

Life and Death in Psychoanalysis

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(little girl)-father-mother, but the triangle of rivalry, called in other circumstances the "fraternal complex": ego-parents-brother or sister.²⁴

3. This clinical example afforded Freud the opportunity to examine the problem of repression from various points of view: the relation of repression to regression, the relation of repression to sexual role, masculine or feminine, and so on. We shall simply add a remark intended to render explicit the identity of the *object* on which repression bears: it is essentially on the second phase, or on the fantasy at its emergence. It is, nevertheless, quite common to speak of repressed childhood memories, and not without clinical basis. In fact though, *what is repressed is not the memory but the fantasy derived from it or subtending it*: in this case, not the actual scene in which the father would have beaten another child, but the fantasy of being beaten by father. And yet it is clear that the repression of the fantasy can drag along with it into the unconscious the memory itself, a memory which after the event [*après-coup*] takes on a sexual meaning: "My father is beating another child—he loves me (sexually)." Just as the object to be refound is not the lost object, but its metonym, so the "scene" is not that of the memory, but that of the sexual fantasy derived from it.

4. Finally, we have situated, in the position of what we called reflexive masochism, or the middle voice, a fantasy which, however, has a properly masochistic content in the "passive" sense: I am being beaten by my father. But that is because, as we have emphasized, the process of turning round is not to be thought of only at the level of the content of the fantasy, but *in the very movement of fantasmaticization*. To shift to the reflexive is not only or even necessarily to give a reflexive content to the "sentence" of the fantasy; it is also and above all to reflect the action, internalize it, make it enter into oneself as fantasy. To fantasize aggression is to turn it round upon oneself, to aggress oneself: such is the moment of autoerotism, in which the indissoluble bond between fantasy as such, sexuality, and the unconscious is confirmed.

If we press that idea to its necessary conclusion, we are led to emphasize the privileged character of masochism in human sexuality. The analysis, in its very content, of an essential fantasy—the "primal scene"—would illustrate it as well: the child, impotent in his crib, is Ulysses tied to the mast or Tantalus, on whom is imposed the spectacle of parental intercourse. Corresponding to the perturbation of pain is the "sympathetic excitation" which can only be translated regressively through the emission of feces: the passive position of the child in relation to the adult is not simply a passivity in relation to adult activity, but passivity in relation to the adult fantasy intruding within him.²⁵

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Why the Death Drive?

Although there is little likelihood that the contents of the article "The Economic Problem in Masochism" will disappoint its reader, the title does raise expectations that are only partially fulfilled. The essential part of the text is devoted to a series of developments and quite fascinating reformulations: the description and analysis of the different clinical forms in which masochism may become manifest in analytic experience. But only the first pages of the text are devoted to the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the very notion of masochism. Moreover, the "solution" proposed barely invokes any clarification of the notion, and is based on the distinction between the life drive and the death drive, to which two different principles of operation would correspond: the pleasure principle and the Nirvana principle. Thus the "economic problem"—indeed the essential paradox—in masochism was quickly emptied of its content and relegated to the level of a primordial opposition between "love" and "strife," that titanic struggle of which we know from experience only the muted and inevitably ambiguous derivatives, since we can only encounter "combined" forms.

It is not even certain that the introduction of the "death drive," rather than illuminating the difficulties of masochism, does not, on the contrary, compound them, with the result that, among the numerous paradoxes generated by masochism, two in particular appear as fundamental: one seems inherent in the very notion; the other is generated by the articulation of masochism with the death drive.

THE PARADOX OF MASOCHISM

If we accept the definition "the pleasure of unpleasure," the *paradox inherent in masochism* lies in the very contradiction of those terms. From that point of departure, solutions—are they the evasions of reason or the evasions of the subject itself?—are conceivable only through the introduction of a difference of register between the terms of the equation, or through some conceptual slippage from one to the other of the terms.

One might attempt to resolve matters by situating each of the two terms in a different *place* in the topography of the subject, according to the well-known formula "What is pleasure for one system is unpleasure for another one." One could press the formulation further by assuming that one of the agencies (the superego) derives its pleasure *from the very fact* of inflicting unpleasure on another agency (the ego). That theory is normally quite compatible with common sense, for which the pleasure of sadism would be in no need of any special explanation, but would be fully "understandable." If, in the sadistic scenario, the pleasure is in the subject and the unpleasure in the object, the introjection of the latter and its integration into an agency of the personality (the ego) would result in an *internalization of the entire scene*, thus accounting at minimal expense for the paradox of masochism; the masochist would achieve enjoyment only through his fantasmatic identification with the active pole of the scene. That "solution," which would seem to be a matter of course as soon as it is admitted that every individual is divided within himself and against himself, was never proposed by Freud, however, who always considered *the pleasure of causing suffering* as more *enigmatic* and requiring a more complex explanation than *the pleasure of suffering*: which is to say that the "superego pleasure" just invoked can by no means serve as an irreducible and unquestionable axiom. But above all, it should be recalled that the coexistence within the same individual of pleasure and unpleasure, related to each other but assignable to two different "sites," is one of the most general of psychoanalytic discoveries. Clearly, in the case of any subject in analysis—be he "psychosomatic," "neurotic," or whatever—we encounter a certain suffering, and the movement of therapy consists in showing how that suffering is provoked by the individual himself, in the name of a search for pleasure in another site. To characterize such a conjunction, in every individual, as masochism or moral masochism is tantamount to diluting the very notion of masochism and perhaps even of depriving it of any meaning at all. Not that a masochistic potential, prepared to be reawakened and to reinforce suffering of any origin, does not exist in every human being. But it remains that the subject is masochistic only insofar as he derives enjoyment *precisely there where* he suffers, and not insofar as he suffers in one place in order to derive enjoyment in another, as a function of some arithmetic or algebra of pleasure. This may also be formulated as follows: the subject suffers *in order to* derive enjoyment and not only *in order to be able to* derive enjoyment (or to pay the "tax" for enjoyment).

At this point we are thus led to seek out, within the persistently disquieting equation pleasure = unpleasure, a slight hiatus that would be introduced simultaneously within the domains of pleasure and of unpleasure. If for reasons of convenience, we designate the two members of the

equation as a positive pole and a negative pole, we can continue to state that positive = negative only if the "positive" is not quite a positive, and the "negative" not quite a negative. Or rather: the "negative" is not quite the negative of the positive it is opposed to.

On the negative side, first, the notion of suffering or, more interesting still, the phenomenon of *pain*—as an effraction of the boundary and a rush of "unbound" energy—may be substituted for the notion of unpleasure.

On the positive side as well, distinctions are proposed which are not facilitated by established terminology and in particular by the German term *Lust*, traditionally translated as "pleasure" or occasionally as "enjoyment," but including as well the meaning of "lustful desire." We should introduce, in addition, the notion of *satisfaction*, which refers to the appeasement linked to a reduction of tension and is thus situated entirely within the "vital" register. But in that case, within the positive pole, pleasure would seem to divide into two directions: on the one hand, enjoyment [*jouissance*], in the sense both of frenetic pleasure and of lust, and on the other, satisfaction, understood in terms of the allaying of vital tensions. Within that opposition, the term "pleasure" may be used—depending on the author, and, in the case of Freud himself, at different times—to refer to one pole or the other of the fundamental opposition: either it is situated in opposition to functional satisfaction (and in that case, what is being referred to is the pleasure of the drive: for example, what Freud calls "organ pleasure"), or it is opposed to frenetic "enjoyment" [*jouissance*] (and in that case pleasure would be situated on the side of constancy and homeostasis):

Satisfaction/pleasure ~ pleasure/frenetic enjoyment!

We shall now make use of the results arrived at precisely through an interpretation and repositioning of Freud's theses:

1. Two levels must be scrupulously distinguished: the quantitative series or scale: (functional) pleasure—(functional) unpleasure; and the level of lust and/or enjoyment.

2. It is at this second level, lust and/or enjoyment, that the thesis of primary masochism is situated. It might be formulated as "the lust for and/or the enjoyment of pain." It is intimately connected with the notion of fantasy as an alien internal entity and with the drive as an internal attack, so that the paradox of masochism, far from deserving to be circumscribed as a specific "perversion," should be generalized, linked as it is to the *essentially traumatic nature of human sexuality*.

3. There remains ~~the~~ question ~~raised~~ by the formula lust and/or enjoyment, in which the terms are posited in a complex relation of both conjunction and disjunction. Certain of Freud's formulae, in their

appearance of imprecision, may indicate a fruitful path at this juncture: "The subject derives enjoyment from the excitation," wrote Freud in "The Economic Problem in Masochism," perhaps thus posing the entire problem of the sexual drive; and, in the *Three Essays* of 1905, concerning the very "sources" of the sexual drive: "The concepts of 'sexual excitation' and 'satisfaction' can to a great extent be used without distinction, a circumstance which we must later endeavor to explain."² "Deriving enjoyment from excitation": that expression situates Freud in a line of thought that long predates him, one affirming that "man prefers the hunt to the actual capture." Ought we simply to say that the hunt *also* entails within it the fantasy of the capture? But that formulation would be banal and inadequate if we failed to realize that the fantasy is no longer the same, is not the simple reflection or image of the capture, and is *derived* from it through a complex series of displacements. Such would be, in the most general terms, the relation between lust and "satisfaction."

"Deriving enjoyment from excitation"; "lust and/or enjoyment": these formulae lead us to inquire as to what value—at the level of that "mechanics" or "hydraulics" of ideational representatives which characterizes human sexuality—may be attributed to economic concepts derived metaphorico-metonymically from the register of biological homeostasis. The paradox compounded by the introduction of the notion of the death drive into the problem of masochism will guide us in what follows.

THE ECONOMIC PARADOX OF THE DEATH DRIVE

Beyond the Pleasure Principle, which in 1920, one year after "A Child Is Being Beaten," introduces the death drive, remains the most fascinating and baffling text of the entire Freudian *corpus*. Never had Freud shown himself to be as profoundly *free* and as audacious as in that vast metapsychological, metaphysical, and metabiological fresco. Terms which are entirely new appear: Eros, the death drive, the repetition compulsion. Old and apparently forgotten ideas, in particular those of the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, are taken up again and renewed. More than ever, the problem of Freud's "biologism" exercises, in this text, a global pressure: what is the function of the recourse to the life sciences, manifest at times as unrestrained speculation, at others, as a series of references to precise experimentation? A dialectical move "beyond" *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, if it is to be convincing, will be possible only after the meaning of that biologism has been elucidated. Finally, concerning the questions more directly approached in our two previous chapters, we find in this text a new, entirely original, and even unheard-of conjunction of the different modes of what might be designated, in all its

generality, as the "negative": aggression, destruction, sadomasochism, hatred, etc.

Profoundly baffling, Freud's discourse is only sporadically and superficially subordinated to logical imperatives: it constitutes a mode of thought that is free (in the sense of free associations), is undertaken "in order to see," and implies a series of "about-faces," acts of virtual repentance, and denials. *That* (equally attractive) counterpart of the freedom of Freud's style of inquiry may well disappoint the reader who fails to identify with that style: the holes in the reasoning constitute so many traps; the sliding of concepts results in blurring terminological points of reference; the most far-reaching discussions are suddenly resolved in the most arbitrary manner. If one resists the inherent movement of the text, one may derive the impression that every question in it is poorly posed and in need of reformulation.

Seductive and traumatic as it was, the forced introduction of the death drive could only provoke on the part of Freud's heirs every conceivable variety of defense: a deliberate refusal on the part of some; a purely scholastic acceptance of the notion and of the dualism: Eros-Thanatos on the part of others; a qualified acceptance, cutting the notion off from its philosophical bases, by an author like Melanie Klein; and, most frequently of all, a passing allusion to or a total forgetting of the notion.

Beyond the Pleasure Principle, in two distinct *frescoes* or *canti*, draws us irresistibly towards its myth: in a first phase, the most varied manifestations of *repetition*, considered as their irreducible quality, are attributed to the *essence of drives*. In a second movement, the tendency of the human individual to reproduce his earliest states and objects is related to a universal force largely transcending the fields of psychology and even life itself: a cosmic force that would irresistibly bring more organized forms regressively back to less organized ones, differences of level to a generalized equality, and the vital to the inanimate.³ At stake then is an effort to grasp what is most "driven" in the drive—ataraxy, Nirvana as the abolition of every drive—and what is most vital in the biological—death, explicitly designated as the "final aim" of life. Every living being aspires to death by virtue of its most fundamental *internal* tendency, and the diversity of life, as observed in its multifarious forms, never does anything but reproduce a series of transformations determined in the course of evolution, a series of adventitious detours provoked by any one of a number of traumas or supplementary obstacles: the organism wants not simply to die, but "to die in its own way."

As opposed to the "universal" of death, concerning which we are, however, hard put to imagine what could conceivably restrict it, a second principle, is, nevertheless, necessarily posited: the *life drive* or *Eros*, a tendency, which, despite certain of Freud's denials, contains within it a

measure of the optimism borne by the ideology of progress or evolution: Eros is the gatherer and tends to form perpetually richer and more complex unities, initially on the biological level, then on the psychological and social one. Finally, as opposed to the principle of energy-entropy, that has been plausibly compared to the death drive, Eros tends to maintain and to raise the energy level of the configurations whose intimate bond it forms.

Exactly like Thanatos, however, Eros is an *internal* force, inherent within the individual: atom, cell, living individual or psyche. It is within that monad that the dialectic or, rather, the fierce struggle between the two primordial forces unfolds; secondarily, a part of the primal destructiveness is deflected towards the external world, giving rise to the manifestation we identify in phenomena as aggressiveness. Thus, to return to the question already debated in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," what is affirmed here is the primacy of self-aggression over heteroaggression, that self-aggression being, in turn, only the consequence of the absolute primacy within the individual of the tendency towards zero, considered as the most radical form of the pleasure principle.

But what is posited in this case as primary within the individual combines, under a common rubric, tendencies which are hardly compatible: the reduction of tensions to zero (Nirvana), the tendency towards death, self-aggressiveness, the search for suffering or unpleasure. From an economic point of view the major contradiction consists in attributing to a single "drive" the tendency towards the radical elimination of all tension, the supreme form of the pleasure principle, and the masochistic search for unpleasure, which, in all logic, can only be interpreted as an increase of tension.

With an analytic sharpness, an originality of clinical observation, and a dialectical sense which are all characteristic of his work, Daniel Lagache has inquired into the "situation of aggressiveness" in a brief text.⁴ It is an important point of reference for an understanding of the author's own thought, but also for sorting out the different meanings that mesh in the notion of aggressiveness. The concept of the death drive is considered in the essay as "the formal unity of several ideas that are related but not identical." Within this virtual monster (in the sense in which beings created by human fantasy, chimeras or dragons constructed out of the most heterogeneous bodily parts and members, are so designated), Lagache enumerates various ideas, with the intention of criticizing them one by one, proposing a plausible interpretation of them, and finally resituating them in a different region of theory or experience. He thus examines:

1. The tendency towards a transition from the organic to the inorganic, in which he detects the most speculative and specious aspect of Freud's argument. He finds for it a possible application at a purely descriptive level within clinical practice: in order to designate a kind of reification of the subject—elsewhere termed psychical inertia or viscosity—in which routine and sclerosis have replaced, in a lasting or even definitive manner, renewal and creativity.

2. The tendency toward a "reduction of tensions." It is a notion that Lagache accepts, provided it not be pressed to the absurd, that is, to its extreme form as a reduction of *all tension*. When thus restricted, it constitutes within the author's personal problematic one of the poles of human activity, in opposition to the tendency toward a "realization of possibilities": two principles of psychical life which alternate, fuse in more or less harmonious compromises, or oppose each other according to type of conflict or stage of life. Between these two principles, psychoanalysis need not choose.

3. Finally, primary masochism, a notion concerning which Lagache first looks for psychophysiological illustrations or equivalences, but which he ultimately interprets as the initial state of the infant, totally dependent on another for his satisfaction. "Primary masochism" would thus find its place within the "narcissistic masochistic position," one in which the notion of masochism is assimilated a priori by the author to those of passivity and dependency.

To criticize, in the etymological sense of the term, is to choose, to redistribute the cards, to "air out" what has been mixed. In that sense, Lagache's criticism is one of the most far-reaching and relevant of those applied to the domain of aggressiveness. And yet, such a conception of criticism and analysis is, in our opinion, incomplete, if one intends to approach *as a psychoanalyst* a concept posited by the very founder of analysis. It goes without saying that with the death drive, there was a poor deal of the cards; the hand is all wrong. But is it sufficient, in that case, to begin the deal all over again and to effect a more correct combination? We believe that it is insufficient simply to redistribute the cards without first attempting to interpret the previous "deal." To analyze, to interpret: we have attempted to sketch the outlines of what might be an undertaking of this type, a project which is not that of any "pathography"—the interpretation of the individual desire of someone (Freud, in this case) through reference to the biographical traces he left—but an interpretation of what, in a work, allows for an intuition of the unconscious, even though it is already at the level of discursive thought: a theoretical exigency, the refracted derivative of desire.⁵ Exigency? We would willingly adopt instead a Freudian term, that of *Zwang*: the compulsion,

constraint, or demoniacal force of which one of the most striking examples is the *Zwang* of the oracular message irrevocably determining the destiny of Oedipus.⁶

Of those great compulsions of thought that periodically resurge within Freud's creation, the death drive is the most glaring and perhaps the one that combines all the others. How can one fail to note, with Jones, the manifest characteristics of this *Zwang*? In 1920, a text appears that was written out of the same inspiration marking the discontinuous and syncopated series of other writings that were similarly produced in a kind of second state: from the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* to "On Narcissism: An Introduction." But here a completely new development originates, situated outside any predictable trajectory: outside of the continuity of the metapsychological writings of 1915 and of their system, which seemed on the brink of attaining closure; divergent as well from the calling into question entailed by "narcissism," since what is at stake is not so much consolidating that entity as shattering it. A hypothesis emerges that calls everything into question. A hypothesis? It is presented without restraint, with arguments of every kind, frequently borrowed from fields outside of psychoanalytic practice, calling to the rescue biology, philosophy, and mythology. The argument progresses through a series of interruptions, obstinately following the details of a scientific debate only in order to abandon it abruptly, like an unlucky gambler who suddenly kicks over the table. We are thinking here of the extremely long and highly documented discussion of the problem of the immortality of the living cell in the light of experiments on protista, in which abruptly, when the reader has the impression that an examination of the various theses would end up refuting the existence of an *internal* tendency towards death, Freud breaks off his argument with an *ad hoc* invocation of the metaphysics of entities:

It becomes a matter of complete indifference to us whether natural death can be shown to occur in protozoa or not. . . . The drive forces which seek to conduct life into death may also be operating in protozoa from the first, and yet their effects may be so completely concealed by the life-preserving forces that it may be very hard to find any direct evidence of their presence. . . . But even if protista turned out to be immortal in Weismann's sense, his assertion that death is a late acquisition would apply only to its *manifest* phenomena and would not make impossible the assumption of processes *tending* towards it.⁷

This hypothesis is presented under cover of an extremely "liberal" argument: the universal right to pursue a train of thought as far as one wants, the sovereign freedom to philosophize and to dream.

Soon, however, the *Zwang* appears; the metaphysical reverie becomes dogma, as much for Freud as in relation to his disciples: "To begin with 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 upon me that I can no longer think in any other way."⁸

A second and opposite index of the same *Zwang*: this veritable dogma, which seems ineluctable at the level of the systematicity of Freud's thought, has only a relatively slight repercussion on the totality of his work as soon as that work moves closer to clinical practice: the new "dualism" is poorly integrated into the theory of conflict, in which the old oppositions of drives subsist, while the death drive is invoked as a last recourse and generally remains in the background: "Theoretical speculation [as opposed to "empirical analysis"] leads to the suspicion that there are two fundamental drives which lie concealed behind the manifest ego-drives and object-drives."⁹

Similarly, when, in *The Problem of Anxiety*, Freud reexamines the theory of neuroses, he integrates the death drive into the oedipal conflict only in the form of hatred, without according it any place insofar as it is self-destructive. Even though the theses of Rank on the "birth trauma," which are extensively discussed in that text, might have served as a pretext for the idea of a primordial internalization of destructiveness, the hypothesis of a primary death anxiety is ultimately discarded and the absence of death on the unconscious level reaffirmed.¹⁰

In speaking of the "hold" upon him exercised by the notion of the death drive, and thus authorizing us to propose the term *Zwang*, Freud himself opens up the path to attempts at interpretation. Jones, for his part, as Freud's biographer, sketches out such an analysis, but in a direction that one cannot but regard as reductive. It should be recalled in his favor that in so doing he was following certain indications given by Freud himself concerning the interpretation of philosophical works:

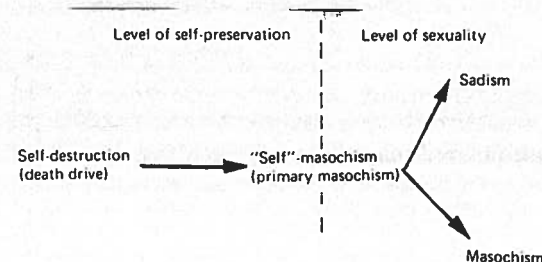
Psychoanalysis can indicate the subjective and individual motives behind philosophical theories which have ostensibly sprung from impartial logical work, and can draw a critic's attention to the weak spots in the system. It is not the business of psychoanalysis, however, to undertake such criticism itself, for, as may be imagined, the fact that a theory is psychologically determined does not in the least invalidate its scientific truth.¹¹

Thus Jones juxtaposes bit by bit objections concerning the intellectual "content" of the work, and the psychoanalytic interpretation as a function of the biographical elements at his disposal. The dichotomy itself already is dubious, but one's impression of inadequacy is compounded upon examination of each of the two terms: no doubt Freud's personal position in relation to death—his own as well as that of those close to him—is deserving of attention even in its slightest details—but analytic neutrality, which should be the rule for such a leveling of "material," is hardly to be found in the opinion that thinking "of [death] every day of [one's] life . . . is certainly unusual."¹²

Such naïveté or prejudice—which, in our opinion, by no means disqualifies every attempt at analytic psychobiography—finds its complement in an insufficiency of theoretical awareness. In this area, Jones isolates, in fact, two “turning points” in the same period: the revision of the conception of the psychical apparatus, resulting in the “second topographical model,” in which the author would see only a crowning or felicitous perfecting of Freud’s work; and the introduction of the death drive, in discontinuity with the whole of Freud’s earlier elaborations, in which the irruption of an emotional attitude that had been repressed too long would have only the import of a symptom. Ultimately, a certain cast of rationalistic mind, which may be analytic, but is profoundly antidialectical, results only in isolating and fragmenting: in separating—with the possibility of subsequently juxtaposing—the basic criticism from the psychological interpretation; in splitting the theory into good and bad innovations without imagining that there might exist a structural tie between them; and finally, in neglecting to relate the compulsion of the death drive to everything that prefigures or prepares it in other configurations within Freud’s work.

Although our project is to interpret, at the level of Freud’s work, the *Zwang*, the exigency governing this paradoxical turning point, it will be impossible for us to support that interpretation by following in detail the relevant texts, in particular *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. We are thus compelled to present, with a minimum of justification, the elements in it that recur, and whose energy serves to propel the concept of the death drive. In our opinion, there are three of these.

The first element is what we have called the priority of the “self-” or *selbst-* phase: the reflexive phase. That primacy, within the field of psychoanalysis, is manifest as much in the theory of autoerotism as in the presupposition of primary narcissism, conceived of as that state which is totally closed in upon itself and which offends both theoretical considerations and the most elementary data of observation.¹³ We shall simply add, in this context, that within *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the life drive or Eros, the force that maintains narcissistic unity and uniqueness, can be deduced as a *return to a prior state* only through an appeal to mythology: the fable of the androgyne, proposed by Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium*. So will it go as well for the death drive: here, the priority of the reflexive phase, which was solidly affirmed concerning *masochism in the sexual sense*, will begin proliferating or fissioning in relation to origins: already at the level of the self-preservation of living beings, aggression was there “in place,” stagnating *within*, and it is “in place,” “bound” there libidinally with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation” in the form of primary masochism.¹⁴



The second element of the exigency of the death drive is the *priority of zero over constancy*. As is known, Freud’s statements on the pleasure principle refer it—as if to its objective or even mathematical foundation—to the constancy principle. But *the duality of pleasure*, which splits it into functional pleasure and into organ pleasure, into calm satisfaction and into frenetic enjoyment [*jouissance*], is rediscovered at the economic level. The formulations of the constancy principle give the impression of masking, in turn, the same duplicity. We may cite, in illustration, two definitions of that economic principle in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

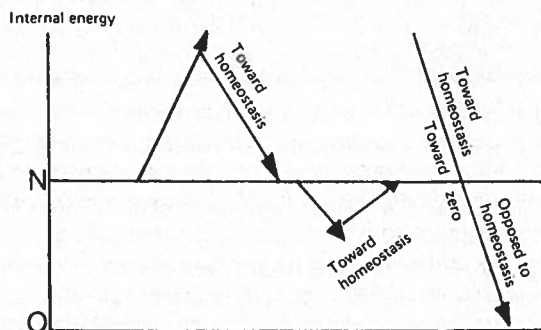
- (a) the tendency to “the reduction, constancy, or removal of internal excitation”;
- (b) the tendency of the psychical apparatus “to maintain as low as possible the quantity of excitation present within it, or at least to maintain it at a constant level.”

Thus the terms “zero” and “constancy,” which we would separate, are often presented by Freud as situated on a continuum, either by establishing between them a vague synonymy, with “psychophysiology” receiving the task of distinguishing between them more clearly, or else by presenting the tendency towards constancy as a “makeshift” replacement for an absolute reduction of tensions.

And yet at this quantitative level, in which Freud introduces a terminology that is, to all appearances, mathematical, an a priori discussion of the different relations possible between the two terms is justified:

1. *Can zero be assimilated to constancy?* Imagine a simple homeostatic system, in which a self-regulating mechanism has as its function the maintenance of a certain energy level N. In such a system, depending on whether it strays from level N by excess or by lack, what will be needed to reestablish the homeostasis is either an evacuation or an influx of energy. Moreover, an energy reduction tending to bring the system to level zero will, for part of its way, appear as favorable for the reestablishment of constancy, but pushed to its extreme, it seriously contradicts the constancy principle.

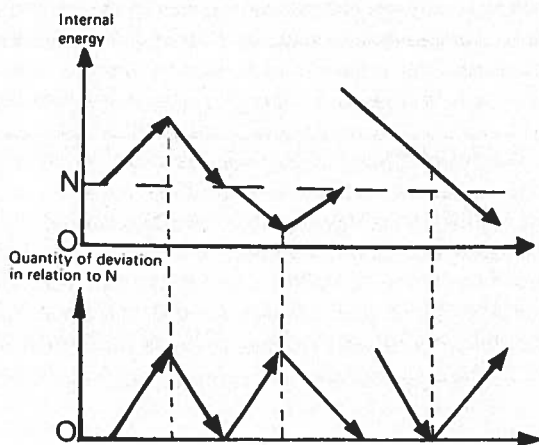
In relating this to the level of the homeostasis of an *organism*, we encounter the experimental evidence that a living being does not seek—as Freud would have it—only to evacuate excitations which would be perpetually brought to it from the outside: that organism, depending on circumstances and on its internal energy level, can just as well be in quest of “excitation” as desirous of avoiding it or evacuating it.



Thus, insofar as they are related within a single system to the same type of quantifiable energy, a zero principle and a constancy principle are irreducible to each other.

2. *Can a zero principle be considered as second in relation to a constancy principle?*

Consider once more the same homeostatic system, but introduce this time a second variable: along with the internal energy, the *quantity of deviation* in relation to reference level N, whether that *deviation* be



produced by the diminution of the absolute amount of energy or by its increase. In that event, a single energy exchange between the system and its environment will manifest itself differently depending on which of the two variables is being considered: the law of constancy, posited as governing the variations in time of absolute quantities of internal energy, will be translated into a zero law when it is the *quantity of variation or divergence* in relation to the norm which is itself taken as a variable (see diagram on p. 114).

These considerations bring us directly to the thought of Fechner, three of whose theses ~~should be considered as~~ basic points of reference in discussing Freud's considerations on the economy of pleasure: *the statement of the pleasure principle*;¹⁵ *the statement of the stability principle*, considered by Freud as the equivalent of his constancy principle;¹⁶ finally, the fundamental *psychophysical law* that quantifies “sensation” as the “logarithm of excitation,” thus establishing a precise relation between the quantity of variation that can be subjectively perceived (a quantity defined by the sums of successive divergences) and the quantity of the objective rush of energy. Now Freud's position in relation to these three crucial contributions of Fechner is quite remarkable: He does not say a word about Fechner's statement of a “pleasure principle of action” in terms rather close to his own conceptions. He considers the “stability principle” as the most general statement of “the tendency which we attribute to the mental apparatus . . . and that is subsumed as a special case under Fechner's principle.”¹⁷ He declares that “G. T. Fechner held a view on the subject of pleasure and unpleasure which coincides in all essentials with the one that has been forced upon us by psychoanalytic work,” and quotes an extremely explicit passage in which Fechner applies to the sensations of pleasure and unpleasure the fundamental “psycho-physical relation.”¹⁸ And yet he refuses, on that basis, to follow the path that would allow him to relate, in a precise function, the tendency towards zero to the tendency towards constancy, the zero of perceived divergence to the constancy of the internal energy level.

In order to unravel his own definition of the constancy principle, Freud, working in the same direction as Fechner, would have had to distinguish two entirely heterogeneous kinds of quanta: the quantum of divergence in relation to stability (which Fechner terms sensation) and the quantum of energy (which Fechner terms excitation). Now from the outset, in his earliest pronouncements on “economics,” Freud's thesis refers to *only one kind of “quantity”*: in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, the internal quantities (Q_n) are of the same kind as the external quantities (Q) and are differentiated from them only by virtue of the diminution imposed by a system of filters; elsewhere, and constantly, terms like “quantum of affect,” “sum of excitation,” “external stimula-

tion," "internal stimulation," etc., are given as purely and simply homogeneous.

3. Thus Freud rejects Fechner's solution. He needs a quantum of *materially* detachable psychical energy, capable of circulating, and not that *mathematical function*—Fechner's "sensation"—which is inseparable from the "excitation" whose logarithm it is. But above all, what he needs to affirm, against all biological or psychophysical plausibility, is the *primacy of zero in relation to constancy*.

As early as the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, the distinction between the two principles that will later appear in the form of the Nirvana principle and the constancy principle is clearly posited: we have already come across the first of those principles under the name of the "principle of neuronic inertia": "Neurones tend to divest themselves of quantity." And it is once again explicitly asserted as a tendency towards zero excitation: "Its original trend toward inertia (that is, towards a reduction of its level of tension to zero)."

This *zero principle* is constantly identified with the following notions:

- (a) free energy, tending towards discharge by the shortest paths;
- (b) the primary process;
- (c) the pleasure (or unpleasure) principle: "Since we have certain knowledge of a trend in psychical life towards *avoiding unpleasure*, we are tempted to identify that trend with the primary trend towards inertia. In that case *unpleasure* would coincide with a rise in the level of quantity or with a quantitative increase of pressure. . . . *Pleasure* would be the sensation of discharge."¹⁹

It will be seen that in this definition of pleasure-unpleasure, *within the psychical apparatus, the question of constancy is irrelevant*. Not that a principle of constancy is absent from Freud's earliest elaboration; but it is to be found in an entirely different position, *in opposition to* the primary process. The notion of constancy is introduced secondarily, as an adaptation, on account of "the necessity of life," of the principle of inertia:

The neuronic system is consequently obliged to abandon its original trend towards inertia (that is, towards a reduction of its level of tension to zero). It must learn to tolerate a store of quantity sufficient to meet the demands for specific action. In so far as it does so, however, the same trend still persists in the modified form of a tendency to keep the quantity down, at least, so far as possible and avoid any increase in it (that is, to keep its level of tension constant).

Thus the *law of constancy*, even if it is not explicitly posited as a principle, corresponds quite precisely to bound energy and the secondary process. We had already identified it earlier as linked to the emergence of

the agency of the ego, a form cathected at a constant level and serving to ballast, moderate, and regulate the free circulation of unconscious desire, inhibiting the hallucinatory recathexis of ideational representatives linked to the first "experiences of satisfaction."

And it is quite true that with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is the same priority of zero which, under the name of Nirvana, is being reaffirmed. The displacement of the term "pleasure principle" should not mislead us: the pleasure principle, insofar as, throughout the text, it is posited as being of a piece with "its modification" as the reality principle, is henceforth situated on the side of constancy. It is "its most radical form" or its "*beyond*" which, as the Nirvana principle, reasserts the priority of the tendency towards absolute zero or the "death drive."

But Freud's thesis would be only a rehash if it did not bear witness to another aspect of the *Zwang: the necessity of inscribing the two preceding priorities (the priority of the self-phase, the priority of zero) within the domain of the vital*. Starting with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is the whole of the biological domain, its history as well as its contemporary manifestations, which are infested by the immanence of a tendency to zero, working *obscurely but ineluctably "within."*

Shall we invoke a romantic or Rilkean theme bearing witness to Freud's permanent familiarity with his own death? Perhaps. But the carrying over of zero into life and the attempt to *deduce* the living from it are manifestations that are not without precedent within Freud's theoretical work itself.

To the extent that the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* is presented, in the most total metaphorical ambiguity, as being *also* a theory of the living organism, it is particularly illuminating to compare that theory with *Breuer's thinking* as it is articulated at the very same time in the chapter on "Theoretical Considerations" written for the *Studies in Hysteria*. For one would have to limit oneself lazily or thoughtlessly to the most extrinsic formulations in order to consider without discussion what is presented there by Breuer as the initial stage of Freud's thought.²⁰

For although their clinical experience is apparently the same—the "retention" of affect in hysterical manifestations and its contrary, "abreaction"—and although the "rule of constancy of sums of excitation" is presented as the first "joint theory" of the two authors (to the point that each attributes it to the other), the divergence between Breuer's physiology in the "Theoretical Considerations" and that which may be derived from the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* is, in fact, profound.²¹

Breuer, it should be recalled, collaborated with Hering in his work on one of the principal self-regulating systems of the organism: breathing. The constancy he refers to is of the same type: a *homeostasis*. Not, of course, a *homeostasis* of the whole of the organism (like those which

regulate the major constants in life), but a homeostasis of a more specific and specialized system: the central nervous system.

It is within that framework that his distinction between a "quiescent" energy or "intracerebral tonic excitation" and a kinetic energy circulating through the system should be understood. The constancy principle, for Breuer, regulates the *base level* of the tonic energy; it is thus unlike the pleasure principle, which, for Freud, will regulate the *flow* of circulating energy.

For this reason Breuer can write: "There exists in the organism a tendency to keep intracerebral excitation constant."²²

A base level of the kind envisaged is conceived of as an *optimum*. As such, it can be threatened by various changes of level, some effecting a generalized disturbance, others a more localized one; as such, it can be reestablished through a discharge (abreaction) *but also through a recharge*. What is at stake, it may be said, is the maintenance of a veritable energy *Gestalt*.

Finally, that optimum has its own finality: the free and successful circulation of kinetic energy, that is, an uninhibited functioning of thought, the existence of unimpeded associations:

We have spoken of a tendency on the part of the organism to keep tonic cerebral excitation constant. A tendency of this kind is, however, only intelligible if we can see what need it fulfills. We can understand the tendency in warm-blooded animals to keep a constant mean temperature, because our experience has taught us that that temperature is an optimum for the functioning of their organs. . . . I think that we may also assume that there is an optimum for the height of the intracerebral tonic excitation. At that level of tonic excitation the brain is accessible to all external stimuli, the reflexes are facilitated, though only to the extent of normal reflex activity, and the store of ideas is capable of being aroused and open to association in the mutual relation between individual ideas which corresponds to a clear and reasonable state of mind.²³

Inversely, in dreams, associations will be defective and impeded. In a *thesis diametrically opposed to Freud's*, dreams, for Breuer, manifest a state in which psychical energy is anything but "free," and *that* because of a "decrease" in the base level of tonic potential which is "the very condition of the power of transmissions."²⁴

The model used here is one of a network in which modulation is possible only by virtue of a certain electrical base level, which is to be maintained at all costs: the tonic energy has an absolute priority over every possible circulation of the kinetic energy.

This all too brief summary of Breuer's thought should suffice to show the interest merited by a neurophysiological approach which, although starting from the "physicalist" notions of Helmholtz's school, remained extremely flexible and quite close to physiological experience. Such an

approach may be considered to be not in rigorous contradiction with later discoveries of neurophysiology (e.g., the maintenance of a base level by the activating reticulated system), and, as such, to be a scientifically plausible and open hypothesis.

Freud, however, in his earliest writings and throughout the length of his work, uses as a fundamental point of conceptual reference the opposition between two types of energy: free energy and bound energy. He attributes the introduction of that distinction in psychology to Breuer and explicitly assimilates his free energy to Breuer's kinetic energy, his bound energy to quiescent energy: "This picture can be brought into relation with Breuer's distinction between quiescent (or bound) and mobile cathectic energy in the elements of the psychical systems."²⁵

Reference to the common origins of the theories of Breuer and Freud in Helmholtz's thought should, in principle, allow us better to understand such an assimilation. And, indeed, we do find clearly posited in Helmholtz the distinction between *free energy* and *bound energy*. He introduces these terms in the course of considerations concerning the Carnot-Clausius principle and the degradation of energy. The Carnot principle, as is known, results in the idea that despite the initial definition of energy as "the capacity to produce work" and despite the principle of the conservation of energy, what is conserved in a given system—its total internal energy—is not, for all that, able to be indefinitely reconverted into work. Whence the distinction between two types of energy whose sum constitutes the internal energy: energy that can be reconverted into work and is "usable" (Maxwell), and energy that cannot be reconverted and is "degraded" in the form of heat. It is in order to designate these two types of energy that Helmholtz proposes the terms *free energy* and *bound energy*: "It seems certain to me that we must distinguish, within chemical processes as well, between that portion of the forces of affinity capable of being freely transformed into other kinds of work, and that portion that can only become manifest in the form of heat. To abbreviate, I shall call these two portions of energy: free energy and bound energy."²⁶ For a given system, this may be translated by the equation:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Internal energy} \quad \text{Free energy} \qquad \qquad \text{Bound energy} \\ U = F(\text{reie}) \searrow + G(\text{ebundene}) \nearrow = C^{\text{te}} \end{array}$$

In the equation, the free energy (freely usable energy) tends constantly to diminish, whereas the bound (nonreconvertible) energy increases.

Now a certain analogy may be found between this law and that which, in a mechanical system, governs the relative quantities of potential or tonic energy and kinetic energy: like tonic energy, Helmholtz's free energy

presupposes a high level of potential and the capacity to be transformed into another form; it resembles tonic energy as well in that it tends to decrease in the course of its different conversions and eventually attains a minimal level, whereas kinetic energy, for its part, can never be completely reconverted into tonic energy.²⁷ Despite certain details, which are irrelevant in this context, we can propose a second equation, at the level of the mechanical laws governing states of equilibrium:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{Total energy} & & \text{Tonic energy} & & \text{Kinetic energy} & & \\ E & = & T & \searrow & + & C & \nearrow & = & C^{1e} \end{array}$$

If, then, a comparison was to be made with the science of physics, it would be between free energy and tonic energy, bound energy and kinetic energy, a comparison which is *exactly* the reverse of the one Freud made in assimilating his own terms, free energy and bound energy, to Breuer's distinction between kinetic energy and quiescent energy.²⁸

A misideal? A double set of cross-purposes? Freud takes up terms charged by Helmholtz with the meaning of the second law of thermodynamics; he more or less reverses their meaning, interpreting the adjective "free" in the sense of "freely mobile" and no longer "freely usable"; finally, he superimposes that opposition on distinctions introduced by Breuer. If, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a manifest absurdity corresponds to an ironic criticism to be found in the latent content, we believe ourselves authorized to see in this formally respectful treatment of Breuer's theory the mark of an exasperated irreverence.

And indeed, what a difference between the *reasonable* hypotheses of Breuer and the vast *machinery* of the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*! At the present juncture, that difference may be observed at the very level of the organism. Breuer posits the bases of a viable organism, whose relations with its environment are regulated by homeostases and in which an unimpeded functioning, proper circulation, is second in relation to the maintenance of a proper form. Freud, on the contrary, would deduce within the organism the "secondary function," starting from a primary tendency to evacuate energy. One need only follow carefully the first lines of the *Project*, devoted to the "quantitative line of approach," to see how strange it is.

The principle of neuronic inertia, a principle of absolute evacuation of energy, is from the outset illustrated by what is commonly called *the model of the reflex arc*:²⁹ the evacuation at the motor end of the excitation received at the receiving end, with the essential postulate that it is the same quantity of the same energy that is carried to one end in order to be restored, in the form of movement, at the other end. It is a naïve model of

conduction of received mechanical energy by the nervous system, as if what were under consideration were a hydraulic draining system; it is a model incompatible with physiological discoveries already made by the end of the nineteenth century; a model which Freud himself corrects at times by indicating that what takes place at the motor end is not a simple transmission of energy, but the triggering of a release of internal energy at the level of the "motor neurones";³⁰ a model which, nevertheless, in its massive mechanistic simplicity, will be rediscovered at the foundation of the evolution of the "living vesicle," as late as in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Now it is on the basis of this abiological functioning, which seems "deathly" in the very sense of the death drive, that Freud would introduce, through a kind of deductive argument, the constitution of a "reserve of energy." The mediator, in this deduction, is what Freud calls the "exigencies of life," meaning by that the pressure exercised on the organism by a rush of excitation of internal origin, the inadequacy of anarchical organic reactions in durably evacuating that overcharge, and the necessity of triggering appropriate "specific" actions, which are alone able to open the floodgates towards discharge:

The neuronic system is consequently obliged to abandon its original trend towards inertia (that is, towards a reduction of its level of tension to zero). It must learn to tolerate a store of quantity sufficient to meet the demands for specific action. In so far as it does so, however, the same trend still persists in the modified form of a tendency to keep the quantity down, at least, so far as possible and avoid any increase in it (that is, to keep its level of tension constant). All the performances of the neuronic system are to be comprised under the heading either of the primary function or the secondary function imposed by the exigencies of life.³¹

Thus, in the transition from a mechanism regulated only by the death drive to an organization subject to the constancy principle, it is the *very idea of life* that would serve as mediator and catalyst. And on every occasion on which Freud refers to the "biological standpoint" in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, he does so in order to bridge the gaping discontinuity in the "mechanistic" argument.

The notion that the *idea* of an organism—the term being taken here with all its connotations, both those of representation and those of *eidos*, "form"—is the factor that "precipitates" the bond and provokes the transition from primary psychical functioning to secondary functioning is a conception coherent with the "introduction of the ego" throughout Freud's thought. But the impasse asserts itself when, at the "earlier" level—the deduction of the living and even of "life" itself—it is still the "exigencies of life" that are invoked, as a final cause, in order to justify the constitution of an organism and the maintenance of a store of energy that

is "bound" by the very limit of the vesicle: thus we find carried back into the vital order the joint priority or primacy of the reflexive phase and the tendency towards zero, which, nevertheless, finds its justification solely within the field of psychoanalysis.

It remains to *interpret* the triple *Zwang* affirmed in the death drive, to perceive the fundamentally original kind of rationality hiding behind the shocking lack of logic of certain theses: an interpretation, which, in each of its three moments, should attempt to coincide with *a call back to order coming from the unconscious itself*.

The priority of the self-phase? We have shown that whether the subject be autoerotism, fantasy, or masochism, what is being discussed is nothing but the position of the originary character of the reflexive moment for the constitution of human sexuality.

What is being recalled as well is the autonomy of the field of human sexuality as the field of psychoanalysis, the rule according to which there is nothing to be sought "beyond" it in the art of psychoanalytic listening and interpretation, since every unmediated reference to life, self-preservation, and reality falls outside of our grasp.

In addition we find in this thesis the affirmation of fantasy as our primary element, the originary internalization of "conflict" and of the irreconcilable. In this sense, the death drive, a concept that seems quite undialectical, is present, in Freud's final formulations, not as an element in conflict but as *conflict itself* substantialized, an internal principle of strife and disunion.³²

The priority of zero over constancy? We would see in it the reiterated affirmation of the laws of the unconscious process, in their heterogeneity in relation to everything that depends on the intervention of reality or of the ego. The free circulation of affect, as it is discovered in fantasy or in the laws of dreaming is reasserted: in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the model of the reflex arc finds its original meaning in a "reflex apparatus," constituted by mnemonic or ideational systems. The pleasure principle, radicalized as the Nirvana principle, was discovered and is valid only at the level of ideational representatives, and cannot be merged haphazardly—lest the most utter confusion ensue for psychoanalysis—with apparently similar principles observed within the "vital order."

And yet it is indeed with principles from the vital order that Freud, from the very beginning, would establish a kind of continuity. It is to them that, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he attributes, as a tendency towards death, a repetition compulsion whose major piece of supporting evidence is, however, the psychoanalytic phenomenon par excellence: transference. We are thus posing the most difficult question when we inquire as to the internal exigency that leads Freud to carry back to the biological level two theses that can be justified only in relation to the discovery of psychoanalysis.

To be sure, the necessity of *affirming the primal or originary*, both in the form of the "individual myth"³³ and in historical or prehistorical myth, may be identified as one of the fundamental, founding orientations of Freud's thought. And asserting the biological myth of the emergence of a living form from a chaos of energy is indeed tantamount to projecting into the same dimension, beyond our grasp, the individual event effecting the coagulation—within what we can imagine only with difficulty under the rubric of the primary process—of the first nucleus of an ego.

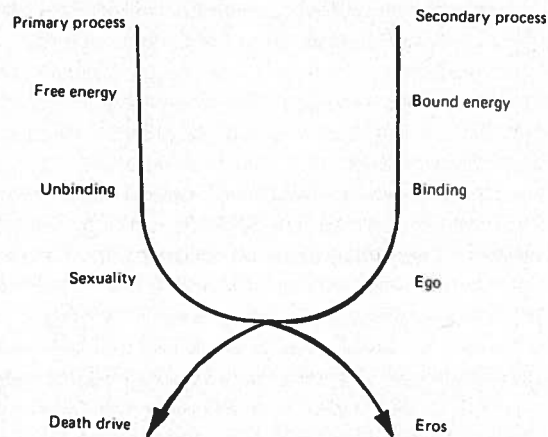
And yet if we consider that this carrying back of the present into the past, of ontogeny into phylogeny, is also, in the case at hand, a carrying back of death into life, we are hard put to avoid a more specific interpretation of that movement towards the originary. It is as though there were in Freud the more or less obscure perception of a necessity to refute every vitalistic interpretation, to shatter life in its very foundations, with its consistency, its adaptation, and, in a word, its instinctuality—concerning which we have noted how problematical it is in the case of humans. And in order to do so, to carry death back (and such, of course, is the paradox) to the very level of biology, as an *instinct*. It is not without good reason that the commentators have on more than one occasion noted that at the level of Freud's last "dualism," it is perhaps no longer drives in the "Freudian" sense of the term that are in question, but instincts, in a kind of hyperbolic transcendence of the banal meaning assumed by that term within the life sciences. In order better to understand how this compulsion to demolish life comes to the surface precisely in the year 1919, with the ascendancy of the death drive, several additional considerations concerning the evolution and structure of Freud's theory would be indispensable.

In 1914 "Narcissism: An Introduction," appeared; in 1923, *The Ego and the Id*. This is the period in which, with the development of the theory of the ego and of its narcissistic libidinal cathexis, "life" imposes itself as more pressing and encroaching. The ego now seems to pride itself on all the powers and delegations it has accumulated: the delegations of self-preservation, but also those of sexuality, even including love and object-choice, which are always marked, as we observed, by the stigma of narcissism. Concomitantly, we now observe the emergence of Eros, the divine force that we were not able to examine at any length, but only to emphasize how it differs from sexuality, the first discovery of psychoanalysis. Eros is what seeks to maintain, preserve, and even augment the cohesion and the synthetic tendency of living beings and of psychological life. Whereas, ever since the beginnings of psychoanalysis, sexuality was in its essence hostile to binding—a principle of "un-binding" or unfastening (*Entbindung*) which could be bound only through the intervention of the ego—what appears with Eros is the *bound and binding form* of sexuality, brought to light by the discovery of narcissism. It is that form of

sexuality, cathecting its object, attached to a form, which henceforth will sustain the ego and life itself, as well as any specific form of sublimation.

In the face of this triumph of the vital and the homeostatic, it remained for Freud, in keeping with the structural necessity of his discovery, to reaffirm, not only within psychoanalysis, but even within biology (by means of a categorical disregard for epistemological distinctions), a kind of antilife as sexuality, frenetic enjoyment [*jouissance*], the negative, the repetition compulsion. Strategically, the carrying back of the principles of psychoanalysis into the vital order is tantamount to a counterattack, a means of wreaking havoc in the very bases from which one risked being invaded. A subjective strategy? A strategy of the thing itself if it is indeed true that this carrying back into life of an intensely human war was already at the origin of the generalized subversion introduced by sexuality.

The energy of the sexual drive, as is known, was called "libido." Born of a formalistic concern for symmetry, the term "destrudo," once proposed to designate the energy of the death drive, did not survive a single day. For the death drive does not possess its own energy. Its energy is libido. Or, better put, the death drive is the very soul, the constitutive principle, of libidinal circulation.



The genealogy of the final instinctual dualism? If we place face to face the terms constituting the constant pairs of opposites in Freud's thought, that genealogy takes the form of a strange chiasmus whose riddle we, as Freud's successors, are beginning to decipher.

Conclusion

As the stages of a meditation on the problematics and history of psychoanalysis, the results presented above have as their principal effect to render more precise the specificity of the field of analysis in relation to the vital order. Now, that specificity is not defined solely through the establishment of an epistemological boundary. It takes on its meaning only if we succeed in elaborating the kinds of relations existing between those two orders: a "genetic" circulation that should allow us to situate the logico-chronological phases of a process of emergence and the modes of transposition from one sphere to the other.

Within human sexuality, the instinct, a vital force, loses its quality and its identity in the drive, its metaphorico-metonymical "derivative." Already the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in their very organization, entailed a radical loss of the biological, even as they posited, in the third chapter ("The Transformations of Puberty"), the scheme through which a different structure could be rediscovered: that resulting from interhuman forms of exchange, a generalized logic of which the oedipal complex is the historically prevalent example.

Within the ego, it is no longer the tension of life but the stable form of the living that is transposed, coming to impose itself by virtue of that primitive physiological weakness that Freud had already designated as the focal point for a specifically human development. The "orthopedic" import of such a form has been emphasized, mainly in order to denounce it, by Jacques Lacan. But considering Freud as the heir of a La Rochefoucauld and a Hegel, analyzing the misprision presupposed by the "reality function" and the defensive or "ideological" alibi lurking behind the ideal of adaptation, is not sufficient to allow one to announce the glad tidings of the "end of the ego," even in the analyst. And this, not only by virtue of the fact that, after all, "life has to be lived" and a human being can supplement a love of life that is occasionally deficient only by a love of the ego or of the ideal agencies which are, in turn, derived from it, but also—if the essence of the ego function is indeed *binding*, before being adaptation—because a minimum of intervention by that function is

13. There is an absolute realism of the thought process; thought is in the body, in the head, and is an internal object—which is to say that in a certain sense, there is no "scientific psychology" based on psychoanalysis.

14. "The dream *is* the fulfillment of a wish"; "the hallucination *is* a satisfaction"—these theses, which are central to psychoanalysis, defy every experimental observation. Freud, moreover, has a certain difficulty in fending off the objection that would admit that dreams express intentions and meanings, but would refuse the notions that those meanings are solely wishes or desires. For indeed, why not include as well hope, fear, resignation, regret, etc.? In order to justify Freud's a priori position (beyond any verification, which would always be suspect), we would have to admit that the fantasy *is in itself* a sexual perturbation.

15. We speak here of a "first pain" as Freud, in the *Project*, speaks of a "first hysterical lie or deceit." The two models are connected in an essential way.

16. "A Child Is Being Beaten," in *SE*, 17: 186.

17. See p. 93.

18. *SE*, 12: 185.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

24. We are not, of course, suggesting that this triangle of rivalry is chronologically "prior" to the "sexual" triangle of the oedipus complex.

25. Where shall we situate the third stage of the fantasy "A child is being beaten"? Freud himself hesitated to qualify it as either sadistic or masochistic and finally concluded that "only the *form* of this fantasy is sadistic; the satisfaction which is derived from it is masochistic." *SE*, 17: 191.

The question strikes us as somewhat formalistic to the extent that we, along with Freud, would affirm "the regular and close connections of masochism with its counterpart in instinctual life, sadism." "The Economic Problem of Masochism," p. 163. That complementarity, authorizing us to retain the concept of "sodomasochism," has nothing to do, it should be emphasized, with an actual complementarity between the sadistic and masochistic *perversions*, nor with the possibility of an actual transition from one to the other (through a "turning round," for example). Perversion always presupposes the fixation of *ego* at one of the poles of the fantasy. The diagram we have extracted from "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" shows in its simplicity that there can be no direct transition from position *S* to position *M*, even though they both stem from a common "primal fantasy."

But in that case, the conscious fantasy "a child is being beaten" should be considered neither sadistic nor masochistic *in the sense of a perversion*. As a sadomasochistic fantasy, it is part of "reflexive masochism," which can also be considered as "reflexive sadism." In "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" Freud treats "reflexive" masochism as a characteristic of obsessional *neurosis*, and it is not by chance that the patients Freud refers to in "A Child Is Being Beaten" present symptoms which are predominantly obsessional. Thus "Ein Kind wird geschlagen = a child is being beaten" is a neutralized, neurotic, conscious derivative of the primal reflexive fantasy.

CHAPTER 6

1. This ambiguity of the concept of pleasure cannot be entirely eliminated through a terminological convention. It is the index of a process of metaphorization.

2. *Three Essays*, p. 201.

3. In view of the development of physics, we have no reason, in fact, to imagine that "brute" matter necessarily represents the least organized state of matter, and even less to think that it corresponds to the leveling of energy—all differences of potential reduced or abolished—which Freud would suggest.

4. D. Lagache, "Situation de l'agressivité," *Bulletin de Psychologie*, 1961, pp. 99-112.

5. See Laplanche, "Interpréter [avec] Freud," *L'Arc*, no. 34 (1968), pp. 37-46.

6. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, p. 192.

7. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *SE*, 18: 48. The discussion of biological experiments on the survival of unicellular organisms in a suitably nourishing milieu resulted in the conclusion that the organisms would perish only if the milieu was not periodically purged of the toxins produced by cellular metabolism. Freud sees in this proof that "an infusorian . . . if it is left to itself, dies a natural death owing to its incomplete voidance of the products of its own metabolism" (p. 48). Thus the cell dies for "internal" reasons provided that we leave it in the midst of its wastes—that is, provided that we enlarge the organism so that it includes its surroundings. In this kind of argument we recognize the metaphorical pendant of the internalization—in trauma—of the "irreconcilable" drive and of the element of strife that it conveys.

8. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), in *SE*, 21: 119.

9. "Psychoanalysis" (1026), in *SE*, 20: 265.

10. "In the unconscious, however, there is nothing to give content to our conception of the destruction of life. . . . I therefore maintain that the fear of death is to be regarded as an analogue of the fear of castration." *Inhibition, Symptom, and Anxiety*, in *SE*, 20: 146.

11. "The Claims of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest," p. 179.

12. Jones, *Freud*, 3: 279.

13. On this subject we have had occasion to refer to Melanie Klein, but we may also invoke Balint, and Bowlby as well in an article which, once reinterpreted, proves extremely useful: "The Nature of the Infant's Relation with His Mother," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39, pt. 5 (1958).

14. "The Economic Problem of Masochism," p. 163.

15. A number of the characteristics of Freud's pleasure principle are already present in the text published by Fechner in 1848: "Über das Lustprinzip des Handelns," in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Philosophische Kritik* (Halle, 1848). What we encounter in Fechner is by no means a traditional hedonism: the representation of *future* pleasure or unpleasure is irrelevant. The pleasure principle is a regulating mechanism requiring a *present* sensation to bring everything into action. It functions at the level of the pleasure-unpleasure linked to the ideational representatives themselves, and not to what is represented, aimed at, or projected. Since the movement is always from unpleasure toward pleasure, it will be appreciated that within that pair the motivating term is unpleasure. Freud, as is known, began by speaking of an "unpleasure principle," then of an "unpleasure-pleasure" principle; he asserts on several occasions that there is an *automatic regulation* of psychical processes by this principle; ultimately he situates the principle as regulating the "course of ideational representatives." In each of these moves he is adopting Fechner's theses.

16. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 8-10.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

18. It will be useful at this point to transcribe the passage from Fechner quoted by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: "In so far as conscious impulses always have some relation to pleasure or unpleasure, pleasure and unpleasure too can be regarded as having a psycho-physical relation to conditions of stability and instability. This provides a basis for a hypothesis into which I propose to enter into greater detail elsewhere. According to this hypothesis, every psycho-physical motion rising above the threshold of consciousness is attended by pleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it approximates to complete stability, and is attended by unpleasure in proportion as, beyond a certain limit, it deviates from complete stability; while between the two limits, which may be described as qualitative thresholds of pleasure and unpleasure, there is a certain margin of aesthetic indifference." Fechner, *Einige Ideen zur Schöpfungs- und Entwicklungsgeschichte der Organismen* (1873) pt. 11, Supplement, p. 94.

Freud cannot have failed to perceive the rigorous solution Fechner contributed to the problem of zero and constancy. And yet two lines after this quotation, Freud again offers one of those deliberately vague formulations in which the maintenance of constancy figures as no more than an imperfect approximation of the tendency toward the lowest level.

19. *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, p. 373.

20. That, however, is precisely what S. Bernfeld does in an article whose sole merit lies in its being one of the first to devote any attention to Breuer's thought; see "Freud's Earliest Theories and the School of Helmholtz," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1944).

21. We can find vestiges of that divergence even in the vicissitudes of the "constancy principle" in the different stages of composition of the only chapter of the *Studies on Hysteria* signed by both authors, the "Preliminary Communication" of 1893.

In a letter to Josef Breuer dated 29 June 1892 (*Gesammelte Werke*, 17: 5), Freud first refers—as if to a commonly held theory—to the "theorem of the constancy of the sum of excitation," but without specifying its contents. In a preparatory manuscript composed together, the principle is said to be a principle of *constancy*, the discharge being only the *means* of reestablishing that "condition of health." *Gesammelte Werke*, 18: 12-13. In the text published by both authors and subsequently inserted into the *Studies on Hysteria*, the "Preliminary Communication" of 1893, *every reference to the principle has been eliminated*. Now, at the same time that the "Preliminary Communication" was being published, Freud delivered a lecture on the same subject to the Vienna Medical Society, a presentation of which a summary has been published, and which "bears all the marks of being the work of Freud alone." Strachey, preface, *SE*, 3: 26. There the principle reappears in a form which no longer alludes to constancy but only to a necessary *discharge*: "If a person experiences a psychological impression, something in his nervous system which we will for the moment call the sum of excitation is increased. Now in every individual there exists a tendency to diminish this sum of excitation once more, in order to preserve his health." Lecture, "The Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena," *SE*, 3: 36. Thus it would seem that after working together on a formulation moving in the direction of a *principle of constancy*, Freud and Breuer diverged (explicitly or not), with the result that the point was excluded from publication. Thereupon Freud exploited his new freedom by formulating in more clinical terms a principle of discharge closely related to the *principle of inertia* or the zero principle.

22. *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 197.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

25. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 26.

26. H. Helmholtz, "Über die Thermodynamik chemischer Vorgänge" (1882), in *Abhandlungen zur Thermodynamik chemischer Vorgänge* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1902), p. 18.

27. "A system is in a state of stable equilibrium when its potential energy possesses one of its minimal possible values." D. O. Chwolson, *Traité de Physique* (Paris: Hermann, 1906), p. 117.

28. This set of cross-purposes has been observed by L. B. Penrose, "Freud's Theory of Instinct," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 12, p. 92: "It should be noted in passing that throughout his analyses Freud seems to depend on a terminology opposed to the one in common use: he calls potential energy *free energy* and kinetic energy—which we call *free energy—bound energy*."

29. *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, p. 357.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 383-84.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

32. "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in *SE*, 23: 246.

33. See Lacan, "Le Mythe individuel du névrosé ou 'poésie et vérité' dans la névrose" (Lecture at the Collège Philosophique). In a similar way, Freud had already spoken of the neurotic's "family romance." *SE*, 9: 235-41.

CONCLUSION

1. See J. Laplanche, "La Défense et l'interdit dans la cure et la conception psychanalytique de l'homme," *La Nef*, no. 31 (July-October 1967), pp. 43-55.

APPENDIX

1. *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 129.

2. H. Sperber, "Über den Einfluss sexueller Momente auf Entstehung und Entwicklung der Sprache," *Imago* 1, no. 5 (1912): 405-53.

3. E. Jones, "The Theory of Symbolism," in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Baillière, 1948).

4. Laplanche and Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, trans. Michelson-Smith, as *The Language of Psychoanalysis*.

5. On this subject see D. Anzieu, "Réflexions sur le Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse," *Bulletin de Psychologie* 10 (1967): 126-32.

6. R. Jakobson, with M. Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Paris: La Harpe, 1956).

7. R. Jakobson, "A la recherche de l'essence du langage," in *Problèmes du langage*, coll. "Diogène" (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 34.

8. C. Perelman, *Traité de l'argumentation* (Paris: P.U.F., 1958), 2: 534-42.

9. J. Lacan, "L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud," in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). Translation in *Structuralism*, ed. J. Ehrmann (New York: Anchor, 1970). Such an orientation has the effect of blurring somewhat the distinction between metaphor and metonymy. For since every reference to the "signified" is rejected, the category of trope is defined entirely by the relation—*within the language structure*—joining the signifiers which are brought into play. But whether that relation be one of continuity within a discursive sequence or be reduced to the "vertical dependencies" of a signifier, in both cases what is under consideration is membership in a given set, and consequently, in the final analysis, *contiguity*. As a result, if we bracket the signified, Lacan's examples do not always allow us to decide whether we are dealing with metaphors or metonymies. If metaphor is defined solely by the formula "one word for another," or simply as substitution, *sail [voile] for boat [bateau]* should correspond to the same mechanism. And if metonymy is based only on the word-by-word connections produced by discourse, might not every metaphor find at least a potential basis in a proposition that links its terms?

In point of fact, one has the impression that for Lacan there is an implicit primacy granted to metonymy, which is less corrupted by empirical elements, and that metaphor, despite all his efforts, remains marked by that perception of resemblances in which Lacan detects the sign of the "imaginary." Despite his asserted intentions, Lacan at times seems unable to avoid devaluing metaphor, as though maintaining it at a distance from being: "If the symptom is a metaphor, it is no metaphor to say so, nor to say that man's desire (or wish) is a metonymy. For the symptom *is* a metaphor, whether or not one is prepared to admit it, just as desire *is* a metonymy, even if men chaff at it." "L'Instance de la lettre," pp. 80-81. Here metaphor, *mere* metaphor, is opposed (as the verbal? as the purely subjective?), at least at the secondary level of scientific elaboration, to an utterance alleged to pronounce a truth beyond the figures of language.

10. We should emphasize that we reject the idea of an absolute primacy of the "signifier." Metaphor and metonymy may be conceived of only as dialectical movements which find their mainspring in the play of signifiers, but which always depend on pre- or paralinguistic contiguities or resemblances and end up restructuring and enlarging the universe of the "signified." Metaphor and metonymy are ultimately marked by the contiguities and resemblances of the *vital order* against which they emerge.

11. Swann Harding, *Philosophy at the Tower of Babel*, quoted by Perelman, *Traité de l'argumentation*, 2: 517.

12. *The Ego and the Id*, p. 26.

13. *Ibid.*

14. The ego is an object, an internal reality, the metaphor of the individual. As an object, it is cathected by drives and is a reservoir or accumulator of "sublimated libido." It is that economic status which allows the ego to be a center of action, taking over on its own account and energizing functions which, biologically speaking, belong not to the ego, but which are prior to it and continuous with the biological individual: motility, perception, and, more generally, the sphere of "self-preservation."

15. J. Laplanche and S. Leclaire, "L'Inconscient: Une étude psychanalytique," *Les Temps modernes*, no. 183 (July 1961), pp. 81-129. English translation by P. Coleman in *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, Yale French Studies 48 (New Haven, 1973).