

The other within

Rethinking psychoanalysis

RP: How did you come to psychoanalysis? What made you want to be an analyst?

Laplanche: It's a long story. I was studying philosophy in the 1940s and psychoanalysis was not as well known as it is now. It was something new and revolutionary. But I had two professors who were interested in it. One, Ferdinand Alquié, was in the surrealist movement and was himself in analysis; the other, Jean Hippolyte, was a Hegelian. I was very much in favour of integrating psychoanalysis into philosophy, but I had no thought of becoming a practitioner. I didn't know anything about Lacan, not even his name.

When I entered the École Normale Supérieure, I had a scholarship at Harvard University for a year, 1946–7, and an introduction to Rudolf Loewenstein, Lacan's former analyst in Paris and co-founder of 'ego psychology' in America. I visited him in New York on the way to Harvard. Loewenstein told me, 'When you go to Harvard, don't go to the Philosophy Department, it's not very interesting. Go to the Department of Social Relations. There are some psychoanalysts there and people interested in anthropology, like Kluckhohn and Murray.' I spent a year there and became very interested in analysis. When I arrived back, I decided to undergo analysis – not to become an analyst, just to have a personal analysis – and to continue exploring the use of analysis for progress in philosophy.

I visited Alquié and asked him to recommend someone. He said, 'There is a young psychoanalyst in the street around the corner who is organizing a seminar about pigeons – identification in pigeons and peregrine crickets.' (This is a kind of cricket that changes its shape when it sees another one.) This was Lacan. So I went through all the debates within the movement in France on the couch. I continued in philosophy and after my *agrégation*, in 1951, I decided to become an analyst. On Lacan's advice, I decided to take medicine. Lacan was very much in favour of medical studies. He wanted to be called Doctor Lacan. Even his daughter called him Doctor Lacan. Retrospectively, the analysis with Lacan was considered a training analysis and, after my medical studies, I had supervisions in 1959–60.

RP: You were also a Trotskyist during this period: first, in the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (the French branch of the Fourth International) and later in Socialisme ou Barbarie. Was there any connection between your psychoanalytic and your political interests? Or were they separate spheres?

Laplanche: I was one of the founders of Socialisme ou Barbarie, but the atmosphere soon became impossible. Castoriadis exerted hegemony over the journal (he wrote the main articles) and his central idea in the mid

Jean Laplanche is the most original and philosophically informed psychoanalytic theorist of his day. Setting out from a critical reconstruction of Freud's terminology, he has developed a systematic rethinking of psychoanalytic metapsychology under the heading of a 'general theory of seduction'. Still best known in Britain for his early joint work with Pontalis – 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' (1964; trans., International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 1968) and The Language of Psychoanalysis (1967; trans. 1973) – Laplanche's main work is the five-volume Problématiques (1980–1987), in relation to which New Foundations for Psychoanalysis (1987; trans. 1989) represents a condensed summary of general results. More recently, he has been concerned with the elaboration of a psychoanalytic theory of time and an account of the role of transference in cultural production. His essay 'Psychoanalysis as Anti-Hermeneutics' was published in Radical Philosophy 79 (Sept/Oct 1996). An English edition of volume IV of the Problématiques, The Unconscious and Id, was recently published by Rebus Press, London, 1999. His most recently translated volume, Essays on Otherness (1999), is reviewed in this issue of RP by David Macey.

1950s was that a third world war was inevitable. This was very hard for people in the group to stand: to continue our lives, while thinking there would be an atomic explosion in a few years' time. It was an apocalyptic vision. There was a shift in my interests from political activity to analytic activity at that time. I was still in favour of the thesis of Socialisme ou Barbarie, until '68, but I wouldn't say there was a convergence. Analysis took the place of the political things. They are difficult to keep together.

RP: What was the character of your relations with Lacan? Did you agree with his idea of 'short sessions'?

Laplanche: My relation to Lacan was analytical for as long as possible. I almost forced him to maintain an analytic standpoint. But in the end I went to the Seminar and so on. And I was part of the 1963 split – although I should say that those of us who wanted to re-enter the IPA (International Psychoanalytical Association) did so with the agreement of, and even under pressure from, Lacan. He wanted an international audience again. However, the question of his analyses was at stake – the question of short sessions and the number of analysands – and he didn't want to make any changes in his practice. He did not make any concessions. We wanted him to. He did not.

I am completely against short sessions. The argument for the short session is that it is flexible. It is not flexible. The flexibility is always in one direction only: against continuing. A 'flexible analyst' is never in favour of one-hour sessions. I have never seen a 'flexible analyst' make sessions of one hour or more, waiting for a good moment for scansion, the moment when the analysand has said the right thing. In fact, in the paper where he discussed this, Lacan said exactly the opposite. He said he stopped those sessions because they were uninteresting. 'Empty speech.' The only example he gives is of a patient who was talking about Dostoevsky for years, for hours and hours. And he stopped it. But he could have found the unconscious in those speeches about Dostoevsky, if he had searched.

RP: What about the economic argument: that this is a way to become rich?

Laplanche: There is also the economic argument, yes. But for Lacan, I don't think it was the real reason. It was the 'influence' argument. Freud once said, 'I do short analyses [that is, over a short period, two or three months] because I want to have many followers.' Lacan did something similar: analysis over a long period, but with short sessions, to have more followers. It was the same idea. Freud does not escape this remark. But to return to scansion: for Lacan, scansion is always a way of marking a 'castration'. I must cut you, cut you somewhere. It's a very *passee-partout* interpretation, the key to everything. All is castration. You must assume castration. 'I castrate through a short session.' I am very against it, because I believe free association is one of Freud's fundamental discoveries. If one believes in that method, one must have time to develop free associations. You must be comfortable to develop the association without knowing that you will be cut off in the midst of the very first phrase. I try to make my patients feel comfortable to do the analytic work.

RP: When did you start working with Pontalis?

Laplanche: We knew each other from the time we prepared for the École Normale Supérieure – which he did not enter – between 1940 and 1941. We saw each other a few times later, when I was in medicine, but it was Lagache who asked us to work together. Lagache had begun work on a dictionary of psychoanalysis in his seminar at the Sorbonne, but on a very small scale. It was a large seminar – thirty to forty people – but there were only short articles, with no real discussion about them. It wasn't a good framework. So Lagache decided to do it another way, with just the three of us; although in the end it was only two of us, myself and Pontalis. It became *The Language of Psychoanalysis*.

RP: When you started with Lagache and Pontalis in 1959, did you have a clear model of reading worked out in advance, between the three of you, or did the method emerge out of the work itself?

Laplanche: Out of the work itself. All my readings of Freud emerged from that. We developed a model which, I was aware, was to be pregnant with something else.

RP: It didn't derive, in any way, from Lacan's famous 'return to Freud'? Lacan lectured on Freud's texts, but it's not entirely clear how systematic his procedures were in the 1950s.

Laplanche: I don't think Lacan had a methodology. I don't think he knew German so well, and I don't think he ever read much more than a few lines at any one time. I don't think he read an entire paper of Freud's in German. It was more an impulse, to go back to Freud, which was very important. His interpretations are completely speculative, or imaginative. Such as when he said that Freud nowhere speaks of 'instinct'. That just goes against what Freud said. Instead of saying Freud never speaks of instinct, it's much more interesting to admit that he did and explore the contradiction between 'instinct' and 'drive'.

FANTASY AND CULTURAL CODES

RP: You published another piece with Pontalis on fantasy, in 1964, which became very influential in film studies in Britain and the USA during the 1980s...

Laplanche: Yes, it is a historical paper, and I do not completely agree with the position it expounds. It unearths the concept of 'primal fantasy' in Freud, which was not very well known in psychoanalysis. But unearthing a concept doesn't mean that you agree with it. I don't agree with the concept of primal fantasy.

RP: But do you agree with the account of the *structure* of fantasy there, the structure of identification, separated from the notion of the primal?

Laplanche: Well, that's not the problem in Freud. The problem in Freud is that of genetic inheritance and I cannot agree with that. That's the main problem. To say that there are primal fantasies in another sense, a cultural sense ... well, maybe. But I would be in favour of cultural differences, even as regards those so-called 'primal' fantasies.

RP: At the end of the entry on primal fantasies in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, you say: 'Whatever reservations may be justified as regards the theory of an hereditary, genetic transmission, there is no reason, in our view, to reject as equally invalid the idea that structures exist in the fantasy dimension [*la fantasmatique*] which are irreducible to the contingencies of the individual's lived experience.'

Laplanche: Yes, I still partially agree with that, but I am now looking in the direction of myth or ideology. And I would say that, on the side of ideology, beyond the individual, there are codes furnished by the culture and those codes take the place of the primal fantasmatic. I would put 'primal fantasy' on the side of the codes.

RP: So the fantasies are collective, but the message is individual?

Laplanche: I would rather speak of collective 'codes': the Oedipus is a kind of a code, with its variants.

RP: One aspect of the article that has received considerable attention is your disagreement with the Kleinians. The Kleinians prioritize unconscious fantasy – they want to spell it with a 'ph', to distinguish it from daydreams and conscious fantasy. You say that's not the key distinction in Freud; the key distinction is between primal or *Urphantasie* and secondary fantasy. What is distinctive about primal fantasy is that it's a scenario with multiple entries; unlike a secondary fantasy, where there's a one-to-one correla-

tion between the subject and the protagonist in the fantasy. The secondary fantasy is weighted by the ego, the protagonist represents the dreamer or the fantasist; whereas in primal fantasy, there's no guarantee where the fantasist will be located. They could be located in father, daughter, or seducer, or even in the syntax of the fantasy. Do you still hold to that?

Laplanche: My way of seeing things is now much less structuralist: I would place the idea of 'the primal' on another level, the sociocultural level, the level of the codes. Freud keeps a continuity between conscious and unconscious fantasy. If you spell it with a 'ph' you get something which is supposed to be – and this is the Kleinian thought – separate and biological. I completely disagree with that.

RP: When you return to Freud's essay on the beating fantasies, in your more recent piece on hermeneutics and determinism, you isolate the analysis of the second moment – it's unconscious and it never becomes conscious – and you say Freud's formulation for that is *ursprüngliche* (original) fantasy, which you then say is a rival conception to the inherited *Urphantasie*. But I'm wondering, is the *ursprüngliche* fantasy also a scenario with multiple entries?

Laplanche: I'm not so sure of that, because that second moment in Freud is very fixed. It's fixed to the father, it's not multiple entry. There's not much mobility. But I would say that what is circulating around this personal primal fantasy could have multiple positions. Maybe what is nearest to the unconscious doesn't have multiple entry. Maybe it's fixed to one position. At least in Freud's example, it's fixed to the father and no one else.

RP: This raises the question of the relation between mobility and fixity in the core of the unconscious. There's a paradox here or an anomaly. At the deepest level of the unconscious – the primal repressed, produced by the first translations – there's a fixity. Yet you associate that fixity with unbinding, and with what you call a 'pure culture of otherness', echoing Freud's phrase, the 'pure culture of the death instincts'. So there's unbinding on the one hand, but fixity on the other. Can you elaborate on that?

Laplanche: There is fixity, but in separate and unbound units. As I see it now, the primary process, as Freud describes it, is not a characteristic of the core. It circulates around the core. It's the first form of binding. It's a very loose binding, but it's a binding. The associations, displacements and condensations mean there are bindings. There are pathways established by the primary process.

SEXUALITY, SEDUCTION AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

RP: Perhaps we could talk about some of the innovations that arise out of your reading of Freud. Your work begins philologically, and reconstructively, but gradually becomes more critical, as the systematic implications of particular terminological distinctions are developed. The most important one is that between *Instinkt* and *Trieb*, instinct and drive.

Laplanche: Yes, with regard to the English-speaking world, this is the main issue, because the English-speaking world has been invaded by the mistranslation of *Trieb* as 'instinct'. The object-relations school, the ego psychology school, the Kleinian school – all these schools fail to make a basic distinction between drive and instinct. As a consequence, they still have the idea of a biological basis to infantile sexuality, a predetermined basis, expressed in the evolution of sexuality through certain stages. This is correlated with the concept of instinct – an instinct that develops through certain stages. Human sexuality is completely reduced to an old biological model. The whole of Freud's discovery is forgotten. Freud sometimes forgets it too, in fact.

RP: Which other concepts become highlighted in the attempt to retain the ontological specificity of human sexuality in the drives?

Laplanche: *Anlehnung* or 'leaning on'. Strachey's use of 'anaclisis' as the translation for this has nothing to do with the *Anlehnung* of Freud. The idea of 'leaning on' is the idea that sexuality emerges on the basis of self-preservation, it 'leans on' that basis, but it's not just an internal movement. That's very important.

RP: How does this connect to the concept of seduction, which is your ultimate explanatory concept here?

Laplanche: Seduction theory is a step further. When Freud abandoned the seduction theory, he had to find something to account for the autonomy of sexuality, so he invented the concept of 'leaning on'. But leaning on is only a 'leaning on' concept for Freud, so to speak. He leaned upon it in order to avoid seeing what he had discovered through the seduction theory. It is *un concept béquille*, a concept on crutches. As a matter of fact, it leads back to the concept of seduction.

We had already formulated the idea of a 'theory' of seduction in the text on primal fantasies and in *The Language of Psychoanalysis. Life and Death*, the book I wrote just after *The Language*, was, for me, the moment to capitalize on that work. Then, in the volume of *Problematics* on sublimation, I arrived at the formulation that 'the truth of leaning on is seduction', that leaning on finds its truth only in the seduction theory. The idea of a *theory* of seduction was unknown before we showed what it is. People said, 'Freud abandoned the idea of seduction, the importance of seduction.' People like Masson and Borch-Jacobson, who speak of an abandonment of the 'so-called' theory of seduction, don't know one word about what it is *as a theory*, rather than a mere assertion that seduction is important in infants. They say, 'Well, he saw it was very important; later, he thought it not important, for personal reasons', but they don't see what was at stake theoretically in that. I took the term 'theory of seduction' and developed it. If sexuality leans upon the self-preservative relationships, where does it come from? Either from inside – but that's emergence theory once again – or from somewhere else. The seduction theory explains this 'somewhere else': it comes from the other.

RP: There is another text in the prehistory of the theory of seduction, and the translational model of the unconscious to which it gives rise, which you haven't referred to: the text you wrote with Leclaire on the unconscious in 1959.

Laplanche: It's quite different in scope. For me, it was an assertion of the 'realism of the unconscious'. The reality of the unconscious is not in the realm of meaning, it's not another kind of meaning, a 'deeper meaning', it's something independent of meaning.

RP: So what is the ontological domain in which there is this thing called the unconscious?

Laplanche: Well, I am a materialist, or a parallelist if you like, a Spinozist. I think that anything that exists in the realm of the mind also exists somewhere in space, in the brain. So there is something corresponding to our speech, but not corresponding term-to-term. The process of correspondence is completely uneven and non-analogical.

RP: This is important, because the translational model of the unconscious – the model of enigmatic messages – in which the child's unconscious is formed by the repression of the unreadable elements of the adult's messages, appears to involve a peculiar crossing of domains. Something which begins as a message ends up as an inaccessible, or only partly accessible, 'thing' inside the child. The mind-body dualism in the discussion of parallelism doesn't seem to do justice to the ontological complexity, or peculiarity, of the unconscious here.

Laplanche: It is a *thing-like* signifier.

RP: In the essay with Leclaire you use the expression ‘realism of the letter’. The signifier can accumulate different meanings, but it’s got a materiality in itself. That’s a peculiar notion, ontologically, here, because the signifier is unconscious. Discussions of materialism seem inadequate. It’s more of a memory-trace, isn’t it? The trace of a gesture, of an expression, of a sound, a word, but it’s not memory. That’s the point. The material is fragmented and has to be translated, and a remainder is left behind.

Laplanche: Yes, but it’s a *un-metabolized* trace. It’s not a representation. It’s something that remains from a process. It’s a by-product of a process, a by-product which is continually reactivated. I sometimes say that it’s the only place left for the idea of causality, because science has rejected the idea of causality as such. Scientific determinism uses the idea of law. Even psychology: laws instead of causes. The unconscious may be the only remaining ‘metaphysical’ cause.

RP: I’d like to ask you about the structure of adult–child relations in this model. Most of the work is being done by the asymmetry between maturity and immaturity: the untranslatability of the message which forms the child’s unconscious is a consequence of this asymmetry. Two things: (1) it seems to me a great advance to make the *generic* adult–child asymmetry primary, so that the specific social character of the adult – whether it’s a parent or not, or what sex they are – becomes secondary. You separate the primal situation from the structure of the family and from sexual difference.



Laplanche: Yes, absolutely. What I call the ‘fundamental anthropological situation’ is a universal (rather than parental) situation. A child can become human and be educated without parents, but not without receiving adult messages.

RP: On the other hand, (2) in a way that follows your own spiral model of theory development, your advance seems also to involve a regression: regression to a dyadic model. With Freud’s parental model, although it’s familially overdetermined, you have more than one adult. Surely, the second adult is crucial. You don’t seem to have a way of thinking the plurality of adults. Where is the third term?

Laplanche: The third term is the adult’s unconscious. The plurality of adults are contained within the one adult. There is an elaboration of that in, for example, the Oedipal situation, which is secondary to the first seduction. But the core of seduction is the relation of a child and an adult who sends messages compromised by his own unconscious sexuality.

RP: But is this an *empirical* one or a *transcendental* situation? There seems to be a tension here.

Laplanche: I am currently working on primary identification, starting out from the question of gender: the assignation of gender. The gender of an individual is first an assignation by the other. I’m trying to show that what Freud called primary identification with the ‘father of personal pre-history’, or what Lacan calls primary symbolic identification, is not ‘I identify myself’ but an identification *by* the other. The other *identifies me*. There are not only the daily messages that I refer to in the theory of seduction. There is also another kind of message,

that is given not by the social in general, but by small communities. One member of the group goes to the mayor and registers a name, a first name, a gender, sometimes a religion, sometimes a race, in a few countries. They assign something and this assignation is collective. It's a small collectivity, but it's collective and it works unconsciously. When they say 'he is male', there is much unconscious in that, which must be elaborated. The child has to elaborate this first assignation: 'I am a girl' and 'I am a boy.' What does it mean? How does it translate, 'I am a boy'?

RP: How early is this? Is it pre-verbal?

Laplanche: The assignation dates from the pre-verbal period, but the reworking, the 'translation', of it comes after the primal seductions, at about the beginning of the second year, when the child begins to say 'I am a girl' or 'I am a boy.'

RP: So primal seduction is not gendered, for the child?

Laplanche: This is a very complicated question. There are obviously elements of gender – of sex – of sexuality (my triad) entering the very first seductions.

RP: This assignation and elaboration of gender, is it not immediately connected to sexual difference?

Laplanche: I would say something like this. Sexuation – psychological sexuation, I mean, the castration complex – is a way of elaborating, of treating the question of gender; that is, treating the gender which is given, assigned. The subject has been assigned until now to two groups of people, male and female, and he or she has to elaborate or translate this. The phallic theory is one of the most useful ways of treating gender difference. The most rigid too!

RP: So it's like a code for translating?

Laplanche: Yes, a very useful code. And I'm afraid that this code is the same one that is used in computers. It's binary. It's really difficult to relativize castration, when you see castration working in a computer: through zero and one, yes and no, the presence or absence of a single attribute. Presence and absence is working so well in our technological world that it fits the ideology of castration very well. Maybe we cannot do anything about that. One has the right to be somewhat pessimistic.

RP: And there's always a wish, isn't there? There's a wish for a boy, or a wish for a girl, on the part of the parents.

Laplanche: Yes, that's important, because if there is a wish, a wish may be contrary to the assignation. And then, in the elaboration of the gender, there is something that may become repressed: the contrary wishes of the parents.

RP: It's important for transsexuality. The assignation is one thing, the unconscious wish of the parent another, and the child has to negotiate.

Laplanche: Absolutely.

RP: What is the role of transference here? If the primal communication situation, primal seduction, is *itself* in some sense a transference, this would make transference within the analytical session a reprise of some more fundamental interpersonal relation. Is that right?

Laplanche: Yes. Inasmuch as the analytical situation of transference implies the doubleness of the analyst and of the analysand, there is something fundamental coming from the primal situation: the *doubleness of the other*. The other is not simple, it is always double. There's an other of the other, which is the other's unconscious. The other is other to himself or herself.

RP: But isn't that also true in the analytical situation? Would it be fair to say that your account of primal seduction is a reading of the adult–infant relation *through* the analytical situation? That the analyst's relation to the analysand is in a certain sense your model for the adult's relation to the child? This makes the analyst the model for adulthood, for maturity.

Laplanche: The analytic situation is the *ratio cognoscendi* and the primal situation is the *ratio essendi*. One of the main ways to know about the primal situation is through the analytic situation. The relevant past is not what can be constructed by going outside the situation, but what repeats itself in the situation. The relevant thing is the message part of the situation. It's not the factual part of the situation. The question of 'recovered memories' should be addressed in this way. The important thing for the analyst is the message and the way the message is treated. So even in the cruder cases of seduction, criminal cases of seduction, what is important for us is not how it happened – that's not our problem – but what was remaining of a message in this situation, and what could have been treated by the infant. What was being communicated by the act? A purely factual relation between human beings, without any implicit message (even conflicted and dislocated) is difficult to imagine.

SCIENCE, MYTH AND INTERPRETATION

RP: You are concerned with the critical reconstruction and development of a Freudian metapsychology. Your background is in philosophy, and you draw on this explicitly for conceptual resources. Yet you don't conceive of metapsychology as a philosophical project. To what extent do you think of it as a 'scientific' discourse in a strict sense?

Laplanche: It's a problem of science. I'm very positivistic about this. I am very Popperian. All arguments, all discussions, must at some time or another find their 'no'. Their 'yes', as Popper shows, doesn't say anything, because an accumulation of 'yeses' is just an accumulation, not a truth.

RP: But your own development out of Freud bears no relation to the positivistic model of crucial instances. What you did, in generalizing certain concepts, you did entirely internally to the theory. You didn't have any new instances. You didn't say, 'the current interpretation of Freud is inadequate to this case history, therefore I must rethink Freud'. You're working wholly in terms of the consistency, the internal coherence, and the productivity of the problematics. You're not bouncing off case histories.

Laplanche: Freud was a Popperian. Popper misunderstood this. The famous phrase Popper uses against psychoanalysis is a phrase that is in Freud himself. The phrase where Popper says 'Suppose a man throws his son in water and another saves the young man by swimming in the water, they will always explain it through the inferiority complex, etc.' – I don't have it exactly. But this phrase is exactly in Freud, against Adler. He says: 'whether you have this or this or this, Adler will always explain it through the inferiority complex.' It's exactly the same thing. In general explanations, Freud was very anxious to find the contradiction. One of his main texts is a case of homosexuality that contradicts the theory. He wanted to be confronted with the possibility of a 'no' somewhere. Now, the 'no' is not necessarily in the experience, even the clinical experience. It's more difficult in psychoanalysis, in the human sciences. But if you are not prepared to face some kind of 'no' somewhere, then there is no discourse.

RP: This is very general. It's not just any 'no' that Popper is talking about. Popper's talking about a form of hypothesis formation that will generate falsifiable predictions, crucial instances, which will give you your 'no'.

Laplanche: Yes, he assumed an experimental setting, but he did not generalize that. There are things in astronomy that it is not feasible to experience, for instance.

RP: But the philosophy of science subsequent to Popper showed very quickly there are no necessarily crucial instances. You can always revise the theory. The question of how you treat the anomaly, at what point you give up the theory, remains theoretically indeterminate. It's a question of judgement. There's never an unambiguous moment of falsification. Take Freud's own abandonment of the seduction theory in 1896. Was that an example of Freud coming across a 'no'?

Laplanche: Yes, he says that he meets a 'no', but he could have changed his theory, deepened its basis. He could have deepened his theory without abandoning it. There is an absolute difference between adding ad hoc hypotheses and changing the basis itself, without negating the experience of seduction.

RP: But on what basis? The problem with the Popperian model is that it doesn't register the internal complexity of theory construction and modification in a way which is not ad hoc, because it has such a one-to-one sense of hypothesis formation and prediction. In 1896 Freud behaved like a good Popperian. He said: 'Ah, it's false! I'll throw it away and invent a new one.' Wouldn't Masson, and Borch-Jacobson describe their rejection of psychoanalysis in these same terms? They came to believe that psychoanalysis was, as Popper himself thought, just redescribing the theory in order to take account of the instance. You say Freud should have revised the theory. But how does Popper help us choose?

Laplanche: I think you have too narrow an interpretation of Popper, as being bound to one, and only one, crucial experience. Popper's theory has been widely amended, both by Popper himself and by his followers, like Lakatos. What remains is the idea (1) that a scientific model is invented to provide an account of a certain realm of facts; (2) that no 'yes' is a proof, except of the fact that you may continue; and (3) that any model should be able to be confronted with some kind of 'no', or better, a series of 'nos'. Negations may be internal or external. They may come from the realm of application, or from neighbouring areas of knowledge. For example, the theory of 'primal hereditary fantasies' is in contradiction with everything that we know about genetics.

Confronted with a series of contradictions, a theory does not die at once, to be replaced by another – that was the unique case of 'relativity'. It can survive through artificial means, like a blood transfusion, via additional hypotheses, or one can try to keep some central element, by radically changing other fundamentals. This is what I try to do with the 'seduction theory'. I keep some of its main ideas: the mechanism of trauma, involving at least two moments or events (afterwardsness/*Nachträglichkeit*); translational aspects; the internal-external attack of the drives. But I introduce fundamentals that Freud did not have at his disposal: (1) the universality of parental perversion (in the sense that we all have unconscious remains of infantile sexuality); (2) the category of message, as a third term allowing us to escape the eternal dilemma: factual reality versus fantasy; (3) the duality of attachment (enlarged self-preservation) and sexual excitation; (4) the duality of instinct and drive, with two different ways of functioning (search for homeostasis versus search for excitation). All this newly founded metapsychology seems to me to be better adapted to the psychoanalytic realm of fact – that is, the analytical situation. It is also more adequate to the realm of psychosis. The present state of psychoanalytical theory is a little like late Ptolemeism: an accumulation of extra hypotheses. What's more, psychoanalysts don't seem to be bothered about it. A 'postmodernist' mood permits them to get by with the most heteroclite constructions.

When people talk of analysis as fairy tale or myth they are both right and wrong. They are right because analysis discovered in human life many fairy tales, and in human culture many myths. Now, there is a use of this mythical aspect of psychoanalysis in order to devalue it. But the work of analytic theory is to assign its place to ideology; to say how myths work

in human beings. That's what I'm trying to do when I say that there are types of codes that are used to treat something coming from the other.

RP: But if there is to be a distinct analytical realm, there must be a distinction between general social codes and the codes which are produced in the primal communication situation, which are, if you like, a psychoanalytical core.

Laplanche: Even in the primal situation, a code like the Oedipus is present. It is proposed by the adult world, not only by this or that adult, but by the adult world, also through language. The accusation of analysis being a myth or a fairy tale is justified in so far as many analysts have taken the hermeneutic part of analysis – that is, the use of myths as means of interpretation – as the centre of analysis. We need to take a distance from this hermeneutic position, but also to account for this hermeneutic aspect as being essential to human beings. Humans need myths to treat the strangeness of the messages of the other.

The 'scientific' aspect of analysis is not the myths it discovered in humankind, but its account of the use of those myths, for example, in the theory of repression. We must not confuse the model that explains myth with the use of myth itself. Lacanianism, for example, uses myth under the name of 'the symbolic', it uses myth as a way of working. It uses the myth of castration as a form of active interpreting.

RP: One of the most distinctive things about your view of psychoanalysis is that it is *not* a form of hermeneutics. The anti-hermeneuticism of your position appears to have strengthened recently, in line with your antipathy to Klein. At times, you seem to view all interpretation in the analytical situation as a form of indoctrination.

Laplanche: Not all interpretation. There are some reconstructions which are valid. Interpretation can be an interpretation of process, but you must remember that interpretation of process is always interpretation of the process of defence. All structures you introduce in your interpretation are a defence: maybe of the analysand, maybe of yourself, but certainly a defence in childhood against something else.

RP: So all interpretation is defence?

Laplanche: The whole of interpretation is interpretation *of* defence and interpretation in childhood *was* defence. It is both: interpretation of defence and defensive interpretation. You must keep in the mind of the analysand that even this interpretation is in some way defensive, against something else deeper.

RP: This notion of defence evokes another, rather different model of the formation of subjectivity from that of primal communication, the enigmatic message, and the formation of the unconscious: the formation of the subject out of the defensive retreat of the body from excessive excitation.

Laplanche: It's not just a retreat, it's an active construction. These are two different descriptions of the same thing.

RP: So you think of the child's translation as an attempt to bind the unbound implantations of the other, to establish a homeostatic economy? But aren't these really two different discourses: a libidinal-economic discourse and communicational discourse? Can they really be different levels of description of the same phenomenon?

Laplanche: Let's take it another way. We talk of treatment. Treatment is a fact about human beings. Human beings never cease treating something. They treat messages, in all the meanings of treating: treating a text, making a treaty, and treating as treatment. The human being

treats him- or herself. Throughout the cure, he treats himself. We must untreat him, but we cannot but leave him to treat himself. In the end, we just hope that he keeps something of the relationship to the unknown, to transfer outside of the analysis, which is the best occurrence, as an outcome of analysis.

RP: You are constantly defining the specificity of Freud's position as being neither one thing nor the other, as being between this and that: between hermeneutics and determinism, for example. It's always a double negation, a refusal of alternative models. Do you not feel a theoretical pressure to move beyond these negations to try to find a new discourse?

Laplanche: Absolutely not. In the paper, 'Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics', I tried to indicate to what extent my practice is 'deterministic' and to what extent hermeneutic. But I still stress that hermeneutics is the (self-)psychotherapeutic aspect, whereas 'antihermeneutics' is the specifically *analytic* aspect. My 'between' does not mean that we have to *stay* 'between'. I assign functions to both aspects.

RP: Ricoeur said that the originality of Freud resided in his combining a language of meanings and significations with a language of forces, one interrupting the other – the violence done to meaning. It sounds similar to that.

Laplanche: Not too similar. I don't fit into those models very well: force and meaning.

RP: Well, when you say the child translates a message, but the translation is a way of binding what's unbound, that's force and meaning, isn't it?

Laplanche: We don't only have meaning, we have the signifier. The signifier, which can have a meaning, but which becomes a force. It is the force of the 'thing-signifier'. The *message* forces me to translate. There is a force to translate, a *Trieb* – a drive – to translate, which is inside the message itself.

RP: I'm not sure I can make sense of the notion of a drive inside the message except as coming from the other person's unconscious, from the other person.

Laplanche: No, I would say it comes from the unevenness inside the message. I would say the message itself contains the enigma. The enigma is the force.

RP: Yes, but surely the inequality inside the message derives from the inequality between the conscious and unconscious elements of the external other?

Laplanche: I don't see any necessity to speak of the other 'subject' as such.

RP: This gives a rather different character to your position, because you are often construed as emphasizing the role of the external other, a concrete other, in the communication situation, against the intrapsychic paradigm of representation. But now you're saying it's all in the message, not the other person. But surely the message is just the name for what is at stake in the relation of communication?

Laplanche: But the 'other person' is just a name too, because the other is not what I think he or she is, or what he/she thinks him/herself to be!

**Interviewed by John Fletcher and Peter Osborne
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