

Fatal Attraction

Jean Laplanche on sexuality, subjectivity and singularity in the work of Sigmund Freud

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Freud considered sexuality to be the shibboleth of psychoanalysis. With a surprising stubbornness, he repeats over and over again: 'and yet the libido is sexual'.¹ But when we ask for his arguments for this rather audacious statement, we are for the most part left without an answer. In fact, in the last resort Freud always falls back on biochemistry: one day biochemical research will prove that there are indeed two, and only two, fundamental drives in human beings: one that tends towards self-conservation and another one which is sexual.² This preference for a biochemical model of argument, which in fact might not produce an argument at all, goes together with a tendency to give a biological account of the libido. Freud very often seems to speak of the libido as something that due to internal necessity – that is to say, on the basis of biological maturation – goes through the different stages we are familiar with (oral, anal, etc.), while the psychological evolution would be completely dependent on it. This is the idea, one might say, of a libido that spontaneously wanders from one part of the body to another, until it finally arrives where it was supposed to arrive from the outset: at the primacy of the genital zones.³ And by the same token, Freud sometimes seems to reduce sexuality to the search for 'erotic' pleasure in and through which the excitation of an erogenous zone is discharged.⁴ In other words, sexual investment would be identical to the search for a physiologically accessible pleasure that can be reached through auto-erotic and allo-erotic means. Such a theory is, of course, in direct contradiction with Freud's ongoing attempt to distinguish *Instinkt* from *Trieb*, and with the discovery of the (unconscious) phantasy life that goes along with it. But even if a 'biological' interpretation of the libido, as I have just described, is hard to reconcile

with some of Freud's other theoretical positions, and probably even more so with his practice, the fact remains that one finds far more than this isolated passage in his work that suggests such an interpretation.

How can we free ourselves from this 'biologicistic fallacy' without at the same time giving up the idea that the libido, and thus the unconscious, is sexual? The French psychoanalyst, psychiatrist and philosopher Jean Laplanche has tried for most of his life to articulate an answer to this question.⁵ He does so by first developing the notion of 'leaning on' (*Anlehnung*) as it can be found in Freud: sexuality emerges as leaning on the instinct of self-conservation.⁶ But over the years the idea of 'leaning on' turned out to be insufficient to free Freud's theory of the libido from all the biological connotations already mentioned. Laplanche then returned to Freud's early work – especially the 'Project' of 1895 and the 'Studies on Hysteria' – to develop what he calls a general theory of seduction that would allow for a radical 'de-biologization' of Freud's theory of drives and, more generally, of his metapsychology.⁷ In what follows I would like, on the one hand, to reconstruct some of the essential features of Laplanche's theory of a 'generalized seduction', while on the other hand trying to show how this theory could be philosophically relevant. Indeed, Laplanche's theory of seduction allows for a re-formulation of the relation between bodily existence, singularity and subjectivity in a way that is both philosophically and psychoanalytically relevant. But before entering into this debate let us first go back to Laplanche's theory of a general seduction. The most appropriate way to introduce this theory and the problems to which it is meant to provide an answer is probably via the notion of 'leaning on'.

Freud's notion of 'leaning on'

What does Freud's idea of 'leaning on' imply? Freud uses the notion of 'leaning on' in order to show how sexuality is created or, more correctly, emerges as essentially dependent on the satisfaction of the instincts of self-preservation.⁸ Initially the sexual drive and the instincts of self-preservation are intermingled. The satisfaction of one is intrinsically connected with the satisfaction of the other. While the child is fed – that is, when its instincts for self-preservation are satisfied – it experiences a pleasure that cannot be reduced to a pleasure exclusively linked with the satisfaction of the corporeal function – that is, to a pleasure that goes together with the satisfaction of the need for food as such. Both pleasures have to be distinguished, since in a second moment – which is also, according to Freud, the moment of the genesis of sexuality in the proper sense of the word – this pleasure is sought for its own sake. Contrary to what is often said, Freud's model of infantile sexuality proper is not the child at the breast of the mother, but 'thumb-sucking [*das Ludehn*]'⁹ – which is not primarily a pleasure that is found in the body of the other (or in the object), but a pleasure that is found in one's own body. It is what Freud calls '*Organlust*'. Hence sexuality emerges as essentially auto-erotic. The important point, then, is the following: sexuality emerges not when an adequate (sexual) object is found, but is a moment of loss of the object – more precisely, in a moment of loss of the *real* object. However, this loss of the real object cannot be equated with the loss of every object: *the becoming auto-erotic of the sexual drive is co-originary with the becoming phantasmatical of sexuality*. The real object is replaced by a phantasy one. And it is noteworthy that the real object which is lost is not the same as the phantasy one that replaces it: the lost object is the object that satisfies the instinct for self-preservation – the milk – whereas the phantasy object that replaces it is, on the contrary, the breast.¹⁰

At first sight this theory seems to allow us to free Freudian psychoanalysis from the biologicistic model mentioned earlier. Indeed, if sexuality is always already phantasmatical we can no longer identify sexual interest with the mere search for erotic pleasure in and through which the excitation of an erogenous zone is discharged. But Laplanche argues that, at the same time, and more importantly, in this model the emergence of the sexual drive as such remains a process that develops out of itself, just as was the case in the biologicistic model we wanted to avoid.¹¹ It is true that the notion of 'leaning on', as it is developed in Freud, suggests – but only suggests – that sexuality emerges in an inter-subjective process: the other is present in it from the outset. But his or her role

could hardly be more insignificant – it is purely passive. The other – paradigmatically the mother – is thought to be at the origin of a process that develops completely independently of him or her. The other only functions as a catalyst for a process that is essentially self-sufficient. In this way the very notion of 'leaning on' remains, according to Laplanche, very close to the biologicistic model we wanted to avoid. Indeed, just as in the biologicistic model, the notion of 'leaning on' remains auto- or ipsocentrist in that it describes the evolution as being only from the inside – that is, the sexual drive coming from the inside and leaning on or attaching to self-preservation.¹²

More fundamentally, according to Laplanche, the ipsocentrism just mentioned characterizes all the fundamental psychic mechanisms – projection, introjection, repression, foreclosure, etc. – that are described in psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, for all these terms one can say that the verb has a subject, the person.¹³ This, obviously, is not to say that they are all mechanisms in the first person, since the verb could be the third person. As Laplanche points out, it could be 'I project', 'I introject', or 'Sigmund projects', 'Sigmund denies', 'Jacques forecloses' ... But even if Freud, and most of his followers, remained the victim of this ipsocentrism, which could be regarded as a psychoanalytic variant of subject-centrism, he at the same time allows for a break away from it. Indeed, Freud's texts – at least this is what Laplanche argues – also make it possible to rethink the primal mechanisms as coming from the other. Hence, their subject would no longer be the 'person', but the other. Laplanche claims that it is at this point that Freud's early theory (or should we say 'theories'?) of seduction shows its relevance.

Primal seduction

As we know, seduction plays a central role in Freud's first theory of hysteria. Hysteria is here understood as the result of an early seduction by the father. There are several aspects of this theory that deserve our attention here. For one thing, it is in the context of this theory that Freud introduces the concept of *nachträglichkeit*.¹⁴ This idea implies that a trauma never arrives by itself. One needs at least two 'traumas' to produce a traumatic effect. What does this mean? The following clinical example might help us to understand Freud's position.¹⁵ In his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' Freud tells the story of Emma, who, at the age of eight, was the object of a seduction by the owner of a grocery shop. At the moment that the seduction occurred it had no immediate traumatic effect, since Emma didn't yet possess the proper intellectual and affective means to interpret this scene as

a sexual one. It is only five years later, on the occasion of a second traumatic scene, that the first scene gets its pathogenetic effect. At the age of thirteen she entered a clothes shop in which she saw two men laughing. She immediately thought that these two men were laughing at her clothing and from then on developed a phobia about this type of shop. The reason, according to Freud, lies in the fact that the second scene, through a complex network of associations, was linked to the first one. In this way the original scene could show up again at the limits of consciousness. But since Emma had meanwhile reached puberty, she was now capable of giving the first scene its proper sexual meaning – hence the defensive reaction. The original scene is repressed through a displacement of the affect that linked the first scene onto the second one. So, it is only retroactively – with regard to a second scene – that the original scene gets its traumatic effect.

But there is another aspect of this theory that deserves our attention. In his early theory of hysteria, Freud blames the father for introducing sexuality into the life of the child.¹⁶ The father confronts the child with a world of sexual significations he or she is not yet capable of coping with. Laplanche, however, shows that in some later texts¹⁷ Freud brings another figure onto the scene: no longer a perverted father, but a perverted mother (and, more generally, a perverted adult). And on this occasion we are apparently no longer talking about a purely factual and contingent seduction. Rather, this is a structural seduction from which not only can nobody escape, but which more fundamentally has to be understood in relation to the very constitution of subjectivity. What does this mean?

In his *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud writes: 'Here, however, the phantasy touches the ground of reality, for it was really the mother who by her activities over the child's bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated, and perhaps even roused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals.'¹⁸ And in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud gives a less 'physiological' account of the same phenomenon: 'What is more, the latter (the care-giver) thinks of the child with feelings derived from his or her own sexual life, strokes, kisses and cradles it, and clearly treats it as a substitute for an actual sexual object.'¹⁹ In both cases Freud seems to be speaking of a seduction that is less contingent than the one he previously held responsible for hysteria. But there are also some striking differences between these two citations.²⁰ In the first quotation, Freud fails to generalize the early seduction by the mother to the whole of sexual life, since he limits its effectiveness to the birth of sensations in the genital organ, without recognizing that

something similar could be said, for example, of anal and oral erogenesis. Moreover, and more importantly, he does not take into account the sexuality of the mother. The mother remains sexually neutral. In the second quotation, however, Freud seems no longer to be talking about a physiologically accessible pleasure at the level of a specific erogenous zone. But he is also more explicitly speaking about the sexuality of the adult as such ('*Die Pflegeperson*', the care-giver, but why would that necessarily be the mother?²¹) that is, so to speak, transferred to the child: 'thinks of the child with feelings derived from his or her own sexual life'. And it is clear from the outset, even if Freud almost never recognized it himself, that we cannot understand this transference without taking into account the adult's unconscious. After all, wasn't it Freud who said that the unconscious is sexual and the sexual unconscious?²² The issue at stake here is that the adult world is entirely infiltrated by unconscious and sexual meanings of which not even the adult possesses the code. In the context of the quotation from the *Three Essays* this would mean not only that



'Die Pflegeperson', but let us say the adult in general, could eventually take the child as '*ein endgültiges Sexualobjekt*', but more generally that the adult inevitably gives to the child verbal, non-verbal and behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations. These significations are unintelligible both to the child, who does not yet possess the proper intellectual and affective means that would allow it to understand them properly for what they are, and for the adult, given their unconscious character. It is precisely this fundamental situation – in which the adult inevitably gives to the child sexual meanings whose code neither party possesses – that Laplanche calls 'primal seduction'.²³ We shouldn't avoid thinking of this in a very concrete way: for example, in the way we wash a child – and more generally in the way we take care of it – we are inevitably implicated along with our own (unconscious) sexuality. Or, to give another example, when parents embrace each other in the presence of their child they inevitably confront it with behavioural signifiers that carry all kinds of meanings that are related to their sexuality and of which they are not themselves in control.

Seduction as the truth of 'leaning on'

We should not think of 'primal seduction' as a mere dismissal of the notion of *Anlehnung*.²⁴ On the contrary, Laplanche argues that seduction is the truth of 'leaning on' and thus cannot be opposed to it. But how is this possible? If the theory of a generalized seduction implies that sexuality is in principle introduced from the outside, how then can seduction be thought of as the truth of 'leaning on'? Didn't we say that the notion of 'leaning on' is essentially 'ipsocentrist', that is, that it obliges us to think the emergence of the sexual drive as a process that develops out of itself and in which the other doesn't play a significant role?

In what type of relation do we primarily 'transfer' sexual messages to the child?²⁵ It is a commonplace to say that the adult is supposed to feed, to protect and more generally to take care of the *infans* that is fundamentally 'helpless' (Freud) in every respect. Modern psychology has also characterized this relation as one of attachment. It is quite obvious that this notion of attachment replaces Freud's notion of self-preservation, a notion that seems to imply an all too 'alimentary' view of the relation between parents and children (children and adults). It is true that one very often has the impression that Freud reduces self-preservation to the need for food as such – as if a child would only need to be fed. Re-formulating self-preservation to include 'care' and 'attachment'

allows us to include a wide range of different types of relations that are as necessary in order for the child to survive psychologically and physically as the mere satisfaction of biological functions in the strict sense of the word.

From what we said earlier, it should be clear that it is in and through this relation of attachment that the child is confronted with sexual meanings it cannot understand. Laplanche reminds us in this context that, etymologically, *Verführung*²⁶ refers to the idea of leading something away from its 'normal' goals or from what it is intrinsically.²⁷ Since the 'normal' relation of care cannot but carry enigmatic sexual messages along with it, the child is inevitably led away from its relation of mere 'attachment' to the adult. The child attaches itself to the adult, but in so far as this relation of attachment is invested with enigmatic sexual meanings it is led away (always already?) from what it is in itself.

Freud's original notion of 'leaning on' showed us that sexuality emerges in close dependency – as a *Nebenprodukt*, Freud says²⁸ – to the satisfaction of the instincts of self-preservation. But this original notion remained very close to the 'biologistic model': even if the other is present in it, he is nothing but a catalyst for a process that develops completely independently of him. In Laplanche's new and more complete model, this is no longer the case: in so far as sexuality is introduced in the child in and through the relation of care (that is; in a relation that aims at the satisfaction of the instincts of self-preservation), this new and radicalized model is an intersubjective version of the original theory. Sexuality no longer just 'emerges' in the child, but it is rather introduced into the child from the outside. The 'emergence' of sexuality can still be considered as a *Nebenprodukt* of the satisfaction of the instincts of self-preservation, but this *Nebenprodukt* cannot occur without an active – albeit mostly unconscious – seduction by the other.

Further remarks on Laplanche's theory of 'primal seduction'

Before commenting any further on this theory of a 'primal' seduction, I should stress another aspect of it that seems important not only for the development of my own argument, but also for psychoanalytic theory as such. Laplanche works with a fundamental opposition between self-preservation and sexuality.²⁹ It is in the relation of care for the child – that is, according to Laplanche, in the satisfaction of the instincts of self-preservation – that sexuality is, as it were, introduced from the outside as an enigmatic message. In this way Laplanche can avoid – in contradistinction to Freud in

many of his texts – postulating an anobjectal state at the origin of the subject. But Freud also stresses over and over again that the world of the infant is structured in terms of experience of *non-functional* pleasure and displeasure which are intrinsically linked up with his/her body. On the basis of the model we have just developed we would say, then, that it is precisely these primordial experiences of bodily pleasure/displeasure that get linked up with – if not just ‘loaded’ with – sexual meanings the child cannot understand. In other words, they get linked up with a sexual message from the other which, from the child’s point of view, cannot but appear as an enigma that relates to his/her body as it is concretely experienced as a source of pleasure/displeasure. We also understand now why Laplanche, following Freud,³⁰ calls these enigmatic messages ‘sexual/pre-sexual’³¹ – they are ‘sexual’ with respect to the adult, but they are ‘pre-sexual’ with respect to the child, who is not yet in a position to recognize them as ‘sexual’.³² It is, then, in this context, of the utmost importance to realize that this fundamental situation of ‘primal seduction’ implies a fundamental passivity on the child’s part: the intrusion – the implantation in the erogenous body – of these enigmatic signifiers, as Laplanche describes it, constitutes for the child a situation in which it cannot but be passive.³³ It is as if it were, at least in the first instance, delivered over to – if not placed at the mercy of – the enigmatic signifiers of the other. The relation between adult and child is in this sense fundamentally an asymmetrical one.

Seduction and subjectivity

We considered Laplanche’s ‘primal seduction’ both structural and related to the constitution of subjectivity. But what we have said up to this point only seems to bring us to a position to claim that this seduction is inevitable in a purely factual sense. How, then, would it relate to the constitution of subjectivity? The child is confronted with enigmatic messages that emanate from the world of the adult. In a more Lacanian language,³⁴ one could say that it is confronted with de-signified signifiers – that is, with signifiers that have lost every determinable signified without by the same token having lost their power to signify to somebody.³⁵ They signify to the child, who at the same time cannot attribute a signified to them. In doing so, they lay a claim on the child, as it were – What does it want to say to me? and even: What does it want from me anyway? – to which it has to respond. They confront the child with a *task of interpretation*: the intrusion of enigmatic signifiers is experienced as a demand upon the child which produces a concomitant drive for meaning in the child. Or, in more

Freudian terms, the child has to bind these signifiers – that is, to translate or elaborate them in such a way that they can be integrated into the circuits of meaning.³⁶ However, this translation can never be complete. Since neither the child nor the adult possesses the code of the messages they are confronted with, the translation is bound to fail. There is always a remainder. Something inevitably escapes. Laplanche writes: ‘It is the attempt to link, to symbolize ... signifiers, which results both in what Freud calls the child’s theorization (infantile sexual theories), and in the partial failure of this symbolization or theorization, let us say in the repression of an unmasterable, unencircable remainder’.³⁷ This unmasterable remainder could be thought of as a kind of ‘thorn in the flesh’ of the ego which we continuously try to get rid of without ever being able to. It is therefore in this second moment of failure, Laplanche states, that the original message gets a *traumatic* effect. Indeed, since the sexual message of the other cannot be fully integrated into the circuits of meaning, part of it continues to push from behind our backs; in other words, it forces the psyche into a permanent effort of interpretation that it will never be able to finish or to satisfy completely. As in the example of Emma, what was introduced in a first moment from the outside only receives its traumatic value in a second moment – that is, *nachträglich*, at the moment when it appears to be impossible to integrate it. These traumatic remainders form the core of the unconscious. They are, according to Laplanche, the primordially repressed.³⁸

Between Heidegger and Lacan?

But maybe we are losing track. Maybe we are starting to feel somewhat lost. And I can imagine that some of my readers, in order to ‘bind’ the Laplanchean signifier as I have presented it up to now – that is, in order to integrate it in their circuits of meaning so that they would feel somewhat less lost – have already started to link it up with more familiar references such as Lacan and Heidegger. After all, weren’t we talking about de-signified signifiers (‘pure’ signifiers?); weren’t we suggesting that desire arises from the question ‘what does the other want from me anyway?’ (*Che vuoi?*);³⁹ and isn’t there an analogy to be found between the coincidence of the intimate and the alien that is implied in what Laplanche calls ‘traumatic signifiers’ (they are both ‘mine’ and unmasterable) and what Lacan calls in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis ‘extimité’?⁴⁰ And when Laplanche calls the human subject fundamentally self-theorizing, self-symbolizing and self-interpreting, can we avoid thinking of Heideggerian *Dasein* as the being that poses the question of its own being?⁴¹

Laplanche, however, is neither a Lacanian nor a Heideggerian. But a short confrontation between what we have said up till now and both Lacanian and Heideggerian thought can allow us to introduce, albeit in an all too sketchy way, the problem we have wanted to deal with from the outset: namely, the relation between the body, singularity and subjectivity.

It is true that Laplanche seems to be using a Lacanian language: the unconscious consists of designified signifiers. But does this also imply that the unconscious is 'structured as a language' and/or that we should think of the unconscious as intimately related to the symbolic in the Lacanian sense? It seems not, since Lacan's Symbolic consists of organized signifiers; it is a language.⁴² Laplanche's enigmatic signifiers, however, are not organized at all, and on top of that they are conflictual. There is no principle of unification that would 'govern' them in any way whatsoever. It is precisely the task of the subject to bind – and that also means 'to organize' – them.⁴³ Furthermore, Laplanche refuses to consider verbal language as being at the foundation of the unconscious. And, whether one likes it or not, there is a strong tendency in Lacan to do so. Such a theoretical move forces us inevitably to think the unconscious as something trans-individual, if not 'collective'.⁴⁴ For Laplanche, however, the unconscious is essentially individual: your enigmatic signifiers are not mine. Or, to use a more Heideggerian language, your *lèthè* – after all, we are talking about a forgetting that cannot be undone – is not mine.

This also seems to imply that the reference to *Dasein* as the being that poses the question of its own being, and that is characterized by a fundamental 'je-mein-igkeit', is highly problematic, or should at least be articulated in a very cautious way.⁴⁵ It is true that Laplanche calls the human subject intrinsically auto-theorizing and self-interpreting. But the 'autos' he is talking about are (remainders of) enigmatic signifiers that come from the outside (and that couldn't be integrated). One could think of these remainders as a kind of archive that is in the most radical sense 'my own' – and thus singularizes me – and to which we are at the same time for ever denied access. That which is 'je mein' (always mine) is also that which irrevocably escapes me. If we recall what we said earlier about the relation between 'primal seduction' and passivity, we seem to be in a position to state that at the core of subjectivity there is an essential passivity that can never be completely undone and that at the same time singularizes us.

Before reaching a (provisional) conclusion, let us try to go yet one step further, albeit in an even more sketchy way. In discussing Freud's theory of *Anlehnung*, we

explained why the becoming auto-erotic of the sexual drive is co-originary with the becoming phantasmatical of sexuality. We also stated that the enigmatic (sexual) message of the other is intrinsically related to the body as a source of pleasure/displeasure. Should we not think, then, of auto-eroticism as an answer to the enigmatic signifiers of the other? That which stimulates auto-eroticism and which makes it exist as phantasmatical is, according to Laplanche, the intrusion and the subsequent repression of enigmatic signifiers brought by the adult.⁴⁶ It is not at all difficult to give examples of signifiers that will almost inevitably play a predominant role in these phantasies. The example of the breast – even if it only has a prototypical value – is most striking in this respect. Can we, Laplanche asks over and over again, continue to neglect the sexual and unconscious investment of the breast by the mother in psychoanalytic theory?⁴⁷ Can we assume that this investment is not 'felt' by the infant as the source of an obscure questioning: what does it want, apart from feeding me and, after all, why would it want to feed me at all? It is to this and similar enigmas that early infantile phantasies try to articulate an answer. This implies, in the first place, that the auto-theorizing and self-symbolizing activity of the human subject should not be understood in too 'intellectualist' a manner. It is first and foremost carried out at the level of phantasy life, which we know should be understood as intimately related to bodily existence. And second, if it is true, as the psychoanalytic tradition claims, that it is in and through this phantasmatic activity that the erogenous body-image (as opposed to the physiological body) is constituted, should we not also say, then, that we are singularized in terms of precisely this erogenous body? Or, more precisely, shouldn't we say that singularization takes place in and through the constitution of the erogenous body? Indeed, if the constitution of the erogenous body has to be understood primarily as an attempt to 'bind' enigmatic signifiers, then it is also in and through this attempt that 'something' is irrevocably lost, 'something' which at the same time singularizes us. The erogenous body constitutes *an always inadequate* answer to the intrusion of enigmatic sexual messages.⁴⁸

Conclusion

What can we conclude from all of this with respect to the status of subjectivity? Or, more concretely, if it is true that the subject can no longer be anything but a decentred subject, what does all of this teach us about the very nature of this decentering? We said that that which is 'je mein' – (the remainders of) enigmatic (sexual/pre-sexual) signifiers – is also that which on the one hand irrevocably escapes me, while on the other hand forcing

me into a never-ending effort of symbolization. It is, so to speak, an Other in myself that *makes* me symbolize and that is intrinsically linked with our sexual body as we thematized it. Decentring of the subject doesn't mean, then, that the subject has no centre, but that it has a centre to which it is denied access.⁴⁹ This centre is constituted of (remainders of) the sexual messages of the other that are essentially enigmatic. And it is not without importance to realize that since these signifiers are both non-organized and conflictual, this lost centre cannot be interpreted as a principle of unification either. The subject can no longer occupy the position of the centre, and yet it is in the grip of a centre that fatally attracts it, or, more precisely, that continuously forces it to symbolize in a never-ending effort to recuperate what is irrevocably lost.⁵⁰ Precisely because it is irrevocably lost, this centre '(can) more essentially concern (the subject) and make a more intimate appeal (to the subject) than any other present thing which strikes or concerns (it)'.⁵¹

Notes

1. An earlier version of this text was read at the annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, Seattle, 1994.
2. See S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *On Sexuality*, Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 7, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 83.
3. It was Abraham who developed this idea in all its details. See in this respect, for example, K. Abraham, *Versuch einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Libido*, in K. Abraham, *Psychoanalytischen Studien I*, edited by J. Cremerius, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1971.
4. For example, in those passages in which Freud claims that auto-erotic activity is without an object, be it real or phantasmatic.
5. See especially J. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. J. Mehlmann, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976; *La sublimation* (Problématiques III), P.U.F., Paris, 1983; and *Le baquet. Transcendance du transfert* (Problématiques V), P.U.F., Paris, 1987; *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Macey, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989; *Le fourvoisement biologisant de la sexualité chez Freud*, Synthélabo (Coll. Les empêcheurs de penser en rond), Paris, 1993.
6. For Freud, see, among other passages, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *On Metapsychology*, Pelican Freud Library, Vol. II, Harmondsworth, 1984, p. 81; *Three Essays*, pp. 98–9. For Laplanche's comment on these and similar passages, see especially *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (the first three chapters) and *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, pp. 29ff.
7. The theory of a generalized seduction is already present very early in the work of Laplanche (see *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, p. 34). One finds more extensive developments of this theory in *New Foundations*, pp. 104ff.; *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, pp. 60ff.; *La sublimation*, pp. 106ff.
8. 'The sexual drives first lean on the ego drives, and only make themselves independent of them later on' ('On Narcissism', pp. 80–81 (trans. altered).
9. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 95.
10. It is clear from what we have said already that this is the way in which Laplanche thinks we have to read Freud in order to make sense of his theories on the essentially sexual character of the libido. For Freud himself, as Laplanche is well aware, it was much less obvious that the becoming auto-erotic of the sexual drive is co-originary with the becoming phantasmatic of sexuality (see note 3).
11. J. Laplanche, *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, pp. 29ff; The Freud Museum seminar, in J. Fletcher and M. Stanton, eds, *J. Laplanche: Seduction, translation, drives*, London, ICA, 1992, pp. 56–7, 60–61.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
14. S. Freud, 'Entwurf einer wissenschaftliche Psychologie', in S. Freud, *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse. Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess – Abhandlungen und Notizen aus den Jahren 1887–1902*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, p. 356.
15. For what follows, see *ibid.*, pp. 353ff.
16. *Ibid.*, *passim*. For a detailed study of the formation and evolution of Freud's early theory of hysteria, see J. Corveleyn, *Religieuze themata in de hysterische psychose. Onderzoek naar de eigenheid van het ziektebeeld in de literatuur en psychodynamische analyse van een religieuze waan* (in 2 parts), unpublished doctoral dissertation, K.U. Leuven, 1981, part I, pp. 218–364.
17. See S. Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood', in *Art and Literature*, Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 14, Harmondsworth, 1985, pp. 151–231; *Three Essays*; 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 2, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 145–69.
18. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 154.
19. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 120.
20. For what follows, see Laplanche, *New Foundations*, pp. 121ff.
21. For a more detailed account of this generalization as it is found in Freud's text, see Laplanche, *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, pp. 67ff.
22. This was Freud's leading idea up until the introduction of the 'death drive' in his 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *On Metapsychology*, pp. 275–338.
23. The issue is rather that the adult world is entirely infiltrated with unconscious and sexual significations, of which *the adult too* does not possess the code. And, on the other hand, there is the issue that the infant possesses neither the emotional nor the physiological responses which correspond to the sexualized messages that are proposed to it; in short, its means to establish a substitute or provisional code are fundamentally inadequate (J. Laplanche, 'The Drive and its Object-source. Its Fate in the Transference', in Fletcher and Stanton, eds, *Jean Laplanche*, p. 188).
24. 'My formulation will therefore be: the only truth of "leaning on" is primal seduction' (*ibid.*, p. 190); cf. also 'The theory of seduction is even more important than that of "leaning on", or it supplies the truth of the notion of leaning on, so to speak' (J. Laplanche, *La sublimation*, p. 69).
25. For what follows, see also Laplanche, *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, pp. 67ff.
26. Freud uses the word to characterize the relation of Leonardo to his mother, which was supposed to be completely impregnated with (mostly unconscious) sexual meanings; see Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood', p. 209.
27. Laplanche, *La sublimation*, p. 87.

28. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 98.
29. 'We oppose self-preservatory functions to sexuality' (J. Laplanche, 'The Drive and Its Object-source', p. 187.
30. Freud, Letter 30, in *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse*, p. 113.
31. See Laplanche, *New Foundations*, p. 112; *Le baquet Transcendance du transfert*, p. 238.
32. J. Laplanche, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds, *Formations of Fantasy*, Methuen, London and New York, 1986, p. 9.
33. Laplanche, *New Foundations*, p. 106.
34. For Laplanche's relation to Lacan, see J. Laplanche and S. Leclaire, 'The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study', *Yale French Studies*, 48, 1972. (cf. J. Laplanche, *L'inconscient et la ça* (Problématiques IV), Paris, 1981, pp. 261–321). Cf. also J. Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious. The Enigmatic Signifier in the Work of Jean Laplanche', in Fletcher and Stanton, eds, *Jean Laplanche*, pp. 93–120.
35. Laplanche, *New Foundations*, p. 44.
36. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', pp. 285–7.
37. Laplanche, 'The Drive and Its Object-source', p. 191.
38. Laplanche, *New Foundations*, pp. 133–9. One also finds there a more detailed account of the process of symbolization just referred to. Cf. Laplanche and Leclaire, 'The Unconscious'.
39. J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, Tavistock, London, 1977, p. 313; J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 214.
40. J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Potter, Tavistock and Routledge, London, 1992, p. 139.
41. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, p. 27.
42. J. Laplanche, 'The ICA Seminar: New Foundations for Psychoanalysis?', in Fletcher and Stanton, eds, *Jean Laplanche*, pp. 75ff.
43. Cf. 'The unconscious is an unstructured "like-a-language" ... a "like-a-language" which is no longer that which it resembles' (*New Foundations*, p. 53).
44. For our comparison with Lacan we follow mainly Laplanche's own statements on his relation to Lacan. It is true, however, that the introduction of the notion of 'lalangue', as opposed to 'la langue' (the object of linguistics), might make the contrast between Lacan and Laplanche less sharp than is suggested here. Cf. J. Lacan, *Encore*, Seuil, Paris, 1975, *passim*.
45. For what follows, see Laplanche, 'The ICA Seminar', pp. 68ff.
46. It is because the adult's gestures directed at the child's preservation carry unconscious sexual messages (i.e. unconscious for them), which in turn cannot be mastered by the child, that such gestures produce the movement of cleaving and drifting (*dérive*) that eventually ends up in auto-erotic activity. Thus, the obligatory vehicle of auto-eroticism, that is, what stimulates it and makes it exist, is the intrusion of enigmatic signifiers brought by the adult, then their subsequent repression (Laplanche, 'The Drive and its Object-source', p. 190).
47. Laplanche, *Le fourvoisement biologisant*, p. 78; *New Foundations*, p. 126.
48. From this it is clear why our bodily existence always remains something mysterious, and/or why we can never be completely 'at home' in our bodies.
49. Cf. R. Visker, 'Fascination with Foucault. Object and Desire of an Archeology of Our Knowledge', in *Angelaki* 3, 1994, p. 51.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
51. M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Neske Verlag, Pfullingen, 1985, p. 129 (quoted in Visker, 'Fascination with Foucault', p. 51).

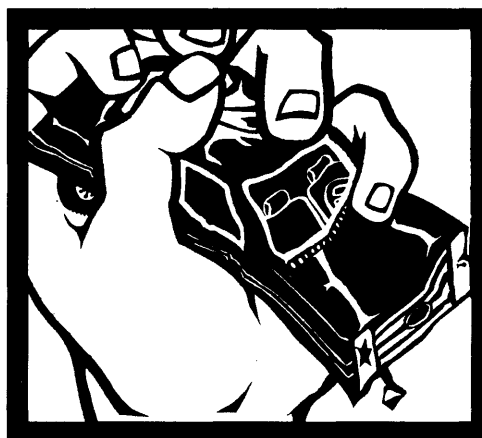
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