithful to Freud gives us some warrant to use Freud in reading Lacan, but it can hardly be forgotten, for all the talk of return, that Lacan is not Freud. To return to Freud is by no means simply to repeat him. "We are not following Freud," Lacan poses,

we are accompanying him. The fact that an idea occurs somewhere in Freud's work doesn't, for all that, guarantee that it is being handled in the spirit of the Freudian researches. As for us, we are trying to conform to the spirit, to the watchword, to the style of this research.³⁵

The concept of the death drive in particular must be interpreted in a spirit that transcends the letter of Freud's text:

This notion [of the death drive] must be approached through its resonances in what I shall call the poetics of the Freudian corpus, the first way of access to the penetration of its meaning, and the essential dimension from the origins of the work to the apogee marked in it by this notion, for an understanding of its dialectical repercussions. (*E:S*, 102)

It is toward the end of revivifying the spirit of Freud's teaching that Lacan offers his most significant innovation: the three orders of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. They constitute, he suggests, "a sort of preface or introduction to a certain orientation of psychoanalysis."³⁶ But that is too modestly said. Beginning in the early 1950s,

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Lacan's work is at every point saturated with the distinction of these three fundamental registers. "Without these three systems to guide ourselves by," he insists, "it would be impossible to understand anything of the Freudian technique and experience" (*S.I*, 73):

In order to gain an idea of the function which Freud designates by the word "ego," as indeed to read the whole of the Freudian metapsychology, it is necessary to use this distinction of planes and relations expressed in the terms, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. (*S.II*, 36)

The imaginary was the first of the three orders to appear, introduced in 1936 by Lacan's article on the "mirror stage." It was inspired by research in ethology, which associated behavior patterns in animals with the perception of specific visual images. Lacan proposed that a similar "imaginary" function operates in human beings. In the "mirror phase," the most rudimentary formations of psychic life are organized for the six- to eighteen-month-old infant as it identifies itself with a body image; either its own image in a mirror, or that of a caretaker or peer. For Lacan, the "imaginary" designates that basic and enduring dimension of experience that is oriented by images, perceived or fantasized, the psychologically formative power of which is lastingly established in the primordial identification of the mirror phase. Lacan's first and arguably most original and far-reaching innovation in psychoanalytic theory was to characterize the Freudian "ego" as a formation of the imaginary.

The symbolic, announced in his 1953 paper on "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," was conceived by Lacan from the outset in dynamic opposition to the captures of the imaginary. Lacan's notion of the symbolic is indebted to the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, and to the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The symbolic is the register of language and of linguistically mediated cognitions. In the "symbolic order," Lacan envisions a complex system of signifying elements whose meaning is determined by their relation to the other elements of the system—a grand structure, then, in which meaning is free to circulate among associated elements or signifiers without necessarily referring to a particular object or signified. In opposition to the *gestalt* principles and relations of perceptual resemblance that govern the semiotics of the imaginary, the order of the symbolic functions in accordance with rules internal to the signifying system itself. Lacanian psychoanalysis

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came fully into its own when Lacan identified the Oedipus Complex discovered by Freud with the formative moment in which the child, molded and snared by the imaginary, accedes to a symbolic mode of functioning.

It is a good deal more difficult to characterize briefly the Lacanian sense of the "real." Especially in his later work, Lacan tries to show the interconnectedness of the imaginary, symbolic, and real, comparing them to the three interlocking rings of a Borromean knot. But the notion of the real is perhaps best introduced as being precisely that which escapes and is lacking in the other two registers. Neither figured in the imaginary nor represented by the symbolic, the real is the always-still-outstanding, the radically excluded, the wholly uncognized. As Lacan puts it, "the real is the impossible."³⁷ In Lacan's sense, then, the real has very little to do with common "reality." By the measure of everyday reality, the Lacanian real is closer to being un- or sur-real. The real is sheer, wholly undifferentiated and unsymbolized force or impact. It is an experience of the real, therefore, that lies at the heart of trauma. However, the real is not simply a designation of something unknown *external* to the individual. It inhabits the secret interior as well. The real is therefore also to be associated with the active yet ineffable stirrings of organic need, the unconsciousness of the body.

The tripartite distinction of imaginary, symbolic, and real constitutes the master key of Lacan's work. To interpret his treatment of the death instinct will therefore ultimately require determining its relation to these three essential registers. As I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, this task offers a unique opportunity for clarifying the interrelation of Lacan's three basic categories to one another. This is true in spite of the fact, or rather precisely *because* of the fact, that each of the three registers seems to claim the death instinct for its own. From one point of view, Lacan clearly associates the death drive with the imaginary. "The point emphasized by Freud's thought, but [that] isn't fully made out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*," Lacan asserts, "[is that] the death instinct in man [signifies] that his libido is originally constrained to pass through an imaginary stage" (*S.I*, 149). At another point, however, it is the symbolic that appears as the order of death. Thus we read that "the nature of the symbol is yet to be clarified. We have approached the essence of it in situating it at the very point of the genesis of the death instinct" (*S.III*, 244). Is the drive toward death to be associated primarily with the imaginary? with the symbolic? Or is it not more fittingly associated with the real? Lacan's notion of the real—as lack or absence, as the impossible, as the unspeakable force of

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the trauma, or as the ineffable exigence of the body—seems eminently qualified to be linked with the activity of what Freud called a “death drive.”

As I hope to show in what follows, the problem of death is relevant to each of the three registers, but in a different way. Clarifying these differences yields not only a more adequate solution to Freud’s problem of the death drive but also a better understanding of Lacan’s own thought as it illuminates the relations of the imaginary, symbolic, and real to one another.

Notes

Notes to Chapter 1

1. As we will see more clearly in what follows, the problem of translating Freud's term *Todestrieb* is anything but a trivial one. Indeed, it confronts us immediately with the challenge of interpreting Freud's idea. Strachey's choice of the word "instinct" for the Freudian *Trieb* was in many respects an unfortunate one. Freud's notion has very little in common with the patterned, spontaneous behavior of animals that we think of as "instinctual," but rather points to an elemental impulse or striving that is radically unspecified with respect to its aims and objects. In general, I prefer to render Freud's *Trieb* by "drive," to indicate that the Freudian concept designates a force or striving that cannot unproblematically be traced back to biological sources. That said, however, the issue cannot be settled once and for all without ambiguity. The signification of the Freudian *Trieb* remains profoundly equivocal, bearing within itself a reference to the effects of psychological structures that function independently from any basis in biology. I return to this issue below on pages 28–31 and again on pages 102–03, yet at the same time retaining a reference to an organic substratum of psychic life.

2. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehler (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 106.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

4. The general outline of the pleasure principle is very clearly visible in Freud's early unpublished theoretical paper "Project for a Scientific Psychology." Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 281–397. Hereafter this source is noted parenthetically in the text, and in the notes, as "SE," followed by volume and page numbers.

5. Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *SE*, 14:73–102.

6. In his letter of January 1, 1896, Freud remarked to Fliess, "I see how, via the detour of medical practice, you are reaching your first ideal of understanding human beings as a physiologist, just as I most secretly nourish the hope of arriving, via these same paths, at my initial goal of philosophy."

For that is what I wanted originally, when it was not yet at all clear to me to what end I was in the world." Jeffrey Masson, ed., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1985), p. 159.

The quotation from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which constitutes the first published appearance of "metapsychology," expressly holds out the hope to "transform metaphysics into metapsychology" (*SE*, 6:259).

7. Sabina Spielrein, "Die Destruktion als Ursache des Werdens," *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* 6 (1912): 464–503.

8. James Strachey, Editor's Note, *SE*, 18:5.

9. Quoted by Frank Sulloway, *Freud: Biologist of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 412.

10. J.—B. Pontalis, "On Death-Work in Freud, in the Self, in Culture," in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature*, ed. Alan Roland (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 86.

11. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 3 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), vol. 3, p. 287.

12. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 99.

13. David Rapaport, "The Structure of Psychoanalytic Theory," *Psychological Issues*, no. 2, Monograph 6 (1960): 50.

14. Kenneth Colby, *Energy and Structure* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1955), pp. 142–43.

15. Otto Rank, *Will Therapy and Truth and Reality* (New York: Knopf, 1936), pp. 121–22, 115.

Ernest Becker similarly accuses Freud of using the death drive to cover over inadequacies of his theory. He continues in the quotation cited above: "Freud's formulations on the death instinct . . . are of interest only as the ingenious efforts of a dedicated prophet to maintain intellectually intact his basic dogma." Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 99.

16. Freud remarks on the conflict between the hypothesis of a destructive instinct and religious notions about the essential goodness of the human soul in "Anxiety and Instinctual Life" (*SE*, 22:95).

17. Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 515.

18. Paul Roazen, *Freud and his Followers* (New York: Meridian, 1974), p. xxii.

19. Quoted by Max Schur, *Freud, Living and Dying* (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), p. 329.

20. Edward Bibring, "The Development and Problems of the Theory of the Instincts," *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 22 (1941): 118.

21. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), pp. 44–45. Hereafter this source is noted parenthetically in the text as “E,” followed by page number.

As a general rule, I will use and acknowledge published English translations of Lacan where they are available. For quotations of French texts, Lacan or others, where no translator is cited in my footnotes, the translations are my own.

22. Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques IV: l'inconscient et le ça* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), p. 230.

23. Thus Lacan remarks that “the pilot science of structuralism in the West has its roots in Russia, where formalism first flourished. ‘Geneva 1910’ and ‘Petrograd 1920’ suffice to explain why Freud lacked this particular tool” (*E:S*, p. 298).

24. Jacques Lacan, “The Seminar on the ‘Purloined Letter,’” trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, *Yale French Studies*, no. 48 (1972): 60.

25. Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study,” trans. Patrick Coleman, in *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, no. 48 (1972): 177.

26. For a discussion of Lacan’s polyvalent use of *objet a*, see David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 114–19.

27. Jacques Lacan, in the preface to Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. vii.

28. Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 114.

29. Jeffrey Mehlman, translator’s introduction to Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. viii.

30. François Roustang, “L’illusion lacanienne,” *Critique* 41, no. 456 (May 1985): 473–74.

31. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre III. Les Psychoses*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), p. 184. Hereafter this source is noted parenthetically in the text as “S.III,” followed by page number.

32. Some recent commentators on Lacan’s work have emphasized the evolution of his ideas over the course of his career. David Macey, for example, has criticized presentations of Lacan that remain insensitive to the shifts in Lacan’s thinking over time. According to Macey, such presentations pursue a “final state” strategy, offering us a retrospective paste-up of Lacan’s often highly ambiguous and historically varying pronouncements as if they could be related to a comprehensive theory that was present from the beginning. It has been suggested that Lacan’s teaching on the death drive in particular seems to have shifted over the course of his career. Slavoj Žižek makes this point in his excellent study *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 131ff. Although I think Macey and Žižek are right to point to the way

Lacan's thinking undergoes significant transformations, there remains in my view an important continuity in his treatment of the death drive, the clarification of which is of considerable value both in understanding the structure of Lacan's thought and for charting more precisely Lacan's relation to Freud.

33. There are many other secondary works that undertake to survey Lacan's work more fully. Among those not mentioned elsewhere in the present study are: Marcelle Marini, *Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Éditions Belfond, 1986); John Muller and William J. Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits* (New York: International Universities Press, 1982); J. B. Fages, *Comprendre Jacques Lacan* (Toulouse: Privat, 1971); and Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Two valuable shorter articles are Malcolm Bowie, "Jacques Lacan," in *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 115–63; and Richard Kearney, "Jacques Lacan," in *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1986), pp. 268–82. More specific in its concerns but also useful is Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

34. Many examples could be offered, but consider especially the treatments of the Irma dream in *Séminaire II*, the Schreber case in *Séminaire III*, and the cases of Dora, the female homosexual, and little Hans in *Séminaire IV*.

35. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Paper's on Technique*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), p. 120. Hereafter this source is noted parenthetically in the text as "S.I," followed by page number.

Lacan insists that, even in the effort to restore meaning to Freud's basic concepts, it is necessary to reach beyond them. "In a discipline that owes its scientific value solely to the theoretical concepts that Freud forged in the progress of his experience—concepts which, by continuing to be badly criticized and yet retaining the ambiguity of the vulgar tongue, benefit, with a certain risk of misunderstanding, from these resonances—it would seem to me to be premature to break with the tradition of their terminology.

"But it seems to me that these terms can only become clear if one establishes their equivalence to the language of contemporary anthropology, or even to the latest problems in philosophy, fields in which psychoanalysis could well regain its health" (*E:S*, 32).

36. Jacques Lacan, "Le symbolique, l'imaginaire, et le réel." My quotation here is from an unpublished transcript of a conference presentation given by Lacan on July 8, 1953 to La Société Française de Psychanalyse. Although a bibliography of works by Lacan cites a published version of this text (in *Bulletin de l'Association freudienne*, 1 (1982): 4–13), I have been unable to find it. See Michael Clark, *Jacques Lacan: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols., (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988), v.1, p. 147.

37. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed.

Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 167. Hereafter, this source is noted parenthetically in the text as “*FFC*,” followed by page number.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Catherine Clément, *Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 100–101.
2. Philippe Julien, *Le retour à Freud de Jacques Lacan: L'application au miroir* (Toulouse: Éditions Erès, 1985), p. 225.
3. Jacques Lacan, *Les Complexes Familiaux* (Dijon: Navarin Éditeur, 1984), p. 31.
4. Henri Wallon makes this point: “The newborn of our species is unusually far from maturity; witness the inadequacy of his motor, perceptual, and intellectual capacities. Although he already possesses all the neurones he will ever have, most of them are in no state to function, owing to the absence of needed interconnections.” Henri Wallon, *The World of Henri Wallon*, ed. G. Voyat, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: Aronson, 1984), p. 20.
5. Lacan, *Les Complexes Familiaux*, p. 28.
6. Wallon, *The World of Henri Wallon*, pp. 94–95.
7. Lacan refers to Bühler’s work at *E:S*, 5 and 17.
8. Jacques Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego,” *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 34 (1953): 15.
9. For the notion of the instinctual representative as a “delegate” of somatic processes, see Jean Laplanche and J.—B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), pp. 364–65.
10. Jean Laplanche and J.—B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 49 (1968): 16n.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
12. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Le Seuil, 1986), p. 270. Hereafter this source is noted parenthetically in the text as “*S.VII*,” followed by page number.
13. Lacan, “Reflections on the Ego,” pp. 15–16.
14. See Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-analysis*, p. 214.
15. See Lacan’s discussion of this point, *FFC*, 168.
16. See *E:S*, 301.
17. See Lacan’s remarks in “Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed.

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