

The Death Drive and the Im-Possibility of Psychoanalysis

Introductory Remarks: The Aporetic Complexity of the Death Drive

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud introduces the death drive at the most fundamental level in psychoanalytic theory and subsequently re-describes central notions in its terms. Again, Derrida finds in this notion a reiteration of the quasi-transcendental complexities already described, for any final determination of the death drive is suspended by our inability to demarcate its attributes clearly and on this basis establish orders of preference among them. In trying to conceptualize the death drive, one remains caught between the economic motifs of archivization, namely those of proper repetition associated with conservation and return and the equally necessary aneconomic motifs of anarchiving violence, of improper repetition associated with aggression, destruction, and dissolution. In other words, incompatible economic and aneconomic motifs belong irreducibly to the notion of the death drive, making it inescapably aporetic. In consequence, if one can say that the death drive is the fundamental transcendental principle governing the proper constitution of the archive (psyche), it also makes such proper constitution impossible, for one must also acknowledge that the death drive is not a principle. As Derrida notes, “it even threatens every principality, every archontic primacy, every archival desire. It is what we will call, later on, *le mal d’archive*, ‘archive fever.’”¹ In short, a fundamental but inescapable incoherence in the

definition of the death drive tempts Derrida to suggest that beyond the pleasure principle lies a disruptive drive, beyond “principality” itself, for as a quasi-transcendental condition, the death drive both must and cannot function as a fundamental principle in any traditional sense.²

In what follows, the aporetic complexity underscored by the introduction of the death drive is addressed from two points of view. First, unraveling a thread from the material condensed in the second of the theses that Derrida risks in *Archive Fever*, I shall briefly outline the archiving/anarchiving entanglement by which the psyche is constituted insofar as it is recast in the terms of the death drive.³ Second, I have grafted onto this discussion of Derrida’s thesis a related argument concerning the “de-constitution” of the psyche, found in the first part of his essay “Resistances,” which, again viewed through the prism of the death drive, highlights the complexity associated with conceptualizing “psychoanalysis” as a therapeutic practice, this time stemming from the aporias associated with the notion “analysis.”⁴ Here, Derrida argues that an attempt to explicate two crucial psychotherapeutic notions, namely “analysis” and “resistance,” yields a curious isomorphism whereby both notions, like the death drive, incorporate irreducible but incompatible moments of return and destruction. These conceptual entanglements pose difficulties for the very possibility of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice.

I should reiterate that, for Derrida, rereading Freud in a way that highlights certain possible/impossible complexities can be nothing but a good thing, for this vacillation between what can be actualized and what forever remains out of reach in psychoanalysis is the source of its critical distance from its own death drive and, therefore, of its life as an institution, discipline, and tradition. Moreover, as I hope to demonstrate in part 3, it is precisely in the general terms of this paradoxical im-possibility that one can best approach Lacan’s appropriation of Freud, for there is a demonstrable accord between what Derrida and Lacan theorize here under the nicknames of “event” and the Real, respectively. This accord, as already noted, can be established by associating both with the Freudian notion of “trauma.” For Derrida’s arguments in *Archive Fever* and “Resistances” and Lacan’s arguments in “Tuché and Automaton,” which I shall address in detail in chapter 7, to be anything other than opaque, Freud’s conception of the death drive and its associated notions (“trauma” and “repetition compulsion”) require elaboration. For this reason, and because “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” where the death drive is first introduced, is, as Derrida notes, “not just any book by Freud and . . . not just any book by Freud for Lacan,” I have prefaced my discussion of these arguments with a fairly lengthy summary of it.⁵

“Beyond the Pleasure Principle”: Introducing the Death Drive

In this essay, as its title suggests, Freud revises his hypothesis that the pleasure principle is fundamental in psychical regulation and argues ultimately that a more fundamental death drive may override it. According to the pleasure principle, “unpleasure” arises from a heightening of excitation, whose discharge brings relief and concomitantly produces pleasure. Failing complete discharge, the psyche strives to keep excitation low and constant.⁶

While the pleasure principle dictates activity that avoids pain and promotes pleasure at all costs, its full sway is checked by certain necessary frustrations.⁷ First, in negotiating the physical and social world, it is inefficient and dangerous and is soon checked in mental life by a “reality principle,” under the dictates of which the psyche temporarily endures pain while it finds safer, more calculated, reasoned, or differentiated paths to pleasure. But powerful instinctual forces constantly threaten such imposed constraints, often “to the detriment of the organism as a whole.” Freud, therefore, predicts enduring psychical conflicts due to the reality-determined frustration of pleasure-seeking libidinal instincts. Second, he argues, community life requires the painful frustration of instinctual life in order to rescue the psyche from opposite extremes: selflessness as libidinal self-sacrifice or selfishness as narcissistic sacrifice of others. Since neither extreme is conducive to harmonious communal life, they are usually accompanied by painful emotions of resentment or guilt if they find occasional outlets. Nevertheless, in these cases, Freud argues, the psychical economy, guided by the pleasure principle and the reality principle that checks it without disputing its supremacy, usually secures an ultimate pleasure gain.

However, most of the unpleasure we experience stems from external sources, either in direct perceptions of pain or indirectly in painful anticipations of danger. Freud argues that a common psychical reaction to externally imposed pain, namely the compulsive repetition of painful experiences, may point to something beyond the pleasure principle. But he is not about to give the game away at the start. Instead, he outlines four cases where this reaction *might* challenge the primacy of the pleasure principle. But in each case he initially presses the explanatory power of the pleasure principle as far as it will extend.

Freud first describes the case of “traumatic neurosis.”⁸ Here, after experiencing an unexpected shock, victims compulsively, and at the cost of their general health, replay its events in fantasy or dreams, renewing the

terror each time as if fixated there. The condition is associated primarily with fright, with its emphasis on surprise rather than anxiety (which prepares one for dangers, known or unknown) or fear (which requires a definite, already known, object). It is certainly difficult, he admits, to explain this condition in terms of the pleasure principle, according to which all dreams function to deflect any repressed and therefore pressing unconscious motives that might disturb sleep, thus releasing psychical tension by offering hallucinatory fulfillment of the disturbing wishes.⁹ It would only be consistent with the pleasure principle if victims dreamed of a healthy past or future respite instead of becoming victim to a persistent renewal of pain and terror. He proposes some avenues for investigation (not all dreams are wish fulfillments; this condition upsets all mental functions, including dreams; the ego tends towards masochism) but concludes that the condition remains at best underinvestigated.

His second case derives from his grandson's initially puzzling habit of repeatedly flinging his toys into the far reaches of his surroundings, accompanied by an expression decipherable as the German word *fort* (meaning "gone").¹⁰ He notes that the child sometimes (although not regularly) included a second act in this drama of disappearance, namely the joyful *da* ("there") of reappearance. According to Freud's interpretation, the boy's repetitive game of "being gone" is a dramatization through which he "compensated himself" for his mother's upsetting departures from the house. Notably, he argues, this game enabled the child to resist an instinctive urge to protest his mother's absence. In other words, this "renunciation of instinctual satisfaction," which indicates the capacity for repression, compensatory sublimation, and delayed gratification, marks the inaugural moment of a "great cultural achievement." But his primary interest in the example relates to the problem of how the game accords with the pleasure principle. This would be unproblematic if the child played the entire *fort-da* game most frequently, for the painful first act would be a prelude to the evidently greater pleasure of the second. But the first act alone is much more frequently replayed, and the game primarily involves not the avoidance of pain but its repetition, which suggests that it might be motivated by something beyond the impulse for pleasure.

Freud considers two candidates: power and revenge. To master the event, the child may have needed to repeat it in play, despite its painful nature, at the same time reversing the power relations so that he becomes the active perpetrator rather than the passive victim of a painful separation. Moreover, by throwing away objects that represent the mother, exacting revenge by proxy, he could then release otherwise suppressed hostile feelings toward her. But one may argue that these repetitions,

while painful, still serve the pleasure principle, for the associated unpleasure would be offset by the greater, albeit different, pleasure of activity, mastery, and revenge. It is unnecessary, then, to postulate something beyond the pleasure principle to supply a motive for children's play. Citing dramatic tragedy as another example of how the repetitive enactment of painful situations can be experienced as enjoyable, Freud concludes that "even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind." By itself, the play impulse does not necessitate the postulate of independent tendencies more primitive than the pleasure principle.

Freud's third case is drawn from "the transference phenomena of neurotics."¹¹ Initially, he believed, the psychoanalytic task was to discover the unconscious material veiled by the analysand's discourse, draw together its various elements in an interpretation, and present it at the appropriate moment. However, since this careful presentation of the analyst's reconstruction did not always have the intended therapeutic effect, there was evidently more to do, namely, elicit confirmation of this interpretation from analysands by helping them find and acknowledge the evidence for it in memory. The emphasis shifts to unmasking resistances to such recollection (for it is unacceptable material that is repressed in the first place) and teaching analysands to overcome and abandon these resistances. Again, it became apparent that even this could not always achieve the psychoanalytic aim of bringing the unconscious into full view. If the essential details of the repressed material are especially resistant to recollection, analysands remain unconvinced that an analyst's reconstruction is accurate. Here, instead of remembering repressed material as belonging to the past, Freud notes, analysands unwittingly and compulsively repeat it as current experience in the relationship with the analyst, that is, in "the sphere of the transference." The analyst's task here is to engender awareness in the analysand that what is reexperienced in the sphere of the transference is only the reflection of a forgotten past. As a rule, Freud notes, analysands cannot be spared this painful phase of treatment.

But does this neurotic "compulsion to repeat" accord with the pleasure principle?¹² First, according to Freud, resistance during treatment does not arise directly from repressed material in the unconscious, for the psyche, persistently seeking an outlet for it, aims precisely to force it into consciousness or to discharge it through action. Such resistance, rather, arises from the system that originally carried out the repression: the ego.¹³ The repetition compulsion describes a means by which repressed material presses for an outlet under the constraints imposed by the ego. Without

doubt, he argues, the ego's resistance to treatment obeys the pleasure principle, since its aim is to avoid any unpleasure generated by the release of repressed material. Psychotherapy, in contrast, appeals to the reality principle, encouraging the temporary endurance of pain for the sake of long-term relief. What about the repetition compulsion? Like the ego, the agency of this compulsion resists the economic compromise of enduring unpleasure in one system for the sake of satisfaction in another. Unlike the ego, however, it does not act in the name of pleasure. Instead, Freud notes, analysands repeat all manner of distressing experiences and emotions usually from early childhood (loss of love, failure, disappointment, jealousy), reviving them "with the greatest ingenuity" in the sphere of the transference. Here, he argues, "we come now to a new and remarkable fact": analysands compulsively but often unwittingly revive past experiences that can never have been satisfying. Moreover, no doubt these would cause less current unpleasure if their repetition took the form of memories or dreams instead of fresh experiences. Yet, in these cases, the psyche does not learn from past pains but repeats distressing experiences compulsively, regardless of the pain. Here, Freud admits, the pleasure principle loses its efficacy as an explanatory principle.

He cites a final case that he regards as equally difficult to explain in terms of the pleasure principle. In everyday life, he observes, people are affected by precisely the kind of repetition compulsion evidenced in the transference phenomena of neurotics¹⁴ (for example, those whose friendships or love affairs repeatedly take the same disastrous course, or those who abandon unhappy encounters with authority figures, restrictive ideologies, or religious cults only to replicate them in new contexts). Here, one gets the impression, he remarks, that some people are "pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'daemonic' power" dedicated to their continued misery.

To sum up so far, in pressing the explanatory power of the pleasure principle, Freud is most successful in the domain of play, but in the other cases enough is left unexplained to justify a new postulate: that of a repetition compulsion in psychic life "more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle" and capable of overriding it.¹⁵ Notably, then, he does not infer that there is something beyond the pleasure principle from his grandson's *fort-da* game. Nevertheless, once the primacy of this compulsion has been established on grounds of the transference phenomena and their replication in everyday life, he is inclined retrospectively to see it at work in certain play activities as well as in the hitherto unexplained "traumatic neurosis," although he adds that it rarely operates in isolation from other motives.

Freud's proposed scientific explanation of this compulsion is tied to his theory of the psychical apparatus,¹⁶ which I shall not repeat; suffice it to note his emphasis on defense.¹⁷ "*Protection against stimuli*," he argues, "is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of stimuli*." In relation to outer stimuli, pain triggers the defense mechanisms of a protective shield that safeguards the organism from overstimulation. In relation to inner excitations, the psyche tends to treat those associated with excessive pain as if they were acting from without, so as to apply against them the defenses of the protective shield.¹⁸ Taking a step beyond the pleasure principle, he describes as "traumatic" any external excitation strong enough to break through the otherwise efficacious protective shield, producing a wholesale disturbance in the organism's energy balance.¹⁹ In face of this flood of stimuli, the pleasure principle becomes ineffectual. Instead, another task presents itself: that of mastering this excess by binding excitation in order to discharge it. To achieve this, he claims, "cathectic energy is summoned from all sides to provide sufficiently high cathexes of energy in the environs of the breach. An 'anticathexis' on a grand scale is set up, for whose benefit all the other psychical systems are impoverished, so that the remaining psychical functions are extensively paralysed or reduced." From this, Freud adds, we can infer that an already cathected system (one that is alert, focused, trained, educated, or ready for action) readily takes up additional excitation and converts it into "quiescent cathexis," or, that is, binds it psychically. Moreover, presumably up to a point, he argues that "the higher the system's own quiescent cathexis, the greater . . . its binding force." Conversely, therefore, a system that is dormant, idle, unobservant, ignorant, uneducated, or unprepared for action will be more violently affected by a breach in the protective shield.

With these speculations in hand, Freud can now suggest that traumatic neurosis occurs in the event of a trauma, when, in addition, the affected systems were unprepared for it, that is, when they were not hypercathected as they would have been in, for example, a state of anxiety.²⁰ Moreover, he adds, this condition suggests for the first time an exception to the hypothesis that all dreams are wish fulfillments.²¹ The dreams of those suffering from traumatic neuroses are tied instead to another task, which must be accomplished before the pleasure principle comes into play. These dreams help to master or bind excessive excitation retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose absence led to the traumatic neurosis. Thus, Freud concludes: "If there is a 'beyond the pleasure principle,' it is only consistent to grant that there was also a time before the purpose of dreams was the fulfilment of wishes."

Turning from external to internal sources of excitation, Freud first reminds his readers that the main internal sources of excitation are the instincts.²² Since the excitations arising from the instincts “have the unconscious systems as their point of impact,” they obey the primary process, which is identified not with “bound” or quiescent excitation but with the freely mobile type that presses for discharge. It would be the task of “the higher strata of the mental apparatus” to bind excitation arising from instincts to appropriate facilitations. Since failure here would provoke traumatic economic disturbances, he again concludes that the task of mastering or binding excitations from internal sources would take precedence over the pleasure and reality principles.

The repetition compulsion, Freud claims, is instinctual in character. Unbound, it would manifest blindly, independently, and sometimes in disregard of both the pleasure economy and the tempering influence of the reality-oriented higher strata (e.g., the rational faculties). But in saying this, he consciously invokes opposing senses of the word “instinctual.” Children’s play, for example, is characterized by an instinct for, and delight in, repetition. But one could say that the enjoyment of reexperiencing identical pleasures over and over serves the purpose of education (training and mastery). The instinctive repetition here, which does not contradict the pleasure principle, accords with a traditional view that instincts press living organisms toward change and development. Yet when the repetition compulsion acts in opposition to the pleasure principle, as in the transference phenomena, then calling it instinctual would immediately place into question this traditional understanding of the instincts, for it would suggest, as Freud puts it, “*that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces . . . or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.”²³

Freud adduces biological evidence from heredity and embryology in favor of this view that the instinctual is “an expression of the *conservative* nature of living substance.”²⁴ But he also raises a plausible objection to this claim, namely that one could think in terms of both “conservative instincts which impel towards repetition” and progressive instincts directed toward “the production of new forms.” Deferring an immediate pronouncement on this objection, he invites readers “to pursue to its logical conclusion” the hypothesis “that all the organic instincts are conservative, are acquired historically and tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things.”²⁵ Here, to avoid confusion, one must remain alert to the hypothetical nature of this train of thought. The structure of his argument

is as follows: The hypothesis that *all* organic instincts are conservative in the inertial sense is contradicted on various grounds. Nevertheless, one cannot for this reason justly deny the postulate of death instincts altogether.

It would follow from the above hypothesis, Freud argues, that the elementary living entity must resist change from the start and would constantly repeat the same course of life in the absence of external disturbances. Alluding to his theory of facilitation, he adds, development would be imposed upon a reluctant organism by irresistible environmental forces, whose traces must be managed (stored up for further repetition). Conservative instincts, therefore, may seem to promote change and progress. But, he argues, it would run contrary to their conservative nature to aim at a state never yet attained. They are instead “seeking to reach an ancient goal” along circuitous paths, both old and new. Thus, paradoxically, he concludes: “If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death.*’”²⁶

An equally paradoxical conclusion is reached “if we firmly maintain the exclusively conservative nature of instincts” (that is, the tendency to return to an inorganic state) against the opposing hypothesis of inherent self-preservative instincts (here understood as the instinct that presses us to maintain life at all costs).²⁷ One could try to overcome this opposition by arguing that the life-preserving instincts function only in the hope of securing a natural death for the organism. Paradoxically, however, as Freud notes, one would then have to say that “the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life’s aim rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit.” Thus to begin with, for Freud, the hypothesis that the nature of the instincts is exclusively conservative lacks support because it generates paradoxes.

Moreover, it is also contradicted when it comes to sexuality.²⁸ Here, Freud suggests that the germ cells (sperm and ova), as “elementary organisms that survive the whole individual,” might plausibly offer an exception to the rule that all living organisms die. These cells, he argues, repeatedly separate from the composite organism (the body), which independently pursues its path to an inorganic state, and under favorable conditions begin anew “the performance to which they owe their existence.” In this way, they gain for themselves a kind of potential immortality, although, as he notes, “that may mean no more than a lengthening of the road to death.” Further, there are sexual instincts that guard the destinies of the germ cells (that shelter them and bring them into contact with

other germ cells). Freud grants that one may indeed call the performance of these cells “conservative” in a variety of senses. For example, their conservatism may be indicated in the fact that they “bring back earlier states of living substance,” “are peculiarly resistant to external influences,” and “preserve life itself for a comparatively long period.” However, he argues, such “conservatism” does not stretch to include the inertial sense that strives to return all living organisms to an inorganic state. On the whole, he counters, the activity of these cells is instead essentially life-preserving, since it embodies an impulse toward combination and development. For Freud, the sexual instincts “are the true life instincts.” But this again opposes the hypothesis that “all the organic instincts are conservative” in that they lead to death.

Although Freud does not support the claim that *all* instincts are inherently death instincts, this is not to deny altogether the postulate of a basic or primordial death instinct. To achieve certainty that there is no such thing as a death instinct, he argues, one would have to make the case that natural death first came into being with multicellular organisms, where there can be a distinction between the mortal soma and the immortal germ-plasm.²⁹ In unicellular organisms, the body and the reproductive cell are still one and the same. Thus if unicellular organisms were immortal, this would give the lie to the idea that all living organisms have an inherent death instinct—the instinct to return to the inorganic state. But, as he demonstrates at some length, the question of immortality versus natural death in unicellular organisms is far from decided. He concludes that “our expectation that biology would flatly contradict the recognition of death instincts has not been fulfilled. We are at liberty to continue concerning ourselves with their possibility if we have other reasons for doing so.”³⁰ Moreover, he adds, speculation among biologists that two contrary processes (“one constructive or assimilatory and the other destructive or dissimilatory”) are constantly at work in living substance adds support to the hypothesis of an inherent opposition between life and death instincts.

Invoking Schopenhauer (“For him, death is the ‘true result and to that extent the purpose of life,’ while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of the will to live”),³¹ Freud in the end prefers the proposition that the development of the organism, which he understands in terms of change as opposed to progress,³² is a response to environmental forces that are negotiated in terms of an inherent opposition between two groups of instincts (the erotic and the thanatic). As he puts it earlier in the essay: “It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been

reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start.”³³

Having posited this instinctual life/death opposition, Freud’s final task is to integrate it with current psychoanalytic libido theory.³⁴ He is required to show that libido manifests as an opposition of instincts at its inception. Tracing out the developmental vicissitudes of his libido theory, he first demonstrates in what sense these new speculations substantiate this theory as it stands, which ties libido to Eros (sexuality and reproduction, union, and narcissism). As he sums up in a later note, “we came to know what the sexual instincts were from their relation to the sexes and to the reproductive function. . . . With the hypothesis of narcissistic libido and the extension of the concept of libido to the individual cells, the sexual instinct was transformed for us into Eros, which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance.”³⁵

Briefly, if the sexual instincts are viewed as that part of Eros directed outward toward objects, narcissism describes that part of libido that is directed inward toward the ego in self-love. Narcissism embodies the desire to see in all otherness merely a reflection of the ego, that is, to incorporate all otherness in the sphere of the self. This self-preservative instinct must, therefore, also be understood as libidinal. Second, Freud suggests that psychoanalytical libido theory might be applicable at a cellular level in multicellular organisms, given the tendency of cells to join together in vital associations, whereby cells take one another as libidinal objects, partly neutralizing the effects of the death instincts, which allows the community to survive even if individuals must die. In this case, “the libido of our sexual instincts would coincide with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which holds all living things together.”³⁶

So far, Freud notes, psychoanalysis has only given credence to *Eros* and neglected *Thanatos*.³⁷ However, this could be remedied by demonstrating that a death instinct is intrinsic to libido (a condition for its function).³⁸ Since psychoanalysis has already characterized “object-love itself” by a polarity between affection and aggressiveness, one could demonstrate that libido contains the death instinct if this polarity was shown to be derived from the opposition between the life and death instincts. Thus, granted that psychoanalysis already acknowledges a sadistic side to the sexual instinct, it remains to be seen how one may derive “the sadistic instinct, whose aim it is to injure the object . . . from Eros, the preserver of life.” Here, Freud argues, the destructive side of *Eros* manifests in the instinctual craving for power over the object of libidinal investment. Initially, erotic mastery over an object is expressed as the power to destroy it. Later,

-serving the reproductive function, this destructive instinct becomes a sadistic tendency to injure the sexual object, overpowering it “to the extent necessary for carrying out the sexual act.” Freud concludes that this “original sadism,” serving erotic purposes, points “the way for the libidinal components of the sexual instinct, and that these follow after it to the object.”³⁹ In short, a certain destruction of the other as “other” is the condition for erotic union. Moreover, adumbrating the theme of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud suggests that this primary sadism might go hand in hand with its reversal in a primary masochism (“the turning around of the instinct upon the subject’s own ego” in self-sacrifice, sacrifice of my own instinctual narcissism, for the sake of erotic union).⁴⁰

We have already seen in what sense mastery of forces in the external environment (including other people) as well as internal forces (self-mastery via repression of the instincts) is associated with the primary motivation of the pleasure principle.⁴¹ Moreover, the “Nirvana principle” that it serves (that is “the dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general . . . to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli”) is “one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts.” Yet, the “proper” confirmation of their existence would arise from our power to demonstrate that the repetition compulsion is intrinsic to the life instincts. It is difficult, however, to ascribe to the sexual instincts the characteristic of a compulsion to repeat. (They are, indeed, extremely rich in the phenomena of repetition, but not, it seems, in the inertial sense ascribed to the death drive.) To achieve this, Freud insists, we would have to trace the origin of the instinct for sex to the need to restore an earlier state of things. But natural science cannot help here, for it has next to nothing to tell us about the origin of sexuality, that is, how and why reproduction in certain organisms became a union of sexually differentiated germ cells instead of multiplication by cell division.

Leaving biological science to its darkness, then, Freud turns to literature, specifically to “the theory which Plato put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*,” which “traces the origin of an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of things.”⁴² One might, he suggests, “follow the hint given us by the poet-philosopher” and venture a hypothesis: perhaps the condition of coming to life is the fragmentation of a substance whose particles (retaining their chemical affinity) subsequently strive to reunite. This desire to return to an earlier state (this death instinct “brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance”)⁴³ would be the basis of the sexual instincts. Requiring protection in this endeavor from “an environment charged with dangerous stimuli,” these

fragments would have evolved a protective layer (a body), thereby achieving a multicellular condition. But the instinct for reuniting would be retained in the germ cells.

Here, Freud breaks off his speculative train of thought with a few words of critical reflection. At this point, he insists, conviction concerning these hypotheses is not yet at issue. “It is surely possible to throw oneself into a line of thought and to follow it wherever it leads out of simple scientific curiosity, or, if the reader prefers, as an *advocatus diaboli*, who is not on that account himself sold to the devil.”⁴⁴ He describes his thought process as one of translating observations into theory, which is inevitably open to sources of error, for example, from overestimation of the significance of certain observations or from deep-seated prejudices. But, he adds, “it is impossible to pursue an idea of this kind except by repeatedly combining factual material with what is purely speculative and thus diverging widely from empirical observation.” The wider the speculation, the more untrustworthy the final result, and the degree of its uncertainty is initially undecidable. In short, despite the acknowledged provisional status of his theory, Freud’s caution here is in the name of “proper” scientific practice, where, for example, falsification operates in the name of a future truth. Further, while acknowledging that psychological, physiological, or chemical terms belong to the figurative language of their own language games, he does not question the possibility of translation between them. Indeed, he believes that the possibility of translating the psychological into the privileged figures of natural science would remedy the deficiencies in his description. Although he grants that some of these are exacerbated by the prevailing obscurities in the science of biology, the relation of priority holds nevertheless: clarity in biology could either support or “blow away the whole of our artificial structure of hypotheses.”⁴⁵

Freud’s final remarks sum up what has been gained from these speculations.⁴⁶ In his words: “If it is really the case that seeking to restore an earlier state of things is such a universal characteristic of instincts, we need not be surprised that so many processes take place in mental life independently of the pleasure principle . . . but it does not follow that any of them are necessarily opposed to it.” The relation between the instinctual processes of repetition and the pleasure principle, he concludes, could be stated as follows: the predominant function of the mental apparatus “is to bind the instinctual impulses which impinge on it, to replace the primary process prevailing in them by the secondary process and convert their freely mobile cathectic energy into mainly quiescent (tonic) cathexis.” This process must occur regardless of any increase in unpleasure. But the pleasure principle is not hereby rejected. To the contrary, Freud

argues, such binding occurs as a condition for the pleasure principle: “the binding is a preparatory act which introduces and assures the dominance of the pleasure principle.” Reciprocally, the pleasure principle “is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep it as low as possible” and is thus “concerned with the most universal endeavour of all living substance—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world.”

The Constitution of the Psyche: Derrida’s Second Thesis

Derrida argues, as noted, that Freud’s “death drive” is spread across two irreducible and incompatible motifs (of conservation/return and of aggression/destruction), which makes it inescapably aporetic. Accordingly, if the difficulties enumerated in the previous chapter concerning repetition at the origin already trouble the coherence of the notion “facilitation” as the condition of the possibility of the psyche (or the archive), this trouble is repeated when Freud recasts the constitution of the psyche in terms of the death drive. In the second thesis of *Archive Fever*, Derrida argues that, on the one hand, Freud admits the aporetic complexity of the death drive.⁴⁷ In his words: “All the texts in the family and of the period of ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ explain in the end why there is archiving and why an archiving destruction belongs to the process of archiving and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes, and beyond.”

To put such aporetic complexity in telegraphic form (I shall elaborate below): without the economic prospect of proper repetition (formulated in terms of the death drive as conservation), there can be no psyche/archive as a record of original events to which a proper return is possible. But because what happens “originally” is in principle traumatic, such an “event” lacks sense and cannot be properly repeated and recorded in the archive. Therefore, as soon as there is archiving (under the pressure of the death drive to return to a pretraumatic state), it is certain that the “event” only appears in the guise of an economizing, appropriating fabrication. Just as originally and necessarily, then, the death drive always already incorporates a moment of aneconomic, an archiving destruction, for the moment of archiving appropriation in which phenomena are constituted is automatically an interpretative violation of the intrinsically impossible “event itself,” or what Lacan calls the Real. The “original experience” that one returns to via the archive is never a proper copy of the traumatic “event itself,” but the first decisively formative fabrication.

Additionally, since, as Freud has demonstrated, the fabrication is inevitably singular or idiosyncratic, the “archive itself” can no longer be understood as merely the proper repetition of intersubjectively shared experiences.

Importantly, then, when Freud suggests that part of the psychoanalytic task is to return via *anamnesis* to the “kernel of truth” in a delusion, such “truth” is not to be understood as a “past present,” that is, a true copy in memory of some past perceptual evidence. Rather, the “kernel of truth” here refers to the originary, decisive fabrication, which, drawing into service existing memory scraps or traces, shapes the course of an inventive appropriation of the event. This appropriation might have little correlation, or none at all, with what is perceptually given. In “Constructions in Analysis,” Freud graphically illustrates this point via a favorite metaphor that links the psyche to an archeological site. The analyst, as archaeologist, he explains, is required to “construct” an analysand’s narrative by putting together a story (or complex interpretative construction) from fragmentary scraps of leftover material made available by direct or indirect means (e.g., parapraxes). Similarly, in his view, in first constructing a phenomenal reality (seen as an attempt to effect a “cure” for the traumatic Real), an individual follows precisely the same constructive process in order to “make sense” of something that has happened. A pathological construction of reality, or a delusion, named because it persists despite clear contrary experiences, gains its power of persuasion from the hallucinatory vivacity of certain memory scraps that have been used in its construction (but might well derive from much earlier experiences). To treat a dysfunctional delusion, then, is to help the analysand reconstruct a better narrative, perhaps by a retrospective reordering of the same fragments, perhaps with the aid of alternatives.⁴⁸

Thus, acknowledging the quasi-conceptuality of the death drive, Freud irrevocably “ruins” the traditional aneconomic/economic distinctions between fabrication and truth, belief and knowledge, literature and science, inside and outside. Here, he implicitly acknowledges the impossible, impure “spectral space”⁴⁹ between so-called original and copy (which is the milieu of the quasi-transcendental) that Derrida has nicknamed *différance* or *khôra* and therefore opens psychoanalysis to the multiple risks, but also the chances, of the prosthesis (fiction, fabrication, and delusion).⁵⁰

Yet despite all this, Derrida argues, “as classical metaphysician and as positivist *Aufklärer*,” there is a residue in Freud’s writing that does not altogether respect the “logic of repetition” (that is, iterability) and, therefore, the quasi-conceptuality of the death drive, which he otherwise takes

into account. He does not consistently believe in belief (the fundamentality of fabrication) but sometimes believes in knowledge, as if the belief in knowledge were not itself the hallucinatory projection of a paranoid wish. Freud, then, against the grain of his radical insights, still sometimes dreams of presence; he dreams that a return to the indestructible grain of truth in the delusion corresponds not with a return to the decisive fabrication but with, as Derrida puts it, “a return to reality, here to the originary effectivity of a base of immediate perception.” Notably, this argument echoes and elaborates on Lacan’s similar observation that Freud’s conception of the real is intrinsically troubled by an internal vacillation between perceptual repetition, tied to reality testing, and fabrication, tied to pleasure.⁵¹

The Death Drive as Condition of the Possibility of the Archive

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” according to Derrida, Freud shows that the conservative death drive is precisely what allows psychical life to take hold in the first place, thus making the archive possible in the most obvious sense of repetition. For Freud, biologically speaking, any living organism’s continued existence depends primarily on its enclosure within a “membrane” or “barrier” of some kind, which forms a protective shield between itself and the external environment. Precisely this separation between an inside and an outside is the condition of the possibility of an archival medium vulnerable to impressions made by occasioning forces. Of course, complete enclosure as a consequence of impenetrable resistance to the imposition of external forces would be self-defeating, which is why the tendency toward protective closure can be thought of as a death drive. However, this separation between an inside and an outside is simultaneously the condition that makes receptivity possible, whereby an “imprint” is conserved as a modification of the archival medium that has at least a certain durability.

In conformity with the biological principle that protection from external stimuli supersedes reception, Freud insists that the first psychical task is to form a defensive shield against overstimulation from external events.⁵² For Freud, then, our defensive/receptive perceptual system is the psychical equivalent of the membranous barrier that surrounds unicellular organisms and maintains their integrity. The “first” moment of the archive, then, is the resistance to the outside that constitutes a protected “inside.” Derrida names this “first” moment an “originary finitude,” whose correlative is a sense of “expropriation,” or loss of an outside. Notably, “originary finitude” here is the Derridean equivalent of Lacan’s notion of “lack.”

Lacan's name for Freud's "defensive shield" is libido, represented by the figure of the "lamella," which replaces the traditional myth of origin as a body without organs.⁵³ The lamella again functions as a protective/receptive "border," which ensures that the organism is neither open to the outside nor closed off from it and, therefore, protects the organism from overstimulation (or "lack of lack") and from lack of stimulation. As neither inside nor outside the organism, it functions as the "original division" that "separates" life (the pleasure economy) from death ("proper" or full jouissance). As the *khôral* "region" of the not-yet, it is the Lacanian equivalent of what Derrida will speak of as "originary dissemination" (more on this in chapter 8).

The sense of expropriation correlating to "lack" is, as Lacan also makes clear, misplaced, for "the outside" was never actually held as a property to be taken away. The sense of "expropriation," accordingly, marks what Lacan describes as the supposed "loss" of what is only retrospectively constructed as a primary experience of being "the All." The death drive toward full reappropriation of the "outside," then, is necessarily frustrated, for satisfaction here would be a matter, impossibly, of eradicating the protective barrier that both enables the inside to resist the "outside" and opens the one up to the other.⁵⁴

Along with Lacan, Derrida finds that the resistance named by this receptive/defensive barrier (*khôra* in Derridean nomenclature, "lamella" in Lacanian) may only be grasped in terms of its multiple paradoxes, which makes it the troubling quasi-condition of the possibility and impossibility of repetition. The "protective shield," for example, names a receptivity whereby the very condition of repetition (namely, the resistance that allows a durable impression, imprint, or "copy" to form in the archival medium) is simultaneously its "ruin," for the nature of the medium allows only "selected bits of the real" to gain a purchase.⁵⁵ Just as light is refracted differently when it passes through different substances, so the archival medium "receiving" the imprint presses back, so to speak, and in so doing, codetermines the very nature of the imprint. This is why, to put it bluntly, individuals experience "the same" events differently.

In its conservative sense, moreover, this resistance both offers the chance for repetition (life) to "take hold," and poses the threat of stasis or death. In the everyday life of the psyche, as Freud explains, outside forces persistently breach its protective shield, upset psychical equilibrium, heighten tension, and threaten its integrity. Under the constant, self-protective, thanatic pressure to contain the threat of traumatic overload, eradicate excess tension, and return the organism to its pretraumatic state, the

psyche, as noted, takes both unconscious and conscious measures to master traumatic incursions. It may bind them into the existing web of facilitations (interpretations) or adapt and extend the web by establishing new passages for the expression of excess energy.⁵⁶ Further, it conserves new facilitations as expedient, preprepared outlets for future use. Freud describes such conservatism as “a kind of compulsion to repeat which, when a regulation has been laid down once and for all, decides when, where and how a thing shall be done, so that in every similar circumstance one is spared hesitation and indecision.”⁵⁷ Facilitations, therefore, are new memory traces made in response to the violation of an organism’s innate, conservative death drive, or its tendency to resist the new. Thus, ironically, the defensive pressure of the death drive, in spite of its being a fundamental inertial drive to return to an earlier state, promotes the development of the psyche as an archival web of facilitations. It is in this sense that the death drive, associated with repetition in the economic sense of conservation, makes the psyche (or archive) possible.

The defensive conditions that enable psychical development, by conserving (repeating) facilitations, may also impede it, for the death drive promotes what Freud calls “psychical inertia,” namely, a strong investment in existing orders, even if they are dysfunctional dis-orders, and the psyche can become a pathological straitjacket. As Freud notes, “the nature and trend of the ideas already united in the ego” determines whether the psyche will recognize and accept a new idea or reject or censor it.⁵⁸ In ambivalent cases where the psyche recognizes an idea as intolerable, it defends itself against the idea by forcing it out of consciousness and conscious recall. But, he insists, the psychical trace of it “must be there.” Thus, for example, he envisages the archival structure of the neuroses (here hysteria) as a circle segmented (as one would cut a cake) into themes, each of which contains a series of chronologically ordered memories. These are overlaid by a second series of divisions, depicted as concentric circles, representing layers of resistance to conscious recall. The memory traces in each theme, then, are also arranged from the more accessible in the outer layers toward the more deeply concealed. At the core lies the interdicted unconscious wish.⁵⁹

This nucleus, Freud argues, may become pathogenic “precisely as a result of its expulsion and repression.” While the ego, having originally forced it “into hiding,” persistently opposes its return to memory, the excitation it generates nevertheless requires expression, under the pressure of the death drive. The psyche, therefore, finds disguised ways to express the material contained in this nucleus, by following a twisted and ramified

path of associative links through the web of traces that surround it. Accordingly, it undergoes a process of “conversion” whereby the idea becomes ostensibly unimportant, and its associated affect is transferred onto a substitute.⁶⁰ Freud cites many cases in which violent but unacceptable desires are dissociated from the ego (disavowed to the point of being forgotten) and strong affective energies are converted into manifest discursive or physical symptoms. Such conversion, for him, never occurs arbitrarily but follows an articulated, if complex, pattern of links that connect seemingly disconnected memories.⁶¹

In short, one of the effects of the conservative death drive is the guarantee that nothing once traced through the psyche is ever permanently lost.⁶² Thus, Freud insists that a “kernel of truth” may be found in any delusion, which directs the fabrication, however bizarre the connections between any number of reinscriptions on its path to discharge. In this case, it would in principle always be possible for an analyst to pick up the thread of these links, returning from node to node toward the center, dissolving resistances encountered along the way, and thus clearing new paths for appropriate discharge once the “kernel of truth” is brought to light.

The Death Drive as Ruin of the Archive

But—and here is the autodeconstructing vacillation that undoes any proper conception of the archive—Freud remains justly ambivalent concerning the status of this “kernel of truth.” So far in this discussion there has been little to prevent one from assuming that he thinks of it as the replica in the archive of an original, actual trauma and that facilitations in the first instance reflect actual material forces, experiences, or things “out there” in the external world, although the ego may sometimes disavow these and disguise them after the fact. It would seem, therefore, that the death drive, insofar as it combines the motifs of conservation and return, makes the psyche possible as a proper archive. Here, the psyche becomes the place where impressions take hold and are kept (repeated) and organized as facilitations in a complex network whose ordering is not arbitrary, even if it is sometimes alogical (associative and idiosyncratic) and dependent upon the character—the maturity, experience, flexibility, and scope—of the individual.

In turn, there is little so far to prevent one from dreaming, along with the ego psychologists, of refinding traumas of the past in psychoanalytic hermeneutics. Freud is not entirely immune to this dream of proper remembrance or genuine *Anamnesis* that would return, via the archival records, to the trace that left “the first” impression and can be revived as

a true past present. In this respect, Derrida likens him to the archaeologist Hanold, one of the principal characters in Jensen's novel *Gradiva*, who goes to Pompeii in search of a trace. Hanold dreams, in Derrida's words, "of reliving the singular pressure or impression which Gradiva's step [*pas*], the step itself, the step of Gradiva herself, that very day, at that time, on that date, in what was inimitable about it, must have left in the ashes. He dreams of this irreplaceable place, the very ash, where the singular imprint, like a signature, barely distinguishes itself from the impression."⁶³ I cannot here unravel the complex ironies attached to this citation; suffice it to note that Gradiva is a fantasy figure in the imagination of a literary character, Hanold, who, in turn, is the product of Jensen's imagination. Moreover, the novelist whom one meets here is himself a product of the archive, that is, of my reading of Derrida's reading of Freud's reading. This performance of an archival *mise en abyme* suggests that fabrication remains inescapable, even for the kind of Freudians who dream of the end of analysis in, as Derrida puts it, a moment of "pure auto-affection," before the distinction between "the active and the passive," the "touching and the touched," "where, suddenly indiscernible from the impression of its imprint, Gradiva's footprint speaks by itself!"⁶⁴

The point of this performance, then, is to show that this would be to seek what Freud has already found to be impossible, namely, the moment of truth as yet uncontaminated by the processes of archivization, for the detour between occasioning force and its archiving recognition is not nothing. As Freud demonstrates as early as his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, a so-called originary impression is produced in consciousness only after it has already traced its way through psychical facilitations. This quest for the past present therefore goes against the grain of his awareness that the archive is no passive record of a "kernel of truth," preexisting the archive and determinable independently of it, but a process of fabrication that co-constitutes the "first" perceptual experience. In other words, for Freud in his aneconomic moments, the "kernel of truth" is the decisively formative fabrication. As a general "principle," then, the recognized phenomenon never copies the event, which withdraws in this very recognition and therefore potentially retains the power of surprise. Freud shows, in short, that humans live in the milieu of more or less dysfunctional constructions of reality.

This gap between the interpretative prosthesis and the "event" is precisely what gives the death drive its chance in its aneconomic guise of inventive destruction and poses the danger of destructive invention. The aneconomic, anarchiving motif of the death drive is always already implicated in archivization, which automatically entails an aggressive violation

of the other (the traumatic, the event, the Real) in the name of appropriating, interpreting, sense. This reductive gesture by which an archive is constituted and preserved means, paradoxically, that a certain “originary forgetting,” which may be called the forgetting of trauma (event, Real), is the guardian of memory. Such “originary forgetting” cannot be subsumed under Freud’s notions of repression and foreclosure. If the psyche configures experiential reality as a web of habitually employed prosthetic interpretations, what is repressed has already figured as something meaningful within this network, but it has been disavowed by the ego as unbearable, and interdicted. Earlier than this, the psyche may foreclose upon or reject an interpretation found to be impossible to integrate into the fabric of its other interpretations. Here, the interpretation is not archived as a concealed memory trace. Rather, it leaves its mark by affecting the very weave of the web, so preventing in advance similar interpretations from being produced as conscious phenomena. Repression and foreclosure, one could say, become disorders insofar as they represent the idiosyncratic rejection of phenomena that have already been adequately “reality tested” through intersubjective confirmation. However, pressed by the thanatic drive toward reduction and simplification, interpretation, which aims to make of “what happens” a present, archivable phenomenon, hides the complexities of “contamination” (paradoxes, fissures, anomalies, difficulties, and undecidabilities) behind prosthetic substitutes. Intersubjective confirmation and reality testing themselves are therefore homogeneous with the withdrawal of the Real in a necessary “originary forgetting” of contamination.

The psyche, resistant to change, strives to master threatening external forces to suit its own purposes (to return to a lower state of tension), at almost any cost. As Freud puts it: “The psychological apparatus is intolerant of unpleasure; it has to fend it off at all costs, and if the perception of reality entails unpleasure, that perception—that is, the truth—must be sacrificed.”⁶⁵ Indeed, describing the everyday psychological processes of inventive destruction, Freud insists that “each one of us behaves in some one respect like a paranoid, corrects some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him by the construction of a wish and introduces this delusion into reality.”⁶⁶ “Every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality.”⁶⁷

According to Derrida, if fictionalization (whether conservative and limiting or inventive) is an integral part of the interpretative processes that constitute reality, then it is Freud (among others) who has damaged the “proper” concept of the archive (as a noninventive reserve of recorded memory traces). Freud acknowledges, it would seem, that facilitations/

interpretations are both enabling and dysfunctional (reductive, distorting, fabricated), more or less noticeably in particular contexts. Facilitation, in other words, is less about reflecting some primordially and independently true state of affairs than the pragmatics of functional fabrication. To the extent that one gets by well enough on a delusion, it is not generally taken as an indication of mental illness. For example, Freud thinks of religion as an attempt to “procure a certainty of happiness and a protection against suffering through a delusional remoulding of reality.”⁶⁸ In his view, “by forcibly fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he does not recommend the mass psychoanalytic treatment of all the world’s religious.

Thus, to sum up so far, not even Freud escapes what psychoanalysis teaches: that the archival prosthesis shelters, memorializes, covers over the “event” in order to protect it, save it from oblivion, keep it intact, but in this very sheltering, it simply keeps it secret by putting something else in its place. The archive hides as much as it reveals. It is not only that the thing burns up in the grasping, but, more radically, there will always “be” that for which one does not even know to look. Speaking of Freud’s legacy, Derrida notes: “We will always wonder what, in this *mal d’archive*, he may have burned.” But more than this:

We will always wonder, sharing with compassion in this archive fever, what may have burned of his secret passions, of his correspondence, or of his “life.” Burned without him, without remains and without knowledge. With no possible response, be it spectral or not, short of or beyond a suppression, on the other edge of repression, originary or secondary, without a name, without the least symptom, and without even an ash.⁷⁰

But before anybody gets ready to abdicate all responsibility for historical “truth” or accuracy, Derrida warns against an entirely aneconomic view of the archive and archivization. These fissions, instead, leave us in a state not of subjective idealism but of archive fever, a double bind or irresolvable *aporia* where strictly speaking a purely economic account of the archive and the process of archivization is impossible, yet we cannot do without it. One cannot abandon the economic thinking of the archive (archivization at bottom records truths) to its aneconomic aspect (all is fabrication), since in this case the archive as such would be equally impossible. Then there would be no history, but a collection of stories no different in value. If one cannot maintain grounds for arguing that certain

versions and revisions of events, and not others, constitute an abuse of the archives, then all writings and rewritings of history would be equally (in)valid, and one could say with equal force, for example, that the Holocaust or Rwanda, the Gulf War, or “9/11” did and did not happen, or one could confuse the abusive rewriting of history with a different kind of rewriting that includes what was left out of an archive for political or ideological reasons.

Psychoanalysis and the Death Drive

If the constitution of the psyche remains tied up in aporias, one may wonder how this reflects upon psychoanalytic practice, as deconstitution or analysis of the psyche for therapeutic ends. Derrida finds a double anagogic/philolytic motif inscribed in the word “analysis.” In his words:

There is, *on the one hand*, what could be called the *archeological* or *anagogical* motif, which is marked in the movement of *ana* (recurrent return toward the principal, the most originary, the simplest, the elementary, or the detail that cannot be broken down); and, *on the other hand*, a motif that could be nicknamed *lytic*, *lytological*, or *philolytic*, marked in the *lysis* (breaking down, untying, unknotting, deliverance, solution, dissolution or absolution, and, by the same token, final completion).⁷¹

Described in terms of this double motif, psychoanalysis, which, as a therapy, aims to equip an analysand to master in retrospect the psychical overload caused by an unassimilated trauma, hopes to return through the detours of dysfunction to its repressed source, untying improper bindings along the way and cutting through resistant symptomatic knots. Having confronted the subject with the “trauma” anew, its further task is to rehabilitate misdirected, entropic, or destructive energies by encouraging the proper binding of excitation, or, that is, obtaining for it the appropriately directed release that would allow the psyche to regain its balance.⁷²

Questioning the coherence of these anagogic/philolytic motifs, however, Derrida focuses on the phrase “resistance to analysis.” “Resistance” is intrinsic to “analysis” as a notion. It is that point at which analysis stops, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the type of resistance. Freud, Derrida notes, recognizes various types of “resistance to analysis,” proceeding from the ego, id, and superego, all of which require different psychotherapeutic strategies.⁷³ But if these strategies depend on the type of resistance faced, things would get complicated were it to turn

out that the various kinds of “resistance” cannot be unified into the regulated polysemy of a concept but remain incompatible moments brought together in a notion, for the unity or “proper” sense (if there is such a thing) of psychoanalysis is intrinsically bound up with how the ultimate resistance that ends an analysis is conceived.

Derrida’s investigation into the possibility of psychoanalysis, from the point of view of a conceptual analysis of “analysis” and “resistance,” occupies the first part of his essay entitled “Resistances.” Unsurprisingly, he argues that resistance indeed defies unification into a concept and instead condenses an entangled meshwork of multiple *and* conflicting threads that can neither be separated out nor harmoniously coordinated. In short, the notion “resistance” functions as a quasi-transcendental condition of analysis. He ties his investigation to a retrospective note of three sentences appended to Freud’s analysis of his dream of “Irma’s injection.” The note consists of a confession and two remarks “whose juxtaposition and heterogeneity would deserve interminable analysis.”⁷⁴ It reads as follows: “I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield.—There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.”⁷⁵ Reading this note as an instance of Freud’s own “kettle logic,”⁷⁶ Derrida claims that these sentences imply incompatible senses of resistance. This suggests a framework for tracing out three scenes in which the corresponding descriptions of psychotherapy also are found to be incompatible. Scene one: what ends analysis is the original unconscious wish, and, accordingly, the philolytic and anagogic motifs in psychotherapy work together under the auspices of the “principle of reason.” Scene two: what ends analysis, rather, is a provisional resistance to analysis, in relation to which psychotherapy becomes a political, polemical, and erotic play of forces, but still governed by the “principle of reason.” Scene three: what ends analysis is a knot in the psychic weave that cannot be untied. Here psychotherapy works in the dark, without rule, as therapeutic synthesis.

Thus, depending on how the limit to analysis is understood, there is either an economic account of psychoanalysis “properly speaking” (scenes one and two) or an aneconomic account of psychoanalysis as (paradoxically) synthetic (scene three). But, Derrida asks, and this introduces his deconstructive hypothesis, can one make sense of resistance and psychoanalysis in terms of an either/or choice: as either homogeneous to sense

(making psychoanalysis entirely possible) or heterogeneous to sense (making psychoanalysis entirely impossible)? In short, are these two positions related by the logic of contradiction? Clearly not. Rather, as it turns out, resistance is homogeneous with the space of analytic work, and this entangles psychoanalysis in the circular logic of paradox or aporia. What follows is an elaboration of this argument.

Resistance in Analysis/Analysis as Economic

Freud's retrospective confession that the analysis of a certain dream fragment had not gone far enough and his suspicion that a concealed *meaning* exceeded (limited, resisted) the analysis reveals an attitude akin to that described as his dream of presence. Briefly, his self-criticism here displays no doubt that what is concealed at present has a sense. Moreover, it is only contingently concealed: as a provisional excess or hidden meaning, it implies that certain knots impossible to untie during an analysis may be appropriated to sense in retrospect. It is, therefore, in principle possible progressively to uncover the hidden meaning completely, given the analyst's energy, patience, skill, knowledge, and/or motivation to take the analysis as far as it will go.⁷⁷

In this case, then, resistances to analysis are understood as contingent but potentially meaningful obstacles to the progress of an analysis toward the final resistance: the "grain of truth" or unconscious wish that is not amenable to further breaking down. Further, because the resistances to analysis all remain intelligible, and therefore analyzable, up to the final resistance, analysis "properly speaking" works in accordance with the "principle of reason." Analysis in psychotherapy, therefore, would first of all be a hermeneutic unveiling in the most traditional sense.⁷⁸ It would involve the philolytic task of untying knots, dividing and separating out tangled threads, systematizing, putting things in their proper place and order, making sense, giving meaning, which, in turn, implies the task of dissolving or overcoming barriers to analysis and therefore incorporates the "anagogic" move to get to the bottom of things or to return to what is most originary.⁷⁹ On this account, then, in the recovery of a fully meaningful, original idea or wish that resists further analysis, psychoanalysis has a limit, an end, but for this reason, it has no limitation; in *anamnesis*, it can in principle reach the truth that is its end. In this case, importantly, resistances are not viewed as intrinsic to what is under analysis (a dream, a psyche) but stand as a function and indictment of the analyst's hermeneutic powers.⁸⁰

Psychotherapy took shape initially, Derrida notes, when Freud tacitly acknowledged that his patients had some justification for resenting his technique of “surgically” eradicating painful reminiscences by interdicting them through hypnotic suggestion. His felt obligation to pursue the therapeutic goal without resorting to hypnosis coincided with the basic theoretical shift from out of which psychotherapy took shape.⁸¹ Here, instead of hoping to eradicate symptoms by supporting the processes of repression and, in effect, adding strength to the ego’s defenses against painful memories, Freud found that, to the contrary, a more durable relief from symptoms was achieved by breaking down the resistances that prevented an analysand from consciously acknowledging painful memories and working through their implications. The analysand’s reluctance to air these recollections, and the effort required to uncover them, suggested to him that the ego, the force that had first interdicted them, remained invested in defending itself from them. Nevertheless, he found that he could often overcome the analysand’s reluctance to face certain recollections with the help of a simple technique: a hand on the forehead combined with the injunction to speak.⁸² The psychoanalytic task for Freud became a matter of, as Derrida puts it, “transforming the patient, the resister, into a ‘collaborator’ (that is Freud’s word) to whom one supplies explanations and in whom one arouses an investigator’s objective interest in himself.”⁸³

For Freud, the persistence of defenses, whose aim was to prevent the conscious recall of distressing ideas, suggests that such ideas, while apparently forgotten, remain inscribed in the psyche. Further, he insists that it will always be possible in principle to pick up the logical thread of linked archival traces engendered by the “original” idea, dissolve the knots of resistance, and return to the core, at which point the original impression speaks by itself—purified of the archive. A complete analysis, here, confronts the analysand finally with the original pathogenic idea and a map of the resistances employed to avoid its exposure.⁸⁴

However, as Freud puts it, “it was my view at that time (though I have since recognized it as a wrong one) that my task was fulfilled when I had informed a patient of the hidden meaning of his symptoms.”⁸⁵ This admission, Derrida notes, brings into view, “the question of whether psychoanalysis—whether the idea of analysis which gives it its name—finds suitable lodging in the history of reason.”⁸⁶ For the faith in reason, he continues, which allows one to envisage resistances as protecting hidden *meanings*, seems remarkable since Freud is about to take a step that “will be in truth a leap.” Derrida here refers to what is implied in the two remarks of Freud’s note, both of which unsettle the above conception of the psychoanalytic task as purely analytical. Moreover, as Derrida shows,

Freud produces a rupture between these remarks, making the second more radically unsettling than the first.

Resistance to Analysis/Analysis as Polemic and Erotic

There is a curious discrepancy between the progressive register of Freud's confession and his first remark, in which he insists that pursuing a comparison between certain women in his dream analysis would lead him not down to a kernel of truth but "far afield." Why? Derrida asks: "How can he know that he would go astray where he confesses or claims to confess that he didn't go see, not far enough?"⁸⁷ Finding no good reason ("He does not say, not really"), Derrida adds: "Right here, at this point, it would not be impossible to speak of resistance to analysis."

Having laid out a map of an analysand's pathology, Freud discovered soon enough in his practice that the analysand may refuse to acknowledge the interpretation, without rendering good reasons. (Notably, in the above example, Freud, in the position of analysand, resists his own analysis, for he refuses to pursue a particular line of thought, without rendering sufficient reason.) Here, however, resistance is no longer viewed as an obstacle to the progress of hermeneutic reason, experienced only from the position of the analyst. Rather, in this case, the analyst has reached a solution, *the* solution supposedly, but the analysand refuses to accept it.⁸⁸ For Freud, as mentioned above, the sources of such resistances are various, the deepest and most intractable of which is the repetition compulsion.⁸⁹

Accordingly, beyond the domain of pure hermeneutics, where it was merely a matter of informing analysands of the hidden meaning of their symptoms, acknowledging the force of this new kind of resistance meant that Freud's conception of psychoanalytic strategy had to extend to the "not nonviolent" task of actively engendering an affective transformation in the analysand. Here, analysts are obliged not only to uncover and present solutions but also to assume responsibility for whether analysands accept them.⁹⁰ Thus, it becomes equally necessary to overcome the variously layered resistances to these solutions by uncovering or identifying their underlying sources and overcoming the affective barriers these represent.

Freud, however, acknowledges that resistances can be nonrational, which means that the struggle against them has to mobilize forces other than those of rational enlightenment. It is never for Freud merely a matter of offering, as Derrida puts it, "a theoretical explanation of the origin and the elements of a defense system." Rather, resistance must not only be "comprehended and communicated in its *intelligibility*, but transformed,

transposed, transfigured.”⁹¹ In other words, to persuade analysands to accept interpretations, analysts are required to capitalize on the emotional dynamics of a “*poleros*,” that is, the polemics and erotics of resistance, power, and authority (for example in the sphere of the transference). As Derrida puts it: “It is thus not a matter of simply and in total neutrality substituting an unveiled truth for what resists it, but rather of leading the patient to awareness . . . by actively and energetically using counter-resistances, other antagonistic forces, through an effective intervention in a field of forces.”⁹²

Thus, as he notes, if Freud initially insisted that the analyst was responsible for the analytic solution but not the analysand’s resistances,⁹³ he here changes his mind about the task of analysis. In the context of his frustration with Irma for her resistance to treatment, Freud dreams of her, but substitutes her for a friend. Musing over this swap, he suggests:

Perhaps I should have *liked* to exchange her: either I felt more sympathetic towards her friend or had a higher opinion of her intelligence. For Irma seemed to me foolish because she had not accepted my solution. . . . Her friend would have been wiser, that is to say she would have yielded sooner [by implication to my advice, to my demand—or to my advances]. She would then have *opened her mouth properly*, and have told me . . . more than Irma.⁹⁴

This, according to Derrida, exemplifies a law: “The one that in general commands one to interpret as resistance to analysis, to the solution, to the resolution . . . the reservation of anyone who does not accept *your* solution.”⁹⁵ Freud, he adds, says as much himself: “*I reproached Irma for not having accepted my solution; I said: ‘If you still get pains, it’s your own fault.’*”⁹⁶

To the objection that “the objective truth . . . or analytic neutrality, removes the passions of resistance . . . from this *poleros*,”⁹⁷ Derrida counters that Freud himself has already undermined any possibility of “objective truth” and “analytic neutrality.” Nevertheless, he notes, if the work of analysis is a struggle between intellectual forces and emotive forces of resistance, such a battle between psychical powers is still here understood as having meaning: “Resistance must be interpreted; it has just as much meaning as what it opposes.”⁹⁸ This strategic capitalization on the dynamics of the *poleros* still allows that resistances, albeit not always rational, make sense and can be analyzed. Analysis, then, is still possible as the uncovering of meaning, including the meaning of the nonrational resistances. Once analysts understand the meaning of these, they may gain in polemical or persuasive power, for now such resistances can be dealt with

(e.g., shown up for their irrationality) within the framework of the supposedly more true, rational, everyday reality represented by the analyst. Here, the anagogic/philolytic task of analysis remains in the order of meaning. The primary step of analysis remains a hermeneutic return to the origin by analysts who apparently know analysands better than they know themselves. But it now includes the progressive analysis (uncovering and dissolution) of resistances as analysts attempt to draw analysands along an *anamnesic* path, through their resistances, to the truth of the matter and the “proper” solution to their problems. Freud does not here grant, Derrida concludes, that

a resistance might be, in this context, something other than a resistance to his solution, to his analysis, or, beyond this context and in general, that a resistance might be something other than a resistance full of meaning. Even if it is definitive, resistance belongs, along with what it resists, to the order of sense, of a sense whose secret is only the hidden secret, the dissimulated meaning, the veiled truth: to be interpreted, analyzed, made explicit, explained.⁹⁹

Resistance as Absolute/Analysis as Synthesis

Freud’s second remark adumbrates his famous proposition later in the text concerning the navel of the dream.¹⁰⁰ Having suggested that the meaning of a dream, only provisionally held at bay by resistances, continues to promise itself to progressive approximation, he then paradoxically names the navel of the dream as an absolute limit to this progress:

There is often a passage . . . in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be . . . left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle . . . of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled . . . and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel. . . . It is at some point where this meshwork . . . is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.¹⁰¹

Here as Derrida notes, we are no longer treading the ground of provisional limits to analysis. This proposition, in his words,

concerns rather a night, an absolute unknown that is originarily, congenitally bound or tied (but also in itself unbound because absolute) to the essence and to the birth of the dream, attached to the place from which it departs and of which it keeps the birthmark: the

umbilicus, the omphalic place is the place of a *tie*, a knot-scar that keeps the memory of a cut and even of a severed thread at birth.¹⁰²

Inscribed in this, according to Derrida, is another “unconditionally posed law”: “every dream, *always*, carries within it at least one place . . . that situates it as . . . impenetrable, unfathomable, unanalyzable, like a navel. . . . And Freud adds . . . that through this place it is knotted, attached, connected, or suspended . . . with the unknown.”¹⁰³

Here, as Derrida notes, this birthplace of the dream-wish, the very origin which terminates the process of “unbinding” knots and overcoming resistances, remains an obscure knot absolutely tied up, “in short an unanalyzable synthesis”¹⁰⁴ of threads. But this means that what finally resists analysis is not the dream wish in the form of an intelligible phenomenon or “transcendental signified” at the bottom of it all. Rather, the ultimate resistance to analysis, it would seem, takes the form of an irreducibly non-simple knot of multiple entanglements that still appeals to analysis even as it challenges it.¹⁰⁵ In other words, Freud’s remark here implies another, an entirely other, conception of resistance to analysis.

The thought that in every dream there is no ultimate, intelligible, presentable point of resistance that stops its analysis must in turn trouble any conception of dream analysis “properly speaking.” This trouble, however, is not limited to the analysis of dreams. One should bear in mind Freud’s insistence that the analysis of dreams is the “royal road” to the workings of unconscious processes in the psyche, and that the dream wish is intimately tied to the pathogenic idea targeted by psychotherapy. Because of this linkage, one may legitimately argue that Freud’s remark also tacitly troubles the notion of analysis in psychotherapy, which has been described so far in terms of the anagogic/philolytic process of hermeneutic uncovering and polemical overcoming.

Up to this point, under the assumption that a pathogenic idea is present but provisionally kept out of consciousness by resistances, Freud insisted that, having uncovered what is really at stake in the analysand’s situation, and having overcome all resistances to this solution, moving from the weaker to the most resistant, namely the repetition compulsion, the pathogenic idea will be exposed in its naked truth and acknowledged for what it really is. Having granted it credence, the analysand would now be free to address the problem of reintegrating it properly into the rationally organized framework of everyday experience. The governing assumption so far has been that the forces of resistance, down to the last, can be understood as standing decisively in opposition to those forces (like the psychoanalytic) that seek expression for the original pathogenic idea.

But Freud's insistence that at the navel, the birthplace, the very origin, of every dream (and by implication every unconscious process) lies an impenetrable tangle gives pause for thought, for it hints at as yet unacknowledged complexities or difficulties in the notion of resistance, which is, in turn, supposed to determine the concept "analysis" upon which, again, psychotherapeutic strategy rests. What is at stake in the definition of analysis if the ultimate resistance to analysis turns out not to be what analysis has always sought as its end, namely, the fully present analytic element that cannot be broken down any further, but an impenetrable tangle? On a certain account of resistance, one could say analysis is unlimited (or absolutely possible, in the sense that it can in principle reach its telos) because it has a limit. But on a different account of resistance, one would have to grant that analysis is limited; an absolute, or complete, analysis becomes impossible precisely because it has no limitation. The end of an analysis, in this sense, must remain arbitrary, for more analysis is in principle always possible.

All of this suggests that one should look more carefully at what Freud's insistence upon this navel might imply concerning the place of resistance in psychotherapy. How sound is the assumption that resistance, as a defense that covers the very nucleus that psychotherapy aims to uncover and express, is simply a force that opposes the direction and telos of psychoanalysis? Freud names five kinds of resistance. But, Derrida notes, "the multiplicity of resistances does not necessarily threaten the concept of resistance."¹⁰⁶ It would be easy enough to think of the concept of resistance as a genus with several species, and understand it according to a regulated polysemy. "Its unity of meaning and place, as well as its validity would even be confirmed by this diffraction: it itself, the same, is what one would find again throughout."¹⁰⁷ But, he asks, how does one determine this "it itself, the same?" In determining the nature of resistance, it makes sense to take as a paradigm the most resistant resistance: namely, the repetition compulsion.¹⁰⁸

One may describe the repetition compulsion as an extreme (and therefore pathological) version of the everyday psychical processes of "inventive destruction." In everyday cases, facing a traumatic event, the psyche undergoes a process of learning, in which it redesigns the fabric of its psychic life in an effort to cope. In the event of a traumatic shock of such novelty or magnitude that it remains impossible to assimilate through habitual psychical economies, a kind of "system overload" occurs whereby excitation remains to some degree unbound. Here, the death drive compels the psyche to master the overload by reinstating its pretraumatic equilibrium. But, equipped with ingrained patterns of appropriation that are entirely

unequal to a monstrous event, it lacks the power necessary to grant it a place in reality, which is the first step toward the adaptation required in order to cope with it. Instead, in a pathological response, the psyche attempts to regain equilibrium by avoiding the issue altogether and repressing the unacceptable situation.

Repression works in various ways. A victim of abusive incest, for example, may repress the intolerable monstrosity of an “evil” parent by constructing a “reality” in which this kind of violation can be conceived of as a gain, by inventing a masochistic, guilty self who requires punishment. But she thereby dooms herself to laborious efforts to combat the many unsettling symptoms of something amiss in her constructed world, for she now requires constant confirmation of the construction that keeps her reality intact. Such a victim, then, tends obsessively to seek out situations in which the abuse is repeated.¹⁰⁹ Further repressed material improperly bound in this way continues to produce tension that presses for discharge at all costs. Under the pressure of the death drive, it must resurface. But, since it remains subject to the ego’s refusal under the pressure of the pleasure principle, the psyche settles for an economic compromise in which, as mentioned earlier, this material resurfaces via the detour of disguises. In other words, as a consequence of this unsatisfactory compromise, repressed material persistently and compulsively reappears in obsessions, dreams, parapraxes, neuroses, projections, paranoias, and other symptoms. This tends to exact a price, for the death drive, prior to any intelligible pleasure calculus, serves constancy blindly, instinctively, without reason, and potentially at the cost of all—family, friendship, health, pleasure, philosophy, and so on, and, importantly, therefore, of emotional, social, professional, and intellectual development. Thus, driven either to assimilate or reject change but lacking the necessary competence to do either, the psyche remains in suspension. Unable to return properly to a previous state or decisively move on to something new, it becomes fixated on, or seemingly doomed to repeat, its ultimately unsatisfactory efforts to master the traumatic breach.

Psychotherapy works on the assumption, however, that dysfunctional constructions, once invented, can in principle be reinvented. Even so, the repetition compulsion, as resistance to change (any change, even change for “the good”) represents the most intractable resistance to psychoanalytic reinvention, for the earlier constructions become obstacles that stand in the way of revision. The psyche clings to them, due to their dubious success in keeping the psychic world intact, where it seems to the one who suffers that the only alternative is to fall apart or break down.

This, however, is where the trouble starts and notions become entangled, for Derrida finds that the repetition compulsion both opposes and mirrors the direction and telos of psychotherapy. In other words, the repetition compulsion is quasi-transcendental: as “the most resistant resistance,” it both gives and unsettles the meaning of resistance, and this, he claims, “disorganizes the very principle, the constitutive idea of psychoanalysis as analysis of resistances.”¹¹⁰ In his words: “The paradox that interests me here is that this repetition compulsion, as hyperbolic paradigm of the series, as absolute resistance, risks destroying the meaning of the series to which it is supposed to assure meaning (this is an effect of formal logic . . .), but still more ironically, it defines no doubt a resistance that *has no meaning*—and that, moreover, is not a resistance.”¹¹¹

First, the repetition compulsion, he argues, has no meaning in the sense that it is not, like the others, a resistance that makes economic sense. Instead of being a cover that disguises an already constituted nucleus, the repetition compulsion is implicated in the very constitution of the nucleus. Further, the repetition compulsion as the consequence of an impossible situation, an aporia, represents the site of a compromise (a navel) that gives birth to a highly idiosyncratic fabrication that does not make sense. When psychoanalysis, therefore, returns to the so-called origin, the last line of defense, the most resistant resistance, it finds “at bottom” not a kernel of truth but a synthesis of strands, a tangle or navel, in which the repetition compulsion is always already implicated. From the start the most resistant resistance and the pathogenic idea are already bound up with one another in a knot that is impossible to untangle.

Further, the repetition compulsion, as Derrida puts it, “resists analysis in the form of nonresistance, for the primary reason that it is *itself of an analytic structure or vocation*.”¹¹² In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud argues that repressed material in the unconscious should not resist psychoanalytic treatment, for both have an aim in common (namely its expression). Resistance, rather, arises from the ego. The repetition compulsion, then, is the attempt to master psychical overload by finding substitute expression for material that is repressed under the pressure of constraints imposed by the ego. The repetition compulsion is, therefore, not a resistance, strictly speaking. Yet it nevertheless poses the most recalcitrant barrier (resistance) to psychotherapy, precisely because it serves a similar aim, namely, to regain psychical equilibrium, and to some extent it achieves this restitution via substitutes that, although inadequate, it is unwilling to give up. This ultimate resistance that is supposed to put a stop to analysis as philolytic/anagogic mirrors the structure of analysis. Analysis, therefore, finds its end and its limit not in the originary “grain

of truth” that cannot be analyzed further, but in more analysis. It is, paradoxically, infinite analyzability that resists and limits analysis. As Derrida notes: “This compulsion combines the two essential motifs of all *analysis*, the regressive or archeotropic movement and the movement of dissolution that urges towards destruction, that loves to destroy by dissociating—which is why a moment ago I called it *philolytic*.”¹¹³

Not only does the repetition compulsion “destroy” the original trauma by dissociating it from what is finally expressed in consciousness, but the fabricated reality becomes increasingly entangled if the ego, over time, is obliged to elaborate the defense to explain away incongruities. Thus, as already noted, Freud saw that what links the trauma to its expression in a symptom is a chain of idiosyncratic interpretations and associations (transcriptions that are not translations). This is the sense in which, as Derrida puts it, “the link can be interruption itself” rather than a smooth logical chain. To compound the entanglement, facing the repetition compulsion, psychotherapy begins to defy its analytic (intellectual, hermeneutic, economic) character. Facing the singularity of this knot, having turned the analysand into an analytical collaborator, having pushed back all other resistances to analysis, psychoanalytic strategy itself becomes singular, reliant on an affective factor, namely, the personal influence of the analyst. In Freud’s words:

We must endeavour, after we have discovered the motives for its defence, to deprive them of their value *or even to replace them by more powerful ones*. This no doubt is where it ceases to be possible to state psychotherapeutic activity in formulas. One works to the best of one’s power, as an elucidator (where ignorance has given rise to fear), as a teacher, as the representative of a freer or superior view of the world, as a father confessor who gives absolution, as it were, by a continuance of his sympathy and respect after the confession has been made.¹¹⁴

Here, aligning psychoanalysis with teaching and religion, the psychoanalytic task is redefined. The analyst intervenes in the activity of the repetition compulsion, *no longer* to dissolve it by theoretical explanation, nor even to overcome it through active counterresistance techniques, but to reconfigure its shape, by “re-binding” or reconfiguring the threads of its invention of value. But what psychoanalysis has enabled one to see is not only that fabrications legitimate themselves on pragmatic grounds (“it works for me”) but also that it is only on those pragmatic grounds, rather than the grounds of an alternative true reality, that psychotherapy can

offer a challenge to the analysand. One respects the “reality” of the analysand and assesses its merits not in terms of some ideal of true reality in the everyday but in terms of its internal costs and benefits.

Paradoxically, then, facing what at bottom has no rational meaning, the task of analysis is reformulated in a way that repeats precisely the reconstructive character of its most difficult adversary. It becomes nonanalytic, synthetic: taken up, that is, in the fabrication of adaptive facilitations, in the construction of new narratives or new disguises for the unanalyzable event—the event that cannot be dissolved, the scar that cannot fade. In short, psychotherapy as analysis, a process or practice that directs itself toward an end, mirrors, speculates on, that which most strongly resists this process, namely, the repetition compulsion as a synthetic construction and revision that cannot be concluded. In Derrida’s words: “Some would be tempted to infer from this that psychoanalysis is homogeneous to it and that psychoanalytic theory, treatment, and institution represent the death drive or the repetition compulsion *at work*.”¹¹⁵

One faces in the end the *mise en abyme* of a double mirroring, for “psychoanalysis” and “resistance” become inextricably entangled with one another, since they prove to be isomorphic. On the one hand, the quintessential resistance to analysis, which should give sense to all the others, namely the repetition compulsion, turns out to repeat the very structure of analysis. Instead of putting a stop to analysis, then, the repetition compulsion is itself analytical in structure, making for an abyssal aneconomy of infinite analyzability. On the other hand, psychoanalysis, as synthetic, turns out to repeat the repetition compulsion. This puts psychoanalysis in a spin: if psychotherapy mirrors the aim and the activity of the repetition compulsion, since the repetition compulsion resists psychoanalysis, this entangles us in the impossible (aporetic) thought that psychoanalysis itself, *as the death drive*, poses the greatest resistance to analysis.

This, of course, Derrida notes, would not necessarily be cause for complaint. What is successful in psychotherapy depends on the insistence that, in principle, one must always be able to revise fabrications through careful intervention. It therefore demonstrates, on the one hand, the irreducibility not of the repetition compulsion but of repetition as iterability, as repeating-differently. On the other hand, one is obliged to ask for whom, or according to what definition of “mental illness,” the analysand’s interpretations are called fabrications, and, moreover, who decides, and in the name of what, which are the better constructions? In other words, psychoanalytic intervention, insofar as the analyst assumes the place of authority, teacher, or father-confessor, is equally in danger of

being taken in by its own repetition compulsion, namely that commanded by a certain disciplinary or institutional status-quo. There is, then, no simple answer to the question of whether psychotherapy overcomes the repetition compulsion or is overcome by it.

Concluding Remarks

To sum up, then, Derrida sees psychoanalytic strategy shift, according to the kind of resistance it faces, from the hermeneutic task of “comprehension and communication,” through the effective *polemic* and *erotic* task of active engagement, and finally, “beyond all these discursive and intellectual situations” to the affective factor of personal influence, in a reconstructive synthesis where there are no more general rules to follow.¹¹⁶ But in this case, he argues, psychoanalysis exceeds the concept of analysis that traditionally dominates philosophy, logic, and science, which, he claims, “could not intervene, at least as such, in an effective and affective fashion, in a *decisive* fashion to remove resistance of any sort.” These effective, affective, personal, and synthetic factors in psychoanalysis tempt one to think that it simply inaugurates another concept of analysis, which would, in turn, dismiss the possibility of there being a single scientific tradition.

However, Derrida remarks, “things are surely not so simple.”¹¹⁷ First, Freud did not invent a new concept, but without choice, if he wished to be understood, had to submit to the inherited legacy of the two motifs that constitute every notion of analysis. Second, in his attempt to inaugurate a science, “he had to justify his discourse and his institution before the tribunal of traditional analysis, before its norms and its law.” These remarks suggest, on the one hand, that “analysis” in psychoanalysis overlaps with the traditional concept of analysis, in the sense that it must submit to its tradition.

Yet, on the other hand, Derrida insists, this imbrication of psychoanalysis and the tradition of analysis equally places this tradition into question, particularly since psychoanalysis, “in the form of its philosophical or scientific knowledge,” has developed “as a practical analysis of the cultural, political, and social resistances represented by hegemonic discourses.”¹¹⁸ Here, he argues, if psychoanalysis belongs (with philosophy, logic, and science) to a single tradition of analysis, it would have been defined as a unified concept. But the unity of psychoanalysis in turn depends on a similarly unified concept of resistance. Yet, in his view, “this was never the case.” Thus: “If it is true that the concept of *resistance to analysis* cannot unify itself, for nonaccidental or noncontingent reasons,

then the concept of analysis and of psychoanalytic analysis, the very concept of *psychoanalysis* will have known the same fate.” Instead, psychoanalysis is divided between two motifs. As Derrida puts it: “on the one side, an Enlightenment progressivism, which hopes for an analysis that will continue to gain ground on initial obscurity to the degree that it removes resistances and liberates, unbinds, emancipates, as does every analysis, and, on the other side, a sort of fatalism or pessimism of desire that reckons with a portion of darkness and situates the unanalyzable as its very resource.”¹¹⁹ Accordingly, if psychoanalysis and the tradition of analysis overlap, then it brings out into the open what has always been repressed in order for there to be a tradition: namely, that analysis as a concept is incoherent and that, therefore, a single tradition of analysis is constituted only on the basis of repression, as is any hegemonic discourse.

Psychoanalysis can neither reject nor embrace either economic analysis, which values objectivity, neutrality, and truth, or aneconomic synthesis, which embraces a Nietzschean motif of self-invention. How, then, are these extremes to be related? It would be an error, of course, to assume that the economic and the aneconomic in psychoanalysis form proper opposites between which one can make an either/or choice.¹²⁰ For Derrida, instead, these sides are caught up in an aporetic vacillation, which, unable to come to rest, reflects the incoherence of the notion “psychoanalysis.” This is not, one must add immediately, intended as criticism. As he insists: “The inability to gather oneself, to identify with oneself, to unify oneself, all of this is perhaps tragedy itself, but it is also (the) chance.” Again: “To say that psychoanalysis does not have *the* concept of what it itself is in its auto-identification, because it cannot give itself a concept of resistance, is certainly not to describe a paralysis of psychoanalysis, at least not a banal and negative paralysis. . . . It gives movement, it gives one to think and to move.”¹²¹