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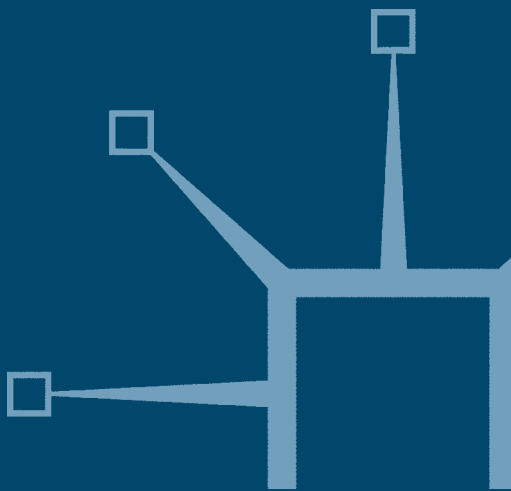
Freud's Drive

Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film

Teresa de Lauretis



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Teresa de Lauretis

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Introduction: Death @ Work

Reflections for the end of a century

'La mort au travail.' This phrase of Jean Cocteau has been with me since I first encountered it, its unnerving figure working its way in my thoughts and meandering through the scattered reflections offered here by way of introduction. In 1970, speaking of cinema, Jean-Marie Straub glossed it to mean that cinema is the only art capable of capturing time in flight, catching death at work. Straub was arguing against the notion of 'historical film' understood as a film that more or less faithfully re-presents a historical subject, period or event. One can reflect on the past, he stated bluntly, but there is no such thing as a historical film; it cannot be made ('un film historique n'existe pas, ne peut pas se faire: on peut faire une réflexion sur le passé …'). All that a film can do is to document the historical moment of its production ('l'époque où il a été tourné'), the history of its own time, the history of its present.[1]

The project, or the wish, of this book is to reflect on the relevance of Freud's theory of drives for the history of this, our present. Like the early decades of the twentieth century, our times are marked by massive geopolitical trauma as well as shifts in technological, epistemic and sexual-representational practices. When Freud elaborated the idea of a death drive, between the First and Second World Wars, he was living in a Europe under the shadow of death and the threat of biological and cultural genocide. Now, in the postmodern, wireless First World, violence erupts spontaneously, apparently unmotivated, in individuals or collectivities as it does elsewhere throughout the geopolitical space; in the most comfortable, civil, managed, social environments as in the most impoverished, oppressive, controlled ones. The well-to-do clamour for reproductive rights, international adoption and the biotechnological

extension of human life through prostheses, cloning, stem-cell research, and so forth, while resources are diminishing throughout the world and others are dying of hunger, collateral damage, and – yes, again – genocide. In these times, with global warfare and genocide firmly planted on the horizon of history, Freud's speculation on the co-presence of life and death drives in the human psyche and in human society takes on a renewed significance.

It was only a few years ago we feared the United Nations might go the way of the League of Nations, when the general issue of gas masks to military and civilian personnel readying for the second Gulf War, digitally mediated on our computer and television screens, reactivated repressed memories of surrealist art photography and smudgy newspaper photos of the First World War, the first known instance of intentional chemical warfare, if we leave science fiction aside. The highly wrought figures of Djuna Barnes and Virginia Woolf – *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* – have an uncanny double in the visual inscription of the death drive in David Cronenberg's films *Crash* and *eXistenZ*.

This is not to say that history repeats itself, but rather that states of emergency have the capacity to collapse history and suspend the logic of linear temporality, as Walter Benjamin said of the 1930s. In such cases, he wrote, 'Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.'[2] If it may be granted that what is called theory in the humanities is nothing else than thinking about the world in which we live and die, then theory, as Benjamin suggests, involves not only thoughts that flow in a temporal movement towards the future or the past, but also thoughts that stop in their tracks and, in trying to figure out the enigma of the world at a particular moment, assume something of an abstract, spatial shape. The thinking that is theory, then, has both a temporal and a spatial form; it moves backward and forward in time only to visualize or make legible a space in which to live or die, in the here and now. In this sense, theory is timeless, like poetry, or like the unconscious as Freud conceived it – and by timeless I do not mean eternal, universal or valid for all times and places. On the contrary, I mean that theory is a figure of the history of the present. Or, to paraphrase Edward Said, it is 'the present in the course of its articulation, its struggles for definition'.[3]

Though its roots are grounded in the past, reaching across the contingent, material, social, sexual, racial, intellectual history of the theorizing subject, and regardless of its uses and abuses in the unforeseeable future, the time of theory is always now. To put it another way, thinking,

however abstract or whatever its form of expression, originates in an embodied subjectivity, at once overdetermined and permeable to contingent events. But to the extent that it is invested in figuring out the present opaque state of the world in the here and now, the thinking of theory is not simply personal or subjective, it is also political. The state of the world, of course, is constantly changing, and so is theory. I have myself, over time, contributed to articulate various forms of critical theory – semiotic and film theory, feminist theory, gender theory, queer theory – and in each of those instances the time of theory as articulated thought, as theorizing, thinking and writing about a state of the world, was always the present. But for well over a decade now, I have felt myself turn away from the militantly critical theories I have contributed to articulate.

At first it was a vague feeling of dissatisfaction, as with something gone adrift in its passage through discursive space, as a knot of twigs and leaves carried downstream by a weak current may get caught briefly on a tree stump or a rock only half-submerged, to then resume its drifting towards another rock or stump and then another, until the twigs and leaves, loosened, float lightly on the surface. What seemed pivotal moments in the flow of critical discourse after the 1960s – the debates on nature vs. culture, theory vs. praxis, essentialism vs. social constructionism, and related 'binaries' – were only temporary halts, quickly overtaken in turn by a new concern and another debate. Eventually, I could no longer tell what had held the twigs and leaves together in the first place.

In this brave new century, we are survivors of the modern era in the West. With the end of the twentieth century have also ended its enabling fictions, from the French Revolution to the October Revolution and all those that followed; its movements of resistance, independence, liberation; its myths of freedom and equality, universal suffrage, community-building and multiculturalism; its dream of a free cyberspace turning into the nightmare of globalization. The movement theories since the late 1960s, based in social practices engaged in contestations of power, marking the coming-to-voice of subjugated knowledges – women's studies, Afro-American studies (as it was called), ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory – have been sustained by a hope that today appears hopelessly enmeshed in academic managerialism. Their later configurations – what in England Stuart Hall, after Ernesto Laclau, calls 'a theory of articulation' and Gloria Wekker in The Netherlands, after Kimberlé Crenshaw in the US, calls 'intersectional theory' – are facing

the old dangers of racism and general conservatism as well as the new danger of a rising neoliberalism.[4] Modern Western forms – theorized practices – of armed struggle against the liberal-democratic state, such as those of the 'lead years' (*anni di piombo*) in Italy from the 1970s onwards,[5] seem to me incommensurable with the forms of so-called terrorism that struck the World Trade Center in New York, the Atocha station in Madrid, the London underground system and other monuments of Western power. Yet they coexist.

The enigma of the world in the here and now consists in what I can only think of as a paradox: a negativity that is also, at the same time, a positivity; a stubborn, silent resistance to discursification, articulation, rationalization or negotiation that coexists with the technologies of instant communication through global media. Freud's conception of the oxymoronic nexus of life and death drives in the human psyche and in human society offers the intellectual comfort of a trope, a conceptual figure of conflict and paradox with which to approach, if only asymptotically, the enigma of the now.

The events of 11 September 2001, commonly referred to as 9/11, and what took place 911 days later in Madrid on 11 March 2004 – to name only the first two of an apparently open series of occurrences – have both revealed and spectacularized, or made dramatically visible, a rupture in the fabric of the Western world that has reached the proportions of a societal trauma. The time of the idea of the collapse of history, differently inflected but not unrelated to Benjamin's, has come again: 'History can collapse because it is nothing but construction … . A given version of history collapses with the occurrence of an event that does not easily fit into received versions of a community's past.'[6] Just as the Nazi genocide collapsed the history of Germany and European high culture, states Hayden White, so 'the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 had the effect of collapsing a particularly triumphalist version of American history – or shall we call it a history of America – and leaving it in a rubble every bit as toxic as that which remained on the site of the collapsed Twin Towers.'[7] At the start of a century that seems so advanced in respect of the old, modernist 1900s, history is lived again as trauma.

Trauma, Freud wrote in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), is a breach in the protective shield of the human organism, the mental projection of the body's surface, that 'provoke[s] a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and [sets] in motion every possible defensive measure. At the same time, the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action.'[8] What causes trauma is not fear (*Furcht*)

of something known, or anxiety (*Angst*) about something unknown, but rather fright (*Schreck*), the shock of something unexpected that suddenly attacks the ego from outside its bodily boundary, impacting the surface of the body, piercing or rupturing the skin, and produces the excess of affect commonly referred to as panic. The impact of two jumbo jets on the Twin Towers of New York, televised live around the world, was a spectacular representation of this notion of trauma on both a national and global scale.

Unlike medical theories that considered shock a physical damage to the molecular or histological structure of the nervous system – the shell shock diagnosed in veterans of the First World War, for example – Freud was concerned with the effects of trauma on the human psyche; that is to say, how the external assault on the organism affects the internal functioning of the psychic apparatus, or as he put it, 'the organ of the mind' (*SE* 18: 36). The psychic apparatus – or the ego, as Freud named it in his reconfiguration of the psychic space known as the second topography – caught by surprise, is unprepared to master or control the impacting force. Unable to bind the excess of affect produced by the impact on its bodily envelope and to sort out the indeterminate sensations it gives rise to – chiefly pain – the ego is overwhelmed. The psychic functions that constitute conscious subjectivity, such as cognition, perception, fantasy, memory and identity, are extensively reduced or paralysed, and the subject may end up in a catatonic state. This is also the case in the symptomatology of recently diagnosed diseases such as extreme environmental stress or post-traumatic stress disorder. However, unlike the psychological studies that seek to account for them, the psychoanalytic view of trauma is focused on intra-psychic processes, which centrally include the unconscious, or what Freud named the primary process, and hence hark back to the infantile condition. Indeed, one of the typical manifestations of panic is psychic regression.

Freud had been concerned with psychic trauma since the 1890s. In the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895), which he left unpublished, and in the early *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) co-authored with Josef Breuer, he had analysed the traumatic impact of sexuality and sexual seduction on psychic processes leading to the formation of hysterical symptoms. By 1919, he was confronted with another type of symptoms resulting from the 'war neuroses', which included the compulsive repeating, in dreams and hallucinatory fantasies, of the shock and terror actually experienced during the war. The evidence of a compulsion to repeat painful, even unbearable experiences, for which Freud found support in mundane observations as well as analytic practice, brought

him to formulate the hypothesis of a death drive and to re-elaborate, on that account, his entire theory of the psyche. It is hardly coincidental, I think, that the idea of a death drive should take centre stage in Freud's thoughts from 1919 until his death in 1939: that was the time of the massive geopolitical trauma that hit Europe in the wake of the Great War and was to culminate in the Shoah and the Second World War. That Freud's conception of the death drive was unacceptable then, as it still is for the most part today, is but a confirmation of the traumatic impact that the very idea of a death drive has on the ego, causing it indeed, as Freud said, to set in motion every possible defensive measure.[9]

When Sándor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham and others at the 1918 Psychoanalytic Congress in Budapest called for the establishment of centres for the therapy of war neuroses by psychoanalytically trained physicians, they encountered typical medical objection to psychoanalysis, namely, its insistence on the sexual origin of psychic conflicts, as Freud's expansive view of sexuality was (and continues to be) 'confused with the narrower concept of "genitality"'; and the expert opinion Freud presented in a 1920 Memorandum to the Austrian War Ministry about the deleterious and often lethal effects of shock treatment for war neuroses was filed away in the Ministry Archives.[10] The twin scandals now dogging the US military nearly a century later – the incidents at Abu Ghraib in Iraq and at the Walter Reed National Army Medical Center in Washington, DC – are instances, if egregious ones, of the return of what medical science represses.

In the Memorandum and in his introduction to *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, Freud argued in his most restrained, for-laymen-only style that all neuroses are the expression of a conflict in the ego, whether the 'ego is defending itself from a danger which threatens from without' but provokes an aggressive and morally intolerable reaction within the ego, as in the war neuroses, or whether the ego is defending itself from the demands of the libido, as in peacetime neuroses; in either case, the enemy from which the ego defends itself by producing a neurosis is an internal enemy. He did not say (mindful, no doubt, of his addressees) what is obvious to anyone familiar with psychoanalytic theory – that the 'internal' or unconscious nature of the ego's conflict is attested by the very existence of the symptoms, the symptom being precisely the conversion or the translation of an unconscious (sexual) wish into a somatic event. But he did nevertheless clinch his argument: 'After all, we have a perfect right to describe repression, which lies at the basis of every neurosis, as a reaction to a trauma – as an elementary traumatic neurosis' (*SE* 17: 210).

The return of the repressed, in Freud's memorable phrase, is the result of a traumatic experience that is inscribed in the psyche in the peculiar manner of the double temporality he called *Nachträglichkeit*, inadequately rendered in English as *deferred action*: 'a memory [can arouse] an affect which it did not arouse as an experience' (*SE* 1: 356). Thus, for instance, what produces Emma's phobia at the age of 13 is the memory of having been sexually molested at the age of 8. The repressed memory is not traumatic until it is revived at a later date (*nachträglich*), when its sexual nature is understood and the excitation it contains becomes unacceptable or threatening to the ego, thus creating a conflict; faced with that conflict, the ego represses the memory, and this further (secondary) repression produces, in turn, the neurotic symptom.[11] The case of Emma, Freud remarks, 'is typical of repression in hysteria. We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action*' (*SE* 1: 356).

One of Freud's most effective tropes is the figuration of psychic trauma as an internal 'foreign body', an alien entity installed in the psychic space of the ego and acting there like a computer virus in a database.

> The causal relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume rather that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.
>
> (*SE* 2: 6)

The double temporality of psychic trauma accords with the two kinds of processes with which it is inscribed in the psyche: the linear or diachronic temporality of secondary process (conscious or preconscious memory) and the timeless or synchronic present-ness of the primary process (unconscious mnemic trace). It is because of this double temporality that, when an external event impacts the bodily ego as 'a breach in the protective shield of the human organism' and provokes the excess of affect (the large-scale disturbance 'in the functioning of the organism's energy') that we call trauma, there can be no simple determination of cause and effect, but there is, instead, an overdetermination of unforeseeable effects due to the linkages that may be established with unconscious memory traces through the primary process.

The compulsion to repeat unpleasurable, unmasterable or shattering experiences appeared to defy the rule of the pleasure principle, that is, the work of the psychic apparatus to regulate the amount of excitation in the organism and hence to reduce excessive tension to the level that the ego perceives as pleasure or well-being. On the concept of the pleasure principle, elaborated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud had built his theory of the psychic apparatus and of the interactions between the external world and the psychic processes internal to the ego. In 1919, on the evidence of repetition compulsion in the war neuroses and in what he then was calling the narcissistic neuroses (dementia praecox, paranoia, melancholia), Freud found himself compelled to hypothesize the presence in the human organism of a force driving the apparatus to lower excitation beyond the pleasure threshold to a zero level of energy or the total absence of tension characteristic of inorganic matter. This self-destructive force, which he named *Todestrieb*, or death drive, appeared to work 'silently' (undetected by consciousness) in opposition to those forces he designated as life drives, or Eros, in that they tend to preserve, reproduce and enhance life in social as well as physical organisms. The two contrary sets of forces, then, Freud speculated, must coexist in conflict in each organism from the beginning to the end of its life, if in different proportions at different times.

As Jean Laplanche has incisively argued, the metapsychological concept of the death drive reconfigures the theory, no less than the dynamic landscape, of the psyche by ascribing to the death drive the 'radical tendency to unbind', that is, the disruptive, undoing – shall we say, *un*civilizing – force that Freud had first identified with the sexual drive.[12] At issue, however, is the question of where the drive comes from. Is it innate in the organism, the physical body, or a product of language and culture? It might seem obvious, even to a casual reader of Freud, that to pose such an either/or is to miss the point, for the concept of the psyche is precisely what undoes the categorical distinction between body and mind. Nevertheless, the question is quite relevant, because Freud himself was ambivalent. While his earlier definition of the sexual drive was cast in the figural terms of a conceptual, virtual space ('an instinct appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic'; *SE* 14: 122), the death drive seems solidly planted in the living organism ('an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things'; *SE* 18: 36).

Laplanche, one of Freud's most astute and closest readers, attributes his ambivalence to 'going astray' (*fourvoiement*) or backing off from the strictly endopsychic conception of the unconscious and the drive that

marked Freud's radical break with Cartesian rationality; a backing off that could only lead him back to a reliance on biology and thus to a 'retrenchment' into biologism. I take issue with this reading in Chapter 3, 'The Queer Space of the Drive', where I suggest another way to read that ambivalence and still do justice to Freud; a way Laplanche himself indicated but did not follow.

Freud's view of human imperfectibility has always been unpopular, and understandably so. To me, there is something quite compelling in a negativity that counteracts the optimistic affirmations of the human's infinite potential for life through information, communication and biotechnologies at a time when Western technology is synonymous with global capitalism and like capitalism appears unstoppable, inevitable, awesome and yet exciting in its creations as in its destructions – much as the reproductive instinct urging procreation appeared to Sabina Spielrein, the lay analyst whose writing anticipated Freud's conception of the death drive. (I discuss Spielrein's work in Chapter 4.) Today, to many in the West, procreation is an option, unlike technology. If we no longer think of it as an innate instinct, a force of nature, we owe it in no small measure to Freud, who first disjoined sexuality from reproduction, and drive (*Trieb)* from instinct (*Instinkt*). And yet he remained ambivalent, the doubt persisted and grew darker with the darkening of the world towards the end of his life.

Thinking about the world today, I wonder whether our epistemologies can sustain the impact of the real; whether our theories and epistemic practices, our modern belief in or reliance on the discursive, the productive, the cultural, the socially constructed order of things are adequate to confront the here and now. If I return to Freud's notion of an unconscious death drive, it is because it conveys the sense and the force of something in human reality that resists discursive articulation as well as political diplomacy, an otherness that haunts the dream of a common world. As the world again grows darker in these times, I want to recover Freud's suspicion that human life, both individual and social, is compromised from the beginning by something that undermines it, works against it; something that may transcend it not from above or beyond, but from within materiality itself.

Psychoanalysis, literature, cinema

The chapters in this book return to Freud's metapsychology in an attempt to approach the enigma of the now through the figures of his *Bildersprache*, the 'figurative language' with which, Freud states, he is

'obliged to operate,' in full awareness that all scientific terms, be they those of depth psychology or those of biology, 'are only part of a figurative language' (*SE* 18: 60). Freud's own terms – the drive, the unconscious, the ego and other terms of his metapsychology – are conceptual figures or tropes which inhabit the space between mind and matter, a space not traversable by referential language. By that I mean a language that is believed adequate to represent the phenomenal world and trusted to comprehend it. Figural language, on the other hand, offers no guarantee of phenomenal cognition, as Paul de Man puts it: rhetoric 'opens up *vertiginous* possibilities of referential aberration'.[13] It cannot, therefore, presume to close the gap between language and the real or, subsuming one in the other, elide the space between mind and matter; a space that indeed can only be represented figurally, as in de Man's verbal metaphor or in Hitchcock's cinematic metaphor of the stairwell in *Vertigo*.

The space outlined by Freud's 'topographies' is of such a kind. Consider the ego: for all the mundane personifications he devised to convey the ego's relations to the superego and the id (a servant to three masters, a constitutional monarch dependent on parliament's decisions, a man on horseback driven by the horse, and so on), the ego figures a space between the inhuman in language which de Man reads in Benjamin's *reine Sprache* – 'linguistic structures, the play of linguistic tensions, linguistic events that occur, possibilities which are inherent in language'[14] – and the inhuman 'inorganic' which insists, or persists, in the living matter (*lebende Materie*) of the organism. Freud's *Bildersprache*, his way of writing and thinking, should not be read 'as the representation [*Darstellung*] of something that can be grasped, named, once and for all', remarks Samuel Weber, but rather as an *Entstellung*, the distortion characteristic of the dreamwork; for his metapsychology entertains 'a singular relation of cognition to the unknown, figured and disfigured'.[15] This accords with my reading of Freud's paradoxical organism 'wish[ing] to die only in its own fashion' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*SE* 18: 39) as an oxymoron that defies the binary logic of either organic or inorganic; its materiality is not that of empirical science or, for that matter, the materiality of the signifier, but the intimation of a materiality, exactly, 'figured and disfigured'.

My reading of Freud takes place in the context of what Laplanche, himself a university professor as well as a psychoanalyst, has wittily called 'extramural psychoanalysis' ('*psychanalyse hors les murs*'; *EO*, 118). But in extending the concept of drive, and of the death drive in particular, to cultural texts, I am not proposing to apply a theoretical (metapsychological) model to an object or a domain of pertinence external to it.

All the interrelated elements of Freud's thought, from the phantasmatic of the Oedipus complex and the primal fantasies of origin, seduction and castration to the conceptual figures of the unconscious, the ego and the drive, pertain as much to cultural phenomena as they do to psychic ones; to wit, his own repeated forays into literary, anthropological and sociological analysis. That Freud elaborated his theoretical constructs from within the particular interpretative practice that is psychoanalysis does not invalidate their heuristic value for other analytical and textual practices. Indeed, de Man's theory of reading is strongly reminiscent of the psychoanalytic reading method and, vice versa, I argue in Chapter 5, the formative influence of literature in Freud's thought caused him to envisage the psyche as text.

As I take up the concepts of drive, fantasy, the unconscious or the ego, I cannot ignore how they have been read and engaged in visual and literary theory through the writings of Jacques Lacan and typically contested or misunderstood in gender and cultural studies through Michel Foucault's. My current thinking, as well as my reading of Freud, however, is significantly indebted to the work of Jean Laplanche – and more so where I take issue with it – from his strikingly innovative reading of Freud in *Vie et mort en psychanalyse* (1970), based on the massive linguistic research that resulted in the collaborative *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (*Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*, 1967) with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, to the theory of primal seduction which he has developed in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1989) and throughout the 1990s, in conjunction with the scientific direction of the new French translation of Freud's *Oeuvres complètes* (1988–).

In extending psychoanalytic concepts from the psychic domain to the field of cultural production, I take Laplanche's suggestion that the relation of the subject to cultural texts, and in the present instance of reader to text, is a kind of transference analogous to, if distinct from, transference in the clinical situation. In both cases, as the etymology implies, transference is closely related to translation in that 'the fundamental dimension of transference is the relation to the enigma of the other'.[16] The creation and the reception of cultural artifacts, Laplanche proposes, entail a transference – a transposition and a renewal – of the relation of primal seduction that binds each human infant to its adult caretakers. By primal seduction he means the 'implantation' of sexuality in the infant in the form of unmasterable, and hence traumatic, excitations carried by the messages that the mother and/or others address to the child, both intentionally and unconsciously; messages transmitted not only verbally but particularly through the practices of corporeal

care, and which the child is unable to translate with the limited means at its disposal.

The untranslatable residues of such enigmatic signifiers, remaining thereafter active in the unconscious, constitute both the source and the objects of what Laplanche calls the drive to translate, *la pulsion à traduire*.[17] The phrase, borrowed from the German poet Novalis (*der Trieb zu Übersetzung*), is Laplanche's 'translation' into his own theory and his own figural language, of what Freud called 'instinct for knowledge', a component of infantile sexuality leading to 'the sexual researches of childhood' and all pursuit of knowledge thereafter (*SE* 7: 196–7). This concept of translation, linking psychoanalytic and literary theory, is especially relevant to my reading of Djuna Barnes' novel *Nightwood*. I elaborate on it in Chapter 5.

With Laplanche's reformulation of the other as a site of enigmatic messages, which the work of analysis enables one to detranslate and retranslate, we can think of subjectivity as a work of self-analysis, an ongoing process of translation, detranslation and retranslation, not only of the enigmatic signifiers ever present in the individual unconscious, but also of the enigmatic messages that interpellate us from the site of culture. 'Perhaps', Laplanche suggests, 'the principal site of transference, "ordinary" transference, before, beyond or after analysis would be the multiple relation to the cultural', to the 'intrusive, stimulating and sexual' messages that continuously invade the living human, renewing the traumatic aspect of the childhood enigma and sustaining the drive to translate (*EO*, 222–5). As the qualifier *enigmatic* suggests, Laplanche's *message* is not to be taken in the sense of communication theory, in respect of a content or meaning it may convey, but rather for the function of address it carries: it is a message in so far as I take it to be addressing me.

Here, then, I will be attending to some of those cultural messages in the form of theoretical, literary and film texts; as I will be reading them with Freud, a certain amount of repetition from chapter to chapter is unavoidable. With the exception of Chapter 1, which is provided as something of a didactic outline of Freud's theory of drives, my readings, or misreadings, attempt to heed in the texts the echoes of that relation of cognition to the unknown that Weber rightly hears in Freud's writing and de Man in the work of figurality. The titles of the following chapters are textual figures that both instigated my reading and guided it beyond the texts. Even Chapter 1 has its trope: 'Basic Instincts', a phrase often used by Freud, is a play on the title of the popular film *Basic Instinct* which, together with *The Hunger*, serves as an exemplary illustration of

the notion of drive as it is inscribed in the public fantasies of a culture not so far from Freud after all.

'The Stubborn Drive' of Chapter 2 is the figure of Foucault's disavowal of psychoanalysis in the polemical statement, in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, that 'sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive'. At first merely the *agent provocateur* of my perverse wish to put Foucault face to face with Freud, the figure guided me in a critical rethinking of the relations between bodies and subjects, and hence, not surprisingly, to another figure. Both Foucault's somato-power and Freud's drive are envisaged in a space beyond the reach of the Cartesian subject, in relation to a corporeality that provides the terrain of inscription of the drive, or the material ground for what Foucault, after Laplanche, called 'the perverse implantation' of sexuality. The trope of *implantation*, linking the drive at once to the ego and to the social, outlines the contours of a subject inhabited by the alien presence of the other. In Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the violent implantation of race on the skin, 'in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye', invades the self with the destructive presence of an unassimilable foreign body. As this is precisely psychoanalysis's figure for psychic trauma, a psychoanalytic reading of this text articulates the traumatic impact of racism in its psychic, as well as social, effects and the complexity of their complication.

I titled Chapter 3 'The Queer Space of the Drive' because that is the only way I can express my understanding, such as it is, of what Freud means when he says that the drive is a frontier concept (*Grenzbegriff*). As I let the figure guide me and displace me through the reading of Freud and of Laplanche's reading of Freud, it takes me to a queer, non-binary place – a dis-place – in which the categorical oppositions between the psychic and the biological, between the order of the signifier and the materiality of the body, or between the organic and the inorganic no longer hold. This is the figural space inhabited by Freud's drive, a non-homogeneous, heterotopic space of passage, of transit and transformation 'between the mental and the somatic', where *between* does not stand for the binary logic of exclusion but figures the movement of a passing. The drive itself is a figure of paradox: as sexual drive it is upstream of its object cathexes, of gender identification and other categories of identity; as death drive it carries the intimation of the corpse implicit or latent in the living organism. It is from this dis-place that Laplanche's view of Freud's theoretical going astray can be put into question, not least because the metaphor of *fourvoiement*, a deviation from the right path, implies a deviance to be corrected and hence the normalization

of metapsychology's figural thinking to comport with the logic of non-contradiction.

The last two chapters are readings of two highly wrought and figurally complex texts that bookend the twentieth century from the First World War to what some think of as the beginning of the Third: Djuna Barnes' modernist classic *Nightwood* (1936) and David Cronenberg's film *eXistenZ* (1999). Both perform a *mise-en-abîme* of their respective process of production, writing and cinematography (in the etymological sense of cinematic writing); in both the death drive is inscribed in the figural weave of the text indissociably from the sexual drive. Tracing its textual inscription in these texts, or reading them with Freud, is an attempt to translate the obscure message the world sends me in these times and perhaps to recover something of their sombre wisdom in confronting the enigma of the now.

Like its enigmatic central character, *Nightwood* has 'an odour of memory'. Written in the 1930s under the threat of Nazi racial laws, the novel with its eccentric characters – non-Aryans, social misfits, transvestites, homosexuals – bears witness to the traumatic impact of the Great War and its aftermath on European culture, but it does so in an allusive, obscurely metaphoric language and elliptic narrative that at once figure and disfigure the 'autobiographical' events. While the encompassing trope of the text, the 'night' of the title, figures sexuality as enigma without solution and trauma without resolution, 'the odour of memory' is one of many singular figures in the text that carry the sense of another scene, half-way between a memory and a sensation, the feeling of something unremembered and yet having occurred. Such figures, pointing up the uncanny resemblance of Barnes' writing to the process of the dreamwork, sustain a reading of the novel as the (re)translation of an experience of trauma, at once personal and societal, only representable in the disfiguration that the text can perform.

'Becoming Inorganic' is the ironic figure that guides my reading of Cronenberg's allegory of late capitalist postmodernity: existence has become *eXistenZ*™, a patented commercial product, a virtual reality game in which sex and death are means to customer satisfaction and corporate profit. As the bioelectronic transformation of the body does away with the categories of sexual difference and tears down the conceptual wall between organic and inorganic, the film's self-reflexive irony dissolves the generic science fiction boundaries between utopia and dystopia. Released in 1999, at the zenith of the so-called new economy bubble, the film begs to be read with the theory of capital's creative destruction developed by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter

and its surprisingly close relation to Freud's theory of the life and death drives. Thematized in the narrative and inscribed in the formal construction of the film, the compulsion to repeat, to raise the stakes of virtuality and escalate them beyond the pleasure principle, so to speak, sustains the film's meta-cinematic reflection on the social technologies of virtuality as the modes of production of a death drive at work in these times.

'Death at work.' I first heard this phrase cited in a lecture Stephen Heath gave in 1977 at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, where I was teaching at the time. A frequent visitor to the campus, Heath brought the work of the British journal *Screen* and the French *Cahiers du cinéma* to the immediately captivated attention of film scholars in the US and Canada, establishing an intellectual link and an active research network that were to promote and sustain the development of film theory in the 1970s and 1980s. Because one of the functions of an introduction is to sketch out the epistemic ground from which the book emerges, I will start by citing the passage in Heath's text, 'Film Performance', from which this book's title came to me.

> *Un beau film*: the crime of the good film is the film itself, its time and its performance – its performing of time. It is not by chance that Apollinaire's fascination with the new medium is immediately in 1907 the story of a murder, the relation of cinema and crime: film is exactly a putting to death, the demonstration of 'death at work' (Cocteau's 'la mort au travail'). Made of a series of stops in time, the timed stops of the discrete frames, film depends on that constant stopping for its possibility of reconstituting a moving reality – a reality which is thus, in the very moment of appearance on screen, as the frames succeed one another, perpetually flickered by the fading of its present presence, filled with the *artifice* of its continuity and coherence.[18]

Although the parenthetical reference to Cocteau's phrase follows the meaning given by Straub to the trope of death at work, whereas I take it in another figural direction, the passage alludes to other conceptual figures – time, performance, narrative as achievement of coherence, representation as artificial construction of reality, flicker as the cinematic trope for the illusion of presence and the fading of the subject – that were as central to 1970s film theory as Heath's work was a major influence in it; figures that derived from the structural analysis of narrative, visual semiotics, Althusser's theory of ideology, critical Marxism and

neo-Freudian, in particular Lacanian, psychoanalysis. Cinema was at one and the same time theorized and contested as machine of the visible and ideological apparatus (*appareil* and *dispositif*), social technology and signifying practice, heir to the realist novel as well as to the experimentation of the avant-gardes; the early twentieth-century avant-gardes evoked in Heath's references to Apollinaire and Cocteau, and the mid-century avant-garde film summoned in his closing paragraphs on Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and in the indirect reference to Straub made explicit elsewhere in the book by Heath's discussion of films Straub made with Danièle Huillet.[19]

That conception of cinema has not been superseded, in my opinion, but has been enriched by a more finely articulated analysis of film's effects in spectatorship; that is to say, of cinema's place in the psychic and social formation of subjects, its functioning as a technical and ideological apparatus in the construction of vision, desires, identifications and subject positions, and thus as a technology of gender, class, racial, national and other social identities. If today cinema's unique effectivity in the production of a social imaginary (public fantasies) is understood to work through the fantasmatic production it elicits and shapes in individual spectators (private fantasies), this is because of the confluence into film theory of psychoanalytic theory together with the other major strands of what has become known as poststructuralist theory.

What made this confluence possible institutionally was the low prestige of the nascent field of cinema studies, not yet an academic discipline, not yet encumbered by curricular and canonic requirements. The many, like myself, who began teaching and studying film in the early 1970s and whose field of scholarly research and training was literature may remember the excitement and the sense of embarking on an intellectual adventure we felt at the time. The wide-open world of film scholarship – criticism, history, pedagogy *and* theory – was not bound by rules of propriety, methodological constraints, disciplinary traditions: routes were unmapped and all sorts of encounters might be made along the way. The first encounter, in the years immediately following the Vietnam War and the US invasion of Cambodia, had to be with politics – and I do not mean politics as an academic discipline. This encounter was certainly not exclusive to film studies, for in those years politics was the first item on the campus agenda; but in the new academic 'area studies' such as film, women's, Afro-American and ethnic studies, some form of radical politics was central and integrated into the curriculum from the start. Hence the significant and indeed formative presence of feminism in film studies.

The second major encounter was with 'theory'. Analytical tools and conceptual paradigms, both domestic and foreign, could be eclectically used. No one monitored our teaching or imposed models of critical propriety and consistency with established canons. No one said that Freud was not an acceptable source for reading film texts, that structuralism and semiotics were not germane to aesthetic expression, that *Das Kapital* could not provide an understanding of cinema. And so, in our search for how to teach and write about film, we innocently jumped into theory, or rather into what is today called theory. Literary exegesis and critical notions of genre, periodization, authorship, style, narrative conventions and rhetorical tropes were part of our critical baggage, but they must be drastically rethought in relation to audiovisual forms of representation. Simple transposition would not do. Moreover, the multiplicity of codes, both technological and semiotic, involved in film production and reception made us look for new ways to pose critical questions in non-literary, technical and scientific discourses. Film theory, in other words, *had to be* interdisciplinary; and paradoxically, one may speculate in retrospect, it had to be so in order to become an academic discipline.[20]

Crucial to its development was certainly the influence of Lacan's rereading of Freud in Christian Metz's *Le Signifiant imaginaire* and Heath's *Questions of Cinema*, but of equal importance was Laplanche and Pontalis' re-elaboration of fantasy as a psychic structure in 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', a text published in 1964 but which became influential nearly two decades later.[21] Fantasy, they argued, is the basis of human sexuality and the psychic processes structuring subjectivity. Prompted by the loss of the first object of satisfaction, the activity of fantasizing – conscious and unconscious – is initially shaped by parental fantasies and subsequently acts as a dynamic grid through which external reality is adapted or reworked in psychic reality.

> It is the subject's life as a whole which is seen to be shaped and ordered by what might be called, in order to stress this structuring action, 'a phantasmatic' (*une fantasmatique*). This should not be conceived of merely as a thematic – not even as one characterised by distinctly specific traits for each subject – for it has its own dynamic, in that the phantasy structures seek to express themselves, to find a way out into consciousness and action, and they are constantly drawing in new material.[22]

As the new material includes events and representations occurring in the external world, one might say that fantasy is the psychic mechanism

that governs the translation of social representations into subjectivity and self-representation by a sort of adaptation or reworking of the social imaginary, or public fantasies, into individual, or private, fantasies. In turn, the latter may provide the imaginary scenarios by which events of the world are given dramatic or narrative coherence.

'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' became belatedly influential in the late 1980s, in conjunction with the renewed attention to sexuality prompted by the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (*La Volonté de savoir*, 1976), translated into English in 1978 and released in paperback in 1980. While the subsequent turn in film studies to a Foucauldian conceptual framework, ostensibly anti-psychoanalytic, on the one hand, and the more recent turn to cognitive studies, on the other, seem to have interrupted and replaced the metapsychological reflection on cinema, Western film production since the late twentieth century raises questions about spectatorship, affectivity, subjectivity and fantasy that cannot be answered within the rationalist grid of social-construction theory and exceed the established parameters of cognition.[23] To come to terms with the cultural significance of a film like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), to my mind one of the most egregious representations of death at work in the history of the present, I believe we must again return to Freud.

In reading the Freudian theory of drives with film and literary texts, I am working within the spectrum of epistemic practices in which film theory and literary theory have operated since the 1970s, a period roughly contemporaneous with Foucault's work but preceding its Anglophone reception. Unlike other areas of critical studies in which Volume I of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was to become the canonical text, the point of convergence of various discourses on sexuality and gender, and a focal point of the resistance to Freud,[24] literary theory, like film theory, developed within a broader conceptual field of reference which included post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism. While Foucault's theory of sexuality was imported ready-to-wear, transplanted from its 1960s and 1970s French intellectual and political soil into the US cultural politics of the 1980s, neo-Freudian (Lacanian) psychoanalysis entered the US academy through French departments, as the saying goes; actually, through the work of literary and film scholars whose intellectual formation, closely linked to France and Europe, made possible the painstaking work of cultural translation. One of the first collections of essays concerned with the reciprocal influence of psychoanalysis and literature, for example, was a special issue of *Yale French Studies* on 'Literature and Psychoanalysis', edited by

Shoshana Felman. Its subtitle, 'The Question of Reading: Otherwise', indicated the importance of psychoanalysis in reading literary texts and in the development of the radical literary theory that has since been associated with the name and the teaching of Paul de Man.[25]

Finally, then, what is at stake in extending Freud's concept of drive to cultural texts? 'Concepts can operate at very different *levels of abstraction* and are often consciously intended to do so. The important point is not to "misread" one level of abstraction for another.'[26] Stuart Hall makes this observation in his discussion of Antonio Gramsci's rearticulation of Marxian concepts, such as mode of production or forces and relations of production, from their 'most general level of abstraction' in Marx's formulation to a lower level of concreteness and specificity appropriate to a particular historical conjuncture. Gramsci's concepts, Stuart Hall argues, *were designed* to operate at a level of historical concreteness but presumed those of Marx and continued 'to "work within" their field of reference'; thus Gramsci's writings 'develop and *supplement* Marx's concepts with new and original ones' in such a way as to outline a theory 'of the historical conditions which have come to dominate the second half of the twentieth century'.[27]

Without in any way intending to suggest an immodest comparison, I suggest that Freud's concept of drive in its complex (re)figurations may be transferred or translated from the abstract, metapsychological level to that of historical specificity and revisited in relation to certain cultural products, films and literary texts, that emerged at particular historical conjunctures in the twentieth century (1920–1930s and 1990s), as they may shed some indirect light on the historical conditions in which the twenty-first century begins.

1
Basic Instincts: An Illustrated Guide to Freud's Theory of Drives

> The theory of the instincts is so to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. In our work we cannot for a moment disregard them, yet we are never sure that we are seeing them clearly.
>
> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (*SE* 22: 95)

The purpose of this chapter is to give readers not conversant with Freudian theory a brief overview, in outline form and 'illustrated' by reference to popular films, of Freud's concept of drive and the major changes it underwent during the course of his life's work. As the unconscious is the fundamental concept of Freud's metapsychology (this is the term he used for his theory of the human psyche, of which psychoanalysis was the material, embodied, knowledge practice), so is the drive the single most important concept in his theory of sexuality. It is elaborated and re-elaborated in Freud's major works, from the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) to the metapsychological papers of 1915 to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Each time Freud reformulated the nature and activity of the drive(s) marked a turning point in the development of his theory; conversely, each shift in his thought, brought about by clinical practice as well as historical events, and no doubt by Freud's own, contingent social location and personal history, was accompanied by a reconfiguration of the conceptual space in which he envisaged the drive to operate.

We find the first comprehensive discussion in the metapsychological paper known in English as 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes'. The unfortunate translation of Freud's *Triebe* as 'instincts' adopted by the Standard Edition has greatly contributed to a misunderstanding of the concept.[1]

In fact, Freud conceptualized the drives (*Triebe*) in contradistinction to instincts (*Instinkte*), understood as inherited behavioural patterns common to all animals, geared to the aim of species survival and activated by trigger mechanisms. The sexual drive, on the other hand, is a concept 'lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical' (*SE* 7: 168). He defines the sexual drive (*Sexualtrieb*) as a quantity of affect (*Affektbedrag*) of variable intensity coming from within the organism and linked to a mental image or an idea that represents the drive in the mind, which Freud thought of by a technological metaphor as the mental or psychic *apparatus*.

Schematically, the drive is felt in the body as a continuous pressure, an urge, impulse or tension driving one towards a particular object that alone can relieve the pressure and temporarily provide satisfaction. (Here it may be useful to underline that, just as the ego is a psychic entity, so the term *object* in psychoanalysis refers not to objects or individuals in the external world but to *the mental representation* of people or objects.) This accords, in Freud's view, with a tendency of the psychic apparatus to remove excessive excitation, which is felt as unpleasure or even pain, and so produce the sense of relief that is felt as pleasure or satisfaction; this tendency he calls *the pleasure principle*. When the excitation cannot be discharged because the object is either not available or forbidden, the pleasure principle is faced with an obstacle that the psychic apparatus must acknowledge and somehow come to terms with; it must face, that is, what Freud names *the reality principle* (what is possible or impossible to attain). Typically, the obstacle is accommodated by a compromise; for example, by redirecting the excitation towards another (attainable) object, by postponing gratification, by developing hatred of the object in lieu of love or by repressing the wish for the object altogether, in which case the object is internalized as an unconscious source of excitation and a symptom is produced in its stead. Because the pleasure principle is what regulates the quantity and circulation of psychic affect, it is directly involved in the negotiation of these complex psychic processes, also known as the vicissitudes of the sexual drive.

Before presenting the three moments in Freud's conception and reformulation of the drive(s), a word of caution is necessary: while the outline form adopted in this chapter dictates a presentation that may suggest linear development, in fact Freud's thought proceeded in a nonlinear manner, by advances and returns, false starts, detours and contradictions that are evident and often explicitly stated in his writings. Readers conversant with Freudian metapsychology may prefer to proceed directly to Chapter 2.

At different moments in his work, Freud was fond of referring to the 'popular distinction between hunger and love' (*SE* 14: 78) or 'the popular saying that hunger and love are what make the world go round' (*SE* 18: 255). Before psychoanalysis, he wrote, 'Everyone assumed the existence of as many instincts or "basic instincts" as he chose … . Psycho-analysis, which could not escape making *some* assumption about the instincts, kept at first to the popular division of instincts typified in the phrase "hunger and love"' (*SE* 18: 51). This popular view is both reflected and reformulated in Freud's first theory of drives, known as the libido theory, where he hypothesized a *qualitative* differentiation in the psychic energy underlying mental processes, a primal difference between sexual drives (*Sexualtriebe*) and other drives. The latter he called *Ich-Triebe*, 'ego-instincts', or ego-drives.[2] The plural term *sexual drives* refers to the components of the sexual drive as a whole, that is, the partial drives, named according to their source in the body (oral drive, anal drive) or their aim (drive to mastery, scopophilic drive). In Freud's view, the partial drives characterize infantile sexuality; they may become unified (and hence the singular term sexual *drive*) at puberty, but they may also persist as separate drives, for example in the perversions.

Initially, libido named only the special energy in the mind which pertains to the sexual processes, for these were distinguished from the nutritive and other self-preservative physiological processes 'by a special chemistry', Freud thought.[3] Actually foreseeing the later discovery of hormones, he deemed it 'probable that it is special substances and chemical processes which perform the operations of sexuality'; in spite of his argument in the *Three Essay*s that the aim of the sexual drive is not related to a reproductive object and that its sole aim is pleasure, he still thought of the sexual drive as that which ensures 'the extension of the individual life into that of the species' (*N*, *SE* 14: 78). Thus the particular energy of the sexual drives (libidinal energy) corresponded to the force of love in the same sense as the self-preservative ego-drives corresponded to hunger, the physiological instinct of nutrition, because to love an object (for example, the mother) is to wish to have it, enjoy it, possess it or become one with it. The 'affectionate' love felt for parents or siblings is desexualized or de-eroticized as an effect of the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, but its origin is still the sexual drive.

The conceptual distinction between sexual drives and ego-drives seemed to Freud justified on biological grounds insofar as the sexual drives also fulfil a trans-individual function:

> The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he

> serves against his will, or at least involuntarily. The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his own ends; whereas from another point of view he is an appendage to his germ-plasm, at whose disposal he puts his energies, in return for a bonus of pleasure. He is the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance – like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him.
>
> (*N*, *SE* 14: 78)

However, the paper on narcissism, in which this passage occurs, actually undercuts the basis for the distinction between sexual and non-sexual or self-preservative ego-drives, and thus marks a turning point in the theory. With the concept of narcissism, a second configuration of the drives emerges in the analysis of what Freud called narcissistic neuroses or paraphrenias (paranoid delusions, megalomania, schizophrenia and melancholia). In these cases, the ego, which until then he had considered only an agent of repression, opposed to the sexual drives, appeared to be itself an object of love (as in self-love). This meant that 'the instincts of self-preservation were also of a libidinal nature: they were sexual instincts which, instead of external objects, had taken the subject's own ego as an object' (*SE* 18: 257). And hence Freud spoke of an object-libido directed towards objects and an ego-libido directed towards the ego itself, which are in a relation of reciprocity: 'The more of the one is employed, the more the other becomes depleted' (*N*, *SE* 14: 76). In this second configuration of the theory, then, all drives are powered by libidinal energy, all drives are of a sexual nature and their aim, however it may be attained, is libidinal or erotic satisfaction.

The theory of drives underwent yet another revision when Freud was brought to postulate, side by side with the sexual drives, the existence of an aggressive, destructive and above all self-destructive drive which worked at times in opposition to love or eroticism and at times in concert with it (sadism). What led him to rethink the nature of the drives in 1919 was the observation of traumatic neuroses in his patients after the First World War, which manifested in a compulsion to repeat, in dreams and hallucinatory fantasies, the shock and terror actually experienced during the war. Comparing the symptoms of the 'war neuroses' with those of pathogenic neuroses not related to accidents or war, Freud hypothesized that the compulsion to repeat unpleasurable or even painful experiences must come from an unconscious drive to self-destruction at work in the living organism (or in the psychic apparatus – there is much ambiguity on this point; I discuss it in Chapter 3). He described it as a tendency in the apparatus to go *beyond* the pleasure

principle, that is to say, to lower excitation beyond the stable level that the ego perceives as pleasure, satisfaction or appeasement, and eventually reduce the level to zero, or the total absence of tension.

This tendency of the psychic apparatus to empty itself of all tension is what Freud named *death drive* (*Todestrieb*). At the same time, together and in contrast with it, he also postulated a force which impels each organism to survive by reproducing and aggregating in ever larger units to form higher organisms, families, tribes, nations, social movements, and so forth. And this he designated by the Platonic term Eros, or life-drives, attributing to it a function more social than individual, serving the purposes of reproduction ('a link in a chain') rather than sexual pleasure (the individual's 'own purposes'). These two kinds of drive, Freud speculated, 'were struggling with each other from the very first' as the life-drives seek to 'hold together the portions of living substance', while the death drive continues to strive towards the inertia of inorganic matter (*SE* 18: 60–1). But although contrary to one another, he insisted, the life and death drives are always at work together in each organism, if in different combinations at different times; both are powered by one and the same kind of psychic energy, the libido, and both can direct themselves towards the ego as well as towards external objects. Moreover, both are present in the infantile psychic apparatus, where the death drive takes the form of primary, erotogenic masochism (when directed towards the self) or primal sadism (when directed outward towards objects). 'This concurrent and mutually opposing action of the two basic instincts gives rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena of life' (*SE* 23: 149).

Freud elaborated this last configuration of the theory of drives in several texts, starting with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), but he had already written about infantile sadism and masochism in the analysis of the beating fantasy, 'A Child Is Being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion' (1919), and would revisit the relation of the death drive to erotogenic masochism in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924). I shall expand on this all too succinct summary below in relation to the films, and in subsequent chapters.

Despite the contestations and downright rejection of Freud's theory from many quarters, some notion of the sexual and death drives is common currency in cultural discourses and thematically or figurally inscribed in the popular media as well as artistic and literary productions. A number of films released in the 1990s explicitly thematize the relation of sexuality to the aggressive and self-destructive drives, articulating it to issues of gender and sexual deviance or, we might say, to the

now more respectable perversions: homosexuality, fetishism and sado-masochism. Interestingly, many of these films are based on famous trials or court cases, although none fits the genre of the courtroom drama; instead, they refocus attention on the phantasmatic dimensions of the crime, typically murder, explored through the sexual relationships of two main characters. For example, *Swoon* (1991), an independent film directed by Tom Kalin, is based on the trial of two young men, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, for the apparently gratuitous murder of a boy in Chicago in the 1930s; the men's homosexual relation is explicit and central to this film, in contrast to an earlier version of the Leopold and Loeb case (*Compulsion*, directed by Richard Fleischer, 1959), which centred on the trial and the persona of the 'real-life' defence lawyer, Clarence Darrow, played in the film by Orson Welles.

Similarly, Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1993) is based on the trial for matricide of two adolescent girls in New Zealand in the 1950s. Although acknowledging the historical event on which it is based and beginning with the intimation of a murder, the film only mentions the trial in a written epilogue and focuses instead on the girls' joint construction of a fantasy world through which their passionate friendship turns into a sexual relationship and then to murder. Raphael Zelinsky's *Fun* (1994) and Michael Winterbottom's *Butterfly Kiss* (1995) are also part of the trend, if not the genre, of films based on 'real-life events', about young women who kill together. *Sister, My Sister* (1994), a BBC production directed by Nancy Meckler, revisits the French case of the Papin sisters, two servant girls who murdered their employer and her daughter in Le Mans in 1933. This notorious case, which also inspired Jean Genet's play *The Maids*, prompted a paper by Jacques Lacan in which he compared the Papin sisters with Aimée, the subject of a case he studied for his thesis in psychiatry. Lacan diagnosed both cases as *délire à deux*, or paranoid psychosis, based on repressed incestuous homosexuality, arguing that the persecutory figures were surrogates of the mother imago as ego-ideal (*Ichideal*);[4] in other words, as a result of the repression of the Oedipus complex, the ego-ideal of childhood, the beloved mother, turns into a demanding, cruel, persecuting and unconscious superego.

In the title of Lacan's essay, 'Motifs du crime paranoïaque', the double meaning of the word *motif* in French – *motive* (intention, cause, reason or motive for the murder), which alludes to the legal discourse of crime, and *motif* (musical phrase or recurrent element of a theme), which alludes to the pathological syndrome of *délire à deux* – brings into view the peculiar relation of psychoanalysis and detective fiction so often

remarked upon by literary and film critics (as the Wolf Man recounts in his memoirs, one of Freud's favourite characters was Sherlock Holmes); peculiar, or more properly uncanny, because it links investigation to criminality, to sex and murder, from Oedipus onward, in the manner of a vicissitude, a 'turning round [of the drive] upon the subject's own self' (*SE* 14: 126), which is precisely the vicissitude that links the ego's self-preservative drives, manifested in the drive to mastery, to the ego's primal sadism as a manifestation of the death drive. This is illustrated in the legend of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and became king by marrying his own mother, and only came to realize his crime as the result of the investigation he himself decreed, whereupon he blinded and exiled himself. As we shall see, it is this very turning back or troping of the drive that characterizes sexuality in its emergence, its dissociation from physiological life and its uncanny kinship with the death drive.

It may not be impertinent, therefore, to illustrate the three moments in the development of Freud's thinking about the drive by reference to two popular films about women who kill, whose very titles are direct references to the notion of drive. *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983) is a film about vampires. It fits quite well within the generic parameters of the classic vampire film except in one way: both its main protagonists, the vampire (Catherine Deneuve) and the doctor (Susan Sarandon), are women, and the doctor is the vampire's main target, while David Bowie's minimal role is limited to updating the old plot and, one guesses, box office appeal. *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), starring Sharon Stone and Michael Douglas, is a serial murder thriller that foregrounds the very motifs (motives) Lacan identified as the syndrome of female paranoia: identification between women as repressed homosexuality, 'erotomania' towards a female ego-ideal, and *délire à deux* leading to murder. Both films belong to the lesbian-chic trend and to the hybrid genre of the women-who-kill film that were popular in the 1990s.

Because my purpose in discussing these two films here is merely illustrative of Freud's theory, I will be referring only to their diegesis, that is, the 'world' of the film and what happens in it, without considering their formal or textual construction. I will not be concerned with issues of spectatorship, such as the fantasies and identifications each film may elicit in the viewers, or with the film's own fantasy (legible in *The Hunger*, for example, in the casting of Deneuve as the vampire and in a sex scene with Sarandon). Such questions will be considered later in this chapter in relation to another film.

The Hunger's title ostensibly refers to the hunger for blood that is the only nourishment of a vampire and that alone ensures her/his survival and re-embodiment. This longevous figure of popular culture is driven to blood by a hunger that overrides all other feelings, including love; sex itself is a means to satisfy the hunger for blood, a means to self-preservation. However, since the popularization of Freud's work on sexuality, the sexual connotation of the vampire's lust for blood has been made explicit. In its insistent and ubiquitous reappearances throughout the twentieth century in fiction, visual media and related criticism, including doctoral dissertations, the classic figure of the vampire has acquired multiple and even contrasting valences over time, but the sexual nature of the hunger has remained its most stable and constitutive feature.

In the two main characters, the vampire and the doctor/victim, the film initially outlines Freud's earlier distinction between the ego's self-preservative drives, corresponding to hunger (in the vampire), and the sexual or erotic drives, corresponding to love (in the doctor, whose fascination with the vampire turns her into the victim). But, as the narrative fate of the Sarandon character inevitably plays out (she too becomes a vampire), the film's ending illustrates Freud's words in the long passage I cited above: she is a subject who acts in response to her individual sexual drives but, in so doing, unwittingly becomes 'a link in a chain', 'the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance'. Freud's passage, it will be noted, refers to sexuality, not hunger; and indeed it occurs in the pivotal essay on narcissism, in which Freud realized that what he first saw as a primordial differentiation between the sexual drives and the self-preservative ego-drives was untenable, for all drives were fundamentally sexual.

The film's title gestures precisely towards the double meaning of hunger as instinct of nutrition and sexual craving. As is well known in vampire mythology, feeding is also the means to reproduction, as those on whom the vampire feeds may themselves become vampires. In the vampire figure, then, hunger and love, reproduction and sexuality are on the same continuum, and both are biologically driven so to speak; in the popular media's imaginary, 'hunger and love are the same thing'.[5] By contrast, in a psychoanalytic view, human sexuality is only initially – if at all – related to hunger, and human reproduction is not biologically driven. To clarify this, a brief digression is in order.

According to Freud, sexuality in the human infant is initially propped on, or leans on, the self-preservative function of feeding ('a bodily function essential to life'), but soon detaches itself and becomes

independent. As Laplanche clarifies,

> Simultaneously with the feeding function's achievement of satisfaction in nourishment, a sexual process begins to appear. Parallel with feeding there is a stimulation of lips and tongue by the nipple and the flow of warm milk. This stimulation is initially modeled on the function, so that between the two, it is at first barely possible to distinguish a difference … . The mouth is simultaneously a sexual organ and an organ of the feeding function.[6]

Later, as the stimulation of the oral zone is produced by other means, typically by thumb-sucking, the satisfaction that the child first experiences during the feeding function may be obtained *without* taking nourishment. But this is another kind of satisfaction: no longer serving the purpose of survival and having only the aim of pleasure, it is a purely sexual satisfaction. In other words, human sexuality emerges with the infant's autoerotic pursuit of the second kind of satisfaction, 'in the movement which dissociates it from the vital function' (*LD*, 18). Despite a certain ambiguity that recurs in Freud's writings with regard to the biological or physiological bases of the drive and hence its relation to the instincts of self-preservation, Laplanche concludes:

> The drive properly speaking, in the only sense faithful to Freud's discovery, is sexuality. Now sexuality, in its entirety, in the human infant, lies in *a movement which deflects the instinct, metaphorizes its aim, displaces and internalizes its object, and concentrates its source on what is ultimately a minimal zone, the erotogenic zone*.
>
> (*LD*, 23)

That movement opens up a space between the vital need for nourishment (the instinct) and the kind of stimulus that attains satisfaction by mere sucking. In that space, wishing and fantasy are born along with the drive. In this regard, one more instance of Laplanche's elaboration on Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* is especially relevant. In the third essay, Freud writes:

> At a time at which the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of [the] mother's breast. It is only later that he loses it … . There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the

> prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it.
>
> (*SE* 7: 222)

Laplanche elaborates on the meaning of 'refinding':

> The real object, milk, was the object of the [vital] function, which is virtually preordained to the world of satisfaction. Such is the real object which has been lost, but the object linked to the autoerotic turn, the breast – become a fantasmatic breast – is, for its part, the object of the sexual drive … . The object to be rediscovered is not the lost object, but its substitute by displacement; the lost object is the object of self-preservation, of hunger, and the object one seeks to refind in sexuality is an object displaced in relation to that first object. From this, of course, arises the impossibility of ultimately ever rediscovering the object, since the object which has been lost is not the same as that which is to be rediscovered.
>
> (*LD*, 19–20)

In humans, then, unlike vampires, hunger and love, the instinct of nutrition and the sexual drive, are not on the same continuum: while the first is biologically driven, the second is powered by the (typically unconscious) fantasy of finding a lost object of satisfaction and its promise of a perfect state of bliss. And here perhaps is the reason for the attraction we feel to the figure of the vampire: it gives expression to that fantasy, our wish for a time, at the origin of life, in which hunger and love were satisfied at once, the time forever unrecoverable of an unmediated contact with the real.

I will discuss Freud's ambiguity with regard to the origin and nature of the drives in the context of Laplanche's proposal of 'new foundations' for psychoanalysis in Chapter 3. For the time being, it is important to emphasize that, even assuming that the drives may be innate for Freud, *sexuality is not*. As Laplanche shows in his reading of the *Three Essays* exemplified above, as well as in the essay on the origin of fantasy co-authored with Pontalis,[7] sexuality is constituted through fantasy as a troping of the drive, that '*movement which deflects the instinct, metaphorizes its aim, displaces and internalizes its object*'. By 'troping' I mean that the movement Laplanche indicates with the italicized words *deflects, metaphorizes, displaces and internalizes* is a figural or conceptual movement, not a physical one.[8] And if sexuality comes into being through the intervention of fantasy, then sexuality is an effect of signs.

This is the case whether sexuality is understood as reproductive *telos*, as Freud's later notion of 'life-drives' is often mistaken to imply (see Chapter 3), or as a manifestation of the pleasure principle in keeping with Freud's view that the human organism is first and foremost a pleasure-seeking mechanism. For the troping of the drive is exactly the movement by which, Freud states, an object 'becomes assigned to [the drive] in consequence of being peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible' (*SE* 14: 122). In short, no reproductive *telos* predetermines the choice of sexual object.

The sexual drive, however, may not reach its objects directly if the ego – once the ego is formed and has acquired a moral conscience and an ego-ideal it tries to match up to – considers such objects inappropriate and intervenes to 'defend' itself against the pressure of the drive. In that case, as mentioned earlier in this chapter apropos of the pleasure principle, the drive is deviated from its object in several ways, which Freud names *vicissitudes* (*Schicksale*, the plural of *Schicksal*, fate or destiny): by repression (the object is removed into the unconscious), reversal into its opposite (love turns into hate), turning round upon the subject (the drive turns back from the object to the self-as-object) and sublimation (the drive is deflected from a narrowly sexual object and aim towards a creative, intellectual, humanitarian or other socially valued objective). While such objectives are commonly taken to be non-sexual, Freud insists that they too are derived from and sustained by the energy of the sexual drive. For example, in countering an objection of Jung's, Freud argues that even 'an ascetic anchorite [who] "tries to erase every trace of sexual interest" (but only in the popular sense of the word "sexual") … may have turned away his [sexual] interest from human beings entirely, and yet may have sublimated it to a heightened interest in the divine, in nature, or in the animal kingdom'. This comparison, he concludes, rules out 'the possibility of differentiating between interest emanating from erotic sources and from others' (*SE* 14: 80–1).

It is in the paper 'On Narcissism' that Freud makes the statement just cited, thereby revising his earlier position about the drives: there are not two 'basic instincts' (he had compared them to hunger and love), but only one, and that is the sexual drive. The singular word *Instinct* in the title of the film *Basic Instinct* would seem to suggest as much. But not unexpectedly, in a film constructed within the generic parameters of the 'women-who-kill film' and of the lesbian-chic trend that flourished in Western cinema in the late 1990s, its diegesis differentiates between the sexual drive in men and the sexual drive in women. For my purpose here, the differentiation illustrates Freud's third configuration of the

drives as the co-presence in the human being of an aggressive and self-destructive death drive alongside the self-preservative and life-enhancing drives.

Basic Instinct employs the very motifs diagnosed by Lacan in the Papin sisters case – homosexuality, erotomania, *délire à deux* – as motives in a multiple-murder thriller: the victims are powerful or successful men and the murderer is a woman, or perhaps two women (the film refuses to solve the mystery), who are bound by mutual identification, a brief sexual affair with each other in college and a current sexual affair with the same man. The murderer, as we are shown in the film's opening scene, stabs her male sex partner to death at the moment of orgasm. If the sexual motifs are clear (and clearer they could not be), the motives for the repeated murders are much less so. One woman, Catherine (Sharon Stone), is a murder-mystery writer whose books may be inspired by her real-life encounters with men, or vice versa: her real-life sexual encounters with men may be playing out what she has written in her novels. The other woman, Beth (Jeanne Tripplehorn), is a police psychologist and a former lover of Catherine; and it is perhaps she who, disguised as Catherine, murders in order to frame Catherine whom she both loves and hates as an ego-ideal.

The film's title would at first seem to refer to the second moment of Freud's drive theory in which the sexual drives and the self-preservative ego-drives are all under the sway of narcissistic libido. Catherine's sexual relations with Nick (Michael Douglas), the detective investigating her on suspicion of murder, are self-preservative in two ways: they deflect Nick's suspicion from Catherine and enhance her authorial success by contributing to the characterization and plot details of her next murder-mystery bestseller. Catherine's relations with women are also presented as eminently narcissistic: both her lover Roxy and an older friend (played by Dorothy Malone) look like Catherine and have killed their respective families as Catherine is suspected to have done. In short, Catherine loves only those – regardless of gender – who either can help her or are like her, fitting to a T Freud's definition of narcissistic object choice. Thus one is invited to read the title's singular word *Instinct* as referring to female narcissism, a drive at once sexual and self-preservative which, instead of external objects, takes as its sole object the subject's own ego.

There is, however, the issue of murder and its relation to sex. The basic instincts paradigm, which in *The Hunger* was literally represented as hunger and love, is recast in this film as murder and love or, rather, destructive aggressivity and self-love. Again, as in Lacan's diagnosis,

female homosexuality – represented as narcissistic identification with a female ego-ideal – and paranoid psychosis, both of which can be equally predicated of Catherine and Beth, constitute them as doubles of each other and make them effectively partners in crime. Their motives for murdering men can only be ascribed to an excessive, pathological female narcissism, coupled with a sadistic and destructive drive. Things are different for men. In the single male protagonist, the tarnished, alcoholic police detective Nick, the death drive manifests in the confluence of sadistic and masochistic impulses that Freud describes as typical of male sexuality and calls 'a serviceable instinctual fusion': Nick falls in love with the elusive Catherine and pursues her as a sexual object, even though he knows he may well be her next victim. In this case, as Freud writes, 'the sadistic component of the sexual instinct would be a classic example of a serviceable instinctual fusion', for the aggressive or destructive drive represented in sadism is 'brought into the service of Eros' for purposes of discharge and procreation (*SE* 19: 41); in plainer words, because a certain amount of aggressiveness in the male is necessary for an effective copulation. When, on the other hand, aggression or sadism is a pleasure unto itself, independent of the uniting and binding objectives of Eros, and therefore counts as a perversion, it provides an example of instinctual *defusion*, which is the effect of the death drive working towards the disintegration of living substance.

In the film, the sadomasochistic component of Nick's desire for Catherine is ultimately on the side of Eros, as their last conversation about marriage and children makes clear. As for Catherine's instinctual disposition, it is at best ambiguous: in the concluding sex scene with Nick, which replays the film's opening scene and thus leads the viewer to expect her murder of Nick, she does not kill him and appears to have a regular orgasm instead. But in the very last shot, the camera travels down to the floor below the bed, and there, within reach of Catherine's hand, lies her usual murder weapon, the ice pick. In the end, the 'instincts' in *Basic Instinct* are divided into two classes, life-drives and death-drives, but the former, Eros, is a prerogative of men, while narcissistic women (lesbians or female-identified women, as the film would have it) have only one 'basic instinct', just as the title announced: a murderous death drive, which more often than not leads them to self-destruct (as shown in Roxy and Beth).

Finally, to conclude this overview, I want to refer to another film that takes on directly the relation of narcissism to the death drive. Like the other 1990s films I have been discussing, David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* (1993) is concerned with issues of gender and the lesser paraphilias, or

what I have called the more respectable perversions – fetishism, homosexuality and sadomasochism – but approaches them in a more sustained, critical and ironic manner.[9] The value of *M. Butterfly* for the purposes of this introduction is twofold. First, its formally complex articulation of the central role of fantasy in sexuality, and in particular in the join of the sexual drives to the (self-)destructive drives, further elucidates Freud's concepts of narcissism, fetishism and melancholia and their relations to the death drive. Second, Cronenberg's film is a sophisticated commentary on cinema, a meta-cinematic reflection on spectatorial pleasure and how the cinematic production of (public) fantasy scenarios, in eliciting or even shaping the spectator's phantasmatic activity, may provide new objects for the drive. The following discussion, therefore, is not limited to the diegesis or the thematic of *M. Butterfly*, but takes into consideration something of its formal and conceptual complexity.

Scripted by the Chinese-American playwright David Henry Hwang from his own Broadway play (1988), but with significant changes that make it in every way Cronenberg's film, *M. Butterfly* is based on the 1986 trial for treason of a former French diplomat and his Chinese lover of many years, a former star of the Beijing opera. This trial became famous not because of the gravity of the treason, which was negligible, but as a gender scandal, because the Frenchman appeared to be unaware of the fact that his lover was a man (the French judges could not believe such an equivocation possible). The film, like the play, constructs the lovers' relationship as a conscious and creatively re-enacted replay of the dominant cultural narrative of abject femininity and self-sacrificial motherhood that Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) reconfigured into a spectacular, popular, public fantasy.[10] In Cronenberg's film the opera is a figure for the film's interrogation of fantasy as the support and staging of desire. As its title suggests, *M. Butterfly* reframes the opera *Madama Butterfly* as a mirror in which the two film protagonists see themselves; a mirror that also reflects back to the spectator the psychic effects that the public fantasy inscribed in the opera has on two individuals: how 'Butterfly' takes hold in their subjective fantasies, elicits their mutual desire and compels their sexual drives against the dictates of the reality principle, political commitment and even consciousness.

Addressing itself to current discourses on gender, sexuality and race in postcoloniality, the film solicits an ideological, or moral, reading. It explicitly depicts the Butterfly narrative as a Western fantasy of the Orient that is Orientalist in the sense specified by Edward Said's

Orientalism; that is to say, inflected by the political and economic interests of Western imperialism and by its ideology of racial and sexist supremacy. The stereotyped figure of the submissive Oriental woman who sacrifices all and dies for the love of an unworthy Western man is recast as Song Liling (John Lone), a Chinese homosexual and a spy for the People's Republic, who willingly plays the role of Butterfly, ostensibly to gather information on US troop movements in Vietnam, but actually risks incarceration in a labour camp for the sake of his sexual relationship with the Frenchman. For his part, caught up in his passion for Butterfly, René (Jeremy Irons) apparently remains unaware that his lover is not only a man but also a spy. In the end, however, after the trial and the revelation, the tables are turned: Song Liling flies back to China, like Pinkerton on his ship, leaving the role and the fate of Butterfly to the Western man, who created it in the first place and who now must himself perform it to its tragic end.

In the end, it is the imprisoned René Gallimard, his name the quintessence of Western philosophy and French high culture – René for Descartes, Gallimard for the French publisher of Foucault, among others – who literally becomes Butterfly before our eyes. In an elaborate performance on an improvised stage in the prison, while putting on the Butterfly costume and makeup, Gallimard tells the diegetic audience how he has been loved by the perfect woman and then kills himself with a shard of the mirror he used to put on the makeup. The moral of this reading goes something like this: Western heterosexual man looks into the mirror and sees the face of his other(s), the stereotype of the racial, cultural and gendered other that he himself has constructed for his civilization, his history, his desire; and finally he is consumed like Frankenstein by his own creation and his own will to domination. The discontents of Western civilization have come full circle and the aggression it has directed towards its others now turns around upon itself.

The moral reading is not inconsistent with a metapsychological one: narcissism is again the central term, referring to the psychic state in which the energy of the sexual drive is withdrawn from objects – persons or things – in the external world and wholly reinvested in the ego. In René, the Western male subject, narcissism is the psychic condition corresponding to the ideological structure of an Orientalist culture whose imaginary figuration of self is in relation to an other imaged as 'Butterfly'. That such figuration of self is imaginary – that is to say, that the ego 'misrecognizes' itself in an idealized, aggrandized image of self vis-à-vis the other[11] – is all but confirmed by the psychoanalytic account of the actual situation of passivity and dependency in which the

newborn comes into being in relation to the other, the mother or adult caretakers, on whom it must in every way depend. (I shall return to this in Chapter 3.) The film represents the narcissistic condition in René on a double register, first as fetishism (which in psychoanalytic terms is a perversion) and then as melancholia (one of the psychic illnesses Freud named *paraphrenias*, indicating a disturbed relation to reality, such as schizophrenia or paranoia).

Fetishism

After the trial, with the revelation of his lover's physical maleness – which René has apparently disavowed, that is to say, known and not known, all along – it becomes clear that René's love object is not the person Song Liling but a fantasy object, the femininity figured in Butterfly. Butterfly, then, is a fetish in the Freudian sense: it is an object which wards off the threat of castration looming over the male subject and allays his fear of homosexuality.[12] The ability to hold two contrary beliefs, which Freud named *disavowal* (*Verleugnung*), is the psychic mechanism that sustains fetishistic desire. Cinema, with its lush scenarios, the privileged vision afforded by its close-ups, the mobility of its cameras, its editing and sound-mixing techniques, and the ever-renewed wonder of its special effects, endlessly proposes cultural narratives as public and private fantasies, engaging the spectator's identification and desire in what Coleridge, before Freud, named 'the willing suspension of disbelief'. But as Metz observed, it is the technical, material apparatus of cinema that works as a fetish for the spectator. As the masquerade of femininity in *M. Butterfly* is the fetish object that constitutes Butterfly as the body of desire, so is

> the technical equipment of the cinema with respect to the cinema as a whole. A fetish, the cinema as a technical performance, as prowess, as an *exploit*, an exploit that underlines and denounces the lack on which the whole arrangement is based (the absence of the object, replaced by its reflection), an exploit which consists at the same time of making this absence forgotten. The cinema fetishist is the person who is enchanted at what the machine is capable of, at the *theater of shadows* as such.[13]

In *M. Butterfly*, the fetish that is cinema in its 'technical performance' is represented ironically in René's performance of Butterfly on the makeshift prison stage. Here the fetish is quite literally an object,

namely, the sum of the accoutrements that make up the masquerade of femininity: the Oriental woman costume, the long black hair, the face paint and rouge, the long red fingernails – all the props that René will barter from the prison guard for his final performance. For the fetish is not simply an object (in the common sense of the word, a thing), but an object set in a *mise-en-scène*, in the scenario of a narrative from which it acquires its psychic value as object of the drive. Such is Butterfly to René, a fantasy object which enables his desire, or better, which provides him with the possibility of existing as a desiring subject; desire being the condition of psychic existence.[14] Thus, to René, the revelation that Song is a man means the loss of the object 'peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible' (as Freud defines the object of the drive). But René's erotic and narcissistic investment in the fetish is so strong that he cannot let it go.

Melancholia

In his final words, René identifies himself as 'René Gallimard, also known as Madame Butterfly'. That indicates that he has introjected the lost object, has taken it into himself, identified with it and become Butterfly. This is the psychic condition that Freud names *melancholia*, a pathological disturbance of narcissism in which the ego, by identifying with the lost object, becomes lost to itself. With the loss of the loved object, Freud states in 'Mourning and Melancholia', the ego becomes completely impoverished, incapable of love or achievement; it regresses from narcissistic object choice to narcissistic identification with the lost object. 'In the two opposed situations of being most intensely in love and of suicide the ego is overwhelmed by the object, though in totally different ways' (*SE* 14: 252). The way of suicide can occur when the love for the lost object was ambivalent, that is to say, mixed with resentment or hatred towards one who has abandoned or betrayed us; it is the hatred towards the object introjected into the ego that overwhelms the melancholic subject and produces the tendency to suicide. The distinction between melancholia as a narcissistic mental disorder and the common human reaction to loss, which Freud calls mourning, is represented in the film's ending, respectively, in René/Butterfly's suicide and in Song's mourning demeanour as he sits in the plane about to depart.

For all human beings, Freud maintains, 'the riddle of life' consists in the concurrent presence of two opposing forces, the life and death drives, 'struggling with each other from the very first' (*SE* 18: 61). This means that hostile or aggressive impulses are constitutive of the ego from the beginning and indeed allow its very survival in the face of a

threatening external world and the internal pressure of the drives. But whereas in the *Three Essays* Freud's view is that aggressiveness towards the object/other is prior (primal sadism) and masochism 'must be regarded as sadism that has been turned round upon the subject's own ego', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, having surmised the existence of a death drive, he sees the aggressiveness of the ego as being first of all directed towards the ego and revises himself: 'there *might* be such a thing as primary masochism – a possibility which I had contested at that time' (*SE* 18: 54–5).

Further elaborating this notion of a primary, erotogenic masochism in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', Freud comes to the conclusion that primary masochism is in effect identical with primal sadism; both are operations of the death drive, their join or switching point occurring in the vicissitude he calls 'turning round upon the subject':

> If one is prepared to overlook a little inexactitude, it may be said that the death instinct which is operative in the organism – primal sadism – is identical with masochism. After the main portion of it has been transposed outwards on to objects, there remains inside, as a residuum of it, the erotogenic masochism proper, which on the one hand has become a component of the libido and, on the other, still has the self as its object.
>
> (*SE* 19: 164)

Here again we encounter that turning or troping of the drive which, as Laplanche has argued, is the essential characteristic of sexuality and which, therefore, links sexuality to violence, whether the violence is directed outward, towards the other, or inward, towards the self.

In metapsychological terms, René's suicide shows the imbrication of the death drive in the erotic drive, as the ego is overwhelmed by the lost object and turns itself into it in order to refind it – only to lose it again in death. In meta-narrative terms, the ending is the ironic realization of the cultural fantasy, its consummation in the death of Butterfly; ironic in the film's awareness that the death wish directed towards the other actually 'turn[s] round upon the subject'. In meta-cinematic terms, the suicide sequence is a figure of death at work in the cinema, insofar as films address a spectator; in other words, the sequence is a figure of the mutual imbrication of the death drive with the erotic drive *in spectatorship*. Consider: the operatic staging of the scene conclusively brings home to the viewers the artificial, constructed nature of Butterfly as a figure of performance, a fetish or fantasy object that takes its meaning

from a fantasy scenario. As we see René seeing himself (herself) as Butterfly in the mirror, we become aware of the film's construction as a *mise-en-abîme* or mirror construction: the Butterfly fantasy, first relayed through the opera René watches, is further embedded within the film and relayed to us as we watch it.[15] Thus, as we look at René seeing herself as Butterfly in the mirror that will kill her, we are looking at ourselves seeing ourselves in the fantasy that is the film.

Said otherwise, the film is also our mirror. But will it kill us? Of course not, we tell ourselves, it's only a movie. And yet, as we watch René dying, the blood flowing out of her, our senses filled with the poignant operatic music on the soundtrack, her death is our death as well. As we fully experience the visual and aural pleasure, the solicitation of the scopic and auditory drives that are the lure of cinema and its grip on spectatorial fantasy, identification and desire – death is at work. Cinema is a mirror in which I see myself, an erotic scene laid out for my pleasure, luring me into its fantasy; to the extent that I become part of that fantasy, yes, in that sense, cinema can kill me. In spectatorship, too, the death drive overlays the erotic drive and both converge in the movement of turning round upon the subject to yield the primal pleasure, at once sadistic and masochistic, of seeing (one's) death at the movies.

* * *

In the next chapter I discuss Foucault's ostensibly anti-psychoanalytic stance and his popular thesis in Volume I of *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality must not be conceived of as a stubborn drive internal to the individual but rather as a site of power relations. Here I end by remarking yet another instance of that vicissitude, an ironic turn in the cultural history of the West. That stubborn drive, Freud's 'basic instincts', dismissed by social constructionists, feminists and postmodernists in the 1970s, came back in through the window of the media in the 1990s to haunt, once again, the Western subject's public and private fantasies.

2
The Stubborn Drive: Foucault, Freud, Fanon

> Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population.
>
> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*[1]

The obsessive thematization of sexuality and sexual identity in the late 1980s and 1990s, in particular since the AIDS crisis, seems to bear out precisely what Foucault decried as the deployment of sexuality in late capitalism. This is a time, he wrote in 1976, 'in which the exploitation of wage labor does not demand the same violent and physical constraints as in the nineteenth century, and where the politics of the body does not require the elision of sex or its restriction solely to the reproductive function; it relies instead on a multiple channelling into the controlled circuits of the economy' (*HS*, 114). In other words, the continuing discursive production of 'sexual heterogeneities' (*HS*, 37), in Foucault's words, or, as some say, of neo-sexualities, and the multiplication and proliferation of sexes and sexual identities since the 1990s reverse the picture of 'a sexuality repressed for economic reasons' (*HS*, 114) to that of a sexuality that *is produced* for economic reasons. These are, of course, no longer the reasons of bio-power and bourgeois class hegemony that Foucault attributed to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but rather the economics of transnational capital and labour in the postcolonial world market (sex tourism from the US and

Europe to Asia, sex workers imported and exported across the globe, international networks of paedophiles on the Internet, and so forth).

The reception of Foucault's work in the US seems to have missed this point. Instead, in a cultural context generally resistant to Freud, it has embraced Foucault's contention that sexuality is a 'transfer point [*point de passage*] for relations of power' as a way to dismiss Freud's theory of the unconscious and the drives. This has promoted a reductive and, I believe, false dichotomy between two views on the subject of sexuality known as essentialism and social constructionism.[2] The latter, taking for granted that Freud's drive (*Sexualtrieb*) is biologically grounded, would deploy Foucault to refute its stubbornness and intractability, and replace it with the more optimistic and, to my mind, voluntaristic view that sexuality is constructed or 'discursive' and, therefore, can be transformed – even, perhaps, transcended – through practices of 'resignification'. I am going to argue that the setting up of this opposition between Freud's and Foucault's respective theories of sexuality is ill-advised, as well as unfounded, and that the essentialism/constructionism dichotomy is based on an equivocation.

Foucault reads psychoanalysis as a last-ditch attempt to re-ground sexuality in the Law – the law of alliance, the family, the incest taboo, the law of the father. He sees Freud's endeavour as motivated by reaction 'to the great surge of racism that was contemporary with it' and directly threatened Freud the man, his immediate family and his larger, diasporic community; but in spite of the progressive political stance of opposition taken against fascism by psychoanalysis, Foucault argues, Freud's attempt 'to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order of power' was a regressive move, a 'historical "retro-version"' (*HS*, 150). From his point of view, in the perspective of an effective history, Foucault was right; the thirty or so years since his book was written have more than proved that.

And yet, what do we make of the resurgence of interest in Freud and neo-Freudian psychoanalysis since the 1990s, and particularly in the context of postcolonial theory and the reconceptualization of racial-sexual-gendered identity? I am thinking of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha reading Frantz Fanon; of a younger generation of artists and theorists of the African diaspora, like Isaac Julien, Françoise Vergès, Kobena Mercer and David Marriott; of a Chicana cultural historian like Emma Pérez; of doctoral students' research in queer studies or transsexuality, all of whom return to Freud in order to recast the questions of sexuality, of its production and its relation to fantasy, and of the body as the site of the concurrent inscription of race, gender and sexuality in the social subject.[3]

It is not inconceivable that these questions seek reframing through a Freudian lens, since they are also motivated by political opposition to contemporary forms of racism. But my guess is that the general resurgence of interest in Freud may have to do with another, epistemologically more consequential aspect of psychoanalysis, an aspect that Foucault disregards or underestimates; namely, Freud's unique theorization of that 'stubborn drive' that Foucault would dissolve into 'relations of power' (*HS*, 103).

I will pursue for a while the difference between these two conceptions of sexuality, but also look for their intersections. Foucault's definition of sexuality as a 'technology of sex' (*technologie du sexe*) in Volume I of his *History of Sexuality* (*La Volonté de savoir*) excludes consideration of the subjects on whom that technology is deployed and has effects of subjectivation, that is, constitutes them as sexual subjects. Freud's theory of sexuality, on the other hand, presupposes and indeed hinges on a specific subject, a psyche, a body-ego. These two conceptions of sexuality are couched, so to speak, in different theoretical projects; but they are not as divergent or mutually exclusive as the essentialism/constructionism dichotomy would have them.

One might object that my title, drawn from the passage cited in the epigraph, is misleading, for Foucault does not use the word *drive* in the French original.

> Il ne faut pas décrire la sexualité comme une poussée rétive, étrangère par nature et indocile par nécessité à un pouvoir qui, de son côté, s'épuise à la soumettre et souvent échoue à la maîtriser entièrement. Elle apparaît plutôt comme un point de passage particulièrement dense pour les relations de pouvoir: entre hommes et femmes, entre jeunes et vieux, entre parents et progéniture, entre éducateurs et élèves, entre prêtres et laïcs, entre une administration et une population.[4]

What is rendered in English translation as 'a stubborn drive' in the French text reads 'une poussée rétive' (*VS*, 136), and *poussée* is only a synonym – if an interesting one, actually a metonym – of *pulsion*, which is the official French translation of Freud's *Trieb*.[5] Indeed, as I noted elsewhere, Foucault goes to considerable lengths to disclaim any influence of psychoanalysis on his work, marking his distance from Freud both lexically, as in this case, and discursively, as when, in Volume III of the *History of Sexuality*, he discusses in great detail the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus without so much as a mention of that other famous *Interpretation of Dreams*.[6] Nonetheless, as he himself said in an *entretien*

with members of the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University of Vincennes in 1977 (which is described as a 'conversation' by the anglophone editor, but reads more like a grilling), there is a certain similarity between his project in *La Volonté de savoir* and Freud's:

> The strength of psychoanalysis consists in its having opened out on to something quite different [from sexuality], namely the logic of the unconscious. And there sexuality is no longer what it was at the outset … . Freud's great originality wasn't discovering the sexuality hidden beneath neurosis. The sexuality was already there, Charcot was already talking about it. Freud's originality was taking all that literally, and then erecting on its basis the *Interpretation of Dreams*, which is something other than a sexual aetiology of neuroses. If I were to be very pretentious, I would say that I'm doing something a bit similar to that. I'm starting off from an apparatus (*dispositif*) of sexuality, a fundamental historical given which must be an indispensable point of departure for us. I'm taking it literally, at face value: I'm not placing myself outside it, because that isn't possible, but this allows me to get at something else.[7]

That something else is power. But, although differently framed in their respective theoretical projects, Freud's and Foucault's conceptions of sexuality are not as incompatible or mutually exclusive as they are generally taken to be. It is not that one conception of sexuality, Freud's, posits a subject while the other, Foucault's, precludes it; this becomes apparent in Foucault's recasting of his overall project in the subsequent volumes of his *History of Sexuality*. It is simply that the project of Volume I is not a theory of sexuality as such, but a theory of power. He stated it bluntly in an interview for *La quinzaine littéraire* that same year:

> For me, the whole point of the project lies in a reelaboration of the theory of power. I'm not sure that the mere pleasure of writing about sexuality would have provided me with sufficient motivation to start this sequence of at least six volumes, if I had not felt impelled [*si je ne m'étais pas senti poussé*] by the necessity of re-working this problem of power.
>
> What I want to show is how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth [*les rapports de pouvoir peuvent passer matériellement dans l'épaisseur même des corps*], without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be

> interiorised in people's consciousnesses. There is a network or circuit of bio-power, or somato-power, which acts as the formative matrix of sexuality itself as the historical and cultural phenomenon within which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves.[8]

Here the emphasis on sexuality as a historical and cultural phenomenon leaves out its effects on individuals, what we might call effects of subjectivication. These, however, become the focus of the subsequent volumes of Foucault's history. In the introduction to Volume II, he remarks on the shift, methodological as well as historical, that he had to make in order 'to study the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects'.[9]

In other words, the moment Foucault brings into focus the figure of the subject, he redefines sexuality as 'a historically singular experience' in modern Western society that caused individuals 'to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality' (*UP*, 4). While he does not employ terms such as *the drive* or *the unconscious*, still there is a subject, perhaps even a *self*, who is at once recipient, agent and enunciator of those technologies and techniques that construct individuals as sexual subjects; and in order 'to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of a "sexuality", it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire' (*UP*, 5–6). The terms *individual*, *experience* and *subject of desire* are not incidental, but rather central to Foucault's understanding of sexuality, as they are, by other names, to Freud's.

I want to argue that, even in Volume I, where Foucault speaks of sexuality as a nexus ('a dense transfer point') of power relations, his conception of sexuality is not antithetical to Freud's or incommensurable with it, as he would have us believe. It is differently inflected, analysed in its discursive apparatuses, as a social technology, rather than in its subjective effects and psychic apparatus. For this reason I believe that, far from being mutually exclusive, Foucault's and Freud's theories are both necessary to articulate the psychosocial phenomenon of sexuality in its complexity; and I would go as far as to say that only together can they outline a materialist theory of the sexual subject.

The framing of the two theories in the terms of an essentialism/constructionism model, therefore, is based on a first misunderstanding. The constructionist view would replace Freud's allegedly essentialist conception of sexuality – essentialist because biologically driven – with a conception of sexuality that, being constructed ('discursive') instead of innate, would *ipso facto* be amenable to change by means of an individual's

agency – the change designated by such terms as *reappropriation*, *resignification*, *subversion*, *rearticulation*, and so on. The latter conception is attributed to Foucault.

But in Foucault sexuality is a very complex, multi-discursive formation, supported by a massive apparatus of medico-scientific, juridical, religious and other discourses and practices that are anchored to diverse state and private institutions. The question of the individual subject, and thus of individual agency, is irrelevant to Foucault's project in Volume I, which is the archaeology of sexuality as that complex, multi-discursive, socio-political formation. That question, as I said, arises and takes centre-stage later in Foucault's work when he undertakes to write the history of man-desiring man, and his concern with epistemology – what he called the *archaeology* of knowledge – turns to *genealogy*, the tactical study of practices or the 'anti-science' of insurrectionary knowledges.[10] My point is that the constructionist frame conflates the subject of Foucault's later works, the individual agent of practices that make sexuality an 'art of existence', with the subject of reverse discourse in Volume I, who, in effect, does not subvert the law but assumes it, responds to its interpellation and thus accepts the sexual identity the law assigns to him or her. Indeed, to him *or* her, since the law recognizes only male or female subjects.

Since what Foucault names 'sexuality' in Volume I is the discursive product of institutional practices and apparatuses of power/knowledge, then, when an individual, a doctor, a lawyer, a parent, a daughter or son (an 'offspring') acts or speaks of sexuality – I choose these terms, as Foucault does, to indicate not individuals but their positions in a system of power relations, a social or a kinship system – he or she quotes or reiterates that knowledge; he or she does not act or speak as agent/subject of power/knowledge but rather as a function in what Judith Butler calls 'a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power', a form of 'citationality', a citing of the law – Lacan's symbolic.[11] However, contrary to what Butler goes on to suggest, this sexuality, this massive social technology, is not something that individuals may rearticulate, resignify or reappropriate, whether by drag performance or by political will.

The equivocation is based on the etymological kinship of performativity, a metalinguistic term of linguistic theory, with the referential term *performance*. While the latter designates a doing of the subject, a conscious act, a personal choice based on an individual's aptitude (skill or talent), training or sense of style, which make the performance more or less effective, performativity is a function of the structure of

discourses, and hence of ideology as Althusser defines it, 'the imaginary relation of individuals to the real relations in which they live'; relations by means of which, he underlines, '*individuals are always-already subjects*'.[12] Althusser makes clear to what extent the structure of discourse and its performativity are 'implacable' and unconscious:

> Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. I hardly need add that this familial ideological configuration is, in its uniqueness, highly structured, and that it is in this implacable and more or less 'pathological' (presupposing that any meaning can be assigned to that term) structure that the former subject-to-be will have to 'find' 'its' place, i.e. 'become' the sexual subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance. It is clear that this ideological constraint and pre-appointment, and all the rituals of rearing and then education in the family, have some relationship with what Freud studied in the forms of the pre-genital and genital 'stages' of sexuality, i.e. in the 'grip' of what Freud registered by its effects as being the unconscious.

For Freud too sexuality is the product of social conventions (civilization) that are transmitted through the generations (phylogenesis) and recapitulated in the psychic and social development of each individual (ontogenesis). For Freud, however, unlike Foucault, the social conventions that constitute civilization and its discontents *may* be *re*articulated in the individual's psyche. For Freud, *there is* a subject who has drives and representations. The patient and the analyst speak as subjects (of the transference and counter-transference); indeed, Freud's very theory, his metapsychology, started out from his self-analysis. Psychoanalysis and its method – free association, interpretation and construction in analysis – implicate two distinct subjects, analyst and patient, in the intersubjective construction of a passionate fiction, the retranslation of the enigma of sexuality in which, in Foucault's words, 'we seem at once to recognize and lose ourselves'. Here, then, is a second misunderstanding.

I may put it like this: if Foucault is concerned with the social conditions and mechanisms that, by bringing about the knowledge and practices that produce something called sexuality, implant it in the social subject, Freud is concerned with the psychic mechanisms that implant it by articulating the drives to the body through particular representations or fantasies. There is nothing innate in sexuality as such for Freud; what

may be called innate, but only in the sense of pre-existing its possible articulations, are instead the drive and the psychic structure of fantasy with its potential to engage, focalize and orient the partial drives.

It appears, then, that the popular view that opposes an essentialist (Freudian) conception of sexuality to a (Foucauldian) constructionist one is based on a double equivocation. In the first place, Foucault's 'sexuality' is not something that individuals may *re*articulate, *re*appropriate or *subvert* either by surgery or by performance; secondly, what may be innate for Freud – and even that can and has been questioned – is not sexuality as constructionists presume, but the drive. Indeed, it is the case that *Freud's notion of drive undermines and actually undoes the opposition between constructionism and essentialism*: for sexuality is nothing if not constructed, but if it can be implanted in the subject, it is precisely because of the stubborn drive, the *poussée rétive* that Freud calls *Trieb*. How else would social discourses and practices take hold in the body and so shape one's sexual, gender, class or racial identifications? How else could they *penetrate the body in depth*, as Foucault said in a perhaps unguarded moment, even without the mediation of consciousness or of the subject's own representations?

Trieb and *bio-pouvoir*

As I have argued elsewhere, reading Freud in relation to Peirce's notions of interpretant and habit, it is precisely in the body that the effects of signs are realized.[13] The sexual drive is consciously felt as a somatic pressure having its source in a bodily stimulus, but it does so by traversing a non-homogeneous, heterotopic space in which unconscious mnemic traces are linked to mental representations through the intervention of fantasy. Thus the drive is not to be equated with consciousness, which is merely the sensory or perceptual aspect of the ego, and not its 'interiority', as Foucault suggests. Consider again his statement that

> power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorised in people's consciousnesses (*intériorisé dans la conscience des gens*). There is a network or circuit of bio-power, or somato-power, which acts as the formative matrix of sexuality itself as the historical and cultural phenomenon within which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves.

Foucault said this in the late 1970s, in an intellectual climate – French and more generally European – pervasively influenced by the Lacanian revision of Freud, with its strong emphasis on the unconscious and its rejection of Freud's second topography; we recall that Lacan was engaged in a battle against North American ego-psychology and its privileging of consciousness over the unconscious and the drives. It seems to me that Foucault's stress on a bio-power or somato-power working on its own upon the body and in the body, independent of consciousness, reflects that French reading of Freud and a separation or, better, an opposition between the two psychic agencies, perception-consciousness (*Pcp.-Cs*) and the unconscious (*Ucs.*), more drastic than it is in Freud, even the Freud of the first topography. The idea that power relations (= sexuality) penetrate the body in depth without the mediation of consciousness or of 'the subject's own representations' implies a notion of subject in which consciousness and self-representations are drastically severed from the body and more so from the body-ego of Freud's second topography, where the ego is in direct, interactive relation with the id. Foucault's statement thus implies a subject fully conscious or rational – mind over body, so to speak – like the Cartesian subject; a subject equated with rationality (the *cogito*) and yet deluded in its certainty and self-possession, for it is constituted by the unconscious, in the field of the Other, 'out of the effects of the signifier'. In this, Lacan was explicit:

> In my Rome report ['The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psycho-Analysis'] I proceeded to a new alliance with the meaning of the Freudian discovery. The unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier. This makes clear that, in the term *subject* … I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his *pathos*, his suffering … but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognized as certainty.
>
> (*FF*, 126)

Moreover, to the extent that the subject's delusion, or misrecognition, is a function of what Lacan calls the imaginary, consciousness, in this subject, is synonymous with ideology in the sense of Althusser's recasting of the term as an imaginary relation endowed with a material existence.[14] In other words, the conception of the subject that Foucault's statement

seems to presuppose, and to oppose, is one in which consciousness and self-representation are aligned with ideology on the one hand, and ego-psychology on the other.

It is in antithesis to such a conception of the subject – I would say in opposition to its lurking idealism – that Foucault proposes a materialist conception of the body as directly invested by bio-power; a body that bio-power can invest, penetrate, regulate, control, discipline, manage, insert into the economic and social relations of capitalist production without passing through the defiles of consciousness, ideology and the bourgeois imaginary. But, ironically, this power working upon the body, in the body, is conceived as an apparatus with its own logic and a specific teleology ('the function of administering life'), not unlike the Lacanian conception of the unconscious: as 'the unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject', bio-power may be said to be the sum of the effects of power on a body. In this sense, bio-power stands vis-à-vis the subject in a conceptual location, a discursive realm, analogous to that in which the Lacanian unconscious stands to consciousness – two parallel universes, incommunicable and incommensurable.

Indeed, Foucault's earlier work had been strongly influenced by structuralist thought, in particular the structural conception of the unconscious. His comparison of psychoanalysis and ethnology in *The Order of Things* (*Les Mots et les choses*, 1966) is cast in terms highly reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss:

> One can imagine what prestige and importance ethnology could possess if, instead of defining itself in the first place – as it has done until now – as the study of societies without history, it were deliberately to seek its object in the area of the unconscious processes that characterize the system of a given culture[;] it would define as a system of cultural unconscious the totality of formal structures which render mythical discourse significant … . One can imagine the similar importance that a psychoanalysis would have if it were to share the dimension of an ethnology, not by the establishment of a 'cultural psychology', not by the sociological explanation of phenomena manifested at the level of individuals, but by the discovery that the unconscious also possesses, or rather that it *is* in itself, a certain formal structure.[15]

And again, in the foreword to the 1970 English edition he defines his project as an attempt 'to reveal a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of

scientific discourse', that is, the 'rules of formation' of scientific concepts, objects and theories revealed at the level he called 'archaeological'.[16] But already in the introduction and conclusion of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault dissociates himself from structuralism, even with such a disingenuous statement as 'you must admit that I never once used the word "structure" in *The Order of Things*'.[17] By 1976, when Volume I of the *History of Sexuality* appeared in print, Foucault had jumped the structuralist Lacanian ship and uttered the rallying cry against the deployment of sexuality: 'not sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures' (*HS*, 157).[18] In a psychoanalytic perspective, of course, bodies cannot be disjoined from desire, but how does Foucault conceptualize the body in relation to bio-power?

What Foucault calls bio-power is 'the entire political technology of life [*toute la technologie politique de la vie*]' (*HS*, 145; *VS*, 191), which developed from the seventeenth century onward when political power 'assigned itself the task of administering life' (*HS*, 139). At first it concerned itself with *the body as a machine*, 'its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls'; and subsequently with *the species body*, 'the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity' (*HS*, 139; emphasis added). A paramount technique of bio-power was the deployment of sexuality in the nineteenth century, which produced the modern notion of sex and constituted it as a political issue 'by creating the imaginary element that is "sex"' [*en créant cet élément imaginaire qui est* '*le sexe*'] (*HS*, 156; *VS*, 207).

Just as 'sex' is the creation, the discursive effect, of the complex political technology Foucault named *la technologie du sexe* (*VS*, 155), so it would seem is the body a creation, a product or effect of 'the political technology of life' that he named *bio-pouvoir*. But the structural and lexical parallelism in this construction – two imaginary objects or discursive effects created by two political technologies – is deceiving, for the body is not only a discursive effect, an imaginary element, as is 'le sexe'; or at least it is not so to the extent that bio-power can 'take hold on the body' and 'materially penetrate' it. Whereas the status of sex is that of a purely discursive effect, a construction, the status of the body is double: as *species body*, it is a discursive effect of bio-power, but *the body as a machine*, whose 'controlled insertion into the machinery of production' made bio-power 'an indispensable element in the development of capitalism', is a physical body, a piece of instrumentalized nature (*HS*, 140–1).

If it can be said that bio-power 'acts as the formative matrix of sexuality', then, it is because bio-power, or somato-power, not only deploys itself upon the body as machine to maximize its efficiency and productivity, but at the same time *produces* the body itself as 'species body' (*HS*, 139), seat of biological processes and centrally constituted by its sexuality. Thus, for example, Foucault describes the bourgeoisie 'as being occupied, from the mid-eighteenth century on, with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a "class" body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body' (*HS*, 124). In this sense bio-power produces the *grounds* of sexuality in the two acceptations of the term: it produces the reason or justification to control and manage the sexed body through the regulation of sexuality, but it also produces the corporeal terrain in which to implant it. In the latter activity, it seems to me, somato-power is not so different from Freud's drive after all. Both are located in corporeality beyond the reach of the Cartesian rational subject, and both provide the material, bodily ground for what Foucault has called 'the perverse implantation' of sexuality in the subject. I shall come back to this phrase.

The concept of drive (*Trieb*), central to Freud's theory of sexuality and revisited throughout his major works, was first fully formulated in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' (1915) with the distinction made between *stimulus* and *drive*: a stimulus operates as a force coming from outside the organism and giving 'a single impact, so that it can be disposed of by a single expedient action [such as] motor flight from the source of stimulation', whereas a drive always operates as a constant pressure 'not from without but from within the organism [such that] no flight can avail against it' (*SE* 14: 118).

> [A]n 'instinct' [*Trieb*] appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.
>
> (*SE* 14: 122)

The difference between Foucault's view of sexuality as an effect of *bio-pouvoir* and Freud's view of sexuality as *Trieb*, it seems to me, consists in the respective relation of drive and bio-power to representation and the different conception of the subject this subtends. For one, power relations (bio-power) produce the body as sexual by penetrating it in

depth, without passing through consciousness: sexuality takes hold on the body without 'the mediation of the subject's own representations'. For the other, the drive is engaged in the body without *necessarily* passing through consciousness. Indeed, as death drive, it has no representation; as sexual drive, it has a hold on the body in the form of excitation or affects (instinctual representatives, *Triebrepräsentanz*), which may turn into mental or conscious representations (*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*) or may remain unrepresentable, that is to say, unconscious, except through the distortion of the dreamwork or the compromise of the symptom.

Of course, for Freud, the body itself is a representation and not a merely physical entity: it is the projected perceptual boundary of the ego, which 'is first and foremost a bodily ego (*Körper-Ich*)': 'The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body.'[19] However, if consciousness is here subsumed in the body-ego, the conscious ego, this is only a very small part of the psychic entity Freud calls the ego in the second topography, where the two other agencies that constitute the Freudian subject, namely, the id and the super-ego, operate wholly or largely in the unconscious mode, so that Freud can say that 'not only what is lowest but also what is highest in the ego can be unconscious' (*EI* 19: 27). In other words, the ego that knows itself as a Gestalt, a bodily ego, missing the forest of the id that inhabits it for the trees of its conscious bodily form, is the imaginary ego, Lacan's *moi*; it is not Freud's ego. Even in the first topography of the psychic apparatus, in Chapter 7 of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the unconscious was conceived of as 'the larger sphere' of psychical life which 'includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious', consciousness being no more than a 'sense-organ'.[20]

> But what part is there left to be played in our scheme by consciousness, which was once so omnipotent and hid all else from view? Only that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities. … We regard this system [*Cs*.] as resembling the perceptual systems *Pcpt*.: as being susceptible to excitation by qualities but incapable of retaining traces of alterations – that is to say, as having no memory.[21]

Consciousness, then, in Freud is not conscience, as the ambiguous French word *conscience* might suggest; nor is it rationality, morality or ideology. Unlike the conscious, coherent, if deluded, Cartesian subject implicit in Foucault's statement, constituted by a symbolic order that

transcends it (the unconscious as 'the sum of the effects of speech on a subject'), the Freudian subject is a locus – and an effect – of both conscious and unconscious, secondary and primary processes.

In Freud, it is because the ego is embodied that it provides the *material* ground of subject formation. I would suggest that this is precisely why bio-power can 'materially penetrate the body in depth', as Foucault strangely says. For what is that depth or *thickness* of the body (*l'épaisseur même des corps*) if not the larger part of what Freud calls the ego, the part that lies beneath or inside the conscious ego as mental projection of the body's surface? I ask this rhetorical question to highlight the problem posed by Freud's conception of the psyche, and not only to Foucault: the spatial terms 'beneath' and 'inside' are obviously inadequate to represent the ego as a psychic entity and the body as its mental projection; they are referential terms attempting to represent a conceptual space, the psyche, which can only be delineated figurally, as Freud does in the trope of the drive as a frontier-concept (*Grenzbegriff*) traversing the space between mind and matter.

The sexual metaphor of a body penetrated by bio-power, which has struck me as strange because it seems to undercut, to resist, the logic of Foucault's compelling argumentation, inhabits a figural space not dissimilar to the space of Freud's drive. It is most likely for this reason that the single phrase 'power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth' instigated this (mis)reading of Foucault with Freud: the trope in the phrase demonstrates that the path across the conceptual space between bio-power and the materiality of the body is not traced by the referential aim of discourse but by the figurality of language. In its own conceptual space, the figure of ego–id–superego that designates the Freudian subject is a figure for the stratification of past impressions, reminiscences, inchoate feelings, unmasterable excitations, some of which are available to conscious (self)representation and some are not; a figure more complexly articulated but nonetheless suggestive of the thickness of the body.

Foucault, in his polemical critique of bourgeois idealism, speaks of bodies, not subjects. And bodies, there is no doubt, are permeated through and through by sexuality and power relations. But if power relations, bio-power – in their multiple articulations as compulsory heterosexuality, slavery, incest, work ethics, and so forth – can penetrate the body in depth to produce sexuality as 'the historical and cultural phenomenon in which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves', they cannot but have effects, be they conscious or unconscious, *in* each of us – whether that 'us' is designated by the word body or by the word

subject. For it is only insofar as we are bodies that we can become subjects, and conversely, only insofar as we become subjects that we acquire a sexed and raced body.

Implantation

This conclusion is corroborated by Laplanche's reading of Freud in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* and in the theory of sexuality he has proposed as 'new foundations' for psychoanalysis: sexuality is an effect of primal seduction. It is 'implanted' in the infant's physical body by the practices of maternal care in the form of enigmatic signifiers, whose untranslatable residues or quantities of unmasterable excitation constitute the primal unconscious and remain active thereafter as the source and objects of the drive.[22] It is worth remarking on this figure, *implantation* (French, *implantation*), used by both Laplanche and Foucault in works published within a few years of each other. In *La Volonté de savoir* (1976), Foucault described *the implantation of perversions in the social body* by means of the institutional (medical, legal, pedagogical) regulation of sexual practices, which in the nineteenth century was aimed at population control and the management of bio-power; he titled that chapter 'The Perverse Implantation' (*HS*, 36). Six years earlier, in *Vie et mort en psychanalyse* (1970), Laplanche had written of sexuality as the 'perversion of the instinctual' due to the '*implantation of adult sexuality' in the infant body* – a body without language (*infans*) and, at that stage, without an ego – by the actions and psychic investments, including unconscious sexual fantasies, of parents or caretakers aimed at, we could say, the affective and social management of the individual child (*LD*, 27 and 46).

Implantation is a figure that retains the etymological connotation of planting, inserting something into a soil, a depth or thickness of matter, in common usage as well as in the medical acceptation of introducing something (an implant) under the skin. The French dictionary *Petit Robert* gives as an antonym *déraciner*, to uproot. Indeed, Laplanche speaks of the repressed memory of sexual trauma as of something 'internal-external' like a splinter in the skin or 'a veritable spine in the *protective wall of the ego*' (*LD*, 42). What the figure suggests is that it is the implantation that turns matter into soil, or the physical body into a terrain of inscription.[23] In Laplanche's theory of sexuality, the enigmatic messages of the adult others turn the newborn human into a body with a singular and unique interior, a psychic depth, a thick layering of unconscious memory traces that pertain to that body alone and mark, as it were, its internal or psychic limits. Similarly, in Foucault's theory of

sexuality, the implantation of perversions turns the social body into a particular historical and political formation.

As the figure of implantation works in parallel ways in both texts and in both theories, it allows us to pose the question of the body as it relates to a human subject who is at once a social and a psychic subject, constituted through discursive and material practices, and delimited by temporal and spatial, that is to say, geohistorical constraints. But if the subject can be so constituted and delimited, it is because it is endowed or encumbered with a matter, a thickness or a depth in which the discourses, injunctions, demands, actions, gestures and looks of the other are 'implanted' and take hold. In a later paper, Laplanche further specifies that

> Implantation is a process which is common, everyday, normal or neurotic. Beside it, as its violent variant, a place must be given to intromission. While implantation allows the individual to take things up actively, at once translating and repressing, one must try to conceive of a process which blocks this, short-circuits the differentiation of the agencies in the process of their formation, and puts into the interior an element resistant to all metabolisation.[24]

He associates the violence of intromission to the formation of 'the superego, a foreign body that cannot be metabolized'. Both implantation and intromission, then, as the reference to the superego indicates, are terms of bodily/psychic processes not limited to the body in pieces (*le corps morcelé*) of the infantile stage prior to the formation of the ego, but affecting the body-ego and thus the subject at later times as well. For example, in the case of Emma discussed by Freud in the posthumous 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' and revisited by Laplanche in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, the intromission of the unmetabolizable phobic object of sexual trauma occurs in two scenes, linked by deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), at the ages of 8 and 12/13 (*LD*, 38–40). In psychoanalysis, the alien presence or foreign body within the subject is the very figure of psychic trauma. In Freud's and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* it is the suppressed memory of a traumatic event that acts like 'an agent that is still at work', instigating the materialization of the symptom.[25]

The intromission in the subject of such an unmetabolizable – and precisely, foreign – body is what Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). He recounts the experience of being stared at and someone saying, 'Look, a Negro!' At first, he comments, 'it was an

external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.' But after many recurrences of this event, when a little white boy cried out, 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!', a conscious response became impossible: 'the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema'.[26]

> I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency [*l'arriération mentale*], fetichism [*sic*], racial defects, slave-ships. … My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day.
>
> (*BW*, 112–13)

This epidermal schema, permanently affixed to the body 'in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye' (*BW*, 109), is superimposed on the corporeal, phenomenal schema that Freud calls body-ego, the source of 'both external and internal perceptions' (*SE* 19: 25), and comes to displace it altogether: 'I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more' (*BW*, 111). The 'more' is what Laplanche would call metabolization, the process of translating the implanted signifier or binding the psychic excitation it produces, which the ego is unable to achieve in the case of a violent intromission. The indelible inscription of race on the skin is an unmetabolizable signifier that makes the bodyburst apart, haemorrhage, feel amputated, excised, sprawled, distorted, recoloured – the images Fanon's text gives as the objective correlative of the effects of the intromission (*BW*, 111–13). For something has been installed in the body-ego by the white man's look, something more threatening, more destructive than a splinter in the skin: 'Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema' (*BW*, 111). Again, the word *below* can only be read figurally as marking the trajectory of the racist intromission from the body's surface, the epidermis, to its depth or psychic interior. It is from there that the unmetabolizable foreign body, the 'historico-racial schema', acts like psychic trauma, as a phobic object that attacks the subject from within.

In a reading of Fanon titled precisely 'That Within', where the reference to *Hamlet* adds a further turn to the psychoanalytic trope of psychic trauma as alien internal entity, David Marriott argues that the

body amputated, excised, haemorrhaging in *Black Skin, White Masks* is the expression of the impact of racism, the 'disarticulation of self' produced in the black man by the intrusion of a ghostly presence into the psychic space of the ego:

> The person who experiences this hemorrhaging may be black, but the 'I' acting as witness to the scar is, unexpectedly and bizarrely, white. In moments such as these, the 'I' becomes aware that it is an indeterminate presence within the self, a dissemblance that repels blackness as self-image. This decisive separation, which is more visible, and shielded, than that between ego and other, is perhaps why the black is always out of place, unable to recognize himself as a being with *depth*.[27]

Marriott's psychoanalytic figures trace the loss within the ego, the self-obliteration, the 'dark hole in the real', 'the encounter with oneself in the mirror of colonial culture in which the being of black is reflected back as symbolically deprived' (49), to the pre-oedipal relation to a mother and a mother country, colonial Martinique, in which blackness is all but disavowed and the cultural dependence on France results in 'an hallucinatory state of being in which blacks fantasize themselves as white' (46). Citing Fanon's pained words about his mother's calling him a *nègre* when he is disobedient or noisy (*BW*, 191), Marriott comments:

> What matters here is that this captivating, alienating, seducing recognition comes from the mother. She is both the source and repository of that loss, the proof of what cannot be articulated at the level of the other, the ghost haunting him, the enigmatic *fantôme* that he hears in her voice and in which her desire becomes manifest. She is the punishing source of the recognition that, in so far as he is a *nègre*, he is an undesired child. (49)

The phrase 'punishing source' is more than suggestive of the function of the superego as source of the drive and unmetabolizable foreign body. The intromission of racism in the adult subject by 'the white man's eyes' is thus all the more violent in that it links, *nachträglich* or by retroaction, with the punishing maternal superego already established in the depth of the ego or, as Fanon says, 'below the corporeal schema'. The encompassing figure of Marriott's text, 'that within', marks the site 'where oedipal desire is experienced as a profound abandoning'; it is 'an exemplary figure of the effect of being haunted by what remains inexpressible

or enigmatic in the Other's speech', by 'the gaps left within us by the desires of others' (53). It is in this sense that the ego itself can be a source of death, for it harbours the death drive that 'holds sway' in the superego (*SE* 19: 53) and its very genesis 'is marked by the indissolubly linked image of self and other' (*LD*, 54).

That the text of Fanon, a psychiatrist with a strong, if ambivalent, intellectual engagement in psychoanalysis, sustains such figural, psychoanalytic readings is in part owing to its emphasis on the materiality of the body as terrain of inscription and ontological ground of subjectivity; a body that power relations can penetrate in depth, as Foucault says, without the mediation of the conscious ego when the penetration is a violent, unmetabolizable intromission. In sexuality, Laplanche states, the unmetabolizable intromission 'refers principally to anality and orality', the body's major zones of exchange (*EO*, 137); but all of sexuality – the drive in all its forms and vicissitudes – is the psychic inscription of what was first and foremost an implantation in the body, the overdetermined internalization of an external imposition by means of practices both discursive and material.

If, according to Foucault, the *idea* of race is both cause and effect, presupposition and result, of the modern Western formation of sexuality, then the implantation of perversions must carry the seeds of that idea;[28] racism is thus directly implanted in the social body, as it were, with mother's milk, which is to say, without 'having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness' – or conscience, as the case may be. Fanon's unique contribution to psychoanalytic thought in its current extensions and intersections with poststructuralist and postcolonial theory is not only the renewed attention it brings to the body in the theorization of a difference that is as much psychic as it is social and cultural, but especially the insistent specification that the internal foreign body, the traumatic spectre that haunts the ground of Western subjectivity, is a raced other. The difference between implantation and intromission displays here all of its fearful symmetry.

3

The Queer Space of the Drive: Rereading Freud with Laplanche

The theory of drives has been possibly the most contested area in the whole of psychoanalytic theory, and the main point of contestation is the location of the drive. Is it endogenous, inherent in the biological organism, or a product of language and culture? Does it originate in the physical body, or is it produced as an effect in psychic formation? And if so, what manner of effect: is the drive an effect of the signifier, a discursive effect, or is it the effect of something else? These questions are prompted by an ambivalence apparent in Freud's writings, which recurs at various turning points in the development of his thought; so much so that Jean Laplanche, one of Freud's most astute and closest readers, has spoken of Freud's work as 'the unfinished Copernican revolution'.[1]

Freud was right, Laplanche maintains, in comparing the invention of psychoanalysis to the Copernican revolution, for his conception of the unconscious displaced the Cartesian subject from the centre of the human world as Copernicus displaced the planet earth from the centre of the universe. However, other developments in Freud's thought shied away from this bold vision. Moments such as the thesis on narcissism and the reconceptualization of the unconscious as the id, Laplanche contends, marked a retrenchment or a return to a 'Ptolemaic' conception of the human being: they led to a 'domestication' of the radical otherness of the unconscious by renaming it *the id* (*das Es*) and recentring it in the ego according to the famous formula 'Where Id was, there shall Ego come to be' (*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*).[2] With regard to the drive, while it was Freud who first distinguished drive from instinct, thus disjoining human sexuality from biological reproduction, yet the notion of phylogenesis – suggesting the hereditary character of drives and primal fantasies – and especially the hypothesis of a death drive, Laplanche argues, signal moments of retrenchment in that they tend to

reground sexuality in the physiological body or in what he calls 'the order of life', the organic, the biological.

From his early, fascinating reading of Freud in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1970) to the subsequent elaboration of his own theory of primal seduction, Laplanche has seen these moments in Freud's thought as 'going astray' (*fourvoiement*), erring from the original, 'revolutionary' vision of a strictly endopsychic conception of the drive towards 'a biological idealism' (*EO*, 125).[3] However, he remarks, the massive influence of biology in Freud's thinking – the 'biologism' already noted by Lacan – does not obscure 'the permanence of an exigency' that compels Freud to follow his intuition and pursue his discovery of the unconscious, with all that it entails.[4] Hence the presence of large contradictions in Freud's writing, which are inseparably contradictions in his thought and contradictions in the object of his thought.

If it may be granted that all thinking, however abstract, originates in an embodied subjectivity, at once overdetermined and permeable to the events of the world, then Freud's contradictions are not merely logical, but signs of an ambivalence about life and death and psychoanalysis – an ambivalence Freud lived with and I, for one, find most appealing. Ambivalence, I think, is a predicament of what may perhaps still be called the human condition, and I do not know whether it can, or should, be resolved. Laplanche himself is not sure: even as he critiques Freud, he speaks of the peculiar ambiguity of certain Freudian concepts, notably the unconscious and the drive, as of a 'fertility' that allows them to be read in two quite distinct perspectives. It is this aspect of Freudian writing – fertility, ambiguity or perhaps, as I will suggest, figurality – that I am especially drawn to and that prompts me, as Laplanche himself once auspicated, *not* to 'ask[ ] psychoanalysis to choose between biologism and anti-biologism',[5] but to rethink the concept of drive beyond the terms of that opposition.

The drive as trope

'The theory of the instincts is the most important but at the same time the least complete part of psychoanalytic theory,' Freud wrote in a footnote he added to the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1924, after reformulating the drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and the psychic topography in *The Ego and the Id*. Indeed, he refers the reader to these works as his 'further contributions' (*SE* 7: 168), leaving the door open to future interventions, as if aware of the ambiguity in the theory and the contestations it would provoke.

While the word drive or sexual drive (*Sexualtrieb*) first appeared in the *Three Essays*, other homologous terms such as 'endogenous stimuli' were already present in Freud's first metapsychological work, the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895), which he left unpublished. These precursors of the drive, the endogenous stimuli, were said to 'have their origin in the cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration and sexuality'.[6] Here we see a reason for the contestation, one side of the ambiguity in the theory and of the ambivalence in Freud himself, with regard to the location of the drive; ambiguity and ambivalence that reappear at different moments in his work, most notably in relation to the death drive.

The other side, already present as early as 1899 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is evident in the specification that, although originating in the body, the drive takes effect, not in the cells of the body but in a 'psychical locality', the mental apparatus, which is in no way conceived 'in any anatomical fashion'. Freud can describe it only through an optical analogy: if we think of 'a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus', he writes in Chapter 7, 'psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope … these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated' (*SE* 5: 536). Said otherwise, the psychical locality in which the drives operate is a virtual space. That Freud is well aware of the figural nature of his conception of the drive is apparent in the statement that immediately follows: 'I see no necessity to apologize for the imperfections of this or any similar *imagery*' (emphasis added). In thus describing the mind with a technological metaphor as the mental or psychic *apparatus*, Freud conveys not only its analogy with the virtual space produced in optical instruments, but also the dynamic, transformative nature of that space. The metaphor of a psychic apparatus – he does call it a 'fiction' at some point (*SE* 5: 598) – implies a complex arrangement and interplay of systemic elements and functions that work to transform, regulate and redirect physical energy into something else: psychical energy or cathexis (*Besetzung*).

The distinction between instinct (*Instinkt*) as a somatic force and drive (*Trieb*) as a psychic force is reflected in the two adjectives *instinktiv* and *triebhaft*, translated in the Standard Edition respectively as *instinctive* (as in 'the instinctive knowledge of animals') and *instinctual*, which carries the sense of fantasmatic representation. The term *instinctual representative*, *Triebrepräsentanz*, as Laplanche and Pontalis gloss it, is 'used by Freud to designate the elements or the process by means of which the

[drive] finds psychical expression. At times it is synonymous with "ideational representative" [the mental image associated with the bodily sensation, *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*], while at other times its meaning is broadened so as to embrace the affect as well'.[7]

It is worth noting here that an instinctual representative does not represent the drive iconically, in the sense in which a picture represents an object; rather, it is something that does not look like or in any way resemble what it represents, and hence Freud's word *Repräsentanz*, which means representation in the sense of delegation. In short, the instinctual or ideational representative is not a representation but a delegate of the drive. The drive as such has no direct expression: it reaches the mind only through a process of delegation. In the earlier writings, Freud made no distinction between the drive and the affect or the idea through which the drive manifests itself, that is to say, between *Trieb* and its psychical delegate, *Trieb-* or *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*. In the later works, however, the death drive (*Todestrieb*) seems to have no psychical delegates, no psychical representation whatsoever, and yet it is at work. For the death drive, as Freud puts it, 'work[s] essentially in silence' (*SE* 18: 258). It thus appears to be something not mental but somatic, located in the physiological, living organism. This is one of the moments in which 'biologism' looms large, and I return to it below.

The best known definition Freud gave of *Trieb* retains the constitutive ambiguity of the concept. For the drive is, in the first place, a concept or perhaps better, a conceptual figure.

> Considering mental life from a biological point of view, an 'instinct' [a drive, *Trieb*] appears to us as a concept on the frontier [**a frontier concept**, *ein Grenzbegriff*] between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism [**from the interior of the body**, *aus dem Körperinnern*] and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind [**the mental**, *dem Seelischen*] for work in consequence of its connection with the body [**the corporeal**, *dem Körperlichen*].[8]

As stimuli pass from the interior of the body to the mind, they traverse a non-homogeneous space in which they are first transformed into their delegate, something that is no longer bodily stumuli but something else, something that Freud names drive; this drive, then, links itself to a mental image, an idea, an affect or an emotion, which acts as its delegate to consciousness. In other words, the drive exists in a space between corporeal stimuli and mental representation, a space or 'psychical locality'

that is not just non-homogeneous but more precisely heterotopic: it is the space of a transit, a displacement, passage and transformation – not a referential but a figural space.[9] The drive itself is the figure of that passage and transformation. Thus the drive is, in the first instance, a concept or, more precisely, a 'limit-concept' (*Grenzbegriff*); that is to say, a conceptual figure or trope for what, in the last instance, manifests in the organism. This is the sense in which, I take it, Freud adds that the drive is a measure of the demand for work made upon the mind in consequence of its connection with the body. But who or what is making this demand?

Laplanche has attempted to work out this conundrum with regard to both the sexual drive and the death drive since *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*. Reading across the entire Freudian corpus as if it were a single, multilayered text, he focuses on certain conceptual figures and turning points in Freud's writing, which he sees as pivotal to the structure of Freud's metapsychology, notably the concepts of propping (*Anlehnung*, *étayage*, the Standard Edition's 'anaclisis') and afterwardness (*Nachträglichkeit*, *après coup*, the Standard Edition's 'deferred action'). Laplanche's analysis, at once structural and deconstructive, and keenly attentive to the figural dimension of language, is an interpretation (*Deutung*) of the Freudian text that accords with the interpretative method Freud devised for dream analysis and demonstrated in his own textual analyses of Schreber, Leonardo, Jensen's *Gradiva*, and so forth; it is also a (re)construction or, better said, a (re)translation of Freud's theory of sexuality as drive, where drive is the term of a troping, a turning back and away from the physiological, vital order of life.[10]

His subsequent elaboration of the theory of primal or generalized seduction, which returns to the theory of seduction Freud claimed to have abandoned ('I no longer believe in my *neurotica*', he wrote to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897), marks, after Lacan's, the second major return to Freud in the history of Western thought.[11] Laplanche's work thus 'constitutes a radical reformulation of psychoanalytic thought and a renewal of its inaugural provocation and exigency', as his Anglophone interpreter and editor John Fletcher writes in a comprehensive introduction to the collected *Essays on Otherness*: he 'has systematically retraced the trajectory of Freudian thought, its strayings, returns and displacements, seeking to intervene in its aporiae, and to confront its "Ptolemaic" recenterings, whether biological or ego-psychological, with its own Copernican decenterings and openings to the other'.[12] Indeed, one of the distinctive features of Laplanche's theory of seduction is his conception of the other as a double entity: the other is *der Andere*, the

other person, the adult on whom the infant depends for its life and being, as well as *das Andere*, 'the other thing', the psychical other (*das andere Psychische*) that is the unconscious.

This latter, Laplanche remarks, is not the 'unconscious structured like a language', the purely linguistic and transindividual Other of the early Lacan, but the other 'implanted in me'; and hence 'the so-called "supremacy of the signifier" [is] put back into its originary frame: the real primacy of the concrete adult over the child' (*EO*, 226).

Laplanche's redefinition is closer to Freud's conception of the unconscious as timeless and characterized by 'the absence of negation, the absence of discursivity from the diachronic point of view, and the absence of "value" (in the Saussurean sense of structural opposition) from the synchronic' (*EO*, 256); a conception he deems incompatible with the view of the unconscious as 'the discourse of the other'.[13] But as Laplanche thus takes his distance from Lacan, he also takes his distance from Freud:

> The unconscious cannot in any way be considered the kernel of our being, the *Kern unseres Wesens*, in the sense of an *intimior intimo meo* ['something more inward than my inwardness']. Far from being my kernel, it is the other implanted in me, the metabolised product of the other in me: forever an 'internal foreign body'.
>
> (*EO*, 256)[14]

Laplanche's critical rereading is aimed at countering Freud's 'lapses' into a conception of the unconscious as an 'innate, biological, instinctual kernel' (*EO*, 241). The close attention he pays to Freud's metapsychological texts – in particular, the *Three Essays*, 'The Unconscious,' *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 'A Child Is Being Beaten', *The Ego and the Id*, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' and the posthumous 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' – is intended to make them yield their 'elements of truth' against Freud's wavering or straying in the face of his Copernican revolution, that is to say, of the radical implications of his discovery of the unconscious. It must be also said, however, that Laplanche's critique is always intent on doing justice to Freud, as much as a translator ever can, and more so than other critics, philosophers or thinkers.[15] Because of the complexity and nuance of Laplanche's arguments, I will first take up his reading of the sexual drive across the spectrum of Freud's writings from the *Three Essays* to 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', and then his reading of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and elsewhere.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the drive, however, a brief account of Laplanche's theory of seduction is in order. For while the question of the drive has been a constant focus of Laplanche's thought, his arguments in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* are somewhat recast in the process of elaborating, through the critical rereading of Freud, a theory of sexuality as the effect of the trauma of primal seduction, a process that anglophone readers can follow in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, *The Unconscious and the Id* and *Essays on Otherness*, which contains most of the works collected in *La révolution copernicienne inachevée: Travaux 1967–1992*.

Sexuality, Laplanche argues in *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée*, is 'exogenous, intersubjective, and intrusive' (*EO*, 198); it comes from the other. It is not innate, inherent in the physical body *ab origine*, but the result of a foundational inter-human relation: it is 'implanted' in the infant by the actions and psychic investments – not the least of which are unconscious sexual fantasies – of the mother, the parents or other adults who nurse, clean, handle and care for the child. It is their actions and fantasies that implant sexuality in the newborn long before language and before the mirror stage; long before there is an ego or even a body, for the body as such comes into being as a perception and only later a Gestalt with the formation of the ego.

At the basis of human existence, Laplanche posits an originary and universal situation, made necessary by the prematurity of the newborn; an asymmetrical relationship of passivity/activity in which the infant's life and being are entirely dependent on the adult(s). The human being exists only by virtue of this first 'interhuman' relationship, which entails what Laplanche calls *primal seduction*: 'An infant is confronted by an adult world which from the beginning sends him messages, suffused with sexual meanings, unconscious meanings, which are unconscious for the transmitter of the message himself; messages perceived as enigmatic, that is as a "to be translated" [*à traduire*].'[16]

Because the heterogeneous messages (less verbal than of a sensory character) that address the infant have no content, no meaning to a being that is not yet an ego, they may be thought of as enigmatic signifiers, or signifiers without a signified.[17] What makes them messages is the function of address, which they carry and to which the infant responds; what makes them enigmatic is the infant's inadequacy to decipher or translate them. Once received, although untranslatable, the messages are retained as residues inscripted within the infant (primal repression) and constitute the first, rudimentary form of the psychic apparatus, the primary process and hence the first nucleus of the

unconscious.[18] Quite like Freud's mnemic traces, the repressed residues of the enigmatic signifiers remain active within the unconscious as internal entities – impulses, urges, inchoate wishes or fantasies; they are enigmas that the developing ego will attempt to translate and retranslate again and again at different moments of psychic life according to the codes, languages, discourses or knowledges available to the subject at each moment. In this sense, Laplanche's theory of seduction, in envisaging psychoanalysis as a practice of translation, is also a theory of transference as translation.

The drive and the ego

> Everything comes from without in Freudian theory … but at the same time every effect – in its efficacy – comes from within, from an isolated and encysted interior.
>
> Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, 42–3

In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche argued in line with Freud that the drive first appears in the infant in conjunction with the bodily functions necessary to its physical survival: it is propped against, or leans on (*lehnt an*), the satisfaction of the need for nourishment, cleanliness, warmth, and so forth. While satisfaction of the vital instinct of nutrition, for example, is produced through activities that in themselves are not of a sexual nature, 'sexual excitation arises as a concomitant effect [*Nebenwirkung*]' of the stimulation of sensory surfaces (*SE*: 204). Commenting on this passage in the *Three Essays*, Laplanche remarks that, in effecting a modification or a perturbation in the organism, mechanical stimulation and muscular activity (later, even intellectual activity) are 'capable of becoming the source of … sexual excitation at the point at which that perturbation is produced' (*LD*, 87–8). The so-called erotogenic zones, he specifies, are parts of the body 'particularly *exposed* to the concomitant, or marginal effect' (*LD*, 22) because, as 'breaking or turning point[s] within the bodily envelope … sphincteral orifices: mouth, anus, etc. [that bear] the principal biological exchanges [feeding, defecation, etc.]', these areas of the body are a special focus of maternal care and attention. Moreover, they '*focalize parental fantasies* and above all *maternal fantasies*, so that we may say, in what is barely a metaphor, that they are the points through which is *introduced into the child that alien internal entity* which is, properly speaking, the sexual excitation' (*LD*, 23–4).[19]

The words *Anlehnung* (*étayage*, propping; anaclisis in the *Standard Edition*) and *Nebenwirkung* (concomitant or marginal effect, co-excitation)

imply both a dependence and a separation between the nonsexual activities and the emergent sexual drive. The latter, Laplanche concludes, consists in the deviation itself, in the very movement that dissociates it from the vital function.

> Propping is thus that leaning of nascent sexuality on nonsexual activities, but the *actual* emergence of sexuality is not yet there. Sexuality appears as a drive that can be isolated and observed only at the moment at which the nonsexual activity, the vital function, becomes detached from its natural object or loses it. For sexuality, it is the reflexive (*selbst* or *auto*-) moment that is constitutive: the moment of a turning back towards self, an "autoerotism" in which the object has been replaced by a fantasy, by an object *reflected* within the subject.
>
> (*LD*, 88)

The notions of *Anlehnung* and *Nebenwirkung* are central to Laplanche's reading of Freud's theory of sexuality as trauma.[20] The quantum of excitation produced in the erotogenic zones by the activities related to maternal care is traumatic in that the infant is unable to relieve or dispose of (abreact) it; and as the unmanageable, traumatic excitation is linked to an object of satisfaction (the breast or other parts of the mother's body), that object and the affect connected with it are repressed, that is, internalized and remain active in the infant's psychical apparatus as an unconscious fantasy, an 'alien internal entity', and a perpetual source of excitation. In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, by locating the source of the drive in unconscious fantasy as an internal 'foreign body', Laplanche extends Freud's notion of psychical trauma from the hysterical phenomenon to the whole of sexuality. Thus his subsequent development of the theory of primal seduction is already foreshadowed in his first reading of Freud, but the continuity in Laplanche's thought does not prevent something of a 'turn' in another direction.

When, years later, Laplanche revisits Freud's paper on masochism in the context of his own theory of seduction (sexuality is implanted in the infant by the physical actions and unconscious fantasies of its adult caretakers), he again takes up the question of the relation between *Anlehnung* and *Nebenwirkung*. Sharing the late Freud's conviction that the drive has an intimate connection with masochism, he thus restates the concept of sexuality as trauma: 'it is the breaking in of an "excess of message", emanating from the other, which functions like pain, originating first from the outside, then coming from that internal other which

is repressed fantasy' (*EO*, 211). What constitutes sexuality as traumatic in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* is the excess of excitation stored in the psychic apparatus as an internal foreign body or unconscious fantasy; in *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée* (1992), it is an 'excess of message', the untranslatable residue of the enigmatic signifier addressed by the adult other to the infant, which produces in the latter the primal unconscious as well as the source-object of the drive. In other words, in the earlier conception, the drive is an alien internal entity, the active mnemic trace of a repressed object/experience of satisfaction; here, the drive is the excess of message left by an external other, and its source is identical to its object – an insistent, enigmatic presence that demands to be translated.

Laplanche's term *source-object* (*objet-source*) combines Freud's *Objekt* ('the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim'; *SE* 14: 122) and *Quelle* ('the somatic process which occurs in an organ or part of the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by an instinct'; *SE* 14: 123). What the new term conveys is that the source of the drive is itself a psychic entity and not, as it was in Freud, a somatic process; moreover, the source is identical with the object. The fundamental distinction between Freud's and Laplanche's respective views is elegantly encapsulated in the latter's formula: 'the "drive" is to the ego what pain is to the body[,] the source-object of the drive is "stuck" in the envelope of the ego like a splinter in the skin' (*EO*, 209). Both the drive and its object pertain to the ego.

What is in question, then, is not exactly the location of the drive but rather the nature of its origin or source. In the late paper 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924), while further elaborating the theory of the life and death drives first presented in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud looks back at the notion of concomitant effect or libidinal sympathetic excitation (*Nebenwirkung*) he proposed in 1905:

> In my *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in the section on the sources of infantile sexuality, I put forward the proposition that 'in the case of a great number of internal processes sexual excitation arises as a concomitant effect, as soon as the intensity of those processes passes beyond certain quantitative limits'. Indeed [he goes on quoting that text], 'it may well be that nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct'. In accordance with this, the excitation of pain and unpleasure would be bound to have the same result, too. The occurrence of such a libidinal

> sympathetic excitation when there is tension due to pain and unpleasure would be an infantile physiological mechanism which ceases to operate later on [and would] provide the physiological foundation on which the psychical structure of erotogenic masochism would afterwards be erected.[21]

But he quickly rejects this explanation of masochism as inadequate because it does not account for the existence of sadism and their 'regular and close connection'.[22] Sadism, issuing from the death drive, is 'operative' in the organism, Freud postulates, and hence both the life and death drives must be part and parcel of the materiality, the very matter of which human beings are formed, the flesh to which we are heir. Laplanche, on the other hand, sees both sadism and masochism as the predicament and, as it were, the inheritance of the ego as a psychic entity, or what elsewhere he terms 'ego-as-agency'. Freud, he rebuts, does not really 'give up his earlier explanation', but persists in giving the notion of co-excitation an ontological status. He refuses to see that masochism, like its counterpart, sadism, is the result of the trauma of primal seduction, 'the painful assault of an *internal foreign body*, in relation to which the ego is passive and permanently in danger of being invaded' (*EO*, 206).

It is impossible not to note that in 'Masochism and the General Theory of Seduction' (1992) Laplanche repeats Freud's gesture of looking back critically at his prior work. Reflecting on the distance between his current view and a 1968 paper entitled 'Position originaire du masochisme dans le champ de la pulsion sexuelle', written a little earlier than *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, he avows: 'the 1968 article continued on the track [i.e. Freud's] of a leaning-on conceived as a process of endogenous emergence' (*EO*, 209).[23] Here, on the basis of the theory of primal seduction he has developed, Laplanche can confidently assert the *exogenous* emergence of the drive:

> Confronting the essential passivity of the infantile situation is the major task of symbolisation. What symbolisation, conceived as impossible translation, is fated to let drop becomes unconscious fantasy. This alone is the source of the human sexual drive. In relation to this we are in an essentially passive position, a position of 'originary masochism'. (*EO*, 212)

In the later paper on masochism, a new set of metaphors appears. The trauma of sexuality is provoked by an excess of message; the message is

received but not decoded for lack of equipment: the code is there (symbolization, the symbolic) but is not available to the infant. From infantile sexual theories onward, the human's search for self-knowledge or 'self-theorization' is an effort 'to bind anxiety in relation to the trauma that is the enigma' (*EO*, 132). The drive arises from a failure of translation; the source-object of the drive is a mis(sed)communication between the unconscious of the adult and the nascent unconscious of the child. The sexual drive itself is fully (merely?) a drive to translate, an *Übersetzungtrieb*, the term borrowed from the poet Novalis. What happened, one is led to ask, to the somatic component of the drive, the physiological processes it leaned on? The drive is not in or of the body, Laplanche replies, but in and of the ego, which is a psychic entity existing on a more abstract level than Freud's notion of the bodily ego would suggest.

Laplanche's concern with dissociating the drive from the vital order and reclaiming it fully for the psychical entails a distinction between psychology and metapsychology that is predicated on his redefinition of the ego: the ego is not coextensive with the 'biological' individual but a psychic agency in the sense in which Freud envisaged the agencies *Ucs*. and *Pcs*.-*Cs*. in the first topography. The concern was already present in *Life and Death*, where Laplanche's discussion of the genesis of the ego is based on the 1895 'Project for a Scientific Psychology', the theoretical-neurological work that Freud left unpublished but partly incorporated into *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and thus can be considered his first metapsychological work. From the 'Project', Laplanche retrieves a model of the psychic apparatus prior to Freud's first 'going astray', namely, the abandonment of the seduction theory announced to Fliess in the famous 'letter of the equinox'. In that model, the ego appears as an effect of primary process, 'a network of cathected neurones', a zone within the psychic apparatus in which energy circulates in relatively constant or bound form ('Project,' *SE* 1: 323, cited in *LD*, 62). Thus, Laplanche argues, the ego is not only not a biological issue or datum, but is a specific and historical formation within the apparatus;[24] or, as he also puts it, 'the ego is not conceived of as a prolongation of the living individual but as a displacement of it, and of its image, to *another site* … an intrapsychical precipitate in the image of the individual' (*LD*, 53). It is noteworthy that the transition from the living individual to the ego as its intrapsychical *image* elides all the other sensory components that Freud would include in the body-ego (*Körper-Ich*).

Further elaborating the distinction between the ego and the vital order in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1987), Laplanche articulates

two stages of ego formation and correlates them to two moments of primal repression (as distinct from secondary repression, or repression proper, which results from the action of 'conscience' in the developed ego).

> The two moments of primal repression are indissociable from the movement which results in the creation of the ego. Initially, there is no 'ego.' Alternatively, if we do wish to use the term 'ego' in connection with this early stage, we can say that it coincides with the whole individual or, to be more accurate, with the periphery that delineates the individual. At this stage, we have a body-ego, as Freud puts it. The second stage of primal repression concerns the nascent ego-as-agency; the ego-agency is now *part* of the apparatus, and it is made in the *image* of the whole. It is therefore a metaphor for the biological whole, but it is also an organ for the whole, and it exists within a metonymic contiguity with the whole.[25]

The first moment of primal repression, the implantation of the enigmatic signifier in the infant, constitutes at the same time its primal unconscious and its nascent ego-agency; in the second moment, the untranslated/untranslatable residue is internalized in the ego-agency, there to become the source-object of the drive. The two stages of ego formation are represented in a diagram consisting of two oval graphs: (1) a smaller one representing the body-ego, with ES (enigmatic signifier) marked on the circumference, and (2) a larger oval representing the whole individual or Ego-individual, which contains a smaller oval, the Ego-agency, with SO (source-object) marked on the latter's circumference. The two stages or configurations of the ego are articulated as follows:

> The position of the enigmatic signifier (ES) differs from one configuration to the next, depending on whether the ego does or does not exist as an agency. Initially, the enigmatic signifier is external, or, so to speak, embedded in the periphery of the ego. To put it in more concrete terms, it is implanted in the periphery of the individual, and primarily in the points known as erotogenic zones. In the second stage the enigmatic signifier or, to be more precise, its repressed residue, or the source-object (SO), becomes internal; it is still external to the ego or embedded in its periphery but, given that the ego is more restricted than the individual … it is an internal-external element which, as far as the ego is concerned, acts from the outside.
>
> (*NF*, 135)

Whereas Freud's statement that 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' is offered without specification of temporal stages, and indeed in reference to 'the conscious ego' (*SE* 19: 26 and 27), Laplanche distinguishes between the (infantile) body-ego and the later ego-agency. Only the latter, he argues, is assaulted by the drive, which is encysted in it as an internal-external object – internal to the ego-agency and external to the infantile body-ego subsumed in the ego-agency. The case seems to be made by the diagram: by drawing the ego-agency inside the Ego-individual (the larger oval), it shows the source-object of the drive embedded in the ego-agency, and thus internal to the 'biological' individual. But the diagram also shows something else: there is no body-ego in the Ego-individual once the body is beyond the infantile stage. By drawing the body-ego as a separate oval, confining it to the infantile stage of the nascent ego ('At this stage, we have a body-ego'), the diagram visualizes spatially the concurrent transformation of ES into SO and of body-ego into ego-agency. Once the ego-agency is formed, the body-ego is displaced to 'another site', as Laplanche puts it, gives way to an intrapsychic image of the body; thereafter, in other words, there is no body-ego, its place taken by its intrapsychic image. The repositioning of the corporeal body within the psyche *as an image* effectively elides the virtual space between the somatic and the psychical traversed by Freud's drive, or rather closes up that space once the ego-agency is formed – once and for all.

The placement of the body and the ego on conceptual planes that stand in logical opposition to each other is also conveyed by the phrasing of the formula cited earlier, 'The "drive" is to the ego what pain is to the body[,] the source-object of the drive is "stuck" in the envelope of the ego like a splinter in the skin' (*EO*, 209). Rhetorically structured by the trope of the simile, the phrase configures a distance between the ego and the body that is less topographical, in the sense of psychic topography, than categorical: one is a psychic entity, the other is a physical entity; the drive, and hence sexuality, is an appurtenance of the former. The implication of the simile is made explicit elsewhere, in the statement that the impact of the drive should not be conceived as coming from the body, but as 'the action of the repressed source-objects on the body, taking place by way of the ego, which is *initially* a body-ego' (*EO*, 129; emphasis added).

I said that what distinguishes Freud's vision of sexuality from Laplanche's is not the location of the drive – for both, the drive is perceived by the individual in the body – but rather the conceptualization of its origin or source. In Freud, Laplanche contends, the source of the sexual drive is ultimately the instinct, the vital need for nutrition, the

satisfaction of which entails activities that are not of a sexual nature but *somehow* produce as their concomitant effect the sexual excitation that is properly the drive. He pinpointed the paradox, or conundrum, quite precisely in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*: 'the instinct [is] the source of a process which mimics, displaces, and denatures it: the drive' (*LD*, 22). And the solution he proposed there was couched in rhetorical terms more formal than Freud's but very much in the spirit of Freud's figural conception of the drive as *Grenzbegriff*: in *Life and Death* the drive is said to be the 'metaphorico-metonymical "derivative"' of physiological need, and indeed as a perversion of the instinct as vital function (*LD*, 125). Sexuality, in this reading, emerges in '*a movement which deflects the instinct, metaphorizes its aim, displaces and internalizes its object, and concentrates its source on what is ultimately a minimal zone, the erotogenic zone*' (*LD*, 23). The words *displaces* and *concentrates* are unmistakable allusions to the elements of the dreamwork Freud named *Verschiebung* (displacement) and *Verdichtung* (condensation), whose homology with metonymy and metaphor, respectively, was first suggested by Jakobson in his study of aphasia.[26]

It may not be entirely coincidental that, in that book, the figure for the drive, 'a thorn in the flesh' (*une épine dans la chair*), is a metaphor,[27] while in the 1992 paper on masochism, the conundrum of Freud's drive is resolved in a figure, a simile, that divides the ego from the body: the source-object of the drive is stuck in the envelope of the ego as a splinter is stuck in the skin (*comme l'écharde l'est dans la peau*).[28] The differential figural value or meaning effect of simile and metaphor is that the former establishes meaning by the analogical contiguity of two logically distinct orders of phenomena (the envelope of the ego, the skin of the body), while the latter performs a transfer, a displacement, of meaning from one to the other (the drive *is* a thorn in the flesh).

Figurality, as I suggested earlier, is also at work in Freud's conception and definition of the drive as existing in a virtual space and in the form of a troping, a turning away from physiological need to inhabit a heterotopic space of transit and transformation – a dis-place. Indeed it is the term *displacement*, which technically designates one *modus operandi* of the primary process in the dreamwork, that best names the central conceptual figure of Freudian theory, the space-movement of the drive. It was precisely Laplanche who first brought this figural dimension of Freud's writing into sharp focus.[29] In his later work, however, with the shift to a communicational perspective, the emphasis on displacement and the former, formally rhetorical, conception of the drive give way to a logical explanation that will be exempt from any debt to the physicality

or materiality of the body; exempt, most pointedly, from the 'biological metaphysics' that dogs Freud's tracks and makes him go astray or lose the vision of the sexual he laid bare. But is Laplanche himself possibly going astray in abandoning his earlier, figural reading of the drive?

Figurality, inherent in language, is what allows Freud's vision to take form, as it does all acts of conceptualization from the 'sexual theories' of children onward. It is at work in Laplanche's writing as well, as I have just noted with regard to the rhetorical work of simile and metaphor. Although not central to his reading as it was in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, figurality is active in the margins of the communicational framework of the theory of seduction; for example when he claims that, by giving the notion of co-excitation an ontological status, Freud sees the living human as a 'solipsistic monad which would be the arena of the infernal struggle of the two great drives – of life and death' (*EO*, 206). Such metaphors as 'infernal struggle', 'the great originary, timeless drive called Eros' (*EO*, 207) or 'Freud's metaphysical demon' (*EO*, 205) refer, of course, to Freud's theory but are not figures of his cosmology. On his part, old-fashioned materialist that he is, Freud speaks of germ-cells, living substance and organisms that want to die in their own way; his Eros is 'the Eros of the poets and philosophers, which holds all living things together' (*SE* 18: 50); and when he does use the word 'daemonic', for example, in relation to the strength of the compulsion to repeat in children's play and in analysis, he encloses it in ironic scare quotes (*SE* 19: 35). Thus a reader is made to wonder whether the metaphors of one discourse are any less or any more 'metaphysical' than those of the other.

Perhaps more to the point and of greater concern to this reader is whether Freud's notion of *Organismus* must be read strictly within the discursive bounds of biology or whether it could have a valence that trespasses and actually *displaces* them. I think the work of figurality, which militates against the containment of meaning, allows for a reading in the latter direction. Laplanche's fundamental objection to Freud, or better, to the Freud who went astray, is that, after disjoining human sexuality (the drive) from biological determinism (the instinct), he relocates the source of the drive in the biological, the physiological, the vital order – terms that apparently render Freud's 'organism' in the language of the poststructuralist reader. The objection, which I have thus far discussed in relation to sexuality as sexual drive, returns with greater urgency with regard to the death drive and its relation to sexuality. I will address it and attempt to meet it on those grounds in the following pages.

The death drive

> *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.
>
> Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, 107

Freud introduced the notion of a death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), written in the aftermath of the Great War, when he felt called to account for the symptoms of repetition compulsion in patients suffering from war neuroses. On this evidence, added to other instances of repetition compulsion such as the *fort–da* game he observed his grandchild play in his crib and the transferential repetition often encountered in analytic practice, he entered into a 'far-fetched speculation', attempting 'to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead' (*SE* 18: 24). He thus postulated the presence in the human organism of a force antithetic to life.[30] A force that, under certain conditions, drives the ego to disintegrate, that has no psychic representation and no translation into conscious thought, must pertain to the primary process alone, Freud surmised. He called it *Todestrieb*, death drive, and envisaged it as a tendency of the psychic apparatus to lower excitation beyond the level required by the pleasure principle, and thus to reach a state of instinctual quiescence or the total absence of tension, a state resembling that of inorganic matter.

The death drive, then, his speculation went on, must work in opposition to the forces that seek to preserve living substance and bind it in ever larger physical and social units, from the coalescence of two different germ-cells and the conjugation of two unicellular organisms to the sexual reproduction of higher animals and the formation of social units – families, tribes, nations, and so on. Freud designated the latter *life drives* or *Eros*, the term borrowed from Plato – whence, no doubt, the paradoxical charge of biological idealism. Contrary to one another, the two sets of drives appeared to coexist, if conflictually, in each living thing, in the human psychical apparatus no less than in the unicellular organism, Eros seeking to 'hold together the portions of living substance', and the death drive, which 'was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance', continuing to strive towards the inertia of inorganic matter (*SE* 18: 60–1). But since all living things die, since all organisms physical and social eventually fall apart, disaggregate, dissolve or self-destruct – and it must be so for internal reasons, thought Freud the

unreconstructed materialist – the death drive must be present or implicit in the living organism 'from the very first'.

This line of speculation, pursued as far as thought can go and folding back around the central issues of his theory, leads Freud to a new figuration of the drives as life and death drives, both of which are based on the compulsion to repeat and actually modelled on the death drive: '*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*,' Freud emphasizes, 'a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life [*die Äusserung der Trägheit im organischen Leben*]' (*SE* 18: 36).[31] As if the very inertia of inorganic matter exercised a pull, an attraction, a drag (inertia in German is *Trägheit*) on what has become living matter (*lebende Materie*), holding it back or beckoning its return to the prior state.

The following passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* gives an idea of Freud's most speculative attempt to imagine a materialist and atheist cosmogony in which all life, including human life, is but a detour to an original inorganic state.

> The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. It may perhaps have been a process similar in type to that which later caused the development of consciousness [the registering of sensory perceptions] in a particular stratum of living matter. The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state … . For a long time, perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death.
>
> (*SE* 18: 38)

The paradox goes even further. In the 'circuitous path to death', the human drives to self-preservation, self-assertion and mastery, which appear to us as the guardians of life moving us towards change and progress, actually work in the service of death, as *Trabanten des Todes* (satellites of death, which Strachey amazingly translates with the Homeric metaphor 'the myrmidons of death'): their function is 'to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than

those which are immanent in the organism itself [because] the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion' (*SE* 18: 39).

Indeed, biologism does loom rather large in this vision – perhaps *too* large. Laplanche himself observed:

> 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 … . 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*.
>
> (*LD*, 123)

In underlining the word instinct (in French, *instinct*), Laplanche clinches his argument for Freud's return to the biological, disregarding the fact that Freud continues to use the word *drive(s)*, *Trieb(e)*, and even emphasizes it. And just as he says that all drives want to restore an earlier state ('alle Triebe Früheres wiederherstellen wollen'; *GW*, 39), so will he say of the organism that it wants to die in its own way ('der Organismus nur auf seine Weise sterben will'; *GW*, 41).

Freud's image of the organism striving to maintain itself *in defiance* of everything and everyone (*aller Welt zum Trotz*), in its quasi-anthropomorphic cast, seems far from scientific discourse and rather suggests the presence in the organism of a stubborn, unresilient, unclassifiable something he calls *lebende Materie*, living matter. He is quite aware of the paradoxical image he presents us with, that of a living organism struggling against its life's very aim (*sein Lebensziel*), that is to say, struggling against the death or inanimate state that living *matter* is meant to reach. But, he points out in his defence, such behaviour is 'precisely what characterizes purely instinctual as contrasted with intelligent efforts' (*SE* 18: 39). The purely instinctual (*rein triebhaftes*) character of the drives that Freud also attributes to the matter in the organism is in direct contrast to the intelligent efforts of the ego and, *a fortiori*, with the rational understanding we associate with the scientific discourse on life that is biology (*bios-logos*).

To think of an organism as pure or inert matter, not biologically pre-formed into an always already *living* being, runs against the grain of reason since the attribution of life is the most stable semantic feature of the word *organism*, whether as a single entity (a 'living individual', animal or plant) or a collective one (a social system 'regarded as analogous to a living body').[32] But it can be done, I will suggest, by reading Freud's

paradoxical organism – living matter pursuing its own manner of death (*Todesweg*) – as an oxymoron, a trope that inhabits the conceptual and figural space, the heterotopic dis-place, of the drive. For it is not irrelevant that such a figure would emerge in conjunction with the idea of a death drive.

To the death drive, Laplanche has devoted the last chapter of *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* and much sustained attention throughout his subsequent writings. While judging *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* exemplary of 'the problem of Freud's biologism', he admiringly states: 'Never had Freud shown himself to be as profoundly *free* and as audacious as in that vast metapsychological, metaphysical, and metabiological fresco' (*LD*, 106).[33] This is puzzling, for what does it mean to say, how can one say, that Freud is most *free* precisely when his speculation is most mired in biologism? What is at stake in Freud's attempt to shore up the concept of a death drive with arguments drawn from biology, philosophy and mythology – not to mention homespun observations such as the *fort–da* game of his grandchild – in utter disregard of disciplinary distinctions?

With a brilliant turn of phrase, Laplanche argues that what is at stake for Freud is 'an effort to grasp what is most "driven" in the drive … and what is most vital in the biological – death, explicitly designated as the "final aim" of life' (*LD*, 107).[34] He does not remark that this 'final aim' of life (*das Ziel alles Lebens*) resonates with the aim (*Ziel*) of the sexual drive under the sway of the pleasure principle, but for me this only strengthens the resonance of that 'free' predicated of Freud's thoughts on the death drive with the free or unbound energy of the drive itself. Is such resonance unwarranted? I will come back to this question after presenting Laplanche's argument and in response to it.

Laplanche takes great pains to analyse Freud's contradictions and interpret them in light of his radical intuition of the unconscious, which insistently returns in Freud's thought, even in its strayings, with the force, Laplanche remarks, of a compulsion (*Zwang*). Thus, dismissing the objections of Ernest Jones and others eager to attribute the hypothesis of the death drive to Freud's personal situation, his being over 60 years old and living with cancer, Laplanche argues that the death drive is as much 'a theoretical exigency' for psychoanalysis as it was 'the most glaring' of Freud's 'great compulsions of thought' (*LD*, 110).[35] His reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a veritable *tour de force* which cuts through the Freudian corpus – or the Freudian body, as Leo Bersani aptly put it – to show that the death drive is not just an element in conflict with the life drives but is 'conflict itself', the essence of psychic conflict such as Freud

had first posited between sexual and ego drives.

> Whereas, ever since the beginnings of psychoanalysis, sexuality was in its essence hostile to binding – a principle of 'un-binding' or unfettering (*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.
>
> (*LD*, 123–4)

In other words, the hypothesis of a primal self-destructive drive that seeks satisfaction beyond the pleasure principle, in the total elimination of tension, reconfigures the dynamic landscape of the psyche in a manner coherent with, or faithful to, Freud's earlier vision. While the work of binding, preserving and augmenting the cohesion of social as well as individual psychic life is assigned to the ego, with Eros or the life drives as its means of production, so to speak, to the death drive is ascribed a 'radical tendency to unbind', that is, the disruptive, disaggregating, undoing – shall we say, *un*civilizing – force that Freud had first associated with the sexual drive. Once again, as in Freud's first theory of drives (the so-called libido theory), the drive and the ego are in opposite camps. Well, not exactly.

In asking, 'Why the death drive?' (this question is the title of the chapter I have been referring to), Laplanche also seeks to account for 'how this compulsion to demolish life comes to the surface precisely in the year 1919'. He argues that Freud could not but reaffirm negativity – aggressivity, hatred, sadomasochism, destruction – 'in keeping with the structural necessity of his discovery' of the unconscious as radical otherness. Why in 1919? Because ever since the 1914 paper on narcissism, 'with the development of the theory of the ego and of its narcissistic libidinal cathexis', the ego had acquired all the powers, not only those of self-preservation but also those of sexuality, for it can take itself as a love object and love others by whom it is loved; those powers further escalated to a cosmic force, Eros the creator, that presides over the whole of human life, psychical and social, individual and collective, through the generations. 'In the face of this triumph [of the ego] of the vital and the homeostatic,' Laplanche writes, 'it remained for Freud, in keeping with *the structural necessity of his discovery*, to reaffirm, not only within psychoanalysis, but even within biology … a kind of antilife as

sexuality, frenetic enjoyment [*jouissance*], the negative, the repetition compulsion' (*LD*, 124; emphasis added).

I emphasize the phrase 'the structural necessity of his discovery' to remind us that Laplanche was reading Freud in the late 1960s, in the intellectual and political climate of structuralism, the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and in the wake of Lacan's inspiring resistance to North American ego-psychology. In that context, the unconscious, the primary process, and the drive were read uncompromisingly in opposition to the ego, as forces that disrupt or undermine its 'triumph' in Freud's later work. The constitutive premise of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis – namely, the existence of the unconscious as radical alterity – seemed to preclude the contiguity envisaged by Freud in *The Ego and the Id*; whence the critique of the second topography as a *fourvoiement*. However, when Laplanche subsequently elaborates his theory of primal seduction, he not only adopts the idea of the id as contiguous, if not continuous, with the ego and accordingly remaps the two topographies, but revises on that basis his own view of the drive. To the extent that the drive and its source-objects can be conceptualized as encysted in the periphery of the ego-agency, they no longer pertain to the unconscious of the first topography but, as Laplanche seems hesitant to admit, to 'what is called the id' (*EO*, 129).[36]

The ego – with its work of binding the drive to objects and to itself, loving, repressing, sublimating, projecting, and so on – has a stake in the vital order of life, Laplanche maintains; the ego is invested in living. What undermines that investment is the presence of an other or an otherness (*das Andere*) – the unconscious, the drive as unbound psychic energy, sexuality 'in its demonic aspect, in the service of the primary process and of the repetition compulsion'.[37] Therefore, he concludes, the death envisaged in the concept of the death drive 'is not the death of the [physical] organism, but the death of that "organism" that, in the human being, represents the interests of the biological organism, that is to say, the ego'.[38] The distinction between the ego-'organism' and the biological organism whose interests the former represents pre-announces the distinction between ego-agency and Ego-individual or 'biological whole' that will appear in *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1987), which I have already discussed. Here as well, to repeat my point, neither one is the ego as Freud envisaged it in the second topography, that is to say, a corporeal or body-ego (*'ein Körper-Ich'*; *GW* XIII, 255), an organism in which the psychic apparatus is indissociable from the *lebende Materie* through which it is formed.

It may well be that the ambiguity of Freud's *Ich* is unavailable in French, where its translation as *moi*, in contradistinction to *je*, is

burdened by the connotation of imaginary object that the *moi* has acquired in Lacanian psychoanalysis.[39] It seems likely that this influenced Laplanche's distinction between imaginary ego (whole individual) and ego-agency, a distinction already adumbrated in the entry '*Moi*' in Laplanche and Pontalis's *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*. Nevertheless, in their admirable effort to account for the complexity of the concept 'ego', they recognize that '[T]he danger of proposing a usage of "*Ich*" which is taken to be exclusively psycho-analytical by contrast with other more traditional senses is that the real contributions of the Freudian usage may be lost. For Freud *exploits* traditional usages [and] plays on the ambiguities thus created'.[40]

One of Freud's plays, though well within the psychoanalytic discourse, is the different metapsychological valence of the term '*Ich*' in the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' and in *The Ego and the Id*, which Laplanche and Pontalis discuss, and Laplanche will take up in his theory, propending towards the former. Freud's ambiguity, in this case, results less from word usage than from shifts in his thinking over a 25-year period. If the 'Project's' ego was a psychic agency distinct from consciousness as a sense organ, whereas in the second topography consciousness is subsumed in the body-ego, the difference is made by the emphasis that the hypothesis of a death drive has meanwhile displaced from the mental projection (the image, the imaginary) of the body to the living matter of the body.

Laplanche does not contemplate the *lebende Materie* of the body as anything other than the living organism in the terms of the discourse of biology. His committedly anti-biologist reading of Freud aims to reclaim the death drive from the metaphysical notion of death as a self-standing entity not subject to the laws of meaning and to locate it in the psychic, a domain categorically distinct from 'the vital order' or 'the biological', similarly understood as metaphysical entities, as givens. To this end, if the drive is to be the remainder of an exogenous human implantation, and not inherent in corporeal materiality; if it is to be an effect of the signifier and not of *lebende Materie*, it is crucial that the drive be the result of a strictly endopsychic process. That process is repression, Laplanche asserts in the 1984 paper he titles 'The Drive and its Source-Object' to echo Freud's 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', and to avow his debt as well as his reconceptualization, if not revision, of the drive. It is here that the pivotal role of repression in his theory of primal seduction is most explicit, as he elaborates the two phases of primal repression later taken up in *New Foundations* in relation to the two stages of ego formation.

In the 1984 paper, the conception of two phases of primal repression allows Laplanche to define the source-objects of the drive as deriving from 'the intrusion and then repression of the enigmatic signifiers supplied by the adult'. In the first phase, the enigmatic signifiers are implanted in the infant; they are not yet repressed but 'have a sort of dormant status, which is both internal-external or (as Freud also has it elsewhere) sexual-presexual'. Reactivated in the second phase and thereafter, they become

> attacking-internal ones, which the infant must endeavour to bind. It is this endeavour to bind, to symbolise dangerous and traumatic signifiers, that culminates in what Freud calls the infant's theorisation (the infantile sexual theories), and in the partial failure of such symbolisation or theorisation, and by that token in the repression of an unmasterable, uncircumscribable remainder.
>
> (*EO*, 129)

The signifiers reactivated in the second phase live on or are reactualized in the psyche in the form of 'thing-like presentations', taking on 'an isolated status, outside of communication and signification, in what is called the id'. *Représentation-choses* ('thing-like presentations') is how Laplanche retranslates Freud's *Sachvorstellungen* – usually rendered in French as *représentations de chose*, and in English as *thing-presentations* – the better to convey the thingness of these mental presentations.[41] His theoretical move is to recast Freud's conception of the system *Ucs*. laid out in the last chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the metapsychological paper 'The Unconscious' by endowing it with the particular temporality (*Nachträglichkeit*) of sexual trauma that Freud describes in Emma's case in 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (*SE* 1: 347–56). In the first ('passive') phase of primal repression, the signifiers inscribed in the infant body signify nothing; they are insignificant (dormant), pure signifiers. It is only afterwards (*nachträglich*), in the second phase, that they become traumatic as 'internal-attacking' things (*attaquants-internes*) having the status of the Lacanian Real ('outside of communication and signification'). By thus articulating the two phases of primal repression, and Freud to Lacan, Laplanche effectively produces the unconscious as the id (*le ça*, the thing), a site of *Sachvorstellungen* and pure signifiers that is at once external and internal to the ego.

From the vantage point thus attained, Laplanche's critique turns to his own reading of the drive in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, which was based on Freud's notion of *Anlehnung*, the sexual drive's *leaning on*

the self-preservative function of feeding. That notion entailed that the sexual drive emerged in the same place and in relation to the same source as the self-preservative function but then diverged in the movement of displacement figurally described by Laplanche as metaphor and metonymy. Such a reading is no longer acceptable to him. In the new perspective, 'it is inconceivable that sexuality should emerge biologically from self-preservation, even were it to be by virtue of a displacement affecting both aim and object', Laplanche asserts against himself and against Freud: 'leaning-on is only an extreme instance of a physiological conception of the sexual drive' (*EO*, 128). And he concludes with a new definition of the drive:

> *The drive is therefore neither a mythical entity, nor a biological force, nor a concept lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical. It is the impact on the individual and on the ego of the constant stimulation exerted from the inside by the repressed thing-presentations, which can be described as the source-objects of the drive.*
>
> (*EO*, 129)

Diacritically marked by italics like Freud's redefinition of the drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*SE* 18: 36), as if to underline the change, and repeating verbatim Freud's words in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', the statement at once contests both of Freud's views of the drives and both topographies. To a close reader of Laplanche, however, the comparison with the similarly italicized definition of the drive in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* cited earlier (*LD*, 23) cannot escape. And the question returns, is Laplanche possibly going astray?

Nevertheless, his reconceptualization of the drive is compelling. For one thing, it provides a logical answer to the conundrum of the drive, the question I asked earlier: What is it that makes a demand for work on the mind 'in consequence of its connection with the body'? What instigates the drive? It is '*le ça*', Laplanche replies, the unmetabolized 'things' that go bump in the psyche, the untranslatable residues of primal repression. These ghostly, undecipherable, alien presences, which exert a constant stimulation from inside the ego, are at once the source and the objects of the *drive*. For there is only one drive, the *sexual* drive, its dual manifestation as death drive and life drive being a function of the morphology of its source-objects and of the ego's (in)capacity to bind them.

What to Freud appeared as a dualism of the life and death drives struggling with one another from the start – but, we may note, both equally inherent in the organism's living matter and both powered by one and

the same libido – Laplanche sees as 'a dichotomy internal to the sexual drive', whereby 'the source-objects of the death-drives and life-drives are ultimately the same' (*EO*, 130). In the case of the life drives, which work in tandem with the pleasure principle according to the principle of constancy, the psychic energy in the ego is bound to a unified source-object, even when it is a 'part-object' such as, for example, a part of the body; their aim is to synthesize and to bind.[42] In the death drives, psychic energy is unbound and aims towards total discharge, to the zero level of tension that lies beyond the limit set by the pleasure principle; in this case the source-objects are reduced to fragments or 'indices of excitation'.

The genesis of this conception of a dual morphology of the source-objects appears to be Laplanche's reading of Melanie Klein and her notions of good object and bad object. In the fourth volume of *Problématiques*, based on his seminars at the University of Paris between 1977 and 1979, the life drive is also referred to as a 'whole object drive', meaning that its object is one 'in the synthetic and probably also narcissistic sense of the term'; while the death drive is tentatively referred to as the 'indexical drive' or the 'drive of the signifier', and its object is purely 'a source of excitation'.[43]

> From this perspective the whole of Lacanianism – with its emphasis on the signifying, split, 'unary', unilateral aspects of the object, in so far as it is taken from then on as signifier and not as synthesised object – this accent which Lacanianism puts on the signifier is perhaps nothing more than a new accentuation of the death drive in relation to the life drive, which, for Lacan, is relegated to the side of narcissism and the imaginary.
>
> (*UI*, 223)

Laplanche's theory of primal seduction and the concomitant redefinition of the drive, in shifting the accent onto the ego, rebalance the struggle of life and death in psychoanalysis. Several questions arise: isn't the theory itself perhaps too much like the ego, displaying its powers to bind, to secondarize, to rationalize Freud's irrational contradictions? Of course, a theory must be rational, must define its objects in terms of a coherent conceptual structure, as appropriate to its discourse; vice versa, it must create a conceptual structure appropriate to its object. But what about *das rein triebhafte*, the purely instinctual quality of the drives? May it not, through the vicissitude of sublimation, trespass into theory? And what about radical otherness, the unmetabolizable – the otherness that

manifests in the events of the world, which continue materially to impact the body-ego, often with all the force of primal trauma; those unmetabolizable, undiscursified occurrences of the real that bumper-sticker wisdom acknowledges simply as 'shit happens'? Can theory be immune to the impact of the drive, even though it originates in an embodied subjectivity, a bodily ego (or so I think)? To put it another way, can the structural necessity of a theory suffice to withstand the impact of the real? Freud yielded to the compulsion to account for it and went astray, retrenched into biology, claims Laplanche; yet, in so doing, he was free as never before.

I wonder whether such freedom may not come from a mode of thinking that is not resistant to the paradoxical and 'purely instinctual' ways of the drive – its distorted appearance in dream images through condensation and displacement; its bewildering conversion into bodily symptoms; its peeking through in seemingly random slips of the tongue or morphing into parapraxes. If the work of the primary process is indeed of a rhetorical or tropological character, akin in that respect to the most highly wrought forms of writing, a theory of the drive might well allow the figural dimension of language into the space of thinking and suspend the demand for rational, scientific, referential coherence. Freud, of course, was as aware as anyone of the polyvalence of language, on which he founded the psychoanalytic project in all its aspects clinical, theoretical, and sociocultural. Crucial to the early vision of a talking cure and a *sine qua non* of the analysis of dreams, symptoms and jokes, the figurality of language, with its creativity and its 'caprices' (*SE* 18: 111), is also patently at work in his metapsychology from the optical 'imagery' of the psychic apparatus as a fiction and a virtual space, in the first topography, to the unabashed and unequivocal equation of scientific terms to figurative language (*Bildersprache*) in the second:

> We need not feel greatly disturbed in judging our speculation upon the life and death instincts by the fact that so many bewildering and obscure processes occur in it – such as one instinct being driven out by another or an instinct turning from the ego to an object, and so on. This is merely due to our being obliged to operate with *the scientific terms, that is to say*, with *the figurative language*, peculiar to psychology (or, more precisely, to depth psychology). We could not otherwise describe the processes in question at all, and indeed we could not have become aware of them. The deficiencies in our description would probably vanish if we were already in a position to replace the psychological terms by physiological or chemical ones. *It*

> *is true that they too are only part of a figurative language*; but it is one with which we have long been familiar …
>
> (*SE* 18: 60; emphasis added)

Commenting on this passage, Samuel Weber points out how Freud here appeals to a notion of observation 'that his entire approach to the psyche otherwise undermines. For what distinguished psychoanalysis from science in its more familiar forms is precisely the non-observability of the "phenomena" it addresses'.[44] Far from having a 'privileged proximity' to empirical data, Freud's *Bildersprache* addresses the bewildering and obscure processes of the psyche in the manner of the dreamwork, through figures and distortion (*Entstellung*). 'At the heart of psychoanalytic theory, then, is not, as Freud would have us believe, a privileged proximity to observed data, but rather a singular relation of cognition to the unknown, figured and disfigured – *entstellt*.'[45]

Not that Laplanche is unaware of this; on the contrary, his close reading of Freud's texts pinpoints precisely how the ambivalences and the compulsions of his thought manifest in language. In developing his own theory of the drive, however, Laplanche would do away with the ambivalences, if with the laudable objective to dispel from sexuality the spectre of biology and lift from psychoanalysis the charge of metaphysics. If I respond to Freud's ambivalence and am drawn to the notion of a death drive that is not only a contingent reduction of psychic excitation but some thing, force or quality inherent in matter, it is because the dates 1914 and 1919 signify more that two texts, however pivotal, in the structure of Freud's theory. It seems to me that these dates, marking as they do the time of the first major catastrophe in Freud's world during his lifetime, the Great War, must have something to do with his ambivalence about life and death in psychoanalysis, when the world was dying around him and not by 'natural' causes. As the world around us is dying a similarly unnatural death, one may well harbour a suspicion that human life, both individual and social, is compromised by something that undermines it, works against it, *drags* it; something of the inertia (*Trägheit*) in *lebende Materie*, as Freud speculated, something that transcends life not from above or beyond, but from within materiality itself. The unconscious or the id (however one may think of it), though not itself a material entity, is constituted through and because of the materiality of flesh and bones, blood, sweat and tears. How not to entertain at least the doubt that just such living *matter* may exert that drag or that attraction on the human psyche; that 'the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego' (*SE* 18: 14) are not exclusively the effect of enigmatic

signifiers but also in some way related to the matter or, in Hjelmslev's terms, the substance of its form?

Looking again at Freud's conception of the death drive as the expression of 'a kind of elasticity' that draws the organic to the inorganic, the animate to the inanimate, or life towards lifelessness – simply, he says, because lifelessness was there prior to life (*das Leblose was früher da als das Lebende*, *GW*, XIII, 38) – it seems to me that the oxymoron of the organism striving to die in its own way carries the sense of a double quality ('elasticity') of its matter as at once living and lifeless. While the quickened, live quality of matter in the organism is represented to the body-ego by consciousness as 'a sense organ' for perception, the lifeless, inert matter of the corpse has no representation. But Freud's figure of a drive working silently, undetected, bears an intimation of the corpse implicit or latent in the organism, the lifeless matter that the living matter of the organism will become in the 'undocumented record of time'.[46] Thinking this way, the drive is once again – or still – a figure of passage. As the sexual drive figures the queer dis-place between somatic stimulus and mental representation, a heterotopic space of transit and transformation, so is the death drive the conceptual figuration of a space not referential but purely virtual; the space, as we say, of a passing.

The continuity in Freud's figural conception of the drive, in spite of the 'turn' taken in 1919, brings me back to Laplanche's remark that Freud is *free* as never before in writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. That he is most free just when he yields to the compelling thought of a death drive inherent in the organism calls up the resonance of the word *free* with the free or unbound energy of the drive. And I, in turn, yield to the thought that Freud's speculation is most free when he is free of the future; when, in contemplating the inhuman work of death in the physical and social organisms of his world, he can avow a stubborn drive at work in the living matter of his own ageing body. Like the free energy of the drive not bound by the ego's investments in living, by Oedipus and Eros, writing is free from the referential and empirical constraints of science, and thought is free from the coherence required of systematic theory. The oblique, distanced, even ironic reference to biology in the text of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not an authoritative or authorizing invocation; it is a figural evocation that neither reifies nor disallows the real of materiality but suspends the certainty of cognition – a certainty that some would secure by the referential language of biology and others by the discursive logic of theory.

Laplanche would not accompany me in such a reading of what he himself saw as a figurative work, 'that vast metapsychological, metaphysical

and metabiological *fresco*'. Nor would he go as far as seeing the primacy of the past in Freud's conceptual apprehension of human temporality as directly linked to a personal relation to death. In fact, he critiques Jones for interpreting Freud's conception of the death drive 'as a function of the biographic elements at his disposal' and without observing 'the rule' of 'analytic neutrality' (*LD*, 111). I would certainly be guilty on both counts if my purpose in reading Freud were a psychobiography or psychoanalysis. This reading, made possible to a great extent by Laplanche's work, is intended as a reflection on the state of the world today and on the relevance of Freud's theory of drives for the dis-ease of this postmodern civilization. From where I stand, on the cusp of a new technological century, the charge of metaphysics or biologism levelled against Freud appears inconsequential; an effort to shore up the humanistic value of the future and of the ego's struggle against the inhuman that surrounds it, be it matter or language, thing, enigma, or machine.

Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, a manifesto for the twenty-first century, takes queerness as the figure for an ethical position against the 'democratic literality that marks the futurism of the left' as well as any other reproductive futurism: 'Intent on the end, not the ends, of the social, queerness insists that the drive towards that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself.'[47] The coincidence of Edelman's and my critical projects, quite unrelated and unaware of one another, is remarkable: both read visual, literary and cultural texts with psychoanalytic theory (Lacan in Edelman, Freud and Laplanche in mine) and a focus on figurality. As much as they converge on the linked tropes of queerness and the future, perhaps not surprisingly, our readings diverge on the issue of the death drive. Edelman urges queers to embrace a figural identification with the death drive as *jouissance*, a figure for the undoing of identity and the heteronormative order of meaning. My reading of Freud's drive offers no programme, no ethical position, no polemic, only queer figures of passing in the uninhabited space between mind and matter.

In this vein I read two texts, in the following chapters, that inscribe the figure of death at work in Freud's time and in ours, respectively, Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* (1936) and David Cronenberg's film *eXistenz* (1999).

4

Becoming Inorganic: Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, Virtuality and the Death Drive

> Everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again.
>
> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*[1]

> Everything that can be an object of our internal perception is virtual, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light-rays.
>
> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*[2]

> Every film shows us the cinema, and is also its death.
>
> Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier'[3]

Released in 1999, David Cronenberg's film *eXistenZ* is a reflection on the new technologies of postmodernity – information, communication and biotechnologies, and new interactive media; a reflection in the twin senses of speculation on (theory) and specularization of (*techné*) the effects they produce in human reality, in the social imaginary as well as in subjective, psychic reality. Under the guise of science fiction – a mere pretext, as the futures of science fiction have become less and less distant from the present of writing – the film documents, both thematically and formally, the history of its (our) present. It shows us the cinema in its twofold aspect of virtual reality and biotechnology.

eXistenZ's science-fictional *novum*, the interface of the human body with bioelectronic devices, is a sort of analogue to Freud's notion of drive (*Trieb*).[4] As the drive is the figure of a process linking the mental and the somatic, an interface of mind and body that produces in Freud's theory the modern conceptual category of psychic reality, *eXistenZ*

represents a linking of the human and the technological that produces all human reality as virtual. My aim in reading it with Freud's theory of drives is twofold. Beside the light that each sheds on the other and the renewed relevance that the film confers, in these times, to Freud's unpopular view of human imperfectibility, I want to recover Freud's persistent doubt about the inhuman that haunts human reality as a way to think about the world in which we live.

Since the late nineteenth century, philosophers and economists have associated modernity, capitalist production and technological development with a process of creative destruction. If *eXistenZ* can be read as an allegory of creative destruction in postmodernity, Freud's *Trieb*, with its bifurcated movement as Eros and death drive, has a place in that genealogical line: Eros, the life drive to preserve living substance and join together individuals to create higher organisms, families and nations, is itself inseparably joined to a contrary psychic force, *Todestrieb*, the drive to disjoin and dissolve all aggregates: psychic social, or organic. That human life itself, for Freud, is governed by a process of creation and destruction is generally attributed to the mentality or episteme of his time. Indeed, on that very basis, commentators and practitioners of psychoanalysis have rejected drive theory as mired in a Darwinian or Lamarckian biologism that renders it antiquated and inadequate to our times.[5] But if we look at Freud's notion of drive in a Foucauldian genealogical perspective from the starting point of Cronenberg's film, we may find confirmation that the drive is not a biological entity but rather a psychic and a figural one.

Interestingly, Cronenberg professes to be 'a Darwinian' who believes in randomness rather than fate;[6] an atheist who will not propagate the mythology of Satan, God and the afterlife ('I don't do demons')[7] and nearly based the figure of the creative artist on the run in *eXistenZ* on Salman Rushdie (*G*, 163);[8] a director who refused to direct *Dark City* because it was a ghost movie, but freely admits to being haunted by the 'memory-ghost' of his deceased parents ('I can hear their voices in my head. To explore that kind of haunting … that's interesting to me')[9] – one thinks of *Spider* (2002), a film he had to make, well knowing it would be too subtle and too focused on psychic processes to have any kind of mass appeal ('Spider is the schizophrenic who doesn't win the Nobel prize').[10] Thus his Darwinism is tempered, to say the least, by a strong current of writerly scepticism, his interest in evolution as mutation and transformation having more to do with poetics than with biology.

From his very first, 16 mm film, *Transfer* (1966), whose title and storyline 'referred to the Freudian concept of transference' (*G*, 23), and the

early 65-minute *Stereo* (1969) about psychosexual experiments allegedly in telepathy but shown to be primarily in orality and 'omni-sexuality', to his first commercially produced feature *Shivers* (1975, released in the US as *They Came from Within*), the concern with sexuality as polymorphous and perverse is only slightly less explicit than the identification of the scientist, mad or not, with the creative artist/director. In the early films, the 'aphrodisiast and theorist' Dr Luther Stringfellow of *Stereo*; the dermatologist Antoine Rouge of *Crimes of the Future* (1970), discoverer of a disease caused by cosmetics (a 'white, aerated, amorphous effluence emerging from ears and nose' that people are irresistibly drawn to smell and lick);[11] and the university professor Dr Emil Hobbes, specialist in urinary diseases and creator of *Shivers*'s parasites (a combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease that spreads like an epidemic through a luxury apartment complex), are absent or distant figures, dead and revered.[12] Their vision and experimental work are carried out by disciples on live subjects in institutions named The House of Skin, Institute of Neo-Venereal Disease or Metaphysical Import/Export, each film an articulation of the social havoc and transformation effected by that vision. If the figure of Freud comes inevitably to mind, its relation to the filmmaker – writer and director – equally absent from the diegesis and equally a *sine qua non* condition of the film's production and circulation, was not far behind. It would soon emerge in the similarly tongue-in-cheek named originators of organic mutations and societal disruption in the subsequent films: the plastic surgeon Dr Dan Keloid of *Rabid* (1976), the psychiatrist Dr Hal Raglan, head of the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics in *The Brood* (1979) and the 'psychopharmacist'-father Dr Paul Ruth in *Scanners* (1980).

In the 1980s and 1990s films, the demiurgic figure is given a progressively more conspicuous diegetic presence and itself mutates, on the one hand, in line with the diffusion of new social technologies (plastic and cosmetic surgery in *Rabid*, psychotherapy in *The Brood*, computer databanks in *Scanners*, television and video cassette recorders in *Videodrome*, up to the biotechnology of interactive video games of *eXistenZ*) and, on the other, in its increasing individualization and specification as creative writer, game designer and self-fashioning *artiste maudit* in *Naked Lunch* (1991), *eXistenZ*, *M. Butterfly* (1993) or *Crash* (1996). As the figural ground of the diegesis shifts from the biological-scientific to the commercial-corporate to the subjective-artistic, the topos of the experiment – conducted on others in the 1970s films, on the self and its double in the 1980s *Videodrome* (1982), *The Fly* (1986) or *Dead Ringers* (1988) – gives way in the 1990s to the topos of individual metamorphosis (Kafka, Beckett,

Burroughs and Nabokov are often cited by Cronenberg as his formative writers). But the contingency of the accident from motorcycle to car crash to attempted assassination, the chance encounter or the unforeseeable effects of psychophysiological drugs on the organism and of mediatic representations on psychic reality continue to point up the randomness that, in initiating a series of exceptional events, subtends all forms of metamorphosis – organic, material and artistic.

What typically instigates the transformation is the human's attraction to the exceptional, the abnormal, the abject, the non-human in its phenomenal appearance as disease, violence and death. Their relation to sexuality, apparent in the symptomatology and epidemic character of venereal disease in the early films, is later refigured in textbook forms of somatization and perversion, from the hyperbolic conversion hysteria of *The Brood*, the sadomasochism hallucinated in *Videodrome*, narcissism in *Dead Ringers* and fetishism practically everywhere, to the marked emphasis of the later films on what Freud called the narcissistic neuroses: melancholia in *M. Butterfly*, paranoia in *eXistenZ* and schizophrenia in *Spider*.[13] The aggressivity and self-destructiveness that accompany all forms of disease in his early films is repeatedly attributed by Cronenberg to the intimate connection of sexuality and death, whence his proclivity for the horror film genre and the particular inflection on the body's interior organs and fluids that has made him the originator of the body-horror film.

The measured statements he offers interviewers, such as 'Death is the basis of all horror' (*R*, 58) or 'Horror films are so primal, and deal with such primal issues – particularly death and therefore also sexuality' (*R*, 57), are meant to underline the cathartic purpose of his cinema, the artist's confrontation with ageing and mortality to achieve 'mastery over death' (*R*, 74); but the compulsion to repeat thematized in the characters, insistent in the scripts and recurrent in the formal structure of nearly all his films suggests that more is going on than simple whistling in the dark. It is as if, in that confrontation, mastery were not only achieved but exceeded or gone beyond; as if death could not be contained in the film and another film had to be made.[14] Mindful of the child's game mentioned by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which it is the distressing experience (*Fort*), and not the pleasure (*Da*), that is untiringly repeated, one might also say of Cronenberg's films that 'the only use he made of any of his toys was to play "gone" with them' (*SE* 18: 15).[15]

That tendency beyond the pleasure principle, 'more primitive than it and independent of it' (*SE* 18: 17), that Freud surmises in his grandson's

play is legible in the diverse figures of otherness, of something not human and yet human, inscribed in Cronenberg's films. The idea that disease 'indicates the presence of some other life form' (*G*, 167), a life form itself organic though neither human nor animal but *somehow other*, is already present in the making of *Shivers*.[16] In *Videodrome, The Fly, M. Butterfly, Crash* and *eXistenZ*, it takes on a more abstract and sombre valence in conjunction with the trope of metamorphosis, as if death itself were but another form of the organism's life, such that the destruction of one organism corresponded to the creation of another.

Creative destruction

To explain the extraordinary pace of economic growth and non-inflationary expansion in the US during the 1990s, which coincided with the rise of a new economy (as it was called) fuelled by technological innovations, economists in the West have retrieved a theory of capital developed by Joseph Schumpeter, an Austrian expatriate and former Harvard professor. Here, for example, is a statement made in 1999 by Alan Greenspan, then chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board:

> The American economy, clearly more than most, is in the grip of what the eminent Harvard professor Joseph Schumpeter many years ago called 'creative destruction,' the continuous process by which emerging technologies push out the old. Standards of living rise when incomes created by the productive facilities employing older, increasingly obsolescent, technologies are marshalled to finance the newly produced capital assets that embody cutting-edge technologies.[17]

Schumpeter's theory has innovation as the moving force in capitalism. It is not labour as such that produces economic value, he maintains, but new technologies, new kinds of commodities, products and services; new forms of business organization, such as mergers; or the opening up of new markets. Innovations, therefore, are responsible for both the progress and the instabilities of capitalism, as evidenced by recurring business cycles. Put very schematically, periods of economic boom are stimulated by new technologies such as the coal and steam engines and the railway in the mid-nineteenth century or motor vehicles and electric power in the early twentieth century. But as the innovations become the norm, the boom peters out and is followed by a period of recession or slump in which the economy contracts until, a variable number of years

later, another innovation ignites another boom wave and a new cycle begins.[18]

In contrast to Marxian theory, the key figure in this process is not the worker but the entrepreneur, the venture capitalist, the individual with a will to create an empire for himself and the urge to beat everyone else to the punch, often at the cost of great social hostility (a figure that many saw embodied in Bill Gates at the start of the Microsoft monopoly trials, known to some as 'Microsquish'); needless to say, Schumpeter was in favor of monopolies. By introducing new technologies, products, and methods of production, entrepreneurs or economic innovators engage in a process of 'creative destruction' that forces existing companies to either adapt or fail, with the consequent trail of job losses, workers' need to retrain, and so forth.[19] The phrase *creative destruction* gained wide currency in market talk in the late 1990s.[20] If I take it up again here, it is not because of the classic elegance of its oxymoron or because of its illustrious genealogy in Nietzsche and Marx and Engels:[21] on the monitor of my mind, the phrase *creative destruction* lights up another series of interdisciplinary links. Click on the first link and you will find

'Destruction as cause of becoming'

'Die Destruktion als Ursache des Werdens' is the title of a paper published in 1912 in *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, the first psychoanalytic journal founded by Freud and edited by Carl Gustav Jung.[22] The paper, ignored or dismissed at the time by the entire psychoanalytic community, was eventually acknowledged eight years later by Freud himself, who cited it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as having anticipated 'a considerable portion' of his own speculations on the death drive (*SE* 18: 55).

The author of the paper was Sabina Spielrein (1885–1941), a former student and patient of Jung, who was also involved in a love relationship with him and had sought Freud's help in order to break it off. She kept up an intense correspondence with both analysts, acting as a sort of mediator in their own professional relationship, which was already deteriorating and soon to end in a total break with the well-known theoretical schism. Spielrein first presented her paper in 1911 at one of the Wednesday night meetings at Freud's house, to which he had personally invited her. Freud, who was already suspicious of Jung's theoretical positions, took the paper to represent Jung's views; after all, a young woman who had been treated for schizophrenia and had fallen in love with her analyst could hardly come up with an idea of her own. Some time later Freud would apologize to Spielrein, but when the question of publishing

the paper arose, he expressed reservations that were apparently meant for Jung's work. Jung, who was the editor of the *Jahrbuch*, was more than happy to belittle the work of a bothersome ex-flame and published the paper in a heavily edited version.

Caught between the two men in their oedipal rivalry, Spielrein never acquired a name in psychoanalytic theory, although she was to become a medical doctor, a practising and training analyst (of Jean Piaget, among others) and the author of significant papers on female creativity and language symbolism, including one on child language development which anticipated arguments later made by Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva.[23] According to Aldo Carotenuto, the editor of her diary and correspondence, Spielrein eventually married a Jewish doctor, had two children and moved to the Soviet Union in 1923. Little is known about her life after this point except that she was admitted to the Russian Psychoanalytic Society, resettled in Rostov-on-Don and started and ran a children's clinic until 1936.

'All traces of her vanish in 1937, a year in which her name still appears in the Russian Society's list of analysts', Carotenuto comments (*SS*,191), for after Stalin banned psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union in 1936 the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* refrained from any mention of the ban and simply eliminated from its roster the names of Russian analysts; the same was done later with regard to countries such as Italy and Germany, where psychoanalysis had been outlawed or virtually silenced (*SS*, 207, 237). But further research indicates that Spielrein died a victim of the Shoah in Rostov-on-Don in 1941 or 1942.[24] She never had a chance. Still today, after films have been made and books have been written about her relationships with Jung and Freud, we only know her as another product of the old technology of gender; her writings have not entered the canon of psychoanalytic theory. However, the idea sketched out in her paper was not only *not* Jung's idea, as Freud suspected, but proved to be central to Freud's later theorization of the death drive and, as we shall see, may still have a bearing on the new technologies of gender in our time.

'Destruction as Cause of Becoming' argued that the instinctual drive for the preservation of the species, the wish to procreate or to give birth (*das Werden*, becoming or coming into being), contains a destructive impulse: 'As certain biological facts show, the reproductive instinct, from the psychological standpoint as well, is made up of two antagonistic components and is therefore equally an instinct of birth and one of destruction' (qtd. in *SS*, 142). Spielrein actually used the phrase 'death instinct', later to be made famous by Freud, in a diary entry of 24 (23)

October 1910, written during the period of her passionate love for Jung, with whom she wanted to conceive a child: 'Now I must make a cold compress for my head, since my wild yearning makes me feverish. Dear Lord, I should like to have some peace, at least at night, so that I may gather my forces to begin my new study, "On the Death Instinct"!' (qtd. in *SS*, 33).

In 1911 and 1912, Spielrein's idea fell on deaf ears, including Freud's, who, as early as 1905 in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, had written of an aggressive or destructive component of the sexual drive whose excessive manifestation is sadism,[25] but was not ready to accept the idea of a destructive drive existing alongside the two classes of drives that constituted psychic life, as he believed at that stage of his theory, namely, the sexual drives (*Sexualtriebe*) and the self-preservative or ego drives (*Ich-Triebe*). He admits as much in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930): 'I remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psycho-analytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it' (*SE* 21: 120). It was not until 1919, after the Great War, when he felt called to account for the compulsive repetition of traumatic experiences in war neuroses, that Freud began to theorize a general tendency in psychic life to repeat unpleasurable events and fantasies despite and even against the rule of the pleasure principle.

Jenseits des Lustprinzips

Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) was in fact the title Freud gave the highly speculative, metapsychological text in which he first outlined the presence of a death drive, which manifested in what he called the compulsion to repeat (*Wiederholungszwang*); a destructive and self-destructive drive that worked at times in opposition and at times in concert with the life-enhancing drives. Thus, for the earlier opposition between sexual drives and self-preservative or ego drives, he substituted a one 'between the life instincts (Eros) and the death instincts' (*SE* 18: 61), insisting that both life and death drives are present in the ego and both are powered by one and the same psychic energy, the libido. Eros is the term he borrowed from Plato to designate the drives 'to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units', from the coalescence of two different germ cells and the conjugation of two unicellular organisms to the sexual reproduction of higher animals and the formation of social units – families, tribes, nations or other social aggregates. Concurrently and against these 'life instincts', he saw at work 'another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back

to their primeval, inorganic state' (*SE* 21: 118–19). The latter, the death drive, is in the first place a self-destructive drive, a tendency in the individual's psychic life to revert to a state of instinctual quiescence or total absence of tension; a state that Freud analogizes to that of inorganic matter and, with one of his characteristic discursive leaps, to nirvana.

While in the metapsychological, theoretical *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud emphasizes the *self*-destructive character of the death drive, its inward direction, his later works of a sociological or popularizing character stress its outward manifestations. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, for example, he states:

> The assumption of the existence of an instinct of death or destruction has met with resistance even in analytic circles … . I know that in sadism and masochism we have always seen before us manifestations of the destructive instinct (directed outwards and inwards), strongly alloyed with erotism; but I can no longer understand how we can have overlooked the ubiquity of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness and can have failed to give it its due place in our interpretation of life. (The desire for destruction when it is directed inwards mostly eludes our perception, of course, unless it is tinged with erotism.) I remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psycho-analytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it … . [And he concludes] I adopt the standpoint, therefore, that the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and I return to my view that it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization.
>
> (*SE* 21: 119–22)[26]

Statements such as these have created understandable confusion, as they seem to place Eros alone on the side of the sexual and thus foster a false equation of Eros with sexuality whereas, as Laplanche has argued, the death drive is ultimately the reconfiguration of the radical, unbinding force that Freud had first associated with the sexual drive.[27] The death drive, in short, is not to be equated with aggression as the will to overcome or destroy others but, in the first place, with the unconscious drive towards one's own death. It is a tendency in psychic life to revert to a state of instinctual quiescence that is not just the death of the physical organism, as in a body becoming a corpse, but a state in which the level of excitation present in the psychic apparatus is reduced to zero. In other words, the death drive is a psychic force that works to unbind

psychic energy, to detach it from the ego as well as from objects (others) and to lower its level beyond the threshold set by the pleasure principle, all the way to the inert state.[28] When it directs itself outwards, towards objects (others), the destructive drive is thus a secondary manifestation of a primary, self-destructive death drive.

We are only in part surprised, therefore, that Freud's objection to Spielrein's paper in 1911 was that she 'want[ed] to subordinate psychological material to *bio*logical considerations', as he stated in a letter to Jung, adding that a dependency on biology was 'no more acceptable than a dependency on philosophy, physiology, or brain anatomy'.[29] We are surprised, of course, in light of Freud's own frequent recourse to metaphors and analogies harking back to the biological. And yet we are not surprised, for Freud's foremost intuition and lifelong effort was to define a new conceptual category, the psychic, and a theoretical domain, metapsychology, formally distinct precisely from 'philosophy, physiology, or brain anatomy'. It is, in fact, from that other domain – metapsychology – that he returns to the biological in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to posit in that *beyond* 'what is most "driven" in the drive', its tendency to zero and to the abolition of every drive (*LD*, 107).

'It is as though,' writes Laplanche, '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*.'[30] Opposite the ego's reign under the pleasure and reality principles and opposite the vital order governed by the binding power of Eros, the death drive is the last avatar of sexuality, that agent of unbinding, negativity, unconsciousness and resistance to the coherence of the ego, which was the cornerstone and the discovery of psychoanalysis.

Going back to Schumpeter's theory of capital's creative destruction, one cannot fail to note its similarity, making allowance for the different disciplinary fields, with Freudian theory and even more, indeed, with Spielrein's idea of destruction as the cause of becoming. This is not surprising, for they originated in a similar epistemological environment, in the high culture of an empire in its advanced stages, prior to collapse.

Consider: both Schumpeter (1883–1950) and Freud (1856–1939) were born in Moravia, a region of the current Czech Republic then was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They both studied at the University of Vienna, 25 years and a generation apart. Schumpeter began teaching

economic theory in 1909, at the age of 26, and quickly gained a Chair at the University of Graz; Freud only got an unpaid lectureship in neuropathology at the age of 30 and, being a Jew, was never offered a Chair. In 1909 Freud took his first and only trip to America, invited by Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts; Schumpeter was an exchange professor at New York's Columbia University in 1915 when the First War World broke out. He returned to Vienna after the war and served as Finance Minister of the new Austrian republic from 1918 to 1919, when Freud was writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud had founded the International Psychoanalytic Association (1910); Schumpeter founded a bank (in 1921; it collapsed under inflation in 1924). In 1932 Schumpeter accepted a permanent professorship at Harvard and bailed out of Vienna; Freud left Vienna for London only in 1938, barely escaping under Nazi occupation, and died the following year as Schumpeter's book on business cycles first appeared in print in the US.

It may be that something of the divergence in their personal and social circumstances is reflected in their theories. Schumpeter's positive emphasis on the *creative* destruction wrought by technological innovation in capitalism's progress towards social wealth corresponds in counterpoint to Freud's darker vision of the human soul (*Seele* is Freud's synonym for psyche) and the malaise inherent in civilization. Social beings, he writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (originally titled *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*), are endowed with 'a powerful share of aggressiveness', as well as with the gifts of Eros, the wish for love, friendship and community. 'As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him' (*SE* 21: 111). Moreover, this state of affairs would not change with either the abolition of private property and the demise of capitalism or complete freedom in sexual life, as early utopian communism claimed; for 'aggressiveness was not created by property … and it already shows itself in the nursery almost before property has given up its primal, anal form' (*SE* 21: 113).

Whereas Schumpeter saw capitalism proceed by alternating cycles and bring social progress and greater prosperity (which would eventually, he thought, lead to its transformation into socialism), the life and death drives act concurrently and together, in contingent and nonlinear processes of instinctual fusion or defusion.[31] Thus there is no progress in the vicissitudes of the drives which, Freud insists, are strictly conservative;

while the destructions of capitalism are deemed creative, the death drive is definitely entropic. Still, in spite of their divergent vectors, the conceptual similarities of the two theories are remarkable. Schumpeter's belief that both internal and external factors determine 'the working of the economic organism' (*BC*, 1) is akin to Freud's conception of the working of the human organism as affected by internal and external stimuli (the former being the drives). While in the aftermath of the Great War his patients' symptoms of repetition compulsion led Freud to postulate a death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Schumpeter compares the question of whether and under what circumstances the economic system 'will *by its own working* produce booms or crises or depressions' to 'whether and why death would come about, in the absence of lesions, by virtue of the working of the human organism' (*BC*, 12).

Further, the presence or absence of fluctuation inherent in the economic process and the role of 'equilibrium' in the economic system as described by Schumpeter[32] strongly resonate with Freud's 'economic' definition of the pleasure principle in terms of quantities of stimulation and discharge, as constancy principle or entropic tendency to zero in the psychic apparatus as systemically conceived in the first topography (*SE* 5: 509–621). The economic metaphor in Freud is nowhere more evident than in the curious analogy he finds to describe the dreamwork:

> A daytime thought may very well play the part of *entrepreneur* for a dream; but the *entrepreneur*, who, as people say, has the idea and the initiative to carry it out, can do nothing without capital; he needs a *capitalist* who can afford the outlay, and the capitalist who provides the psychical outlay for the dream is invariably and indisputably … *a wish from the unconscious*.
>
> (*SE* 5: 561)

It might be interesting to ask to what extent, if any, Schumpeter's theory may have been influenced by that of his fellow Viennese or whether he might, one day, have come across Sabina Spielrein's paper. But my question is another: if Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction is so pertinent to these economic times and the so-called new economy, we might ask whether Freud's more sombre theory of a psychic tendency towards the inorganic may also be relevant to our current technological environment and perhaps useful to read new cultural products such as gender, sexuality and their representations. And so we come to the third link.

Where existence ends and *eXistenZ*™ begins[33]

eXistenZ™ is the name of a game, a virtual reality (VR) game system in a science fictional near-future, that is a close relative – one or two generations down the pike – of today's interactive videogames.[34] This game is played collectively by porting or connecting via a 'bioport', a socket surgically grafted onto the lower end of the spinal cord, to a game module linked to others and operated by a master module. The modules are both electronic and organic; they are made of living matter, with micro-sensors implanted, as it turns out, in mutated animal tissue and patented with the name MetaFlesh Game-Pod (*E*, 18).

The pod is an overdetermined object; a portal to virtual reality that requires no hardware, no computer, no screen, it is most literally a piece of software – soft to the touch, quivering, with a fleshly exterior in the shape of a grotesque living organ, suggestive of a uterus with teats and nipples. It connects to the bioport by means of 'a long translucent cord, apparently filled with some kind of transparent viscous fluid … twisted and sinewy like muscle tissue [and with] red and blue veinlike vessels running just beneath the surface' (*E*, 18). Through this connector, explicitly named UmbyCord, the game is downloaded directly into the players' bodies through the bioport that each has embedded at the base of her or his spine. Made of soft plastic and glittering with electronic connectors, the bioport is described in the novelization as 'finely engineered fleshware' (*E*, 20).

The very explicit foregrounding of the body as flesh, as a layer of sensory receptors where external stimuli and internal organs interface through natural or prosthetic orifices, is a recurrent theme in Cronenberg's films. Whether intentionally made (as in this film) or violently caused in an unsuspecting body by a sudden eruption from within (as in *Shivers* and *Rabid*) these orifices – sockets, holes or slashes gaping in unexpected parts of the body, such as the abdomen and the armpit – are both receptacles into which something is inserted (the gun and the videocassette in *Videodrome*) and portholes from which something is released (the blood-drawing spike in *Rabid*); their relation to sexuality is unmistakable, ranging from thinly veiled to explicit to in your face. In *eXistenZ* the bioport is at once receptacle and porthole, socket and port, a two-way, interactive, living channel and the body's most blatantly erogenous zone.[35]

Its status as an erogenous zone is highlighted throughout the film, from the obvious sensual arousal of Allegra as she caresses her pod to the scene where Ted is fitted with a bioport – halfway between a rite of initiation and a rape. In fact, as becomes apparent in the sex scene between

the two leads, the bioport has taken over the erogenous function of both anus and vagina, of which it is not a metaphor but a replacement, signalling a new sexual economy of the human body. Without a bioport sex is not viable, the senses are dull (as is the imagination) and life is boring. To grasp how this new sexual economy, made possible by technological innovations, intersects with a certain economy of gender and to what extent the notion of creative destruction may apply, we must work through the complicated architecture of the film.

eXistenZ™ is both a sex game and a death game. The film opens in a deconsecrated country church in North America, in which the corporation Antenna Research is testing its latest, most advanced, 'revolutionary' product, *eXistenZ*™, on a focus group of volunteers. For this special occasion, the group is to be led by the game's designer, Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), billed as the world's greatest game designer. She is present with her own master pod, the game prototype, which she will download into the players' bodies so they will all be in the game together. As the group players sway with anticipation, ripple with excitement and fall to their knees at the appearance of the 'Game-Pod Goddess', the film's spectators realize that the star designer, figurehead of a new entertainment technology, has replaced the opera diva and the rock or movie star as the object of fandom and identification. Ted Pikul (Jude Law), a junior executive in training with Antenna Research, has been assigned as her security guard to protect the corporation's hottest property, which is not only the designer but also the game-pod prototype she carries.

To be sure, no sooner has *eXistenZ*™ been launched than a young man in the audience attempts to assassinate the star designer and destroy her game,[36] yelling 'Death to the Demoness Allegra Geller!' a slogan that runs through the film like a *leitmotiv*, as the players, cyborg-like communing with machines (the bioport the very mark of their sinfulness), will be repeatedly attacked by fundamentalist believers in the divine creation of Man and Nature. Ted gallantly rescues Allegra and they escape in her Land Rover. Fugitives from that moment on, they drive deeper and deeper into the embedded structure of the game. They stop at a motel generically named Motel, where Allegra cajoles and Ted reluctantly agrees to be fitted with a bioport at the local gas station in order to help her test the game. A gas station attendant named Gas (Willem Dafoe), who turns out to be a bounty hunter out to kill Allegra and destroy the game, installs a faulty bioport which, as soon as Ted ports into the pod, blows it up altogether. Ted manages to kill Gas before Gas can kill Allegra, and they resume their drive through the night until

they reach a safe haven, a former ski lodge in which Antenna Research scientists repair Allegra's pod and Ted's bioport.

When at last they are plugged into the game, sitting on the bed with the activated pod humming between them, a cut on Ted's eyeline match relocates them in a virtual environment (VE) that looks like a game and video store at the time of Allegra's teens. The game emporium's owner, a character belonging to *eXistenZ*™ (Cronenberg slyly has Allegra comment with disappointment that 'he is not a very well-drawn character, his dialogue was just so-so, his accent wrong'), insists they try the newest game produced by Cortical Systematics, a miniature version of the pod Allegra has designed for *eXistenZ*™. The micropods, which inserted directly into the bioport act as super-potent aphrodisiacs, are entry tokens into another virtual world located 'inside' the VE of *eXistenZ*™, that is to say, embedded in its virtual space. The lust they instigate is interrupted with a 'brutal' cut when a close-up of Ted's hand holding Allegra's breast is replaced by a shot of his astonished face, immediately followed by a close-up of his gloved hand holding what looks like a skinned and bloody frog: he has rematerialized in yet another level of *eXistenZ*™, the transition effected by the jump cut, a visual conceit of the join of sexuality and death.[37]

The new locale resembles an assembly plant where a conveyor belt carries pieces of mutated reptiles' and amphibians' bodies along a line of stalls. In each stall a worker selects the parts with neural tissue still attached, wraps them in brown paper and sends them on to be reassembled into 'motherboards' (*E*, 151). In the plant, euphemistically named Trout Farm and looking more like a slaughterhouse or an early industrial revolution factory than the sterile, aseptic environments of today's electronic production, Cortical Systematics raises reptilian mutants for their nervous system, which is used as 'the basis of the main logic engines in the game pods' (*E*, 189). Cortical Systematics is thus not only the competitor of Antenna Research but its counterpart in the embedded VE, and just as Allegra's would-be assassin in what is presumed to be the real world belongs to a group of fanatic fundamentalists, who consider gaming evil and her a demon, so, in the game, an analogous group, the Realists, are out to sabotage Cortical Systematics' game production. They have infiltrated the Trout Farm as workers, but they also run a sideline of their own: under the cover of running the plant's Chinese restaurant, where the unused parts of the mutant reptiles are put to culinary use, the Realists creatively recycle the discarded animal bones 'as components for undetectable and hypoallergenic weapons', such as the gun made of bones and gristle, with human teeth for bullets, that is fired at Allegra early in the film.

The temporal paradox of the designer returning to her past and finding there her future-perfect, the game micropod she will have realized, is mirrored in the imaging of future technological creation (computerized video games standing for cinema) not as the high-tech products of an imminent techno-future but as uncannily naturalistic or proto-tech artifacts, attained 'by subtraction from the present';[38] 'I wanted to strip away what most people think of as technology … . I decided that the technology was [to be] organic' (*G*, 155). It is an imaging of technology's creative destruction as the organic becoming inorganic. The backward look and regressive character of technologically produced reality in *eXistenZ* make it the equivalent of the hallucinations in *Videodrome* and *Naked Lunch* but provide a more contemporary and conceptually provocative figure for psychic reality; a reality in which psychosis, paranoia and schizophrenia are a generalized condition of existence in the late twentieth century.[39]

To his surprise, while at the assembly plant, Ted sees his own hands move deftly across his workbench as he embodies the role of manual labourer which the game has scripted for him at this stage. Then, following the enigmatic directions given him by another worker, a game character named Yevgeny Nourish (Don McKellar), Ted finds himself at the Chinese restaurant eating stir-fried mutated salamander and killing the waiter with equal gusto – and with an urge as irresistible as the sexual urge that overcame him and Allegra earlier. 'I actually think there's an element of psychosis involved here,' Ted says, suddenly realizing that his main role in the game is that of agent/killer for Nourish's group, the Realist underground, and thus Allegra's enemy. At this point the paranoid space of the game appears configured as one of corporate espionage – stealing game systems and company assets, head-hunting and jumping ship from one company to another. Just like the real world, you might say. And yet, also just like science fiction: an inconspicuous but unequivocal detail of the *mise-en-scène* (the take-away fast food bag labelled 'Perky Pat's' in the motel scene), clearly references Philip K. Dick's novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) in what I take to be, again, the sense of the imbrication of the future in the past.[40]

The game ends spiralling back to the beginning with Ted, the former protector, now in the role of assassin, and Allegra, who has always already known – she is, after all, the game designer – finally winning the game by killing Ted. *eXistenZ*™ is a game of sex and death. But *eXistenZ* the film is not over. The next shot shows again the country church with all the characters seated, including Ted next to Allegra, hooked into the game and about to come out of it. The VR equipment they are wearing

are not pods and UmbyCords but more conventional headsets with paste-on electronic sensors, linked to the game modules by ordinary wires. We do a double-take, and then slowly understand: the film we are watching opened with *eXistenZ*™ about to be run but, unbeknown to us, spectators of the film, everyone we saw was already ported into another game in progress, called *transCendenZ*™ and produced by PilgrImage.[41]

After a triumphant Allegra asks, 'Have I won?' and *eXistenZ*™ ends, the film cuts to the present scene, in which *transCendenZ*™ is about to end. The characters we saw in *eXistenZ*™ were members of a focus group playing *transCendenZ*™, with the former Realist leader, Yevgeny Nourish, now revealed to be its star designer. In a further reversal, Allegra and Ted, in 'real life' a happily partnered couple, turn out to be fundamentalist fanatics who punish and kill Nourish for his 'most effective deforming of reality'. The film ends as they leave the church, but not before the obvious question has been posed: 'Are we still in a game?' Is there any reality outside the game? In other words, was Alice dreaming the Red King or was the Red King dreaming her?

Cronenberg again deploys in this film as he does in *M. Butterfly* the *mise-en-abîme* structure that narrative cinema has refashioned from dramatic art, from Shakespeare and Calderón to Pirandello and David Hwang ('*Six Characters in Search of an Author* … was one of the things I read while I was writing the script' [*G*, 167]). But here he ups the ante in the mirror construction of a game within a game within a game, whose order of embedding is interminable and finally undecidable: we see Ted and Allegra about to play *eXistenZ*™ but find out that they are characters/players of *transCendenZ*™, and then we see them leave the church in what is possibly another VR game and in any case is embedded in a film. Reality is at least four times removed and ever more elusive. And yet the structure of the film reflects contemporary social reality at least in one respect. Like Schumpeter, today economists maintain that technological innovation does not merely replace the old with the new but causes the old to adapt or mutate. And so does Cronenberg, in his fashion, giving reasons to those claiming him for postmodernism as well as to the competing claims for his modernism.

While the plot architecture of the film, much like that of an Escher drawing, may be built with an older, modernist technology of narrative construction, the linkages between the layers of embedding of the *mise-en-abîme* or mirror structure reflect the new, postmodern, digital technology: the mode of passage from one level of the game to another is not serial but digital. For example, when Ted pauses *eXistenZ*™ in the

Chinese restaurant, wary of the command to kill inscribed in the Cortical Systematics micropod – that is to say, the command to kill written into the character he plays in the game – he and Allegra do not rematerialize in the game store where they ported into the micropod, but find themselves back at the ski club where they ported into Allegra's pod and entered *eXistenZ*™. In other words, they do not go back through each level of the game serially, one level after another, but skip directly to the game's starting point (or so we think it is), as happens with a DVD.

The permanence of old social values, albeit in an adapted or mutated form, under the impact of technological innovation is, of course, characteristic of our 'reality', as in the use of biotechnologies to the old end of species reproduction at a time when the dominant white class appears to some as an endangered species, and fertility research is an adaptive form of that bio-power that Foucault saw operating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to ensure bourgeois supremacy. The film explicitly refers to the economic reality in which new bio- and communication technologies accomplish mutation in both animal and human organisms for the old and venerated capitalist purpose of making money.

Similarly, the traditional masculine and feminine gender roles are shown to coexist with a new gender economy: in *eXistenz*, Allegra is the designer, the successful entrepreneur, the master brain behind the game, while Ted is the low-level company trainee, uninitiated into corporate mysteries, inhibited for lack of a bioport and thus innocent of the joy of sex with the pod. She controls the narrative action of which Ted is an unwitting character and wins the game by killing him with a most unfeminine disregard for love and romance; like casual sex, her game must be played with 'somebody friendly'. However, as in the old gender economy, Allegra's narcissistic, autoerotic relation to her own pod is figured as maternal (she refers to it as 'my baby', and it is a baby girl, for, when the pod is damaged, Allegra cries out, 'My baby here took a huge hit in the church, she could be crying out for help right here, right now … she may be crippled for life!'). And, to be sure, at the end of *transCendenZ*™ Allegra is Ted's faithful and supporting partner who, just like a little woman, clings to his arm and *dreams* of being a star designer; while Ted, for his part, feels the need to assure everybody that 'Allegra wouldn't really jump into bed with a security guard … unless he were me'. His proprietary interest in 'his' woman is that of a blue-chip value stock investor in the old gender economy.

And again, while the sexual economy represented by the bioport may seem unquestionably new, the notion of human bodies equipped with

sockets in their wrists and at the base of their spinal cord is not new in science fiction; in exactly that way, for example, the gypsy called the Mouse in Samuel Delany's novel *Nova* (1968) hooks up with the computer-cyborg Olga to control one of the spaceship's vanes 'directly with the nervous impulses from his body'.[42] Thus, when Ted naïvely asks about the batteries that power the game-pod, it is with a wink to the genre that Cronenberg has Allegra reply: 'You are the power source, your body, your nervous system, your metabolism, your energy. You get tired, run down, it won't run properly.' But the acknowledgement of the genre by an *auteur* who owes his box office successes to the popular sci-fi film genre (*Scanners*, *The Fly*), while the films he wrote, like *eXistenZ*, or scripted from literary sources (*Naked Lunch*, *M. Butterfly*, *Crash*) have displeased mass audiences in the US as much as they may please film theorists, is an ironic commentary on the naïveté of the genre. The reference to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) in the very name MetaFlesh Game-Pod packs a punch in the direction of Hollywood's puritanism noted by William Beard à propos of an earlier Cronenberg film: while 'the pod-creatures of *Body Snatchers* wish to enthrone cold reason and expunge emotion – especially "love" and sexual feeling – the parasites in *Shivers* are designed to do exactly the reverse' (*B*, 507, note 5). The same and more go for the Game-Pod in *eXistenZ*.[43]

Indeed, the conceptual novelty in the film, as the bioport has taken over the erogenous functions of both the anus and the vagina, is that the human bodily energy powering the game is specifically sexual, psychic energy; what powers *eXistenZ™* is precisely the sexual drive (its imbrication in the death drive becoming manifest as the film advances). One telling moment among many is the scene of Ted's initiation: after he is fitted with the bioport, Allegra sprays it with a lubricant saying, 'A new port is sometimes a bit tight … I wouldn't want to hurt you.' The lubricant container, recognizable as a can of DW-40, bears the label XE-60 – a visual pun to signify that this is a lubricant for software, an executable file. In a reversal of the old body economy, the bioport is a receptacle for that genetically engineered, external sexual organ that is the pod which when inserted directly is a penis and when ported into through the UmbyCord is a uterus/vagina. Surely, in a world in which a bioport can be acquired by anyone – legally as 'industry standard' or illegally, if necessary, by a quick stop at the local gas station – anatomy is no longer destiny. To Ted's old-fashioned male fear ('I've been dying to play your games,' he tells Allegra, 'but I have this phobia about having my body penetrated'), she replies, 'They do it at malls, it's like getting your ears pierced.' Analogous to piercing in the ungendered prosthetic

pleasure it affords, the bioport nulls and voids all our current sexual identities – male, female, hetero, homo, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer. It is, in other words, a figure of the independence of sexuality from gender, the figure of a drive beyond the purview of the ego's object-cathexes.

Paradoxically, therefore, the new sexual economy in *eXistenZ* is highly reminiscent of the one described by Freud a century ago. In the bioport, as in the other orifices hungrily gaping in unsuspected parts of the human body in many of his films, Cronenberg seems to be refiguring the psychoanalytic understanding that any part, organ, activity or function of the body can acquire erogenous value. For sexuality, in Cronenberg as in Freud, is a function of fantasy, not one of anatomy or biology. As Laplanche and Pontalis have compellingly argued, sexuality originates with fantasy at the 'mythical moment' of the formation of the ego; they originate together in the 'disjunction between the pacification of need (*Befriedigung*) and fulfilment of desire (*Wünscherfüllung*), between the two stages represented by real experience [the classic example is feeding] and its hallucinatory revival, between the object that satisfies [the real object, the milk] and the sign which describes both the object and its absence [the lost object, the breast]' (*F*, 24–5). Although emerging from the function, they remark, 'sexuality lies in its difference from the function: in this sense its prototype is not the act of sucking, but the enjoyment of going through the motions of sucking (*Ludeln*), the moment when … the aim and the source [of the sexual drive] assume an autonomous existence with regard to feeding and the digestive system' (*F*, 26). To this may be added Freud's observation of the high erotic value of kissing 'in spite of the fact that the parts of the body involved do not form part of the sexual apparatus but constitute the entrance to the digestive tract' (*SE* 7: 150). It is not a coincidence that, unlike the representations of sexual acts in most of Cronenberg films from *Videodrome* to *A History of Violence* (2005), the single (conventional) sex scene in *eXistenZ* is of kissing.

The film emphatically shows that the sexual drive does not originate in the physical body as such but in the psychic structure of fantasy, and hence it is only through fantasy that desire is sustained: 'There's nothing happening here,' Allegra says after Ted pauses the game, 'we're safe, it's boring'. Back on the bed at the ski club, with the inactive pod lying between them like a stillborn baby, a decathected object of desire, existence is boring. No game, no fantasy – and no desire. So Ted turns on the pod, as it were, by flipping its 'On' nipple, and off they go into *eXistenZ*™, back to the Farm. Porting into the game, then, represents a

reactivation of that moment in which sexuality assumes an autonomous existence with regard to physiological needs and functions; a moment whose status Laplanche and Pontalis underscore as 'mythical' in that the origin of fantasy, and hence of sexuality, cannot be located at a particular time; a moment that, moreover, recurs again and again throughout the individual's life. That is the moment, we might say, when existence ends and *eXistenZ* begins.

Repetition, refraction

But what can we make of the fact that erotic fantasies in *eXistenZ* are also death wishes? From the very start of the game, when a player attempts to kill the designer, and through the multiple murders of characters, animals and humans, they are less fantasies of creation than fantasies of destruction. Consider, in particular, the theme of disease that runs through the game parallel to the theme of sex. Allegra's game-pod, the very core of *eXistenZ*™, is always sick, at first from a wound made by a human tooth; it is then contaminated, blown up and eventually 'dies'. Ted's bioport is permanently infected: from the moment it is installed by the bounty hunter Gas to when Allegra, under the guise of healing it with a 'sporicidal resonator', actually plugs in the detonator that she will later activate with a remote control micro-switch; the infection is terminal and lethal. And if, in these cases, disease and death are the effects of a destructive or sadistic drive, an intentional, even premeditated wish to kill, Allegra's 'terrible urge' to port into the diseased pod at the factory points to a *self*-destructive wish, a drive towards her own death that the film shows to be unconscious. This death wish is what they find in the game and bring back to what appears to be reality. Thus we come back to Freud's much maligned death drive and to Laplanche's comment:

> 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, [in] its instinctuality … . And in order to do so, to carry death back [paradoxically] to the very level of biology, as an *instinct*.
>
> (*LD*, 123)

There is a similar paradox in Cronenberg's film. *eXistenZ* uncouples sexuality from nature, from anatomy, from gender, from reproduction and from the binding force of Eros, and at the same time carries it back to the body, to the *bio*logical, via the technology of the *bio*port; carrying

it back in the form of mutated neural tissue, of diseased sexual organs and terminally infected erogenous zones; in short, carrying the sexual drive back to the body as death drive. Allegra's compulsion to be in the game is both a drive to mastery and a death drive. The sentimental education Ted undergoes in playing the game puts him face to face with unsuspected aggressive impulses against which neither conscience nor resistance avail him. The very structure of the game (and of the film) is the compulsion to repeat and regress *en abîme*, deeper and deeper into each embedded VE from the ski club to the video/game emporium to the Trout Farm, towards what one expects to be new adventures but is in fact the return of the primal, the sexual as death drive.

'Absolutely, repetition is the absence of direction, a failure of coherence, the return of the same,' writes Stephen Heath in 'Film Performance' *à propos* of the economies of repetition in narrative and avant-garde films.

> [T]he narrative join of a film recasts repetition – difference, the interminable flux of desire, the horizon of death – into the balance of a fiction (an integrity of recall and progression), thus maintains the historical function of the subject ('the death drive expresses essentially the limit of the historical function of the subject'). *A contrario*, certain developments of repetition away from the classic narrative order in avant-garde film entail a threat to that function; a threat translated in the common reactions of 'boredom,' the irritation of 'nothing happens' – a great deal happens, of course, but not the performance of 'the subject'.[44]

While working within the parameters of narrative, *eXistenZ* is also a meta-cinematic commentary on precisely the function of narrative in film's performance. The sense of boredom – Allegra's 'there's nothing happening here' – that threatens the coherence and self-identity of the subject is expressed in the dissatisfaction of those viewers who are disappointed by the film's ending. Unanswered, the question 'Are we still in the game?' leaves the film without end, implies yet another game, another repetition of the same.

Whether for purposes of economic gain or of religious fundamentalist hatred, the exploitation of organic animal life by communication, entertainment and biotechnologies ironically produces a drive towards the inorganic. This new economy of creative destruction, the film seems to say, contradicting Schumpeter's theory and its current proponents, does not lead to greater social wealth and a better human community but to an unbinding of the human community, a de-eroticized, entropic

tendency to mutual and self-destruction, a zero level or inert state of society in which opposing groups and contrary forces cancel each other out. Sex and death are the driving forces in the film's diegetic world of moralistic fanaticism as well as in the game of *eXistenZ*™, whose immersive interactive experience creates a kind of reality that is partially scripted and partially produced by the players' psychic activity, for 'everyone is to some extent a projector', as Cronenberg says of his film audiences: 'They come to the theatre fully loaded with their own films of life' (*G*, 154).

The affinity of this game with the non-immersive but still virtual reality of cinema is signalled at key moments throughout the film, as when Allegra describes the transitions between VEs with the terms of cinematic montage (see note 37) or tells a perplexed Ted that 'things get said to advance the plot whether you want to [say them] or not – kind of a schizophrenic feeling, isn't it?'; or when she boasts that her game system 'cost thirty-eight million dollars to develop, not including pre-release marketing costs' (a sum reportedly 20 per cent higher than the budget for Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*).[45] That *eXistenZ*™ is a meta-cinematic trope, and the game's designer a double of the filmmaker, is explicit in the double valence of the title (the film being no less of a patented product than the game) and in Allegra's authorial attachment to her creation. It is also legible in the minipod she finds in the game emporium of her teens, which is a version of the game-pod developed in *eXistenZ*™ just as the motifs of Cronenberg's early films return, amplified, in his more complex and higher budget films (*Stereo*'s telepaths in *Scanners*, *Videodrome*'s hallucinations in *Naked Lunch*, *Fast Company*'s car racing in *Crash* or the visualization-literalization of the handgun in *Videodrome* reimaged in the organic gun in *eXistenZ*). The disposition of the players' seated, motionless bodies, while all activity takes place as internal perceptions, suggests the modalities of film spectatorship.

'Everything that can be an object of our internal perception is *virtual*, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light-rays,' Freud wrote in the last chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*SE* 5: 611). Without denying material reality, the light-rays, the materiality of the human body, Freud reframes the mode of cognition and access to it: just as we only know the heavenly bodies as images through the apparatus of lenses in a telescope, we know the physical body through the psychic agency of the perception-consciousness system or, as he later renamed it, the conscious ego, which 'projects' the body as a virtual image of its own surface (*SE* 19: 27). In *eXistenZ*, the players' VR experiences and fantasized actions (Ted's compulsive killing of the Chinese waiter, Allegra's

urge to port into the diseased pod) are neither simply scripted in the game nor simply powered by the energy of the body's nervous system, as the film's dialogue suggests, for the film as a whole undercuts a naïve physiological reading of the body.

Cronenberg's own use of the phrase *nervous system* in speaking of his films denies such a reading. Asked whether his films are autobiographical, for example, he replied: 'I think it all comes from [my] life experience … . But it filters through my sensibility, my nervous system, my visual sense' (*G*, 146).[46] Here is how Freud put it: 'ideas, thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localized in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, *between* them'; and pursuing the analogy between the apparatus of lenses in a telescope, 'which cast the image', and the interrelated systems (Consciousness, the Preconscious, the Unconscious) that constitute the psychic apparatus, and hence the objects of perception, he compares 'the censorship between two systems to the refraction which takes place when a ray of light passes into a new medium' (*SE* 5: 611). Refraction, as the work of censorship (repression), would thus correspond to the distortion of unconscious material performed by the dreamwork in dream images as well as to the distortion typical of preconscious memories, or their filtering through one's 'nervous system' and 'visual sense'.

In *eXistenZ*, the (virtual) reality experienced by the players results from the unpredictable encounters of each player's subjectivity (conscious and unconscious affects, fantasies, memories, expectations, projections) with the game's script, *mise-en-scène* and overall design. Much like the cinematic apparatus, therefore, the interactive virtual reality game system that is the film's metaphor for cinema anticipates, preconstructs or guides the players' (spectators') affective responses, projections and identifications, but does not ultimately determine them. The virtual reality of cinema, Cronenberg's trope suggests, is similarly interactive in spectatorship; it is linked to the materiality of the body in the manner of an interface whose site is the spectator's psyche, an interface which makes of cinema effectively a bio-technology.

'*Psychical* reality,' Freud wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams* at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'is a particular form of existence not to be confused with *material* reality' (*SE* 5: 620). But despite his insistence on the specificity of psychic reality as a domain in the mind distinct from the material reality of observable phenomena or events, as well as from the psychological reality of the conscious ego (that is to say, the reality of one's thoughts and feelings), I have argued in chapter 3 that Freud could never quite give up the idea that the materiality of the body,

the very matter of the organism with its inertia, its conservative tendency, must have *some* overdetermining effect on the psyche. By the end of the twentieth century, with the rise of the internet, the global economy and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the belief in a material reality had waned to the point where it seemed to be lost. Exactly 100 years after Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* acknowledges that loss.[47]

In postmodernity, the film asserts, there is no going back to nature, no epistemological recourse to a reality, objective or metaphysical, that can shore up our existence. The real has receded behind representation, beyond our grasp. Reality is all but virtual, a play of mirrors and discursive frames. For everyone in the film except the dog, the only character to whom a bone is a bone is a bone, existence is *eXistenZ* is *eXistenZ™*, a patented commercial product; even the gooey mess of viscera, spores and spurting blood that splatters the players' and the spectators' mind-screen is a virtual-reality effect. Whereas Freud could say that 'Everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again',[48] the prospect the film opens is that of a becoming inorganic for external reasons; becoming, that is, hardwired, hooked into impersonal and virtual information networks, permanently grafted with bioelectronic devices and prostheses, which altogether supersede the organic body that defines the human in modernity.

In *Camera* (2000), a short film commissioned by the Toronto International Film Festival as part of a series of ten 'Preludes' by Canadian filmmakers intended to celebrate the Festival's twenty-fifth anniversary, Cronenberg has an ageing actor (Les Carlson) say to camera:

> I had a dream a long time ago, before I had achieved anything professionally. I dreamt I was in a cinema watching a movie with an audience. And suddenly I realized I was aging rapidly, growing horribly old as I sat there, and it was the movie that was doing it. I had caught some kind of disease from the movie and it was making me grow old, bringing me closer and closer to death. I woke up terrified.[49]

Coda

'Cronenberg is twentieth-century. *Late* twentieth-century,' remarked Martin Scorsese. 'Cronenberg is something that unfortunately we have no control over, in the sense that we have no control over the imminent destruction of ourselves' (cited in *R*, xxiv).

Perhaps the film that most lucidly represents this destruction, this becoming inorganic, is *Crash*. Constructed of flat, glossy surfaces, no depth of field, a metallic sound of electric guitars, staccato editing and lingering shots of the protagonists' polished bodies and empty looks, *Crash* is as cold as the steel braces and vinyl paraphernalia that remap the scarred and wounded bodies of its characters with newly erogenous zones, inscribing them with the sexual as death drive.

In this cold, distant, inhospitable figural space, the corresponding absence of any psychic depth in the characters, and the impossibility of spectatorial identification (which is at least residual in *eXistenZ*), the film links the compulsion to repeat to the eroticization of traffic accidents and the wounded or scarred bodies of people and cars. Crash after crash, sexual encounter after sexual encounter, the body is invaded by the sexual as a drive with no reachable aim or object choice, beyond gender and beyond desire.

The film, as Parveen Adams observes, in its flatness and exteriority, deprives the viewer 'of all the usual parameters of depth', thus preventing identification since 'what gives depth to the subject, what is the three-dimensional space of the subject, lies in the subject's relation to the Other'.[50] Each copulation advances the characters closer to ending their subjection to the Other's desire; 'the apparatus of the subject is progressively smashed to pieces' (120). Repetition in *Crash*, she argues, is not 'at the level of the Symbolic', or 'it would go on repeating itself as if it were repressed material within analysis, as speech which continues to insist, even while facing resistance … . Repetition exists at the level of the Real, [and that] puts the spectator of the film at the edge of the symbolic and its ordering of reality' (107).

As the fatal car accidents of 'immortal' movie stars (James Dean, Jane Mansfield) are staged and relived in a spectacular, unredemptive Passion play, the film itself stages the encounter with the Real beyond the pleasure principle. Repetition drives each character towards their own crash (perhaps the next one will be the crash of Albert Camus or Nathaniel West), towards the place beyond pleasure, beyond mortality, where one becomes immortal. The crash is the figure of the otherness, the 'other life form' that is always latent within living matter – death, the nonhuman.

Cronenberg scripted *Crash* from J. G. Ballard's 1973 novel at roughly the same time he was writing *eXistenZ*. He was returning to the time of his early independent films to find there, like Allegra, his future, perfect film.

5
The Odor of Memory: On Reading Djuna Barnes with Freud

> The Baronin had an undefinable disorder, a sort of 'odor of memory', like a person who has come from some place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall.
>
> Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*[1]

The psyche as text

Psychoanalysis, 'the talking cure', materializes from a practice of language, a practice of listening and reading especially attuned to the rhetorical dimension of language. While the focused attention to figurality aligns it with literature, psychoanalysis is also drawn to the side of scientific discourse by an impulse to theoretical construction. I mean this in the sense Freud gave to his and his patient's joint (re)construction of the primal scene in the Wolf Man's case history, or the sense in which he postulated the unconscious as a necessary explanation of psychic processes on the basis of their observable material effects. That is another way to say that the unconscious is less something that Freud discovered than a conceptual figure or, in his words, a construction in analysis.[2]

The two souls of psychoanalysis, the theoretical and the analytical, are suggested in Paul de Man's conception of literary theory as a practice of reading and a theory of misreading. In a chapter of *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* entitled 'Renewing the Practice of Reading, or Freud's Unprecedented Lesson', Shoshana Felman presents as Lacan's the view that Freud discovered the unconscious not as 'a new *meaning*' but 'a new *way of reading*'.[3] The reading, she elaborates, is 'of such a nature that it cannot be direct, intuitive; it is constitutively mediated by a hypothesis;

it necessitates a theory. But the reading is not theory: it is practice, a practical procedure, partially blind to what it does but which proves to be efficient'.[4] If this statement is reminiscent of de Man's conception of literary theory, it is not only because of the resonance in Felman's writing, and in the very title of her book, of the central tropes of de Man's theory of reading, blindness and insight; it is also because Felman herself inhabits the critical space in which literature and psychoanalysis implicate one another, that is to say, the space of de Man's literary theory.[5]

Elsewhere she observes that psychoanalysis and literature are 'enfolded within each other'. They are two bodies of language, two modes of knowledge that stand to each other in a relation of interiority: they are 'at the same time outside and inside each other'.[6] For, indeed, literature is psychoanalysis's condition of possibility, the language through which psychoanalysis names itself: literature is the inherent reference that motivates and animates the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis – Oedipus, Narcissus, Eros, Psyche, the Marquis de Sade, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch – and in this sense it can be said that literature is contained within psychoanalysis 'as its *otherness-to-itself*, its *unconscious*'.[7] The converse, however, that psychoanalysis is literature's condition of possibility, is evident only in the perspective of de Man's literary theory; for the notion that reading is necessarily misreading, as all acts of language are inherently compromised by the existence of unconscious structures, or what de Man calls the inhuman or non-human character of language, is not inherent in literature as such, but is historically specific and scarcely a century old; it is the contribution of linguistics and psychoanalysis to a theory of literature that is also a theory of language, and to the modernist understanding of what literature is about.

In such a perspective, what psychoanalysis provides is not merely a thematics for literary interpretation but more significantly a rhetoric, a set of tropes by which the literary text, the very quality of the literary or literariness (the Russian Formalists' *literaturnost*) can be specified as an effect of desire in language, yielding pleasure or *jouissance* for the reader/writer (Barthes); or can be read as the inscription of plurivocal, subtextual and intertextual meanings that structure the political unconscious of a text (Jameson); or again, can sustain what de Man has called 'the persistent threat of misreading'.[8] These notions, emerging in the second half of the twentieth century in the wake of structuralism and the French rereading of Freud, supersede and contrast with the psychological interpretation of characters or authors that dominated earlier

literary criticism. The significant difference lies in the understanding that psychoanalysis itself is a practice of language and a textual practice, and that its theoretical constructions, starting with Freud's metapsychology, rest on the figural dimension of language. It is in the perspective of this literary theory, which psychoanalysis has made possible, that we can in turn apprehend the psyche as a *text*, in Roland Barthes' sense, and subjectivity as a kind of writing of self where meaning and identity are continually produced and continually deferred.[9]

There is no doubt, in sum, that Freud's theory of the psyche has influenced our ways of reading and seeing, as well as the practices of textual criticism and theory. But I suggest that, in turn, the practice and the theory of psychoanalysis *as Freud conceived them* are themselves shaped by literary forms and by the work of textual analysis, both literary and visual. It is hardly necessary to remark on the constant references to novels, poems, play, and other literary works in Freud; this is self-evident. His analogies for the mental apparatus have also been noted: at first, he imagined the mind as a multilayered visual instrument like the photographic camera or the system of lenses in a telescope (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 536–7), and later as a psychographic apparatus, a sort of palimpsest or *Wunderblock* ('A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad" ', 1924).

More to the immediate point is Freud's early, 'topographical' conception of the mental apparatus as made up of psychic agencies or systems with distinct modes of operating. The system Unconscious has the primary process as its means of expression, characterized by images or mnemic traces and intensities of affect, and all but devoid of the causal, temporal or logical connections proper to the syntax of Western natural languages. This agency or activity, which operates independently of consciousness and manifests itself, for example, in a person's involuntary speech or unaccountable acts, is responsible for psychic formations such as symptoms, unconscious fantasies, phobias, parapraxes and dreams. Secondary processes are those belonging to the systems Conscious and Preconscious, whose modes of operation are those of grammar, syntax and logic. The primary and secondary processes at work in the psyche roughly correspond, respectively, to the rhetorical or figural dimension of language and to its grammatical and logical functions at work in the text.

The formal similarity between the expressive mechanisms of the dreamwork and the primary figures of poetic language has been noted since the work of Roman Jakobson in linguistics and poetics was taken up by Lacan in his redefinition of the unconscious as a language, or

better said, as a rhetoric.[10] What Freud called condensation, displacement, considerations of representability and secondary revision are now understood to be formally related to metaphor, metonymy, synechdoche and irony, that is to say, to the main rhetorical tropes that constitute the figural work of any practice of verbal and visual language, from common speech to advertising, and from scientific discourse to film.

What has not been sufficiently emphasized, however, is the effect of literary forms, with their narrative and figural dispositions, on Freud's imagination of a new entity, the psyche, that is at once a theoretical object, a conceptual figure and a form of reality – what he called *psychic reality*. It is my contention that the influence of literary form, as much as the scientific language of his training and certainly more than philosophical discourse, to which he was not partial, is responsible for Freud's conception of the psyche as text. Just two examples of literary form embedded in and informing Freud's own theorizing will suffice. First, describing his plans for *Die Traumdeutung* in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud wrote:

> The whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. First comes the dark wood of the authorities (who cannot see the trees), where there is no clear view and it is easy to go astray. Then there is a cavernous defile through which I lead my readers – my specimen dream with its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad jokes – and then, all at once, the high ground and the open prospect and the question: 'Which way do you want to go?'[11]

The model after which Freud imagines the form and content of his book is, of course, not just 'an imaginary walk' or indeed any imaginary walk: first comes the dark wood, *la selva oscura*; then the descent into the hell of self-analysis and the unconscious erupting in the dream of Irma's injection, with its embarrassing personal details, its indiscretions and bad jokes; and finally the attainment of an 'open prospect' in view of the starry sky. These stations or stages of a journey map Freud's not innocent walk onto the geometry of Dante's *Commedia*. In August 1899, before his theory of the psychic apparatus has assumed its final, printed and public existence, it is the narrative trope of the journey of self-discovery and the teleological, forward-moving, narrative form of Dante's poem that Freud takes as model.

Similarly, Freud's identification with the epic hero of Virgil's *Aeneid* is acknowledged in the epigraph to the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: '*Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*' ('If I cannot bend

the Higher Powers, I will move the Infernal Regions').[12] Apparently, the power of the epic literary form is such that it compels Freud's identification with Aeneas, the founder of Rome, in spite of his strong ambivalence towards Rome and his youthful identification with Hannibal, the Semitic African general, whose father had made him swear 'to take vengeance on the Romans', in contrast with the 'unheroic conduct' of Freud's own father when faced with a direct racist affront.[13] (Incidentally, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and again in the context of anti-Semitism, Freud refers to another 'well-known line of Virgil's in which the unhappy Dido commits to posterity her vengeance on Aeneas' [*SE* 6: 9]. Dido is, like Hannibal, a Carthaginian but her gendered status as an abandoned woman, albeit a queen, presumably prevented Freud's racial identification with her.)

When, in the 1930s, Djuna Barnes writes her own dark passage through *Nightwood* (the title's reference to Dante's *selva oscura* is made explicit in the ironic name of one of her characters, Dr. Matthew Dante O'Connor, who is our guide through *Nightwood's* modernist hell as Virgil was Dante's), the form and content of her book, the imaging and the imagination of the journey, have been irrevocably altered. It is not only that so-called historical events – the First World War, Fascism, National Socialism – have changed the objective world, as dangerously for Barnes as for Freud, making 'the high ground' invisible and barely conceivable and instigating their respective ruminations on the death drive. It is also that a discursive event – that epic poem of modernity that is *The Interpretation of Dreams* – has reinscribed the trope of the journey within an altogether different dark wood, replacing the theological/teleological narrative form with one in which the dark wood will never be left behind for the high ground: the journey is henceforth interminable, reversible, discontinuous and intertextual.[14]

The second example, also from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is of course Oedipus. Again, what Freud takes from Sophocles is not just the content of the drama, the originary trauma of sexuality, a trauma that both marks and precedes the birth of the hero, the birth of each subject. What Freud takes is also the particular movement of the drama, both proleptic and analeptic (restorative), from present to past to future, as it is inscribed in the form of the classical tragedy. It is that mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of sexual and traumatic meaning to earlier events – which Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit*, translated as deferred action, retroaction, *après-coup* or afterwardness – that characterizes the structure of fantasy and with it Freud's new, modernist understanding of sexuality.[15] No longer the direct result of a single, biological

causality or reproductive instinct, sexuality in Freud is a function of fantasies conscious and unconscious, which overdetermine the vicissitudes of the drive and make of sexuality a process, a structuring of the subject, an activity of *production*.

The drive, Freud's most original concept, is a liminal figure, like the Sphinx: 'The concept of instinct [*Trieb*]', he writes, lies 'on the frontier between the mental and the physical' (*SE* 7: 168). Like the Sphinx, straddling the divide between animal and human, and partaking of both, the drive inhabits a borderland between the somatic and the mental capacity for representation. That borderland is the psyche, a site where the materiality of the body is represented – written and rewritten – in figures and tropes, the phantasms of language; an immaterial site, and yet one that presides over the repeated materializations of the symptom, the bodying forth of mnemic traces in hallucinations, the ('regressive') perceptions of visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory sensations in dreams.

The psyche, then, as Barthes says of the text, 'is experienced only in an activity of production'; it too, Freud has shown, 'only exists in the movement of a discourse'.[16] That discourse is psychoanalysis. A psychoanalysis is a reading of that text, the psyche, with its polysemy or 'stereographic plurality' in Barthes' words, its 'overdetermination' in Freud's;[17] and the polysemy of the text makes the experience of reading 'not a coexistence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing' (Barthes, p. 159). In other words, reading is a passage through a dark wood – to return once more to that useful trope – a wood populated with the ghosts and voices of other texts. Both psychoanalysis and textual analysis are intertextual, intersubjective, a passage, an overcrossing. And both are interminable since every text, like every dream one analyses, has its navel, the point at which it makes 'contact with the unknown' (*SE* 4: 111).[18] There is no closure to the text, no end to reading. Analysis is interminable.

It is because the psyche is a text that Freud can say 'the asymptotic termination of the treatment is substantially a matter of indifference to me'.[19] One would think that such a statement appears in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (1937), reflecting the late Freud's pessimistic view of the therapeutic effectivity of psychoanalysis, his loss of confidence in the complete success or even the possibility of a cure. But the statement actually appears in a letter to Fliess written in 1900, the year of publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when Freud was just embarking enthusiastically on his project and had not yet surmised the existence of a death drive or its role in undermining the ego and sustaining its resistance to therapeutic alteration, the resistance to the cure.

But why Freud's scepticism? Later he would explain that 'the interminable nature of the treatment … is dependent on the transference' and, in a successful transference, it depends on the patient's desire to be well and, at the same time, to continue to be ill: whence the indefinite deferral of the cure or what he called 'the *asymptotic* termination of the treatment' (*SE* 23: 215). But if the treatment is always meant to terminate, and yet does not, except by the analyst's or the patient's contingent decision; or if the cure is ever about to be attained, and yet never is, is this not because the transference also exists within the psyche and its 'activity of production', a retroactive, deferred, interminable production of self and meaning? Is it not because transference and countertransference only exist dialogically, 'in the movement of a discourse'?

Transference, in the psychoanalytic sense, is an epistemic practice not older than a century: it is a 'historical creation', as Jean Laplanche observes. But other kinds of transference existed before and still exist independently of psychoanalysis, for 'the fundamental dimension of transference is the relation to the enigma of the other'.

> Among the kinds of transference which exist 'before' analysis (before an individual analysis, and before the historical creation of analysis), we have accorded a privileged place to the multiple relations to the cultural, taken in the widest sense. Now, post-analytic transference will not be absolutely the same as pre-analytic transference, nor totally different from it. That is once again to say that the site of the cultural, as the site of an enigmatic interpellation, with many voices and ears, remains privileged in that it concerns the transference of transference.[20]

With Laplanche's reformulation of the other (*der Andere* and *das Andere*) as a site of enigmatic messages, subjectivity may be understood as a process of self-translation, detranslation and retranslation. This is to say that subjectivity is itself 'an activity of production', a kind of text we weave and unweave in retranslating ourselves; a text ever in progress, with its plurality, its overdeterminations, its ongoing confrontation with the other.

My reading of *Nightwood* is a subjective passage through a particularly enigmatic text at a time when world events are exerting a renewed pressure, and indeed a traumatic impact, on subjectivity no less than on the site of culture. I mean this in the sense Freud gave to trauma as a breach of the boundary of the body, the protective shield of the organism: world events since 9/11 have repeatedly breached and shown the

vulnerability of the boundaries, both geopolitical and economic, that the Western world has built around itself. A massive geopolitical and economic trauma was also experienced in Europe when Barnes was writing *Nightwood* and Freud was facing the imminent danger of Nazi occupation. The period of reference for the novel is the 1920s; the year 1920 saw the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with Freud's first speculations on the death drive. I hear in these texts resonances of the present, something of a coincidence with the here and now. This reading of *Nightwood* follows the textual traces of that – perhaps – coincidence.

Djuna Barnes and *Nightwood*

> I'm damned, and carefully public!
> Barnes, *Nightwood*, 163

Admired by poets such as T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas, *Nightwood* was declared a masterpiece when first published in London in 1936.[21] Republished the following year in the US, it was heavily criticized as decadent and pretentious, though later canonized as a classic of Western modernism. Even so, it remained largely unread until the mid-1980s, when feminist literary scholars took it up in the wake of their renewed attention to modernist women. It was the painstaking and loving research, both literary and biographical/archival, of critics such as Mary Lynn Broe, Shari Benstock, Susan Lanser, Louise De Salvo, Jane Marcus and Carolyn Allen, among others, that, on the one hand, disclosed the conditions of a writing inflected by a personal history of familial abuse and, on the other, identified in Barnes' work the terms of a literary legacy to contemporary women writers.

The feminist critics revealed the details of a family history rich in artistic endeavours and socially progressive interests, but also steeped in patriarchal prevarication and bisexual incest.[22] Once exposed, the details of her early personal history are recognizable in almost all of Barnes' major works, from *Ryder* (1928), the story of her family modelled on the picaresque novel and the only one of her works to enjoy some popularity, to the short stories collected in *Spillway* (1962), to her last finished work *The Antiphon* (1958), a tragedy in verse in which Miranda, the daughter, reproaches her mother for standing by when her father and brothers raped her; and of course *Nightwood* (1936). The continuum of intimacy and abuse, eroticism, aggression and passivity that must have shaped the writer's sense of self and her relations to others is

inscribed in a writing which is both stark and intensely allusive, at once lucid and obfuscating, as if only style (I am paraphrasing Barnes) could dress life in the garments of the unknowable.[23]

In New York Djuna studied painting, music, poetry and theatre, earning her living as a theatre reviewer and writing stories for small literary magazines like Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review*, but primarily working as a journalist for news and fashion magazines. One of these, the now defunct *McCall's*, sent her to Paris in 1920 to interview personalities in the news from James Joyce to Coco Chanel. In Paris she met practically all the other American expatriates and the foremost figures of literary and artistic modernism – Ernest Hemingway and Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, Samuel Beckett and Pablo Picasso, to name but a few; and among them, the 'mythic lesbians' of the Left Bank: Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, Romaine Brooks, Vita Sackville-West, Violet Trefusis, Renée Vivien, Colette, H. D., Mina Loy, Janet Flanner, Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, and so on. Several of them are satirized in the vignettes of the anonymous *Ladies Almanack*, privately published in 1928 and sold in the neighbourhood streets by the 'ladies' themselves.

Ladies Almanack was written by Barnes under the pseudonym of 'A Lady of Fashion', allegedly to entertain her lover, the artist Thelma Wood, during an illness. It was privately printed by the same press that had published Joyce's *Ulysses* (Darantière of Dijon). Barnes allowed it to be reprinted under her own name only in 1972. Organized in chapters from January to December and illustrated with drawings, poems and songs – all by Barnes – it is a modern, tongue-in-cheek hagiography recounting the life, death, and miracles of Lady Evangeline Musset, patron saint, protector and beacon of lesbian women – or women with 'Sapphic tendencies', as the phrase went at the time. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Lady Evangeline Musset, preacher of the Sapphic gospel (Evangeline) in the guise of romantic poet (Musset, for Alfred de Musset, the unhappy lover of George Sand) was Natalie Barney, the American heiress whose literary salon was the meeting place of upscale lesbians in Paris at that time. But other characters of the *Almanack* are equally recognizable, such as Una Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall, summarily described in this fashion: 'One sported a Monocle and believed in Spirits', the other 'sported a Stetson, and believed in Marriage'.[24] Overall, however, the *Almanack* is not an easy read. Besides the in-group references that today require the historian's help to be decoded, Barnes' language is highly figural and often obscure, thick with archaic English nouns and verbs, and at times provocatively ungrammatical – although

the references to lesbian sexual practices are pointed, precise and unmistakable. The tone is clearly satirical, but at the same time self-inclusive and self-ironic. It bears keeping in mind that Natalie Barney, who called herself 'the Amazon', was the only out-lesbian in the entire Left Bank community.[25] Those who today reproach Barnes for the pseudonym might recall that in the same year (1928) Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was banned in London after an infamous trial, while Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, in which lesbian sexuality is shrouded in brilliant equivocation, was eminently successful.

In 1930–31, after her passionate relationship with Thelma Wood broke up, Barnes left Paris for England under the patronage of Peggy Guggenheim, another American expatriate, heiress and well-known patron of modern art, who supported poor but promising young writers in her Devonshire villa. There Barnes wrote *Nightwood*, which, after umpteen rejections and revisions, was finally published in London, sponsored by T. S. Eliot, then an editor for Faber and Faber. In 1940, at the age of 52, she returned to New York and settled in the small Patchin Place apartment in Greenwich Village where she lived, practically forgotten and with the financial help of a few friends (among them e.e. cummings, Samuel Beckett), until her death in 1982.

There is a certain irony in the fact that, well after her death, Barnes was rediscovered by women readers, myself included, under the wave of feminism and the growing visibility of militant lesbianism. Then the legend was born of Djuna in the Paris years: a woman beautiful, elegant, as brilliant in conversation as she was quick-witted and sharp-tongued; a writer praised by the great men of modernism as the only woman who could measure up to Joyce (who was also one of her few friends); a highlighted figure of the literary/artistic avant-gardes, who moved with ease among the capitals of Europe – Paris, London, Berlin, Budapest, Vienna – *and then* spent the second half of her life as a recluse in a one-room apartment, in poverty and self-imposed isolation; a woman who had written the first modern work both explicit and knowledgeable about lesbian sex, *The Ladies Almanack*, and yet, when asked, replied, 'I'm not a lesbian. I only loved Thelma'.[26] But even this famous pronouncement, haughtily tossed in the face of those who wanted to pin her to the banner of lesbian feminism in the 1980s, did nothing but add to her legend. At any rate, already in the 1920s, Barnes disliked lesbian militancy only slightly less than lesbian-chic: in *Ladies Almanack* she had her protagonist, Dame Evangeline, say: 'in my day I was a Pioneer and a Menace, it [being a lesbian] was not then as it is now, chic and pointless to a degree, but as daring as a Crusade' (34).

If many critics barred her from the canon of lesbian literature, simply attributing her works to the aesthetic of an abstruse and male-directed modernism, others, beginning with Carolyn Allen, identified in Barnes the origin of a second literary genealogy, that of an experimental lesbian novel distinct from the more popular realist line that from Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* reaches to the fiction of Ann Bannon, Jane Rule, Kate Millett, Rita Mae Brown, Barbara Wilson, Katherine Forrest, Ann Allen Shockley, Audre Lorde and Jewelle Gomez, among others. In her book *Following Djuna*, Carolyn Allen traces back to *Spillway* and *Nightwood* in particular the practice of an experimental and transgeneric writing, whether modernist or postmodernist, from the 1970s onward, which characterizes the work of Bertha Harris, Jeannette Winterson, Rebecca Brown, Mary Fallon and we could add Monique Wittig, Joanna Russ, Emma Pérez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and more.[27]

Although these questions are in the background of my reading, my present interest in *Nightwood* has not to do with whether it is or is not a lesbian novel or with its place in literary history as such, but rather with its inscription of sexuality as trauma and enigma or, in Barnes' words, an 'odour of memory' (118), 'the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting' (44), 'the shudder of a past that is still vibrating' (119). Countless other such tropes – metaphors, catachreses, daring conceits – make up the figural weave of *Nightwood*, whether attributed to a character or not. To both the narrator and the characters, however they might rationalize it, sexuality remains unfathomable, and satisfaction or knowledge unattainable. It is as if its enigma could only be expressed in a densely metaphoric, oracular language, in elaborate conceits harking back to John Donne and the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets ('the foetus of symmetry nourishes itself on cross purposes' [97]), in the hybrid visual images of animal and human ('an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear' [37]), or in the endless stream of allusions, parables and prophecies with which the doctor attempts to fill the void in his life, hiding the chasm between language and the real.

Nightwood is a difficult book, and I have already suggested one reason why I think it is necessarily so. It is not that a plot is missing, for there is a narrative – as Matthew says to Nora, who is eagerly waiting to hear with whom her lover is betraying her: there is a narrative, 'but you will be put to it to find it' (97). Indeed, the story is told with two contrary narrative strategies: one stretches out the time of narration by excruciatingly protracted monologues and punctiliously detailed descriptions of characters and locations, like a film shot in long takes, where we can see

the minutest details but what 'happens' is next to nothing. To the dilation of the time of narration Barnes juxtaposes a second narrative strategy, a contraction of the time of narrated events and their elliptical arrangement, such that the passage of months, at times years, can take up no more than three lines of text, while the events of one night may be played out over two or more chapters, as they are first told and then retold through a character, as in a flashback.[28]

The story concerns a group of eccentric expatriates, mostly Americans, who meet in Paris in the 1920s. They are marginal people, social misfits, disasters waiting to happen, of the sort that History omits from the official record and civil society confines to ghettoes, psychiatric wards or the urban nightworld. They are among those Fascism destined to extinction – the non-Aryan, the mentally or physically weak, transvestites and homosexuals. They remind us that their story, though set in the 1920s, was written in the 1930s under the impending threat of the Nazi racial laws. The night, or the night wood, like Dante's *selva oscura*, is the place literal and figural in which these derelicts meet; but their hell is inside them, as if the trauma of history reverberated in their souls.

It is appropriately at the circus, with its animals and freaks, that *Nightwood*'s characters are introduced, one at a time in the first four chapters, whose titles are their respective narrative figures, and their lives and stories immediately intertwine. I will also introduce them briefly here in order of appearance, for in so doing I will 'find the narrative', appease the reader's demand for story, and thus be able to dispense with it and go on to follow the figural movement of the text.

Bow Down. The first chapter introduces Baron Felix Volkbein, a Viennese half-Jew who passes for Christian, with a fake title and pedigree, and an obsession for aristocracy and the imperial courts of old Europe. But he will never be able 'to span the gap' that separates him from the objects of his passion, for Felix is 'heavy with impermissible blood' (3), and hence his (hi)story is already figured in the chapter's title 'Bow Down'. This is why he loves the circus and the theatre:

> They linked his emotions to the higher and unattainable pageantry of kings and queens. The more amiable actresses of Prague, Vienna, Hungary, Germany, France and Italy, the acrobats and sword-swallowers, had at one time or another allowed him their dressing rooms – sham salons in which he aped his heart. Here he had neither to be capable nor alien. He became for a little while a part of their splendid and reeking falsification.
>
> (11)

There, among the estranged, eccentric spectators and actors of a circus in Berlin in 1920, the *faux* Baron meets the self-styled Dr Matthew Dante O'Connor, a San Francisco-born Irish-American, past middle age, poor, unattractive, homosexual, or quite possibly transsexual, 'whose interest in gynaecology had driven him half around the world' (14). That the 'doctor' is a queen is immediately signalled by a blunt stereotype: a tireless and unstoppable talker, the doctor, the novel says, 'got his audience by the simple device of pronouncing at the top of his voice (at such moments as irritable and possessive as a maddened woman's) some of the more boggish and biting of the shorter early Saxon verbs' (15). His public conversations, like the most private and intimate, are interminable monologues chockfull of bawdy remarks and dirty jokes but also studded with learned references and quotations, lewd but self-ironic anecdotes, philosophical lectures on the world that suddenly morph into gossip and a bragging drenched in desperation.

La Somnambule. Robin Vote is the young woman the doctor is called to assist when she faints in the street. The chapter title defines her as a sleepwalker; in fact, she spends the nights in bars getting drunk and roaming the streets. The reader is told nothing of her background, except that she is an American. Robin hardly ever speaks in the novel and is most often presented from the point of view of others. What we know of her is through the effect she has on them: she is the empty centre around which their lives and passions spin. For example, the Baron marries her so she can give him sons who will honour the past he worships. But shortly after the birth of a child, a small and sickly boy, Robin walks out on husband and son and disappears. The novel laconically states: 'When she was seen again in the quarter, it was with Nora Flood' (49). *Nightwood*'s main storyline develops around Nora's love for Robin and their disastrous relationship, from its halcyon years through its breakup, when Robin leaves Nora for an older and very rich American woman, Jenny, up to Robin's return to Nora in the last chapter, and the shocking ending of the book.

Night Watch. Nora and Robin, we learn in the next chapter, had met in New York in 1923, at a circus show. Nora is in her late twenties, wealthy and politically progressive, one might say today. Barnes says, 'By temperament Nora was an early Christian; she believed the word.' Her house, somewhere in the western United States, describes her as sharply as her face, prefiguring her fate in the novel. It 'was the "paupers" salon for poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love; for Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine' (50); she 'had the face of all people who love the people – a face

that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed' (51).

Returning to Paris together, Nora buys an apartment, chosen by Robin, in St. Germain (where, from around 1900 until the outbreak of the Second World War, lived not only Djuna Barnes and Thelma Wood, and the ladies of the *Almanack*, but practically all the major figures of cosmopolitan modernism, near their publishing houses). 'In the years that they lived together', the novel states (without specifying how many), Robin begins going out alone, more and more often, coming home later and later, and each time drunker. The tension grows and the relationship degenerates until, one night, Robin comes home later than ever and Nora, waiting up for her, sees her in the garden in the arms of another woman. This chapter, titled 'Night Watch', is written mostly from Nora's point of view, but the events leading to its climactic ending, that is, Robin's encounter with Jenny, which leads to her betrayal of Nora and the break up of their relationship, are told again and again in the next two chapters.

The Squatter. The fourth is Jenny's chapter. She is the only character the novel has no compassion for and actually despises (as Barnes must have done): Jenny Petherbridge, the ugly American, is a four-times widow pushing fifty, rich, unattractive and expensively dressed in very bad taste; she is an invasive meddler, greedy for anything that other people may have. The chapter recounts how she meets Robin at the opera and immediately begins a heavy courtship; it ends with Robin's return home and Jenny following her into the garden under Nora's window. In other words, the narrative circles back to the same point in the diegesis where the previous chapter ends, marking the moment of Nora's trauma as an impasse for the narrative as well, as if the narrative itself could not get over it. Obsessively, these events are retold once again in the next chapter, this time from the point of view of the doctor, who could not avoid introducing Jenny to Robin at the opera and, in his campy and typically ironic fashion, cannot refrain from telling Nora – and the reader – that the opera was *Rigoletto*.

'Watchman, what of the night?'

> Creative writers … know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream.
>
> Freud, 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*', *SE* 9: 8

The fifth and seventh chapters, the longest in the book, each consist of a conversation between Matthew and Nora, although they are

monologues than dialogues. It is tempting to read them as the theoretical or philosophical core of the book, for they are thematically focused on what Barnes calls 'the night', a figure for sexuality as a traumatic, unmanageable excess of affect leading to abject degradation. And indeed I read them as a sustained meditation on what Freud called drives (*Triebe*). But in fact the thematic of the night dominates the book as a whole, including, and perhaps especially, the last chapter, which is four pages long with not one line of dialogue, and written in a choppy and factual style that is markedly distinct not only from the rambling rhythm and associative detours of Matthew's monologues, but also from the more fluent descriptive style of the Felix chapters or of Nora's interior monologues.

Nevertheless, I will stay for a while with Chapter 5, whose title, 'Watchman, What of the Night?', links the thematics of the night to the events of the third chapter, Nora's 'night watch' for her lover and its traumatic conclusion. At three in the morning, in despair, Nora goes to the doctor's apartment and finds him in bed, wearing a woman's flannel nightgown and a wig with long golden curls. He is heavily made up with rouge and mascara.

> It flashed into Nora's head: 'God, children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!' But this thought, which was only the sensation of a thought, was of but a second's duration as she opened the door; in the next, the doctor had snatched the wig from his head, and sinking down in the bed drew the sheets up over his breast. Nora said, as quickly as she could recover herself: 'Doctor, I have come to ask you to tell me everything you know about the night. As she spoke, she wondered why she was so dismayed to have come upon the doctor at the hour when he had evacuated custom and gone back into his dress. The doctor said, 'You see that you can ask me anything', thus laying aside both their embarrassments.
>
> (79–80)

Nora recovers quickly from her dismay and soon finds an explanation:

> She said to herself: 'Is not the gown the natural raiment of extremity? What nation, what religion, what ghost, what dream, has not worn it – infants, angels, priests, the dead; why should not the doctor, in the grave dilemma of his alchemy, wear his dress? She thought: 'He dresses to lie beside himself, who is so constructed that love, for him, can be only something special.'
>
> (80)

But why is Nora dismayed at the sight of a male transvestite, when cross-dressing is hardly new to her: her own lover often dresses 'in boy's clothes' (149), and only a few hours earlier, while waiting for Robin, she dreamt of her grandmother 'who, for some unknown reason, was dressed as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked mustache, ridiculous and plump in tight trousers and a red waistcoat, her arms spread saying with a leer of love, 'My little sweetheart!' (63). Why, then, is Nora dismayed at seeing the doctor 'in his dress'? The grandmother dream provides one clue, Barnes' writing a second.

In Mary Lynn Broe's account, the letters that Zadel Barnes, Djuna's grandmother, wrote to Djuna when she was 18 'inscribed a sexual code language complete with drawings' that were 'unmistakably sexual'; they bespoke an erotic relation between grandmother and granddaughter who, according to the letter Broe cites, shared a bed in the family home.[29] It is not inconceivable that Nora's dream of the crossdressing, leering grandmother could come from Barnes' own incestuous experience. If that were the case – and I think it is – the author's experience would appear in the text through a double distortion: first, it is expressed as a dream – and not, say, as a memory of something that really happened; and second, it is displaced onto a fictional character. For Nora is not Barnes, as feminist critics have tended to read her, though Robin may well be Thelma, or rather, Barnes' fantasy of Thelma.

One might correctly object that an author's personal experience and the reader's knowledge or hearsay of it are not grounds for literary theorizing. The point I want to make is that, regardless of any imputable authorial experience, the text of *Nightwood* operates in much the same way as the psyche does; and while this leads me to suppose that Barnes was aware of Freud's work (I will adduce further evidence to that effect), my point does not depend on it. As Freud himself noted à propos of Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*, a writer need not know of psychoanalysis to construct 'artificial dreams' which are perfectly constructed and 'could be interpreted just as though they had not been invented but had been dreamt by real people'.[30] The point, again, is to remark on the homology between psyche and text with regard to their formal modes of operation: primary and secondary processes in the psyche, rhetoric and grammar (or narrative) in the text.

Nora's dream of her grandmother's house (62–3) contains all the types of distortion Freud analyses in the dreamwork (*Traumarbeit*) – condensation, displacement, considerations of representability, secondary elaboration. It is, the novel states, a recurrent dream of Nora's, but this time it 'had all its parts', 'it was now completed with the entry of Robin'

in the house. Some examples of condensation and displacement in the dream: the grandmother's room is 'the absolute opposite of any known room her grandmother had ever moved or lived in', but is 'nevertheless saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother'; the grandmother herself, who 'was not entirely her recalled grandmother', first appears as an ageing figure 'in a long gown of soft folds and chin laces', and then again as a figure of Nora's childhood, 'dressed as a man, wearing a billy-cock and a corked moustache'; the dream ends with the grandmother 'drawn upon as a prehistoric ruin', morphing into Robin, a 'Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain'. In keeping with the dreamwork's considerations of representability, the dream consists almost entirely of visual images with optical effects ('as if Robin and she [Nora; they are located respectively on the ground floor and the top floor of the house] were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end') and a single spoken sentence ('Nora heard her own voice saying [to Robin]: "Come up, this is Grandmother's room", yet knowing it was impossible because the room was taboo'). Lastly, secondary elaboration, the intervention of the dreamer's conscious thought within the dream in order to ensure the continuation of sleep, is marked in Nora's saying to herself, 'The dream will not be dreamed again.'[31]

In short, the dream exhibits all the operations of the dreamwork, the entire catalogue of rhetorical moves a dream can make in order to express, distorted, a forbidden wish bypassing psychic censorship or, as Freud puts it, evading 'the *watchman* of our mental health' (the dream shortly precedes the events narrated in the chapter titled '*Watchman*, What of the Night?').[32] The operations of the dreamwork – Freud actually calls them 'methods of working on the part of the psychical apparatus' (*SE* 5: 567) – are precisely worked into Barnes' writing, woven into a text which also needs to evade the literary censor. For Barnes was certainly mindful of the infamous obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* a few years earlier: if female homosexuality was censurable, incestuous homosexuality would be unprintable. And, had she not been so mindful, her editor T. S. Eliot certainly was.[33]

My supposition that Barnes knew Freud's work, or that Freud was right in thinking of the psyche as a textual process, is based on the following analysis of the long passage cited above. When Nora first sees the doctor in bed, the thought that flashes into her head is, Barnes qualifies, 'only the sensation of a thought' (80). What exactly is the *sensation* of a thought? Psychic processes, Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, can be distinguished into primary and secondary, the former belonging to the unconscious and the latter to the preconscious or consciousness.

He then makes the surprising, counterintuitive remark that 'Thought is … nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish' (*SE* 5: 567). All thinking, he elaborates, proceeds from the memory of what once was, in our infancy, a perceptual, sensory experience of satisfaction and subsequently, in reaching consciousness, becomes 'a *thought*-identity' with that experience, or properly a *memory* of it (*SE* 5: 641).[34] While memory, which belongs to the conscious ego, recalls experience *in thought*, as a thought-identity, a *perceptual* identity with past sensory experience is attained only in hallucinations or in dreams; for in dreaming, the primary process and unconscious wishes can operate more freely than in waking life because the agency of censorship, repression or moral conscience, is temporarily diminished; because, in other words, the watchman is asleep.

Since Nora is not dreaming but awake when she sees the doctor in bed, the phrase 'the *sensation* of a thought' signals an irruption of the primary process into her conscious thinking, owing perhaps to her distressed state of mind and to the affect released by the recent dream. The erotic wish related to her grandmother in the dream now resurfaces as the *sensation* of a thought. It is this: 'God, children know something they can't tell; they *like* Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!' In other words, children like incest and they know it; but they also know the prohibition and that they cannot tell. Nora, however, is no longer a child and her moral censor requires that she denies that wish. So she gives herself an explanation (this is the work of the secondary process or conscious ego) that reassures her that her dismay had no ground at all. The doctor, she rationalizes, is a special case: he 'is so constructed that love, *for him*, can be only something special'.

This is one instance in which we measure the distance between Barnes and Nora, for Barnes knows what Nora does not: Barnes knows Nora's wish and why she must deny it. The writing expresses the wish in a distorted form just as the dreamwork does. Whether the phrase 'the sensation of a thought' is a direct allusion, on the writer's part, to Freud's distinction between primary process (perceptual identity) and secondary process (thought identity) or whether it is not, the passage figurally conveys the priority of sensory perception over mental act. 'It *flashed* into Nora's head … . But this thought, which was only the *sensation* of a thought, was of but a second's duration' suggests a psychic state in which consciousness is overlaid and briefly overridden by a hallucinatory wish.

If Nora keeps at bay the unacceptable wish by attributing it to the doctor (he is 'special'), Barnes' writing reveals its repressed, incestuous

nature. Thus, while in Nora may be represented something of what Barnes herself might have felt or experienced, the text of *Nightwood* is not the mimetic or confessional reproduction of an experience, but rather, in Laplanche's terms, the translation or possibly the retranslation of the enigmatic trace, the 'hieroglyphics', of that experience. Another way to say this is that the distance between Barnes and Nora is the distance of the ironic writer from her empirical self. 'The ironic, twofold self that the writer or philosopher constitutes by his language seems able to come into being only at the expense of his empirical self, falling (or rising) from a stage of mystified adjustment into the knowledge of his mystification', writes de Man à propos of Baudelaire. 'The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity.'[35]

The title of the chapter plays on both the diegetic and the figural registers. Its question, 'Watchman, *what* of the night?' is Nora's question to the doctor ('tell me everything you know about the night'). But it is also rhetorical, Barnes' challenge to the moral, literary and psychic censors: Watchman, what of *the night*? Can you really control, repress or regulate the night, unconscious fantasy, unbound sexual energy, the pleasure principle or its beyond? The answer to the latter question, as provided by the doctor and by the entire novel, is a resounding no.

In the attempt to alleviate Nora's despair at losing Robin, Matthew tells her of his own desperation: 'as for me, so God has made me, my house is the pissing port. Am I to blame if I've been summoned before and this my last and oddest call? In the old days I was possibly a girl in Marseilles thumping the dock with a sailor, and perhaps it's that memory that haunts me' (90–1). Memory and fantasy are but figures of wishing:

> The wise men say that *the remembrance of things past* is all that we have for a future, and am I to blame if I've turned up this time as I shouldn't have been, when it was a high soprano I wanted, and deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king's kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner?
>
> (91; emphasis added)[36]

The night in question, then, is not only the particular one Nora wants to know about, the night still in progress, in which the doctor has been caught in his most secret intimacy and Nora waited for Robin hours on end only to see her in the garden with Jenny (and the doctor will tell

Nora how they met); it is also the night in general. Indeed, Barnes' first title for the book was 'Anatomy of the Night',[37] and it was Eliot who persuaded her to go with *Nightwood*. The doctor, who is well acquainted with the night in all its acceptations – literal, metaphoric, metaphysical – explains that the night is a condition or modality of existence distinct from daytime living. The latter is civilized, orderly, conscious, purposefully directed towards individual or collective goals and governed, we might say, by the reality principle: 'Every day [the doctor says] is thought upon and calculated, but the night is not premeditated' (80). The night is another spacetime altogether, a psychic space haunted by the muted phantasms of a past both individual and collective. These are kept at bay, during the day, by what the doctor calls 'our faulty racial memory' (118), but at night they return: age-old fears and unspeakable wishes populate our dreams; unconscious impulses and fantasies submerged during the day resurface by night and have free play under or beyond the rule of the pleasure principle.[38]

To Nora's naïve comment, 'I used to think … that people just went to sleep [but] now I see that the night does something to a person's identity, even when asleep' (81), the doctor eventually responds by pointing out her American Puritanism: 'You are of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people, and this leaves no road for you. The brawl of the Beast leaves a path for the Beast. You wash your brawl with every thought, with every gesture, with every conceivable emollient and *savon*' (84). I suggest that the brawl of the Beast is Matthew's Christian, scriptural metaphor for what the atheist Freud called drive (*Trieb*); just as Dr. O'Connor's 'boggish' excremental and sexual slang corresponds to Dr. Freud's, shall we say, cloacal Latin terms, the most notorious being the coitus *a tergo* or *more ferarum* (literally, in the manner of beasts) of the Wolf Man case history, the *paedicatio* or intercourse *per anum* of the *Three Essays*, and the *inter urinas et faeces* of 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' (1912).[39]

For all their differences of race, gender and sexual habits, the two doctors have in common a materialist conception of sexuality as carnal, of the flesh, yet shaped by fantasies at once individual and collective, personal and cultural, that are products of history – not the Darwinian history of the species, to be sure, but the history of civilization. Freud calls them primal fantasies; O'Connor sees them as what 'our faulty racial memory' has repressed. 'Have you thought of the night, now, in other times, in foreign countries – in Paris?' he asks Nora, and immediately proceeds to give a disgusting but verisimilar description of life in premodern Paris. Then, he admonishes her, 'You should, for the night

has been going on for a long time' (81–2). Later, talking incessantly, 'Take history at night', he goes on, 'Was it at night that Sodom became Gomorrah? It was at night, I swear!' And again: 'All through the night Rome went burning. Put that in the noontide and it loses some of its age-old significance, does it not? Why? Because *it has existed to the eye of the mind all these years* against a black sky' (86; emphasis added).

The eye of the mind, in which cultural images and imaginary scenes are retained through the centuries of Western civilization so-called (we may well wonder) is like Freud's *Wunderblock*, the mind as a magic writing-pad in which traces of former perceptions are recorded and retained forever after they have been erased from the sensorial surface of consciousness. Both Matthew's mind's eye and Freud's *Wunderblock* are metaphors for the psyche. Those images or scenes that exist in the mind's eye or in some part of the psychic apparatus are what Freud calls primal fantasies (*Urphantasien*): above all, the fantasy of origin, the beast-like parental coitus from which the Wolf Man came into the world; and then seduction, which accounts for the upsurge of sexual feelings; castration, to explain sexual difference and one's subjection to the father; and the nuclear fantasy *par excellence*, the Oedipus.[40]

It bears repeating that primal fantasies are *psychic*, not biological, structures that pertain specifically to human sexuality; Freud sharply distinguishes the human sexual *drive* (*Trieb*) from the *instinct* (*Instinkt*) of self-preservation that humans share with other animals. The crucial distinction between humans and animals in this respect is human prematurity, which renders each human born unable to survive without the care of other, usually adult, humans. The physical tending of infants and children, and all the other forms of corporeal, intellectual and social education by word and by deed are the conduits through which the fantasies of each generation are transmitted and imprinted in the following. This is the sense in which, as Laplanche puts it, 'the complete Oedipal structure is *present from the beginning*, both "in itself" (in the objectivity of the familial configuration) but above all "in the other", outside the child'.[41] Here is Dr. O'Connor again:

> The dead have committed some portion of the evil of the night; sleep and love, the other … . The sleeper is the proprietor of an unknown land. He goes about another business in the dark – and we, his partners … cannot afford an inch of it; because, though we would purchase it with blood, it has no counter and no till … . For the lover, it

> is the night into which his beloved goes … that destroys his heart; he wakes her suddenly, only to look the hyena in the face that is her smile, as she leaves that company.
>
> (86–7)

The unknown land, which cannot be purchased or exchanged because it has 'no counter and no till', is the unconscious psychic life of the beloved from which the lover is inevitably barred: childhood sexual emotions, forgotten memories, unconscious wishes and fantasies latent in the preconscious come alive at night during sleep and cause the beloved to smile. They are hyenas to the lover, for they devour the corpse of a love that cannot be shared. The responsibility for this portion of the evil of the night falls on 'the dead' – parents, grandparents, caretakers, educators, figures of our infancy and childhood, the prior generations: 'Possibly that one only who shall sleep three generations will come up uninjured out of that unpeopled annihilation' (88).

Later in the novel, when Nora comes to know something of the night in the desperate effort to alleviate her loss, she will admit the power of the past. 'I sought Robin in Marseilles, in Tangier, in Naples, to understand her, to do away with my terror' (156). Trying to become 'debauched' like Robin, Nora haunts the locales of Robin's night-life: 'I drank with the men, I danced with the women, but all I knew was that others had slept with my lover and my child. For Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers. In her, past time records, and past time is relative to us all' (156). As if in antiphony to the doctor's statement that 'the dead have committed some portion of the evil of the night', Nora will now say, 'A relative is in the foreground only when it is born, when it suffers and when it dies, unless it becomes one's lover, then it must be everything, as Robin was; yet not as much as she, for she was like a relative found in another generation (156–7).

Nora, however, does not yet know abject degradation and does not comprehend what Matthew means when he says, 'We will find no comfort until the night melts away; until the fury of the night rots out its fire' (85). This is one of the doctor's many prophetic pronouncements, whether in the form of parables, similes, aphorisms or allegories, which anticipate the shocking, enigmatic ending of the novel and thus act as proleptic as well as metanarrative reflections. The chapter concludes with another such prophecy: 'Nora will leave [Robin] some day; but though those two are buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both' (106).[42]

Nightwood beyond the pleasure principle

> Can you read and not see that something new has been said about the very heart of sex?
>
> Emily Coleman to T. S. Eliot, cited by Plumb in *Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition, xxi

The radical alterity of the night is fully dramatized in the brief last chapter, almost a coda, entitled 'The Possessed'. Here events are compressed into four pages written like the script for a film sequence and take place in North America. After leaving Jenny, Robin heads west to Nora's part of the country, circling closer and closer to her house and sleeping in a nearby abandoned chapel. One night, hearing her dog run about the house barking and whining, and then run off, Nora follows him and, like him, starts running, 'cursing and crying' (169). At last she reaches the chapel. There, freeze-framed on the door jamb, Nora sees Robin on all fours inciting and inviting the dog, crawling after him and barking 'in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching'.

> The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees.
>
> (170)

This enigmatic ending, shocking in its unequivocal simulation of a sexual act from frenzied crescendo to (failed) orgasmic release, has probably contributed to the ostracism *Nightwood* suffered in the US. It is as if Barnes wanted to deal a final blow to her country's Puritanism, which is legible throughout the novel in Nora's Christian-liberal views and repeatedly underscored by the doctor. The novel refuses to explain the scene or to rationalize Robin's behaviour. It merely describes in her the physical manifestations of an excess of affect that cannot be bound to a suitable object or to its immediate object (the dog). In Freud's metapsychology, psychic affect is the essence of the drive, and it is the function of the ego to maintain its quantity constant by binding affect to objects or to the ego itself (in narcissism). Throughout the novel, and more so in the ending, Robin behaves as one in thrall to unmanageable

impulses. Her child-like, unreflective and unaccountable acts bespeak an unachieved symbolization which, were we interested in clinical diagnosis, would be suggestive of the loss of reality characteristic of the ego in psychosis. But we are not dealing with a clinical case history, and our interest lies rather in tracing the textual inscription of the drive through the novel's 'stereographic plurality'.

With Barthes, then, we might say that *Nightwood* denies the reader the pleasure of the text by refusing to explain the enigma of Robin, the enigma of a sexuality reaching a traumatic paroxysm in the final scene in the chapel. But the doctor, that other American pervert, who knows the abject degradation of the ego confronted with the ungovernable force of the night, has given us many a clue. While Nora remains speechless and uncomprehending before the spectacle of Robin's 'brawl with the Beast' (by Beast I do not mean the dog, but the excess of affect or unbound psychic energy that racks Robin's body and makes *her* run and laugh and cry and bark and weep), Matthew has words for it that in their very figurality articulate the figural nature of the drive. For instance, 'The roaring lion goes forth, seeking his own fury' (132), as he tells Nora earlier about his own inability to refrain from masturbation in a church. By denying psychological explanations for Robin's actions and leaving the reader with only the doctor's obscure pronouncements as a guide, the text inscribes in the narrative the figure of sexuality as an undomesticated, unsymbolizable force, not bound to objects and beyond the purview of the ego; a figure of sexuality as, precisely, drive.

The pervasive references to animals of all sorts that punctuate the text are both mythical and diegetic. While the former colour the doctor's parables with biblical or surrealist overtones, the actual, diegetic animals the narration presents in conjunction with Robin have a different expressive function (I will address the latter later). Next to 'the night', the doctor's favourite metaphor for sexuality is 'the brawl of the Beast', and the two may reappear combined in a conceit such as the following: 'Life, the pastures in which the night feeds and prunes the cud that nourishes us to despair' (83); or in his remark about women at the opera 'dropping their cloaks rather low to see the beast in a man snarling up in his neck – and they never guessed that it was me, with both shoulders under cover, that brought the veins to their escorts' temples' (103). Robin herself is often compared to an animal in the doctor's direct discourse: she's 'a wild thing caught in a woman's skin' (146); she smiles 'sideways like a cat with canary feathers to account for' (103); she has 'temples like those of young beasts cutting horns, as if they were sleeping eyes' (134). And again, her eyes have 'the long unqualified

range of the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye' (37), as stated in what appears at first to be a free indirect discourse linked to Felix, 'who had been looking into [her eyes] intently because of their mysterious and shocking blue'.

> Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth … . Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache – we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers.
>
> (37)

Only at the end of the passage does the reader realize that such reflections belong to the narrating voice, as it distances itself from Felix: 'Something of this emotion came over Felix, but being racially incapable of abandon, he felt that he was looking upon a figurehead in a museum' (37–8). Remarkably, the movement away from Felix to the third-person narrator does not result in a shift in tone or a greater or lesser figural density. Indeed, the allusion to familial cannibalism resonates with the doctor's statement 'The dead have committed some portion of the evil of the night' (8) and with Nora's 'Robin is incest too … a relative found in another generation' (156–7). The relative stylistic continuity of the narrating voice with that of Felix and Nora, and more markedly with the doctor's speech, effects a prismatic, ironic diffraction of authorial consciousness through the characters who spin in Robin's orbit, as if to approach her enigma from diverse angles.[43]

Robin is the figure of their obsessions and of the text's obsession, a figure of sexuality as trauma and unrecoverable loss. 'Psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work', wrote Freud in the early *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), linking sexual excitation in childhood to seduction and seduction to trauma, symptom and neurosis. Later, after decades of psychoanalytic work, he would extend the link and generalize it: 'no human individual is spared such traumatic experiences; none escapes the repressions to which they give rise'.[44] In other words, all human sexuality originates as

trauma, in the excitation produced in the infant body by the actions of the mother or caretaking others, which the infantile psychic apparatus is not yet able to handle or adequately relieve and stores away (primal repression) as a mnemic or memory trace (*Erinnerungsspur*). The excitations thus inscribed in the psychic apparatus and constituting the first nucleus of the unconscious – or what Freud also calls the psychical other (*das andere Psychische*), as distinct from *der Andere*, the physical, caretaking other(s) – remain active, though latent, as an internal alien entity; they are like 'an agent that is still at work', in Freud's simile, or in Laplanche's felicitous figure, like a 'spine in the flesh', 'a veritable spine in the *protective wall of the ego*'.[45]

Developing Freud and Breuer's statement that 'hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' (*SE* 2: 7), Laplanche argues that the reminiscences act like 'an internal object constantly attacking the ego' (*LD*, 42). They take the form of scenes or fragments of scenes, impressions or fantasies from childhood whose sexual content is clouded by repression, as the pleasure derived from them was inadmissible to consciousness; but precisely because they are 'preserved from all attrition by the process of repression', they become 'a permanent source of free excitation'. Thus, while the cause of the trauma cannot be recovered, nonetheless its effects persist through the agency of the unconscious: when a new event or experience awakens the memory of an earlier scene, 'that memory acts from then on like a veritable "internal alien entity", henceforth attacking the subject from within, provoking within her sexual excitation' (*LD*, 42). In this manner does the repressed return, in a recurrence afterward (*nachträglich* or *après-coup*) that is not simply the delayed effect of an earlier bodily event but a new, psychic event.

Not unlike the mnemic traces that constitute the unconscious, the 'reminiscences' are not actual memories but rather intimations, vague recollections without specific content, bearing affect and often a *sensory* component, such as is conveyed in the figures with which the text of *Nightwood* seeks to capture the enigma of Robin: the '*mirage* of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory' (37), 'the *echo* of some foray in the blood that had no known setting' (44), 'the *shudder* of a past that is still vibrating' (119), an '*odor* of memory' (118). Robin, we might say, is the splinter in the skin of the text. Her enigma is insoluble just as the cause of sexual trauma is unrecoverable. The novel can only refer to it as it is refracted in the emotions, desires or reminiscences she elicits in the other characters, evoking for them the feeling of a past 'not yet in history' (44), of experiencing love as 'the inbreeding of pain' (129), or the self as an 'uninhabited angel' (148).

In Felix, Robin awakens the 'mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory'; she is 'the infected carrier of the past' which haunts him and excludes him, and which he hopelessly pursues. 'He felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting' (44). And again, remembering her years later, he will tell the doctor: 'The Baronin had an undefinable disorder, a sort of "odour of memory", like a person who has come from some place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall … . There was in her every movement a slight drag, as if the past were a web about her, as there is a web of time about a very old building' (118–19). To Nora, Robin is the condition of self-love, the object shoring up the ego in narcissistic identification: 'she is myself' (127) – 'a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself' (143).[46] And the narrator comments: 'In Nora's heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora's blood' (56).

To Matthew, the lapsed Catholic, Robin embodies the sensual innocence of animality unfettered by civilized morality and the constraint of civility, sociality, or relationality: she is a creature of the night, 'outside the "human type" – a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain' (146). The text itself introduces Robin in the figural setting of an inhuman nature, a physicality already, necessarily, trapped in representation:

> On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers … lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled … . The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea … . Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface … . Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (in the apprehension of which the walls have made their escape), thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration.
>
> (34–5)

These metaphors and similes, alluding to an instinctive animality in Robin, have been read as suggestive of a pre-Freudian view of sexuality

in which animal is opposed to human as instinct to drive, body to mind, the carnal to the spiritual. Even a reader as attentive to language as Kenneth Burke interprets the ending as 'Robin's ambiguous translation into pure beastliness', and the novel as aiming at 'a kind of transcendence downward'.[47] Reading *Nightwood* as 'Nora's conversion to perversion or inversion' ('Nora's romantic passion is a secular variant of the religious passion' [243]), Burke finds 'a Rhetorical problem' (241) with its 'stylistics of lamentation', namely, its 'reliance upon ethical or religious values, even though they are exemplified in *re*verse', and concludes:

> In celebrating the modes of invert love (in the course of taking on Biblical accents to the ends of artistic entertainment), it must find ways to make the plot 'serious' (*spoudaios*). Devices for harping on love's sorrow and its attendant degradations serve this purpose. The impression of 'completion' (the *teleios*) is sought through the absoluteness of Robin's translation into identity with sheer beast. (253)[48]

I want to argue that this is too conventional a reading. Consider, to begin with, how Robin herself interacts with animals in the novel. There is between them a sort of communication that is highly charged with affect but is not verbal nor otherwise symbolically coded, a kind of exchange that takes place on the sensory register alone without recognizable meaning; which is to say, outside representation. Consisting of inarticulate sounds, bodily movements, looks or gestures expressive less of conscious emotions than of intensities of affect, the 'exchange', if so it can be called, is entirely outside the symbolic and imaginary registers, as if it were carried out through the primary process alone.

Furthermore, the relationship of Robin and Nora is framed by two such moments. When they first meet, by chance sitting next to each other at a circus show, a 'powerful lioness' stops in front of Robin and locks 'her yellow eyes afire' on her. Then, 'as she regarded the girl, as if a river were falling behind impassable heat, her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface. At that the girl [Robin] rose straight up. Nora took her hand. "Let's get out of here!" the girl said, and still holding her hand Nora took her out' (54). Their last encounter occurs when Robin, in the chapel, wakes up to the barking of Nora's dog 'half an acre away'; the dog, sensing Robin's presence, runs to her unrestrainedly; and Nora follows him to the chapel, there to witness, benumbed, the scene that ends the novel – a scene without words but full of sound and fury, signifying something beyond, or before, representation.

In *Nightwood*, under the cultured, highly wrought discourse of the doctor and the differently inflected discourses of Felix and Nora, runs a layer of nonverbal or pre-semiotic communication that the novel registers in Robin's relation to animals and children.[49] One might want to explain the Robin character by reading the lioness and the dog as fantasmatic figures or stand-ins for the repressed pre-Oedipal wishes that both instigate her attachment to Nora and make their adult relationship impossible.[50] But a psychological reading falls short of appreciating what I think is the novel's more original achievement; namely, *the figural inscription of sexuality as drive*, a psychic excitation that the ego, in the case of Robin, is unable to bind to itself or to external objects, and in any case (specifically in Nora's case, but in the doctor's as well) disrupts the emotional coherence and threatens the self-possession of the ego by the violence of its affective charge.[51] It is in this violence, in this unmanageable quantity of affect and the shattering effects it has on the ego, that sexuality is figured in *Nightwood* as a psychic force that is at once sexual drive and death drive. The latter, according to Freud, is precisely something beyond representation, something that pertains to the primary process alone and typically remains unconscious, 'silent', having no psychic representative (*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*): 'So long as [the destructive] instinct operates internally, as a death instinct, it remains silent; it only comes to our notice when it is diverted outwards as an instinct of destruction' (*SE* 23: 150).[52]

The theoretical import of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is Freud's reconceptualization or refiguration of the drives in relation to the ego and to the social. In his earlier hypothesis, the two classes of drives constituting psychic life were, on the one hand, the self-preservative or ego drives and, in opposition to them, the sexual drives, ruled by the pleasure principle. He understood the pleasure principle as a tendency of the psychic apparatus to regulate the quantity of affect present in the organism by discharging excessive excitation (unpleasure) and maintaining psychic energy at a constant level.[53] In that sense, the human organism appeared to him as a pleasure-seeking mechanism. What led him to rethink the nature of the drives in 1919 was the observation, in pathogenic as well as traumatic or war neuroses, of a compulsion to repeat or re-experience unpleasurable events and fantasies; a compulsion that appeared to disregard the rule of the pleasure principle. He then hypothesized that an unconscious drive was at work in the organism, which caused the psychic apparatus to reduce excitation *beyond* the level required by the pleasure principle, and indeed to empty itself of all tension. He named it *Todestrieb*, death drive.

While in the earlier hypothesis the sexual drive was associated with the primary process and unbound or free-floating psychic energy, threatening the disruption or the coming apart of the ego, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and thereafter it is to the death drive that Freud consigns the function of unbinding psychic energies, detaching them both from the ego and from objects/others, and reducing psychic excitation to a zero level or inert state. Thus, as Laplanche has argued in metapsychological terms, the death drive ultimately appears in Freud as the recasting of the radical, unbinding, psychic force that he had first associated with the sexual drive.

The death drive is perhaps the most unnerving conceptual figure in Freud's metapsychology, and certainly the least understood. I do not intend, here, to tread heavily on this terrain, as I already discussed it at some length in previous chapters. But I do wish to take Freud's speculations back to my reading of *Nightwood* and, first, to Matthew's statement, 'We will find no comfort until the night melts away; until the fury of the night rots out its fire' (85). He is speaking to Nora, who is in agony with love and jealousy and in the throes of sexual passion; this is her 'night', and the fury of the night is the excess of psychic affect which in Nora is bound to Robin. However, Matthew's phrasing, 'We will find no comfort until … the fury of the night *rots out* its fire', does not allude to sexual satisfaction but rather to the extinction of passion, its reduction to rot and ashes, to a burnt-out, inert state. Of his own night and its fury, the doctor speaks throughout the novel. I will give just one example.

The doctor's aphorism cited earlier, 'The roaring lion goes forth, seeking his own fury', apparently accounting for his compulsion to masturbate in church, is prefaced by a sentence, in French in the text ('*C'est le plaisir qui me bouleverse*'), which in English would be something like 'pleasure is my ruin'. If sexual pleasure is ruinous, it is not so for moral reasons, since the doctor's character all but disallows such a reading. Might it be, instead, because sexual pleasure cannot ultimately be dissociated from that tendency of the drive to trespass beyond the pleasure principle, that is, beyond satisfaction; because pleasure itself, which is the very aim of the drive in relation to the ego, is paradoxically part and parcel of the drive's surreptitious, 'silent' work to reduce all psychic excitation to zero thus causing the waning of desire and the coming undone the ego? Indeed Matthew is speaking of masturbation, the solitary pleasure, and in the episode he recounts, his body does not respond to his wish; his penis remains limp 'like a ruined bird' (133). The sexual drive is indistinguishable from the death drive. A few pages earlier he had said to Felix: 'In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most

fully captured. What is a ruin but Time easing itself of endurance? Corruption is the Age of Time … . [W]e do not "climb" to heights, we are eaten away to them' (118). And to Nora: 'Growing old is just a matter of throwing life away back' (136).

I cannot help hearing in these words the echo of Freud's most speculative attempt to imagine a materialist and atheist cosmogony in which all life, including human life, is but a detour to an original inorganic state. As Matthew puts it, 'Time is a great conference planning our end, and youth is only the past putting a leg forward' (130). And here is Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

> The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. It may perhaps have been a process similar in type to that which later caused the development of consciousness [the registering of sensory perceptions] in a particular stratum of living matter. The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state … . For a long time, perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death.
>
> (*SE* 18: 38)

In the 'circuitous path to death', then, the human drives to self-preservation, self-assertion and mastery, which appear to us as the guardians of life moving us towards change and progress, actually work in the service of death: their function is 'to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself [because] the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion' (*SE* 18: 39). Matthew's last words in the novel are 'I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing … I know, it's all over, everything's over, and nobody knows it but me – drunk as a fiddler's bitch – lasted too long.' And again prophesizing the ending of the novel, '"Now," he said, "the end – mark my words – now *nothing, but wrath and weeping*"' (165–6).

Crying and weeping in *Nightwood* are the expression of an affect directly linked to sexuality as drive. Matthew is crying in the church as he tries to masturbate: 'And there I was holding Tiny [Tiny O'Toole is a

nickname he gives his penis], bending over and crying, asking the question until I forgot and went on crying, and I put Tiny away then, like a ruined bird' (132–3). Nora too is 'cursing and crying' as she follows her dog to the chapel. And again crying is a mark of the excitation she witnesses in both Robin and the dog during their physical interaction ('and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head'). But weeping is referred to Robin alone, when all movement in her body is over ('until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping' [170]). Early on, at the circus where Robin and Nora meet, a lioness looks at Robin and 'her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface', Barnes writes, 'as if a river were falling behind impassable heat' (54).

If the weight of this last image – a waterfall contained by a translucid barrier of heat – carries into the final scene of the novel, then the tonal modulation of internal tears, crying and weeping reiterates the doctor's 'Now *nothing, but wrath and weeping*'. And if, as I read it, the figural weave of the text inscribes sexuality as drive, as trauma and enigma, then weeping is both the bodily manifestation and the textual signifier of the psychic drift beyond the pleasure principle towards a zero level of tension and the silent quiescence of inorganic matter. In their peculiar punctuation, the doctor's words, 'Now *nothing, but wrath and weeping*', do not indicate an endpoint to the drift: denying the comfort of quiescence after 'the fury of the night rots out its fire', they join together *wrath and weeping*, the sound and fury of sex and the silent drive to death, in the emphatic negation of any possible redemption ('Now *nothing*'), just as Barnes refused to provide the text with the closure of a narrative resolution.

Figures of translation

> The scenes for hysteria fall in the first period of childhood (up to 4 years), in which the mnemic residues are not translated into verbal images … . Hysteria always results and in the form of *conversion*, since the combined operation of defence and surplus of sexuality prevents translation.
>
> Freud, letter to Fliess, 30 May 1896 (*SE* 1: 230)

I have suggested that *Nightwood* might be Barnes' (re)translation of a personal experience of trauma. After all, she did refer to *Nightwood* as 'my life with Thelma'.[54] But that very quip belies its rhetorical nature of

trope, the irony of 'a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of [its] inauthenticity' (de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 214). For while Robin may be Barnes' fantasy of Thelma, her enigma, in the *nachträglich* structure of fantasy, is the obscure inscription of another scene. Barnes knows this, indeed tells us so when she has Nora dream of 'Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain' (63), and in a private communication wrote, 'a great deal of my writing is intuition, remembrance of time and pain'.[55] Robin, then, is not Thelma but the figure of what Laplanche calls 'the source-object' of the drive to translate, the splinter in the skin of the text, the hieroglyph of an experience forever lost and unrecoverable except in the (dis)figuration that the text can perform.

Hieroglyphics, 'the ancient hieroglyphic scripts', are specifically mentioned by Freud as an analogy for the most unique element of the dreamwork (considerations of representability, *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*) to illustrate how unconscious dream-thoughts find expression in visual images; images which, he emphasizes, '*are not made with the intention of being understood*'.[56] Once again, with the metaphor of writing as ambiguous or undecipherable script, Freud asserts the homology of psyche and text in respect of their functioning and modalities of expression, whereby the picture quality of the dreamwork, which is a condition of representability of unconscious material, corresponds to the obscure figurality of language. It is on the basis of this homology, no doubt, that Freud said, 'Creative writers … know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream' (paraphrasing Shakespeare but leaving open the door for psychoanalysis's great dream).[57]

But why do *creative writers* know of such things more than philosophers, historians or other writers? And how do they know? To answer these questions, we may briefly return to the mutual implication of literature and psychoanalysis. 'Literature', writes de Man, 'unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge', that 'sign and meaning can never coincide'. If all literatures designate themselves as existing in the mode of fiction, it is because 'a work of fiction asserts, by its very existence, its separation from empirical reality, its divergence, as a sign, from a meaning that depends for its existence on the constitutive activity of this sign'.[58] Fiction, in other words, exists in the mode of non-referentiality as dreams and fantasy do, in a space akin to what Freud names psychic reality.[59] What fiction is to literature, fantasy is to psychic reality. As the dreamwork combines unconscious fantasy with residues of the day's events, disfiguring them, so does fiction with

fantasy, memory and observed events. If the in-mixing of primary and secondary processes in dreams and other psychic productions (not only, say, parapraxes or symptoms but also self-identity) corresponds to the interweaving of rhetoric and grammar (narrative) in the writing of a text, then the work of figurality in literary writing is the nearest approximation to the agency of the unconscious, while narrative construction is the work of the conscious ego.

All writing is a confrontation, even a struggle, with the nonhuman element of language, the phonemic, morphological, syntactical and tropological structures that are active in language before and beyond any writing activity begins, independently from the writer's intention or wish. Semiotics tells us that the creative freedom of the writer or language user exists only at the higher levels of linguistic articulation – lexical, syntactical, rhetorical. But psychoanalysis suggests that such 'freedom' from the constraints of linguistic structure opens or facilitates the way to the irruption of the primary process owing to its affinity with the rhetorical dimension of language. Literary or creative writing, we may infer, entails a particular attitude towards language, a receptivity, at once an openness and a passivity, not unlike the openness and passivity towards unconscious material that occur in dreams as sleep suspends the control of the conscious ego.

Paradoxically, then, in exercising that freedom from linguistic constraint, the writer is all the more bound to the enigmatic traces of the other (*der Andere)* in the unconscious (*das Andere*). This is the sense in which Laplanche's notion of transference as (self-)translation rejoins de Man's suggestion that writing is a translation without an original, as both find in Benjamin support for their respective theories.[60] If writing, as Laplanche suggests elsewhere, is the transference to the cultural of the relation of primal seduction, and hence 'a renewal of the traumatic, stimulating aspect of the childhood enigma' that enables the subject to (re)translate the enigmatic message of the other,[61] then writing is a way 'to understand the original from the perspective of the translation' (de Man, 83), an original not translatable 'even though this is what drove us to translate' (Laplanche, 205).

That Laplanche finds a motivation for one of the central concepts of his theory, the drive to translate (*la pulsion à traduire*, *der Trieb zu Übersetzung*), in the words of Novalis,[62] as well as in the close etymological kinship of the terms *translation* and *transference*, reaffirms the co-implication of psychoanalysis and literature evident in Freud's work, in the founding moment of psychoanalysis. Reading Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' with both de Man and Laplanche, one has the outline

of a theory that is at once a theory of literature and a theory of language, a theory of the psyche and a theory of the text. In this perspective, the figurality of language is the site of emergence of the unconscious as enigmatic signifiers or mnemic traces that the text attempts to decipher by means of figures and the unforeseen associative chains they generate in both writer and reader. For reading at its best, like any writing that befits the qualifier 'creative', is also an activity and a passivity, a process open to the inhuman in language, its inherent possibilities and play of tensions, and open as well to the unknown that is the unconscious, *das Unbewusste*, the psychical other, and to the human other(s) whose enigmatic traces are recorded in the body and in the palimpsest of the mind.

The 'odor of memory' is one among many such figures in Barnes' text. I tried to show, in my reading, how certain words or phrases revive the sense of another scene, half-way between a memory and a sensation, the feeling of something unremembered and yet having occurred, something that cannot be recalled but is effectively conjured up and made active through those very words; something made active, like a splinter under the skin, but not made visible or legible, not represented. In thus pointing up the uncanny resemblance of Barnes' writing to the process of the dreamwork, figures such as 'the odor of memory' guide my reading of the novel as the (re)translation of an experience of trauma at once personal and social; an experience only representable through the disfiguration that the text can perform, its rhetorical weave open and opening up to the primary process.

The figure, like the text with its fragmented narration, obscure figurality and oracular tone, carries the sense of an enigma without solution, a trauma without resolution. For there is no 'time recaptured' in *Nightwood*, and Barnes was not to write, like Proust, her own *Le Temps retrouvé*. Her writing qualifies for what de Man defines 'absolute irony', a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language: the ironist invents a form of himself that is "mad" but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified.' However, de Man cautions, this is not to say that such ironic writing 'could be a kind of therapy, a cure of madness by means of the spoken or written word'. On the contrary, the ironic writer resists the temptation 'to construe its function as one of assistance to the original self and to act as if it existed for the sake of this world-bound person … by carefully maintaining the radical difference that separates fiction from the world of empirical reality'; in other words, by maintaining 'the essential negativity of the fiction'.[63]

The title I chose for this reading of Djuna Barnes with Freud, of literature with psychoanalysis, is a figure of the 'essential negativity' of the literary, not only in its being a figure in the text, but more so in being a figure of the very figurality of the text. In the text, 'the odor of memory' is a catachresis of the same order as Nora's 'sensation of a thought', which I discussed earlier as signalling the irruption of the primary process into her waking thoughts and the insistence of an unconscious wish that must be quickly quieted by the conscious ego's secondary process. But insofar as the narration allows this reading, moving away from the character enough to let us glimpse the psychic processes at work (for example, by describing Nora's prior dream); and insofar as this particular trope returns again and again in relation to the elusive, enigmatic presence of Robin as the narrative's object of desire, the text links the trope of catachresis to the agency of the unconscious in its own – the text's – modalities of expression. Or we might say, paraphrasing Lacan, that the text links the trope of catachresis to the agency of the unconscious in the letter.[64]

The 'odor of memory', then, is also a figure of the *nachträglich* structure of fantasy, the particular temporality of the psyche whereby a present experience awakens an earlier scene whose contents remain clouded by repression or, with the figure I have been using, awakens the sensation of a splinter in the skin, sexuality as psychic trauma manifesting in the body's sensory apparatus. Finally, the 'odor of memory' is a figure of the very figurality of the drive, its coming into being in the troping movement that, as Laplanche said (I could not say it better), 'deflects the instinct, metaphorizes its aim, displaces and internalizes its object' (*LD*, 24).

This chapter, like all critical writing, is written under the sign of the conscious ego and its linguistic and ideological structures. I can only hope to have managed to convey at least in part the effect that Barnes' struggle with language has had on me as a reader: how in struggling with the 'difficult' language of *Nightwood* – its unusual lexical choices, its syntactical and rhetorical density, the kaleidoscopic storytelling embedded in its elliptic narration – I eventually reached what I have called the openness and passivity that allows the figurality of the text to work its way into associative networks and chains. Reading, then, it seemed to me, could accede to a movement of the text across the divide between the conscious and the unconscious, between the human story and the inhuman figurality of language, between the human characters and the nonhuman character of the drive – the unrepresentable real figured in Robin's interaction with the animals that the text stubbornly refuses to anthropomorphize.

My reading of Robin as the splinter in the skin of the text, a narrative figure for sexuality as trauma and enigma, derives in part by association with the historical and biographical conditions in which the novel was written. Barnes, like Freud, was writing in a Europe under the shadow of death. There probably would be no *Nightwood* had Barnes not lived in Paris in the 1920s, just as there certainly would be no *Mrs Dalloway* without London and the Great War. I wonder whether today, under the impact of a diffuse geopolitical and cultural trauma never before experienced in Barnes' native country, *Nightwood* might not be welcomed as it was in England at its first publication; whether it might not offer one way to come to terms with the paradox that I have called the enigma of the now, to work it through and retranslate it in a process of reading that opens the self to the otherness of the world.

Afterwards

'For me, only for me, time returns', muses the eponymous narrator of Italo Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno* (1923). Time has returned for me as well in the writing of this book: the war times of my early childhood, now dispersed and magnified on a global scale; the time of my first encounter with Freud's work in the late 1960s – a Freud that was soon to be contested in the militant, feminist 1970s; the time of my discovery of semiotics as a method of formal, materialist analysis; the time when Marguerite Duras's film *Détruire, dit-elle* (1969) and Christian Metz's reprise, 'Théoriser, dit-il' (1975), made cinema an object of study as well as an object of love, and around which the issues of gender, sexuality and politics first coalesced – the time of theory.

Freud came to me, at that time, like a message in a bottle on the far shore of the American continent. I was 30 years old. My formal education in Italy had been marked less by the Catholic aversion to psychoanalysis than by Gramsci's suspicion of it: I had never read Freud at all or thought much about psychoanalysis before I started teaching in the US. It so happened that in one of my moves across that country from one university to another, having shipped many boxes of books, one of them was exchanged with a similar box containing another person's books; among them was Freud's *A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis* (1935), the first American edition of the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* of 1915–17, translated by Joan Riviere (now volumes 15 and 16 of the Standard Edition). Curiosity got me, as it did Pandora. I opened the box and it was love at first sight. I immediately identified with Oedipus and found a key to reading the novel and the author I was writing on at the time, Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*. An Italian Jewish writer from Trieste, educated in Germany, Svevo was familiar with Freud's work and, as I quickly discovered, made ample use of it in that novel. The

coincidence struck me as awesome and, to say the least, compelling; the article I was writing turned into my first book.[1]

I have remained faithful to Freud in my fashion. For a while, my growing involvement in the project of writing a feminist theory distracted me from the necessary systematic reading. US feminism had an intensely ambivalent relation to Freudian psychoanalysis: in some, a vehement rejection based on selective and often second-hand knowledge, combined with a well-grounded mistrust of an institution that was deeply conservative and entrenched; in others, an exclusive attention to the work of Jacques Lacan, especially on the part of film and literary scholars, or to a version of object-relations theory focused on the figure of the mother but opposed to the theory of drives in its entirety from Freud to Melanie Klein. By another felicitous coincidence, however, a friend's gift of *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, followed by the reprinting of 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' in 1986, urged my return to Freud by a road not travelled by many: the work of Jean Laplanche.[2]

This book marks yet another return, or rather a return to yet another Freud. As I write these closing words, I see with genuine surprise, in the acknowledgments of my book on Svevo, a reference to Dante's *selva oscura* as a figure of writing.[3] I had not yet read Djuna Barnes at that time, nor was I reminded of my book on Svevo or of that reference at any point while writing the chapter on *Nightwood* in this book. Although a connection between the two novels could be made – period, 'autobiographical' narrative, ironic narration, nearness to Freud, even the authors' friendship with James Joyce – I did not make it. It was made by that figure. If writing is always a sort of time travel, it is not that one travels through time, but rather that time travels through one. As *Nightwood's* doctor says, 'youth is only the past putting a leg forward'.

Notes

Introduction: Death @ Work

1. 'Le cinéma, comme disait Cocteau, prend "la mort au travail," et cela signifie que le seul art qui en est capable prend le temps qui s'enfuit.' 'Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 223 (August–September 1970): 53.
2. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 262.
3. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 51.
4. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 141; Gloria Wekker, 'Building Nests in a Windy Place: Thinking about Gender and Ethnicity in the Netherlands', trans. Gonny Pasaribu, in *The Making of European Women's Studies*, Vol. IV (Utrecht: Athena, November 2002), p. 119. The spark for some of the thoughts in this and the next paragraph came in 2002 from a then unpublished manuscript by Dimitris Papadopoulos, 'World 2. On the Significance and Impossibility of Articulation'.
5. See Timothy Brennan, 'The Empire's New Clothes', *Critical Inquiry* 29.2 (Winter 2003): 337–67.
6. Hayden White, cited in the brochure of *Collapsing Histories: Time, Space, and Memory*, 'a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary exhibition of the catastrophic experience', curated by Aaron Kerner at the Sesnon Gallery, University of California, Santa Cruz (October–December 2003).
7. Ibid.
8. Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74); hereafter abbreviated *SE*. The citation is from *SE* 18: 29.
9. Jean Laplanche saw this in 1970: '*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' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 107). Samuel Weber, a subtle and close reader of Freud's texts, has shown how both traditional and radical readings of the death drive take Freud's speculations in philosophically or intellectually safer directions (*The Legend of Freud* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982], pp. 121ff.).
10. Freud, 'Introduction to *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*,' *SE* 17: 208. See 'Appendix: Memorandum on the Electrical Treatment of War Neurotics,' *SE* 17: 211–15.

11. Another instance of deferred action is detailed in the analysis of the Wolf Man's infantile neurosis: 'At the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he is unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and to be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four; and only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him' (*SE* 17: 45n).
12. Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, selection and introduction John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 199; hereafter abbreviated *EO*. The two terms used by Freud, *Trieb* and *Instinkt*, are rendered in the *Standard Edition* with the single English word *instinct*. To avoid confusion and following contemporary critical usage, here the term *drive* is consistently used for *Trieb*, except in quotations.
13. Paul de Man, 'Semiology and Rhetoric', in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10; emphasis added. I note, as not coincidental, the title of Stephen Heath's book on Roland Barthes, *Vertige du deplacement* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1974).
14. Paul De Man, 'Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', in *The Resistance to Theory*, foreword Wład Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 96.
15. Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, pp. 82 and 27.
16. Laplanche, 'Transference: Its Provocation by the Analyst', in *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 222–5.
17. See Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', in *Essays on Otherness*, p. 173.
18. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 114. 'Film Performance' was originally an opening address delivered at the conference on 'Performance: Film/Theater/Video', held at the Center for Twentieth-Century Studies, University of Milwaukee – Wisconsin in February 1977. Published in the now defunct Canadian journal *Ciné-tracts*, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 7–17, it was reprinted in *Questions of Cinema*, pp. 113–30.
19. A representative selection of essays in film theory from 1970 to the mid-1980s is collected in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). See also *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: Macmillan, 1980).
20. The two preceding paragraphs are part of a 'micro-history' I wrote in introducing a special section on cinema, which I was invited to edit for the journal of the Modern Language Association of America. See 'Introduction: On the Cinema Topic,' *PMLA* 106.3 (May 1991): 412–18. As I was writing this piece during the first Gulf War, I noted its unhappy coincidence with the actual rise of film studies at the time of the Vietnam War. Now, as I am writing this, I must note yet another such recurrence, the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. History returns indeed.
21. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 'Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origines, origine du fantasme', *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 215 (1964), first translated in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 49 (1968) and reprinted with a 'Retrospect' by the authors in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and

Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5–34. For the critical value of this text in film theory, see my 'Recasting the Primal Scene', in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 81–148.

22. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 317; emphasis added.
23. The online 'salon-journal' *Film-Philosophy*, for example, founded in 1994, solicits submissions 'on any topic concerning the philosophy of the moving image, e.g., analytical film philosophy, film aesthetics, cognitivism, Deleuzian film philosophy, phenomenology, etc.'. On Slavoj Žižek's particular use of films as illustrations of his philosophical-Lacanian critique of ideology, see Heath, 'Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories', in *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Bergstrom (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 25–56.
24. The active and overwhelming influence of Foucault on gay studies, for example, is documented by David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
25. *Yale French Studies*, no. 55–56 (1977), reprinted as Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). Among the contributors were Jacques Lacan, Shoshana Felman, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Peter Brooks, Philippe Sollers, Fredric Jameson, John Brenkman and Barbara Johnson. On de Man, see Felman, 'Paul de Man's Silence', *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Summer 1989), pp. 704–44.
26. Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, p. 413.
27. Ibid., pp. 414–15.

1 Basic Instincts: An Illustrated Guide to Freud's Theory of Drives

1. The two terms used by Freud, *Trieb* and *Instinkt*, are rendered in the *Standard Edition* with the single English word *instinct*, although the editors themselves note that 'the word "*Trieb*" bears much more of a feeling of urgency than the English "instinct"'. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74); hereafter abbreviated *SE*. The citation is from *SE* 18: 35. To avoid confusion and follow current critical usage, here the term *drive(s)* is consistently used for *Trieb*(*e*) except in quotations.
2. Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' (1914), *SE* 14: 78; hereafter cited in the text as *N*. See also Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes' (1915), *SE*: 14: 124.
3. Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,' *SE* 7: 217. This passage, added to the revised edition in 1915, belongs to the same period as the paper on narcissism.
4. Jacques Lacan, 'Motifs du crime paranoïaque. Le crime des soeurs Papin', *Minotaure* (February 1933): 25–8.

5. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955–1956*, trans. Russell Grigg, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), p. 54.
6. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. and introduction Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 17; hereafter abbreviated *LD*.
7. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origin of Sexuality', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5–34, hereafter abbreviated *F*.
8. The etymology of the word *trope* (Greek, *tropos*; Latin, *tropus*) carries the meanings 'turn, way, manner'; for example, heliotropes are plants that 'turn' towards the sun; the tropics or tropical circles are so designated in relation to the apparent passage or 'turning' back of the sun towards the earth. In rhetoric, trope is the general term for various figures of speech, such as metaphor, metonymy or irony. Thus the terms *trope* or *troping* are also appropriate to the vicissitude of the drive that Freud called 'turning round upon the subject's own self', and that is, of course, also a figural movement.
9. The term perversion was changed to paraphilia in the official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. Homosexuality was not included. 'Eight paraphilias were listed: fetishism, transvestism, zoophilia, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, sexual masochism, and sexual sadism, all of which were liable to legal prosecution' (John Money, *The Lovemap Guidebook: A Definitive Statement* [New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999], p. 55). I thank Timothy Koths, a doctoral candidate in History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for this information.
10. For a longer discussion of the 'Butterfly' fantasy in relation to popular culture, see Teresa de Lauretis, 'Popular Culture, Public and Private Fantasies: Femininity and Fetishism in David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly*', *Signs* 24. 2 (1999): 303–34. This and the following paragraphs summarize my reading of the film and develop it in relation to psychoanalytic theory.
11. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 1–7.
12. See Freud, 'Fetishism', *SE* 21: 152–7.
13. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 74.
14. Homi Bhabha has argued that it is a specific fetish, a specifically racial stereotype, that sustains the subject in colonial discourse by both recognizing and disavowing cultural and 'racial' difference (see *The Location of Culture* [London: Routledge, 1994]). The film shows the profound interconnection of sexuality and desire with both gender and race.
15. 'MISE-EN-ABÎME refers to the infinite regress of mirror reflections to denote the literary, painterly or filmic process by which a passage, a section or sequence plays out in miniature the processes of the text as a whole' (Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* [London and New York: Routledge, 1992], p. 201). It is not coincidental, I think, that this technique of visual and narrative construction, which in French is called *mise-en-abîme*, in English is called mirror construction.

2 The Stubborn Drive: Foucault, Freud, Fanon

1. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980), 103; hereafter abbreviated *HS*.
2. For evidence of the resistance to Freud among North American intellectuals, one need only see Frederick Crews' reviews 'The Unknown Freud', *The New York Review of Books*, 18 November 1993, pp. 55–66, and 'Keeping Us in Hysterics', *The New Republic*, 12 May 1997, pp. 35–43. The ambivalence displayed by the rhetorical excess of Crews' attacks on Freud, repeated on just about any likely occasion, is but a better informed version of the ambivalence that has characterized American academic studies since the late 1960s and American intellectual life as a whole since Freud's first and only visit to the US in 1909. See Teresa de Lauretis, 'American Freud', *American Studies/Amerikastudien* 41.2 (1996): 163–79.
3. Some of these issues, as related to the work of Fanon, are broached in Teresa de Lauretis, 'Difference Embodied: Reflections on Black Skin, White Masks', *Parallax* 23 (April–June 2002): 54–68.
4. Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 136; hereafter abbreviated *VS*.
5. According to *Le Petit Robert* (Paris, 1986), the noun *poussée*, like the verb *pousser*, comes from the Latin *pulsare*; among its given synonyms are *pression*, *attaque* and (figuratively) *impulsion*, *pulsion*; the example given for the latter is '*la poussée de l'instinct, de l'élan vital*'. *Impulsion* comes from the Latin noun *impulsio* and the verb *impellere*; its first synonyms are *impression*, *poussée*. *Pulsion* is dated '1910; "poussée", 1562 (and also poulcée, 1530); de impulsion, pour traduire l'all. *Trieb*' and defined only in the psychoanalytic acceptation. Interestingly, in 'The Deconstruction of the Drive', Lacan uses *poussée* to translate Freud's term *Drang*: 'Drive (*pulsion*) is not thrust (*poussée*)'; see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 162; hereafter abbreviated *FF*. *Drang*, translated as 'pressure', is one of the four terms Freud uses to describe the drive, designating the amount of force exerted by the internal stimulus. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), hereafter abbreviated *SE*; esp. 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', *SE* 14: 122.
6. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self. Volume III: The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1986). Freud refers to the *Oneirocritica* in his *Traumdeutung* (*SE* 4: 98–9).
7. Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 212–13 and 218; hereafter abbreviated *PK*. The original interview, with the title 'Le jeu de Michel Foucault', was first published in *Ornicar? Bulletin périodique du champ freudien* (1977) and reprinted in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits. 1954–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 volumes (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), Vol. III, pp. 298–329.
8. 'The History of Sexuality', in *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 186, 1877; 'Les rapports de pouvoir passent à l'intérieur des corps', in *Dits et écrit*s, Vol. III, p. 231.

9. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume II of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), p. 5; hereafter abbreviated *UP*.
10. Foucault, 'Two Lectures', *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 83–4.
11. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 15.
12. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 165 and 176.
13. 'Sexual Structuring and Habit Changes', in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 298–312.
14. 'Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p. 162).
15. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 379–80. Cf. 'The unconscious ceases to be the ultimate haven of individual peculiarities – the repository of a unique history which makes each of us an irreplaceable being. It is reducible to a function – the symbolic function, which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, and actually corresponds to the aggregate of these laws' (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967], p. 198).
16. Ibid., p. xi.
17. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 200–1. For a balanced assessment of Foucault's relation to structuralism, see Arnold I. Davidson, 'Structures and Strategies of Discourse: Remarks Towards a History of Foucault's Philosophy of Language', in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. and introduction Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 1–17. A less balanced view of Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis is Jacques Derrida, '"To Do Justice to Freud": The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis', in the same volume, pp. 57–96.
18. Reading Foucault from Bersani back to Bataille, Jonathan Dollimore points out that the persistent link between death and desire in Foucault's early works is later replaced by the proximity of pleasure and death (Jonathan Dollimore, 'Sex and Death', *Textual Practice* 9:1 [1995]: 38–42).
19. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, *SE*, 19: 26–7 n. 1; hereafter abbreviated *EI*.
20. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 612.
21. Ibid., 5: 615.
22. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. and introduction Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), hereafter abbreviated *LD*; *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989); hereafter abbreviated *NF*.
23. With a strikingly similar insight, Hortense Spillers calls *flesh* what I am calling *matter*. She argues that the African slave in American captivity, being outside the category of the human as defined by the symbolic order of the Name of the Father, did not have a body but was merely 'flesh' (Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book',

Diacritics [Summer 1987]: 65–81). While the non-slave newborn is, of course, already pre-enrolled in the symbolic register Spillers cleverly names *grammar*, my point is that it becomes a subject only through the process of inscription.

24. Laplanche, 'Implantation, Intromission' (1990), trans. Luke Thurston, in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. and introduction John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 136; hereafter abbreviated *EO*.
25. 'The causal relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume rather that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.' (Freud, *SE* 2: 6)
26. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110–11; hereafter abbreviated *BW*.
27. David Marriott, '"That Within"', in *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 43; page references hereafter included in the text.
28. 'The preoccupation with blood and the law has for nearly two centuries haunted the administration of sexuality [in the West] … . Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematics of blood was sometimes called on to lend its entire historical weight toward revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, "biologizing", statist form): it was then that a whole politics of settlement (*peuplement*), family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race' (*HS*, 149).

3 The Queer Space of the Drive: Rereading Freud with Laplanche

1. Jean Laplanche, 'The Unfinished Copernical Revolution', trans. Luke Thurston, in Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, introduction John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 67; hereafter abbreviated *EO*. Seven of the ten essays in this collection were originally published in Jean Laplanche, *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée* (Paris: Aubier, 1992).
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74); hereafter abbreviated *SE*. The citation is from *SE* 22: 80. See Lacan's discussion in 'The Freudian Thing', *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 128.
3. See Jean Laplanche, *Le Fourvoiement biologisant de la sexualité chez Freud* (Paris: Synthélabo, 1993).
4. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. and introduction Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 3; hereafter abbreviated *LD*.

5. Jean Laplanche, *The Unconscious and the Id*, trans. Luke Thurston with Lindsay Watson (London: Rebus Press, 1999), p. 69; *Problematique IV: L'Inconscient et le ça* (Paris: PUF, 1981).
6. Cited in the editor's introduction to 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', *SE* 14: 114.
7. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 223. They also discuss a third term, psychical representative, used by Freud interchangeably with these and their respective nuances (p. 224).
8. Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', *SE* 14: 122. In the passage cited, the *Standard Edition* wording is underlined; my translation is in bold. The original reads: 'Wenden wir uns nun von der biologischen Seite her der Betrachtung des Seelenlebens zu, so erscheint uns der "Trieb" als ein Grenzbegriff zwischen Seelischem und Somatischem, als psychischer Repräsentant der aus dem Körperinnern stammenden, in die Seele gelangenden Reize, als ein Mass der Arbeitsanforderung, die dem Seelischen infolge seines Zusammenhanges mit dem Körperlichen auferlegt ist' (Sigmund Freud, 'Triebe und Triebschicksale', in *Gesammelte Werke*, 17 volumes [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999]; hereafter abbreviated *GW*. The citation is from Volume X, p. 214).
9. Heterotopy: 'displacement in position. *Path*. The occurrence of a tumour in a part where the elements of which it is composed do not normally exist' (*OED*). 'An Ambiguous Heterotopia' is how Samuel Delany defines his science fiction novel *Triton*, whose protagonist is a transsexual.
10. Laplanche describes his own project thus: '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' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 109).
11. Freud, 'Extracts from the Fliess Papers', *SE* 1: 259. Laplanche, however, demonstrates that the concern with seduction is still paramount in the 1905 edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Jean Laplanche, 'Les Trois Essais et la théorie de la séduction', unpublished ms.).
12. John Fletcher, 'Introduction: Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Other', in Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, p. 51.
13. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), pp. 89, 137 *et passim*.
14. With the words 'internal foreign body' and elsewhere 'alien internal entity', Laplanche is referring to Freud and Breuer's notion of psychical trauma in *Studies on Hysteria*: 'The causal relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume rather that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work' (*SE* 2: 6).

15. See, for example, Derrida's discussion of Foucault and Freud in Jacques Derrida, '"To Do Justice to Freud": The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis', trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. and introduction Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 57–96.
16. Jean Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', in *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, a dossier compiled by John Fletcher and Martin Stanton (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), p. 175.
17. Laplanche takes up Lacan's notion of 'pure signifier' or 'signifier that signifies nothing' (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955–1956*, trans. Russell Grigg [New York: W. W. Norton, 1993], pp. 199 and 185) in the perspective of an unconscious communication between adult and infant.
18. Here is how Freud describes his hypothesis concerning the formation of the unconscious as primary process, to which he elsewhere refers as 'the fiction of a primitive psychical apparatus': 'A hungry baby screams or kicks helplessly. But the situation remains unaltered, for the excitation arising from an internal need is not due to a force producing a *momentary* impact but to one which is in continuous operation. A change can only come about if in some way or other (in the case of the baby, through outside help) an "experience of satisfaction" can be achieved which puts an end to the internal stimulus. An essential component of this experience of satisfaction is a particular perception (that of nourishment, in our example) the mnemic image of which remains associated thenceforward with the memory trace of the excitation produced by the need. As a result of the link that has thus been established, the next time this need arises a psychical impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathect the mnemic image of the perception and to re-evoke the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction. An impulse of this kind is what we call a wish' (*The Interpretations of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 565–6).
19. As Laplanche will later put it more bluntly, the breast, its ubiquitous importance in psychoanalysis notwithstanding, is nowhere to be found in analytic writing as an erogenous zone in the mother or nurse. And yet the nursling is bound to sense the sexual excitation in the other, in the 'breast that feeds but also excites me, that excites me as it excites itself' ('The Drive and its Source-Object', in *Essays on Otherness*, p. 128). Freud, too, if late and marginally, spoke of the mother as the first seducer in 'Female Sexuality' (1931), *SE* 21: 232 and 238.
20. In an appendix to *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche notes that Freud's notion of *psychical trauma* and Charcot's *traumatic hysteria* are 'derivations' from surgical medicine, which defines trauma as a piercing of the body surface, 'a breaking into the organism, entailing the rupture or opening of a protective envelope' with repercussions that involve the entire organism. Freud, after Charcot and with Breuer, elaborated the notion of psychical trauma as a 'paralysis due to ideas' by a *displacement* of the elements and conditions of physical trauma into the psychical domain: he 'retained the idea of a shock as a brutal rush of excitation and that of a breaking-in as an intrusion into the psyche of a group of ideational representatives that would remain there, a "separate psychical group" or an "alien internal entity"' ('The Derivation of Psychoanalytic Entities', *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 129–30). For the reference to 'alien internal entity', see note 14 above.

21. Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', *SE* 19: 163, cited in Laplanche, 'Masochism and the General Theory of Seduction', *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 205–6. The same passage of Freud's is cited in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 96.
22. 'The inadequacy of this explanation is seen, however, in the fact that it throws no light on the regular and close connections of masochism with its counterpart in instinctual life, sadism' (*SE* 19: 163).
23. The idea that the ego is charged with endogenous energy is also stated in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 64. The 1968 paper 'Position originaire du masochisme dans le champ de la pulsion sexuelle' was reprinted in *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée* (Paris: Aubier, 1992), in which also appeared the original French version of 'Masochism and the General Theory of Seduction'.
24. 'The ego … is itself formed of mnemic systems; we should conclude that the ego is founded by processes that have something to do with memory: it has thus a historical origin' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 62).
25. Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. by David Macey (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 134; hereafter abbreviated *NF*. The two stages or phases of primal repression are elaborated in the 1984 paper 'The Drive and Its Source-Objects', discussed below.
26. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), cited in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 131.
27. And actually a cliché, as Laplanche indicates by putting it between quotation marks: 'Psychical trauma comes from within. A kind of *internal-external* instance had been formed: a "spine in the flesh" or, we might say, a veritable spine in the *protective wall of the ego*' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 42); 'Il s'est formé une espèce d'*externe-interne*, une "épine dans la chair", ou, pourrait- on dire, une véritable épine dans l'*écorce du moi*' (Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse* [Paris: Flammarion, 1970], p. 70; hereafter abbreviated *VM*).
28. 'That the "drive" is to the ego what pain is to the body, that the source-object of the drive is "stuck" in the envelope of the ego like a splinter in the skin' (*Essays on Otherness*, p. 209); 'que la "pulsion" soit au moi ce que la douleur est au corps, que l'objet-source de la pulsion soit "fiché" dans l'enveloppe du moi comme l'écharde l'est dans la peau' (*La Révolution copernicienne inachevée*, p. 452).
29. See 'Appendix: The Derivation of Psychoanalytic Entities', included in the English version of *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 127–39.
30. On the compulsion to repeat in analysis, see also Freud's paper on technique, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through' (1914), *SE* 12: 145–56, in which he introduced the term *Wiederholungszwang*.
31. Emphasis in the German text is indicated by expanded character spacing rather than italics: 'Ein Trieb wäre also ein dem belebten Organischen innewohnender Drang zur Wiederherstellung eines früheren Zustandes' (*Gesammelte Werke* XIII, p. 38).
32. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1969). Similarly the *OED*: 'an organized or organic system … compared to a living being'; 'an organized body … constituted to share a common life.'
33. 'Jamais Freud ne s'est montré si libre et si hardi que dans cette grande fresque …' (Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse*, p. 163). In the English

translation, the word *free* is italicized and further emphasized by the modifier 'profoundly *free*', suggesting that Jeffrey Mehlman, the translator and himself an astute reader of Freud, also heard the rhetorical pitch of the statement.

34. 'Il s'agit donc de saisir ce qu'il y a de plus "pulsionnel" dans la pulsion … ce qu'il y a de plus vital dans le biologique – la mort explicitement designée comme "but final" de la vie' (*Vie et mort en psychanalyse*, pp. 164–5). The quotation marks in 'final aim' refer to Freud's '*Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*' (Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* XIII, p. 40).
35. On Jones, see Laplanche, 'Interpréter [avec] Freud', *L'Arc*, no. 34 (1968): 37–46; reprinted in *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée*.
36. He remaps the two topographies through a close reading of Freud's 'The Unconscious' and *The Ego and the Id* in *Problématiques IV: L'inconscient et le ça* (see note 5 above).
37. '[S]on aspect démoniaque, asservi au processus primaire et à la compulsion de répétition' (Laplanche, 'La pulsion de mort dans la théorie de la pulsion sexuelle', in *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée*, p. 280; my translation). The passage also appears in *Problématiques* IV, pp. 223–4.
38. 'La *mort* visée dans la "pulsion de mort" n'est pas la mort de l'organisme, mais la mort de cet "organisme" qui, chez l'être humain, représente les intérets de l'organisme biologique, c'est-à-dire le moi' (ibid., p. 276).
39. According to Anthony Wilden, one of the first translators and commentators of Lacan in English, Lacan stopped translating Freud's *Ich* by *je* after the 1949 article on the mirror phase, 'Le Stade du Miroir', in which the *je* still appears. See Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, translated with notes and commentary by Anthony Wilden [Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968], p. 135.
40. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 131–2. Citing Freud's statement that the body-ego is not only a surface entity but the projection of a surface, and is derived from bodily sensations, they take them to 'suggest that we search for the agency of the ego in an actual psychical operation consisting in the "projection" of the organism into the psyche' (p. 141).
41. On the distinction between word-presentations and thing-presentations, respectively in the preconscious and in the unconscious, see Freud, 'The Unconscious', *SE* 14: 201–4.
42. Laplanche clarifies the extent to which Freud diverges from G. T. Fechner with regard to his 'principle of stability' as well as from Breuer's physiology with regard to the 'principle of constancy'. The latter, he argues, is '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' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 116–17).
43. Laplanche's notion of *indexical* drive or *indices* of excitation almost begs for a comparison with C. S. Peirce's notion of *index* as a kind of sign in respect of its relation to its object. A comparative discussion of the term in the two theories, however intriguing, is outside the scope of this work and will be pursued elsewhere.
44. Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 26.
45. Ibid., p. 27.

46. My figural reading of Freud's death drive was probably inflected by the reading of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (see Chapter 5) and vice versa. In particular, his passages on life and lifelessness resonate uncannily with her description of one of her characters: 'She was broad and tall, and though her skin was the skin of a child, there could be seen coming, early in her life, the design that was to be the weather-beaten grain of her face, that wood in the work; the tree coming forward in her, an undocumented record of time' (*Nightwood*, p. 50).
47. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 28.

4 Becoming Inorganic: Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, Virtuality and the Death Drive

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), vol. 18, p. 38; hereafter abbreviated *SE*.
2. *SE* 5: 611.
3. Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', trans. Ben Brewster, *Screen* 16.2 (Summer 1975): 41.
4. 'A novum or cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality. Now no doubt, each and every poetic metaphor is a novum, while modern prose fiction has made new insights into man its rallying cry. However, though valid S[science]F[iction] has deep affinities with poetry and innovative realistic fiction, by "totalizing" I mean a novelty entailing a change of the whole universe of the tale' (Darko Suvin, 'SF and the Novum', in *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward [Madison, WI: Coda Press, 1980], p. 142).
5. It must be noted, however, with John Fletcher, that 'the two theorists who elaborate a vehement and systematic critique of the false biologism of classical psychoanalytic theory, Jean Laplanche and Jean Lacan, both retain a concept of the drive; indeed, both elaborate new theories of the drive'. See 'Introduction: Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Other', in Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 22.
6. David Cronenberg, *Interviews with Serge Grünberg* (London: Plexus, 2006), p. 174; hereafter abbreviated *G*.
7. Jonathan Dee, 'David Cronenberg's Body Language', *New York Times Magazine*, 18 September 2005, p. 79.
8. Cronenberg went to London to interview Salman Rushdie on behalf of the Canadian magazine *Shift*: 'As I was sitting and talking to him, I was thinking about the film that I would make that dealt somewhat with his situation. When I came back to work on my script, I thought we would never play the game in the movie. I thought it would be more about an artist who has a fatwa pronounced against him because of his art … . As I was writing it, I was so curious about the game that I couldn't stick to my concept of not playing the game' (*Interviews with Serge Grünberg*, p. 163). But at least the word *fatwa* is actually used in the film's dialogue.

9. Ibid., p. 169; and Dee, 'David Cronenberg's Body Language', p. 79.
10. Cronenberg, cited in William Beard, *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 552, n. 27; hereafter abbreviated *B*.
11. Ibid., p. 15, cited from the film's voice-over narration. Both *Stereo* and *Crimes of the Future* were filmed in 35 mm, black and white, with no synchronous sound.
12. The conception and visual form of the parasite bursting out of the human body in the low-budget *Shivers*, Cronenberg's first experiment with the body-horror film, was later copied in Ridley Scott's much more popular *Alien* (1979).
13. The latter were already adumbrated, as Cronenberg retrospectively notes, in Max Renn's hallucinations in *Videodrome*: 'He hasn't reached a point in his life where he actually connects with melancholia. But I think it's there … . Jimmy Wood's presence on the screen began to feel like a projection of me.' See *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, ed. Chris Rodley (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 94–6; hereafter abbreviated *R*.
14. For example, *The Brood*: 'It was a compelling script; it insisted on getting written. It pushed its way right up through the typewriter … . It was like automatic writing' (*R*, 75).
15. Of course, Freud remarks, an adult's 'artistic play' that, unlike children's, is 'aimed at an audience' is 'of no use for *our* purposes' because it 'presupposes the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle' (*SE* 18: 17); it gives no evidence of what he will shortly call the death drive ('death instinct,' *SE* 19: 44). No evidence, to be sure, for the purposes of the analysis of an individual artist's or author's psyche; and yet evidence enough for the purpose of analysing their texts is provided by Freud himself in his analyses of Leonardo, Schreber, Hoffman, and so forth.
16. In the humorous, youthful transgressivity of *Shivers* he has one character say, 'disease is the love of two kinds of alien creatures for each other … even dying is an act of eroticism … even to physically exist is sexual' (*Shivers* soundtrack).
17. The statement, dated 8 September 1999, is quoted in Sharon Reier, 'Schumpeter: The Prophet of Bust and Boom', *International Herald Tribune*, 10–11 June 2000, p. 17.
18. Joseph Schumpeter, *Business Cycles: A Theoretical, Historical and Statistical Analysis of the Capitalist Process* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1964 [1939]); hereafter abbreviated *BC*.
19. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975 [1942]), pp. 81–6. On the role of the entrepreneur, see pp. 132–3.
20. Again Alan Greenspan, testifying before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress in 1999, remarked on the 'evident acceleration of the process of *creative destruction*, which has accompanied these expanding innovations and which has been reflected in the shifting of capital from failing technologies into those technologies at the cutting edge – such as the microprocessor, the laser, fiberoptics and other information technologies' (Reier, 'Schumpeter', p. 17; emphasis added). The phrase has already reappeared in at least one work of literary criticism by another Harvard professor, Philip Fisher, *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction* (Cambridge,

MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 13. I am indebted to Ulla Haselstein for this reference.

21. As Carla Freccero pointed out in her response to an early version of this paper, presented at the 'New Technologies of Gender' conference, sponsored by the Institute for Humanities Research of the University of California, Santa Cruz.
22. Sabina Spielrein, 'Die Destruktion als Ursache des Werdens', *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* 4 (1912): 465–503. Founded in 1908, the *Jahrbuch* published five volumes (1909–13) and ceased publication after the Freud/Jung split in 1912.
23. See Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein Between Jung and Freud*, trans. Arno Pomerans et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. 191–5; hereafter abbreviated *SS*. See also M. J. Santiago-Delefosse and J. M. O. Delefosse, 'Spielrein, Piaget, and Vigotsky: Three Positions on Child Thought and Language,' *Theory and Psychology*, 12 (2002): 723–47.
24. Carotenuto reports the 1941 date, in a footnote in the introduction to the second Italian edition, *Diario di una segreta simmetria: Sabina Spielrein tra Jung e Freud* (Milano: Bompiani, 1999), p. 42; a German documentary directed by Elisabeth Márton, *Ich heiss Sabina Spielrein* (2002), reports her death at the hands of German soldiers in 1942. Another film, *Prendimi l'anima* (Italy, 2003), directed by Roberto Faenza, focuses exclusively on her relationship with Jung.
25. 'Sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position' (*SE* 7: 158).
26. See also *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933) and *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1938). Freud returns to the theoretical elaboration of the death drive in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924). Already in 1909, however, he had sharply distinguished his conception from Alfred Adler's notion of an *Aggressionsbetrieb* in male sexuality: 'I have myself been obliged to assert the existence of an "aggressive instinct", but it is different from Adler's. I prefer to call it the "destructive" or "death instinct"' ('Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', *SE* 10: 140).
27. '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' (Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 124; hereafter abbreviated *LD*). Introducing Laplanche's recent work in English translation, Fletcher points out that 'the distinction between life and death drives is a distinction within the field of sexuality. Laplanche's reading of the successive shifts in Freud's thinking about the drives traces what he calls a strange chiasmus in which sexuality, hitherto associated with the primary process, the tendency to unbinding and fragmentation in opposition to the ego, binding and the secondary process, passes over to its opposite, after the formulation of narcissism and of the life drive as Eros. At this point the concept of death drive also appears as the reaffirmation of unbinding, the

repetition-compulsion, the discharge of all tensions in opposition to the bound and binding Eros' (Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 33–4).

28. This is how Freud reverses the common-sense perspective on life and death: 'The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception. It may perhaps have been a process similar in type to that which later caused the development of consciousness [the registering of sensory perceptions] in a particular stratum of living matter. The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state' (*SE* 18: 38).
29. Freud, letter to Jung, 30 November 1911, in *The Freud/Jung Letters*: *The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, trans. Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull, ed. William McGuire (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 469.
30. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 107, 123. See also p. 58: the pleasure principle 'is not a principle of life [and] has nothing to do with vital functions … . *It is at the level of ideational representatives alone, and not in the functioning of a living organism that this model of a complete evacuation of psychical energy is discovered*.'
31. See Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', in *SE* 19: 155–70.
32. 'Equilibrium and the Theoretical Norm of Economic Quantities' is the title of chapter 2 of *Business Cycles*.
33. The phrase comes from the back cover of a mass distribution paperback, the kind one finds in airport and supermarket stands (Christopher Priest, *eXistenZ* [New York: Harper Entertainment, 1999]; hereafter abbreviated *E*). On the front cover we read: '*eXistenZ*™ – Now a major motion picture written and directed by *David Cronenberg*. Starring Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jude Law, Willem Dafoe, and Ian Holm. Novelization by Christopher Priest. From an original screenplay by David Cronenberg.' Neither a screenplay nor a novel but a *novelization*, this is a new genre of fiction that is itself the product of a new film-marketing technology. When no page number is cited, the quotation is from the film dialogue.
34. In giving the film's (and the game's) title word the German morphological form, Cronenberg self-ironically attributes the film's conception of existence to 'Martin Heidegger, the German existentialist philosopher (though he didn't like the term existentialist himself)' (DVD director's commentary, qtd. by Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 430). For a critical history of entrepreneurial research in virtual reality technologies and virtual environments (VE) in military, entertainment and university settings, see Ken Hillis, *Digital Sensations: Space, Identity, and Embodiment in Virtual Reality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
35. Erogenous zones are 'any region of the skin or mucous membrane capable of being the seat of an excitation of a sexual nature. More specifically … the oral, anal, genital and mamillary zones' (Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [New York: W. W. Norton, 1973], p. 154; hereafter abbreviated *L*). While the body as a whole, including the skin and all internal organs, may operate as an erogenous zone, and indeed does so in infancy, Laplanche adds that the maternal

care of infants by adults, 'in focusing on certain bodily regions, contributes to *defining* them as erotogenic zones, zones of exchange which demand and provoke excitation in order subsequently to reproduce it autonomously, through internal stimulation' (Laplanche, *LD*, p. 44).

36. As reported in the *Herald Tribune* article cited above, an interviewee stated: 'Capitalism is restless, and somewhere in California, there is a young kid plotting Bill Gates's downfall' (Reier, 'Schumpeter', p. 18).
37. To leave no doubt about the figural relation of the game to the virtual reality of cinema, Cronenberg has Allegra explain to Ted how the transitions between VEs are affected in her game with the terms of cinematic montage: 'It depends on the style of the game. You can get jagged, brutal cuts, slow fades, shimmering little morphs … '
38. As Cronenberg elaborates in the DVD commentary, 'So for example, in the motel room, you don't have a television set and you don't have a telephone, because except for the pinkfone there are no telephones in the movie, there are no television sets, in fact there are no screens, no computers of any kind – which might seem odd for a movie that's about gaming – in fact there are no running shoes in the movie, no ties, and no patterns on the clothes … no watches, no earrings, no necklaces and so on. It gives the movie a very austere look' (cited in Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, 544, n. 36).
39. Insisting that his film is not a virtual reality movie, Cronenberg states: 'I wasn't even thinking in terms of doing a sci-fi movie at this point. Every movie now has *Blade Runner* as a touchstone, whether it's *Strange Days* or the Italian film *Nirvana*, they're all *Blade Runner* revisited … . I wanted to deliberately set the film in the countryside … because I was defining myself against the films which have been done about the new techno-future … . I didn't really consciously go back to my other movies [but] the imagery is still there in me. It hasn't changed, so there's a sense of revisiting some of the concepts and some of the images of the past, but from a different vantage point in my life … . This is the first completely original script I've written since *Videodrome*, [it] was written before I made *Crash* … . I guess that's my inner landscape, the landscape that you see in my movies' (*G*, 165–6).
40. Earl Jackson, Jr. has suggested that Cronenberg's reference to Dick's novel (Perky Pat is a game played by Martian colonists, seated in a circle, while taking a drug called Chew-Z, which creates collective hallucinations and whose commercial success is threatened by the competitor drug Can-D) may be 'a gesture toward the gnostic aspects of the virtual reality technology' (personal communication, 5 April 2000). In spite of several thematic affinities between the novel and the film – the mediated nature of fantasy, a sharp social critique of commercially produced needs and desires, an awareness of the power of visual media to shape viewers' identifications, and the parallel between drug-induced and VR game-induced time dilation – Cronenberg's film seems to me far from any search for spiritual truth and firmly anchored to a materialist, if not rationalist, understanding of life in which the flesh and the intellect, matter and mind, existence and transcendence battle with one another without any final victory.
41. I take the film dialogue's insistence on the spelling of these names ('capital C, capital Z' for *transCendenZ*; 'capital P, capital I' for *PilgrImage*) to mock the naming style of dot.com companies and new technology products like the

iMac (where the prefix may refer to the 'internet' but also suggests the owner's identification with the machine) and to point up the harshly competitive corporate environment of the entertainment industry. The trademarked name of the iPod, which was commercially launched in 2001, would seem to bear a perfect reference to Cronenberg's film but, according to *Wired* magazine, October 2006, was allegedly based on Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey*. My thanks to Jay Olson, Client Services Manager at Information Technology Services, University of California, Santa Cruz.

42. Samuel R. Delany, *Nova* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), p. 52.
43. On Cronenberg's view of the naïveté of contemporary Hollywood science-fiction films, notably the Wachowski brothers' blockbuster *The Matrix* (1999) as 'juvenile … like it was made for eight-year-olds', see Cronenberg, *Interviews with Serge Grünberg*, p. 156.
44. Stephen Heath, 'Film Performance', in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 124. The quotation in parenthesis is from Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977), p. 103.
45. Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 457. Beard also reports Cronenberg's words in a *Cahiers du cinéma* interview: 'I wanted the film to refer clearly to the cinema' (p. 448).
46. Again, speaking of books read long before the decision to script them, J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* and Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*, 'The book sits there for a while, and then suddenly it establishes itself in your nervous system somehow as a legitimate thing, and with enough force to make it possible to make it into a movie … It needs to occupy a very deep part of you' (*G*, 139); or more generally, 'What we take into our bodies and our nervous systems is so vast, and there's a surplus that spills over from us … . It's the spill-over, somehow, of something that has to go somewhere. In my case it goes in my art, but it's not in my life' (*G*, 148).
47. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was completed in 1899, although it bears the publication date 1900. *eXistenZ* was released in 1999.
48. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *SE* 18: 38.
49. http://www.filmreferencelibrary.ca/index.asp?navid=42. I am grateful to Logan Walker, doctoral student in History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for providing me with a DVD transfer of the film.
50. Parveen Adams, 'Death Drive', in *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg*, ed. Michael Grant (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), pp. 108 and 112.

5 The Odor of Memory: On Reading Djuna Barnes with Freud

1. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 118; page citations hereafter given in the text are from this edition, unless otherwise specified.
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 volumes (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74); hereafter abbreviated *SE*. See 'Constructions in Analysis', *SE* 23: 255–69. On the distinction between theoretical construction (*Konstruktion*) and analytic interpretation (*Deutung*), see Jean Laplanche,

'Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics', in *Essays on Otherness*, selected and introduced by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 138–65; hereafter abbreviated *EO*.

3. Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 23.
4. Ibid., p. 24.
5. See Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, with an introduction by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979); and *The Resistance to Theory*, foreword by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Although Felman does not refer to de Man in the book on Lacan, her debt to him and in particular to his *Blindness and Insight*, which she cites in its first edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), is acknowledged in her earlier book, *La Folie et la Chose littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 22 ff. (*Writing and Madness* [Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003]), and lovingly repaid in 'Paul de Man 's Silence', *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Summer 1989): 704–44.
6. Shoshana Felman, 'To Open the Question', in *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, special issue of *Yale French Studies*, ed. Shoshana Felman, no. 55/56 (1977): 9.
7. Ibid., p. 10.
8. Paul de Man, 'Literature and Language: A Commentary', in *Blindness and Insight*, p. 285.
9. Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), pp. 155–64.
10. Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 55–82; Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 146–78.
11. Sigmund Freud, Letter to Fliess dated 6 August 1899, quoted in [editor's] footnote, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 4: 122.
12. The editor's translation appears as a footnote to Freud's reusing of the line in ch. 7, with this comment: 'Freud remarks … that "this line of Virgil [*Aeneid*, VII, 312] is intended to picture the efforts of the repressed instinctual impulses" ' (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 608).
13. 'Like so many boys of that age, I had sympathized in the Punic Wars not with the Romans but with the Carthaginians. And when in the higher classes I began to understand for the first time what it meant to belong to an alien race, and anti-Semitic feelings among the other boys warned me that I must take up a definite position, the figure of the Semitic general rose still higher in my esteem. To my youthful mind Hannibal and Rome symbolized the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organization of the Catholic Church. And the increasing importance of the effects of the anti-Semitic movement upon our emotional life helped to fix the thoughts and feelings of those early days' (*The Interpretations of Dreams, SE* 4: 196–7).
14. This new form will return, not unlikely as an homage to Barnes, in Monique Wittig's novel *Virgile, Non* (Paris: Minuit, 1985; *Across the Acheron*, trans. David Le Vay with Margaret Crosland [London: Peter Owen, 1987]) in which

the first-person narrator, named Wittig, journeys back and forth through a lesbian hell, limbo and paradise located in the San Francisco area, with the guide of, *not Virgil*, but a woman named Manastabal.

15. *Deferred action* (*Nachträglichkeit*) is first defined in 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895): 'a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered' (*SE* 1: 356); it is again brought up, unchanged, in the 'Wolf Man' case history (*SE* 17: 45) to aid in the construction of the primal scene and subsequently articulates the very structure of castration. Laplanche proposes the English term *afterwardness* in *Essays on Otherness* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 260–5.
16. Barthes, 'From Work to Text', p. 157.
17. Ibid., p. 159; Freud, *SE* 5: 505 (*et passim*).
18. 'The dream's navel [is] the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought' (*SE* 5: 525).
19. Freud, letter to Fliess, 16 April 1900, quoted in the Editor's Note to 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', *SE* 23: 215.
20. Laplanche, 'Transference: Its Provocation by the Analyst', in *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 222, 233.
21. On the vicissitudes of the manuscript and the history of its publication and editions, see Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*, ed. and Introduction Cheryl J. Plumb (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995); hereafter cited as *Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition.
22. Djuna's grandmother, Zadel Barnes, was herself a writer and a journalist/reporter who followed the suffragette movement, as well as a spiritualist and a practising medium. She ruled the household as a matriarch and, with her son, Djuna's father, oversaw the education of all the Barnes children, who were not allowed to attend public schools or leave the family farmhouse in rural upstate New York. Besides Djuna's mother and siblings, the unconventional family included the father's mistress and the children she bore him. At the age of 18, Djuna was married to a man of 52. After a time of which no biographical record is available she was able to leave the family home and move to New York City. See Mary Lynn Broe, Introduction to *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 3–23.
23. I am paraphrasing Matthew's reproach to Nora: you have set a formula (your 'truth') between yourself and Robin, 'you have dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known' (136).
24. Djuna Barnes, *Ladies Almanack*, Introduction Susan Sniader Lanser (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 18.
25. See Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986).
26. Andrew Field, *Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Putnam's, 1983), p. 101. Thelma Wood was Djuna Barnes' lover throughout the 1920s.

27. Carolyn Allen, *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).
28. As a contemporary reviewer put it, 'Whatever action there is occurs as something now being relived in dialogue … . Once the stage is set we do not know what has happened until the characters involved begin their post-mortem' (A. Desmond Hawkins in *The New English Weekly*, 29 April 1937, quoted by Jane Marcus, 'Mousemeat: Contemporary Reviews of *Nightwood*', in *Silence and Power*, p. 201).
29. See Broe, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy: Incest as Exile, the Textual Economics of Hayford Hall', *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 42.
30. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams, SE* 4: 97.
31. The rhetorical equivalent of secondary elaboration is *parabasis* (the part of Greek comedy in which the chorus *steps forward* to address the audience in the name of the author). De Man points out its link to *irony* in Friedrich Schlegel and in the 'self-conscious narrator' of English criticism, that is, 'the author's intrusion that disrupts the fictional illusion' (de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 218–19).
32. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 567; emphasis added. Freud again used the expression 'the watchman over our mental life' several years later in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', *SE* 19:159. In Barnes' original numbering of chapters, 'Night Watch', the chapter ending with Nora's dream, immediately preceded 'Watchman, What of the Night?' Barnes apparently accepted Emily Coleman's suggestion to insert the Jenny chapter, 'The Squatter', between them. See Plumb, 'Textual Apparatus', in *Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition, p. 147.
33. According to Plumb, 'Eliot blurred sexual, particularly homosexual, references and a few points that put religion in an unsavory light.' Citing Emily Coleman, Plumb also notes that Eliot intended to publish the book 'in an expensive edition in order to attract the right audience and avoid prosecution. "E. says the English are against Lesbianism particularly"' (*Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition, pp. xxii–xxiii).
34. Elsewhere Freud writes: 'Every psychical act begins as an unconscious one, and it may either remain so or go on developing into consciousness, according as it meets with resistance or not' ('A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis' [1912], *SE* 12: 264). In other words, the 'method of working' of the unconscious in mental processes is primary in both the temporal and the causal sense.
35. de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 214.
36. The phrase 'the remembrance of things past', spoken by the learned homosexual 'doctor', is actually the English title of Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu*. This passage, as well as the nightgown and wig the doctor wears 'in the grave dilemma of his alchemy' (80), suggests a possible reading of Matthew as a transsexual along the lines indicated by Jay Prosser for the character of Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. See Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 135–69. A further trait the two characters share is their respective engagement in an act of masturbation, if explicitly recounted by Matthew (132–3), as I will discuss below, and only implied in

Stephen Gordon by the narrator (see my *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994], pp. 209–11).

37. While Andrew Field's biography credits Eliot for the title *Nightwood* (*Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes* [Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985], p. 212), Cheryl Plumb states that Barnes herself came up with it and so announced in a letter to Emily Coleman on 23 June 1935. 'Only later in October 1936 did Barnes write Coleman of her discovery that the title was Thelma's name: "Nigh T. Wood – low, thought of it the other day. Very odd"' (*Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition, viii–ix).
38. 'During the night … this suppressed material finds method and means of forcing its way into consciousness', writes Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (SE 5: 608), and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: 'Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright … . I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it … . We may be driven to reflect on the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego' (*SE* 18:13–14).
39. Respectively *SE* 17: 37 and 41; *SE* 7: 152 and 145; and *SE* 11: 189.
40. It should be noted, since there is controversy on this issue, that Freud's conception of *Urphantasien* and the Oedipus complex as 'phylogenetically inherited schemata' – as a 'recapitulation' of the previous stages of human life or 'precipitates from the history of human civilization' (*SE* 17: 119) that occur in each individual – is not directly a biological concept but *an analogy* loosely drawn from Darwinian and Lamarckian biology. It is an analogy, a conceptual figure, in that the previous stages are those of human *civilization*, not those of species development, and what is inherited by each individual are 'the psychological peculiarities of families, races and nations' (*SE* 23: 240) – hardly a biological concept.
41. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 45; hereafter abbreviated *LD*. See also Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5–34.
42. Yet another prophecy concerns Felix. At their first meeting, early on in the novel, the Baron refuses the doctor's offer of a glass, 'Thank you, I never drink', and the doctor replies, 'You will' (19–20). By the novel's end, in the chapter of his demise, entitled 'Where the Tree Falls', Felix drinks heavily and haunts the cafés of Vienna with his dying son in the hope to catch a glimpse of nobility in 'the son of a once great house' (122).
43. For this reason the doctor's self-ironic plaint, 'I'm damned, and carefully public!' (163), seems to me a fitting introduction of the self-ironic author of *Nightwood* in this chapter. One of the fascinating aspects of *Nightwood*'s authorial voice is its peculiar nearness to the characters, a relation that may be described as 'speaking nearby', to borrow a phrase Trinh T. Minh-ha has used in relation to her own filmmaking practice. See Trinh T. Minh-ha with Nancy N. Cheng, 'Speaking Nearby', in *Visualizing Theory*, ed. Lucien Taylor

(London: Routledge, 1994), reprinted in Trinh, *Cinema Interval* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 209–26; and Trinh, 'Beware of Wolf Intervals', in *Cinema Interval*, p. xi.

44. Freud, 'Studies on Hysteria', *SE* 2: 6, and 'An Outline of Psycho-analysis', *SE* 23: 185. In her succinct and illuminating presentation of the neo-Freudian view of trauma, Paola Mieli glosses these passages as follows: 'L'avénement de la sexualité apparaît comme traumatique. Le traumatisme inscrit la jouissance dans le corps et la condamne comme intolérable. Son empreinte refoulée constitue une cristallisation soumise aux lois du processus primarie, capable d'attirer d'autres représentations intolérables.' 'Les temps du traumatisme', in *Actualité de l'hystérie* (Paris: érès, 2002), p. 49.
45. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 42.
46. In the section of the *Three Essays* on auto-eroticism in infantile sexuality, Freud writes: 'The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction [of sucking at the mother's breast] is … why at a later date [one] seeks the corresponding part – the lips – of another person. ("It's a pity I can't kiss myself", he seems to be saying.)' (*SE* 7: 182). Lacan refers to this passage in Freud: 'He tells us somewhere that the ideal model for auto-eroticism would be a single mouth kissing itself – a brilliant, even dazzling metaphor' (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1978], p. 179). Much closer to Barnes is Luce Irigaray's reprise, 'Two Lips Kissing Two Lips', in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 210.
47. Kenneth Burke, 'Version, Con-, Per-, and In-: Thoughts on Djuna Barnes's Novel *Nightwood*', in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1946), pp. 250 and 244; page citations hereafter in the text.
48. In this condescending and self-important essay, a conventional understanding of rhetoric ('Rhetoric'), combined with a conventional view of life and literature, seems to produce more blindness than insight. And yet, what de Man calls the inhuman element in language leaves traces in Burke's language of an insight nipped in the bud. Robin's 'symbolic *return to the infantile*' and her 'transcendence downward' are negatively compared to *Oedipus* at Colonus 'translated to the realm of a tutelary *Beyond*' (244); the novel's 'stylistic devices and enigmatic conclusion [are] designed to make the plot seem absolute … as though this were *the "primal" story of all mankind*' (245). The Freudian resonance in the phrases I underlined and especially the direct allusion signalled by the quotation marks in the last one, are tell-tale signs of an interpretative direction immediately closed off and forcefully rejected.
49. Robin never sees again the child she gives birth to (the narrating voice comments that the boy, named after Felix's father Guido, 'had been born to holy decay' and by age ten was 'mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death' [107]). But there is another child in the novel, a little girl living in Jenny's house, of whom the novel offers only brief glimpses. Sylvia's relation to Robin is summed up in their first encounter: the girl 'sat, staring under her long-lashed eyelids at no one else [but Robin], *as if she had become prematurely aware*' (70; emphasis added).
50. Carolyn Allen has shown how the erotics of loss between Nora and Robin is articulated in relation to the two axes feminine–masculine and mother–child but tilting towards the latter. She argues that it is the pre-eminence of the

maternal in Nora's fantasy, overlaid by the culturally scripted trope Mother, that makes Robin leave her. Allen further examines seduction and the erotics of nurture in Barnes' short stories 'Cassation, The Grande Malade', and 'Dusie', reading them as sketches or studies towards *Nightwood*. See Allen, *Following Djuna*, pp. 21–45.

51. Cf. the description of Nora's reaction to seeing Robin with Jenny: 'Unable to turn her eyes away, incapable of speech, experiencing a sensation of evil, complete and dismembering, Nora fell to her knees, so that her eyes were not withdrawn by her volition, but dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body … . As she closed her eyes, Nora said "Ah!" with the intolerable automatism of the last "Ah!" in a body struck at the moment of its final breath' (64).
52. *Vorstellunsgrepräsentanz*, translated as *ideational representative*, is more precisely a delegate of the drive, an idea that represents it in the psyche. Freud's words resonate uncannily with another description of Robin's interaction with animals: 'Robin walked the open country … pulling at the flowers, speaking in a low voice to the animals. Those that came near, she grasped, straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck' (168).
53. Laplanche clarifies the extent to which Freud diverges from G. T. Fechner with regard to his 'principle of stability' as well as from Breuer's physiology with regard to the 'principle of constancy'. The latter, Laplanche argues, is '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' (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, 116–17).
54. Cited by Plumb in *Nightwood*, Dalkey Archive edition, p. vii.
55. Ibid., p. xix.
56. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 5: 341. Freud expanded the analogy in the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* of 1915–17 (*SE* 15: 179 and 229–30), a book that, according to the editors of the *Standard Edition*, had 'a wider circulation than any of Freud's works' and was the most translated of all, with two English and two American editions between 1920 and 1935 (Editor's Introduction, *SE* 15: 4).
57. Freud, 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*', *SE* 9: 8.
58. De Man, 'Criticism and Crisis', in *Blindness and Insight*, p. 17.
59. Laplanche and Pontalis define psychical reality as 'whatever in the subject's psyche presents a consistency and resistance comparable to those displayed by material reality; fundamentally, what is involved here is unconscious desire and its associated phantasies'. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 363.
60. See de Man, 'Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', in *The Resistance to Theory*, pp. 73–105. Laplanche reads the same essay by Benjamin in 'The Wall and the Arcade', in *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*. *A Dossier*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), pp. 197–216.
61. Laplanche, 'Transference: Its Provocation by the Analyst', in *Essays on Otherness*, p. 224. His theory of primal seduction is outlined in Chapter 3 above.
62. See Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', in *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, p. 173.

63. De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 216–19. A reading of Barnes as absolute ironist is supported by Barnes' refusal of a lesbian identity in the face of feminist sexual politics in the 1980s. Her much cited 'I'm not a lesbian. I only loved Thelma' may have been the mundane way for the author to uphold 'the essential negativity of fiction' by fending off an identification with the character of Nora and a biographical identity that lesbian readers were all too eager to confirm. In this context, valuable as I find much of Victoria Smith's reading of *Nightwood* – for example, her emphasis on the importance of the other 'ex-centrics' in the story, Felix and the doctor, often considered by critics next to irrelevant to the main-stage drama of Nora's loss – I cannot see 'the performance of loss in the excesses of Barnes' text [as] a strategy for recuperating what has been unspeakable, including the woman, and especially the lesbian, subject' or how 'finding a speech for loss converts loss into gain' (Victoria Smith, 'A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*', *PMLA* [March 1999], pp. 196 and 203).
64. Cf. Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud', in *Écrits*. Catachresis is defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as 'the strained use of a word or phrase, as for rhetorical effect' and 'a deliberately paradoxical figure of speech'. As de Man points out, 'It is notoriously difficult ... to establish precisely when catachresis becomes metaphor and when metaphor turns into metonymy' (*Blindness and Insight*, 284).

Afterwards

1. Teresa de Lauretis, *La sintassi del desiderio: struttura e forme del romanzo sveviano* (Ravenna: Longo, 1976).
2. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, translation and introduction Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986).
3. I thanked a friend and colleague, Sylvie Romanowski, 'per aver illuminato di cartesiana chiarità la selva oscura di questa piú che mai accidentata scrittura'.

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