

DEATH AND MASTERY

*Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject
of Late Capitalism*

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The theory of the instincts [Triebe] is so to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. In our work we cannot for a moment disregard them, and yet we are never sure that we are seeing them clearly.

—Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*

Introduction

In Defense of Drive Theory

One could say that this book is an attempt to illuminate the varied psychic and social impediments to the achievement of mastery. When we hear the word *mastery*, it is natural to turn to Hegel or to think of some kind of domination or subjugation, but we very often use the word in a more everyday sense to designate the acquisition of a skill, a certain deftness of practice, or even the possession of a basic grip on a difficult situation. It is the obstacles to mastery in the latter sense of the term, and thus the question of why human beings are particularly bad at just getting along, that primarily concerns me here. One might argue that it is a mistake cleanly to separate these two: the critical theorists, after all, convincingly argued that the Enlightenment quest for mastery in the second sense has dissolved into a crisis of mastery in the first.¹

Part of what I try to do in this book is to offer an explanation of this dissolution and thus to propose a theory of the relationship between these two senses of mastery. To admit, however, that they are related, even *necessarily*, is not to say that we should collapse the distinction: indeed, I take the question of how we work toward a stability and equanimity that allows us to get through the day (mastery₂) without going on, whether through frustration, overeagerness, or fear, then to seek the kind of excessive and controlling stability that is bought at the expense of others (mastery₁) to

be a fundamental one for both psychology and social theory. To give up on this distinction—to hold, in other words, that domination is bound inextricably to the task of getting the hang of life—is to fall prey to an irremediable cynicism about the possibility of psychic and social transformation.

My interest in this problematic stems from Karl Marx, who conceives of alienation as an inversion of the human being's natural relationship of mastery over the environment. For Marx, human beings as a species are defined by their capacity consciously to "*produce* their means of subsistence";² in capitalism this capacity is turned against the being in whom it is manifest. Thus, we do not hone and perfect our capacities *through* work but are rather dulled and fragmented *by* work; we do not deploy our intellects toward the solution of our problems but submit to a scientific organization that demands conformity; we do not gain the satisfaction that follows from successfully furthering our abilities but rather stew in a general anxiety about losing our places in processes over which we have no control; we do not work in order to live better, in order to make a difficult but pliable world warm and inviting, but live merely in order to work and according to the demands of a world made icy and hostile. These are the basics of what, in *Capital*, is commonly called the "immiseration thesis."³

In brief, when Marx claims that the human being is "alienated" under capitalism, he means that an animal whose essence it is to master its environment is itself *mastered by its environment*.⁴ What I find lacking in Marx, and also in the general tradition that carries his name, is any recognition of a part of our nature that actually works *against* our own mastery and thus willingly accepts this "inversion." If, to simplify Marx's point in *The German Ideology* tremendously, we are what we do, then surely some place must be made in our conception of ourselves for all the destructive behavior that serves to *erode* our mastery, that welcomes the destabilization wrought by capitalism, and that actively embraces, rather than passively imbibes, cultural "opiates." On this last point the ideal, as I see it, would be to view the beliefs, activities, and organizations too casually labeled distractions not as ancillary to the capitalist mode of production, nor as bearing their own autonomous logic, but rather as speaking to something else about the human being left untheorized by Marx. This would be to recognize all those things we take to provide some relief from alienation to be not so different from less socially accepted ways of attaining that relief, detrimental to the mastery of our own lives, but nonetheless actually providing real satisfaction to some part of ourselves.

Despite knowing precious little about the “communist system” upon which he would so casually cast judgment, Sigmund Freud proposed the basics of an incisive critique of Marx’s understanding of alienation as inverted mastery: if “human nature” is not exhausted by the drive to mastery, and if, more radically, there exists an even more primordial counterforce to this drive, a drive to undo our own mastery and return to heteronomy, then Marx’s theory and its attendant vision of liberation must, at the very least, be rethought.⁵ Indeed, if something like what Freud called the “death drive” exists, capitalism could actually be said to provide a form of perverse psychic gratification in undermining the individual’s mastery. That satisfaction might be ultimately damaging to our general fulfillment, but its very existence nonetheless implies that the theory of alienation could benefit from a new proposal as to what constitutes our “nature,” one that takes into account a psychic force that works against our own mastery. The current project first took root when I realized that it was in the same text (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) in which Freud proposed the existence of this drive that two conceptions of mastery, roughly corresponding to what I have dubbed mastery₁ (in Freud, *Bemächtigung*) and mastery₂ (*Bewältigung*), became conceptually fused in his metapsychology. My intuition and hope, more or less stubbornly enacted in the pages that follow, was that a more robust understanding of how precisely we are alienated today could be formulated by working out the relations between the death drive and these two forms of mastery.⁶

As Marx was the soil and Freud the seed, I naturally accepted a great deal of help in cultivating my little plot from the so-called Frankfurt School. Largely under the influence of early friend and later foe Erich Fromm, the Frankfurt School famously turned to psychoanalysis to supplement Marxism with a psychological analysis of the motivations behind ideological subjectification.⁷ While generally faithful to Freud in his early years, Fromm rejected outright his later metapsychology, and specifically his theory of the death drive.⁸ The “integration of psychoanalysis” that took place under his watch thus self-consciously neglected the drive theory that Freud defended from the 1920s to his death. Though Fromm’s influence on the inner circle of the Frankfurt School was to be short-lived, his understanding of the late metapsychology as essentially pessimistic and thus unserviceable in its original form remained at the core of critical theory. Thus, even Herbert Marcuse, Fromm’s greatest detractor, could only theorize that which “seems to defy any hypothesis of a non-repressive civilization” as a by-product of frustration.⁹ Like most marriages, the

critical theorists' "marriage of Marx and Freud" involved a bit of both repression and suppression.¹⁰

The stage is now more or less set: a problem of mastery in Marx, a possible solution in Freud, and a very interesting conversation by proxy unfortunately structured around the neglect of that solution. What I have just described is a simplification, of course, and what follows will, without a doubt, spill over the sides of this narrative. I nonetheless hope it is enough to entice the reader into following me through the perils of execution. I would further hope, however, that the grand "what if" question at the heart of this project finds answers, or at least echoes thereof, in the present. Of course, a great deal of time separates us from Marx and Freud, and even the Fordist-Keynesian paradigm in which the Frankfurt School operated seems somewhat distant from the present; but no energy need be spent demonstrating the continued relevance of the contradictions inherent in capitalism as described by Marx, the contradictions inherent in the psyche as described by Freud, and the strange intermingling of those contradictions as described by the critical theorists. To those who would decline engagement with my argument ahead of time, and even to those who think I was born fifty-some years too late, I am afraid any such effort would be a plunge into the void.¹¹

I will, however, attempt to do more focused justificatory work in the remainder of this introduction, specifically pertaining to the nature of psychoanalytic drive theory. It was not so long ago that discussion of these psychic forces proudly bore the label *scientific*. Today, however, they have been relegated to the mythological, the realm that Freud, in any case, thought was their natural home. Rather than lamenting this reversion, I take it as a positive opportunity to reassert the nature and value of drive theory free of the scientism that plagued the American psychoanalytic scene for so many years. In a sense, now that the wave of anti-Freudianism has subsided,¹² and along with it the fury at Freud's misguided biologism, it has been given a clean slate, like so many theories that are chewed up and spit out by history. Having been placed right in that wonderful no-man's-land between irrelevance and outmodedness, I find it an opportune time to revisit Freud's grand mythology.

Drive, Psyche, and Interpretation Before 1920 . . .

It is customary to divide Freud's corpus into three main periods: 1. his prepsychoanalytic writings of the late 1800s; 2. his "early" psychoanalytic work beginning with *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in which

he develops the “topographical” model of unconscious, preconscious, and conscious; and 3. his “late” work beginning with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which he develops the “structural” model of id, ego, and superego. The drive theory that will be examined and expanded upon in the chapters that follow was first developed in the last of these three periods, during which time Freud came to a radically new understanding not only of the drives but also of the nature of the psyche and of psychoanalytic therapy. It is my aim in the next few sections of this introduction to explain how Freud’s understandings of drive, psyche, and interpretation changed between his early and late periods as well as how these three fundamental concepts became more intimately related after 1920.

For the early Freud, drive (*Trieb*) is primarily somatic in origin (though it is unclear whether or not drives themselves are strictly somatic forces) and is thus not primarily a force *of* the psyche but rather one applied *to* the psyche. When impinged upon by the drives, it is the psyche’s task then to “process the incoming stimuli [and] to discharge them again in some modified form.”¹³ Since the psyche is understood here to be a kind of stimulus-processing mechanical instrument, we might call this the “mechanism model” of the psyche.¹⁴ For my present purposes, all that I wish to emphasize here is that drive, in this early model, is essentially an *external* and *disturbing* force, a source of chaos upsetting to a psychic apparatus seeking stability, order, and repose. For the most part, a healthy tension is maintained, but at those life-defining moments when Dionysus runs roughshod over Apollo, the latter draws upon its own proprietary tactic for coping with its failure: repression. By banishing the memory of its having been overcome to the unconscious, the psyche is able to return quickly to the status quo but without learning from the experience and thus to the detriment of its own health. The task of interpretation is then to name particular instances during which the psyche was unable to manage the demands placed upon it, with the aim not of quelling, or otherwise altering, the drives, but rather of bringing said failure to consciousness and thereby replacing “hysterical misery” with “common unhappiness.”¹⁵

As an example: a wealthy young Russian named Sergei Pankejeff comes to see Freud in 1910 with a variety of maladies all circulating around a state of deep depression.¹⁶ In the course of reviewing his personal history, Freud discovers conflict in virtually all of Pankejeff’s early relationships. Shortly after his birth, his mother begins to suffer from abdominal disorders and as a result has relatively little to do with his rearing (despite hanging about as a cold, distant presence). Throughout his

childhood, his precocious older sister regularly seduces him into a variety of sexual practices while planting wild ideas in his head. He recalls, on one occasion, her playing with his penis while telling him by way of explanation that his Nanya (the peasant nurse who was caring for him in his mother's absence) regularly did the same with their gardener's genitals. As a result of these experiences, the boy takes on a passive attitude toward sexual activity—it is something *done to him*—and begins to distrust the sole source of maternal warmth in his life. His Nanya does her part to confirm that distrust: catching him playing with his penis in front of her, she threatens that he will get a “wound” there. Finally, and perhaps on account of all of these factors, the child develops a great attachment to his father, who is frequently away in sanatoriums and who overtly prefers his more boyish elder sister.¹⁷

These are the basics of the case study that Freud would publish in 1918 under the title “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,”¹⁸ known more affectionately (or cruelly) as the case of the “Wolfman,” so called on account of an anxiety dream that Pankejeff has just before his fourth birthday wherein he opens a window to find wolves sitting silently and motionlessly in a tree. There is a great deal more to this case, perhaps Freud's most elaborate and important,¹⁹ but we can already see the basic ingredients for depression here. However, rather than chalk up his adult neurosis to this set of infantile factors (undoubtedly the most sensible route to take), Freud instead posits the existence of a repressed “primal scene” that relates to all of these factors but is, according to Freud, the *real* cause of Pankejeff's illness. The infamous scene runs essentially as follows: at the ripe young age of eighteen months, Pankejeff wakes up from an afternoon nap to find his parents engaged in coitus *a tergo* (from behind). On Freud's explanation, while the young boy does not know precisely what to make of this scene at first, it slowly comes to bear an overwhelming significance: as his mother grows increasingly ill, he cannot help but feel that the violent motions he had witnessed that afternoon had somehow caused her infirmity. Even more important: both as a result of being the passive object of his sister's sexual researches and of his intense affection for his father, he comes to identify himself in his mother's position, simultaneously wishing to occupy her role as love object while fearing the violence that this position entails, vividly demonstrated to him in the primal scene.

In “discovering” and articulating the repressed primal scene to the Wolfman, Freud understood himself to have “liberated” his patient in

one particular way: having been debased by his sister and threatened by his Nanya, the boy had overcompensated for these early wrongs with an aggressive masculinity, expressed first in an early phase of cruelty (Pankejeff was, by his own admission, a sadistic child) and then later in his adolescence in an exaggerated enthusiasm for military affairs. This “masculine protest” was cover for a wish that had been engendered by the very passivity to which he was protesting: in short, to be penetrated by his father as his mother had been in the primal scene. The repression of this homosexual object cathexis was in large part responsible for the disconnect between the Wolfman’s affective life and his intelligence: his critical faculties had been impaired by his positive wish *not* to confront his desires, leading to a state of general depletion and indifference accented by bizarre rituals and erratic behavior within which the repressed current forced its way to the surface. In bringing the primal scene to consciousness, the Wolfman recognized that toward which his drives were propelling him and in so doing relieved himself not of the drives themselves but of the neurotic misery they were causing.

Everything I have said thus far of this case has been explained according to Freud’s *early* understandings of drive, psyche, and interpretation. In conjunction with later experiences that “activated” its implications,²⁰ the “primal scene” had forcefully awakened Pankejeff’s sexual and aggressive drives, and he had dealt with the overwhelming and conflicting feelings that followed by repressing it. The drives, however, remained active, leading him to a variety of activities in which could be found an unstable mixture of desire and aggression. Freud’s interpretation then named the *actual moment* of having been overwhelmed and, in so doing, was able to rob the primal scene of its unconscious power.

. . . and After 1920

Like many readers of this case, I have always taken Freud’s interpretation to be so patently absurd that mere rejection somehow misses the mark. I thus feel comfortable in claiming that if we understand this case as the “early” Freud did, there is little reason to read it as anything more than a document of the wild ramblings that a self-appointed seer once offered to a fragile young man in need of real help. Fortunately, around the time that the Wolfman’s (first) analysis with Freud was terminating (and perhaps on account of what transpired in this wild case),²¹ the

“early” understandings of the drives, the psyche, and the task of interpretation that I have just outlined all began to fall apart.²² As if in an effort to reorient himself, Freud set out, at the end of 1914, to systematize his metapsychology—his stock of theories concerning the general nature and structure of psychic life—in a twelve-chapter treatise that he hoped would be a landmark of psychology. The project never materialized, and, in the five papers that did eventually see the light of day,²³ it is easy to see why: what begin as earnest attempts to illuminate a particular pillar of psychoanalytic theory quickly introduce contradictions and tangents that find no resolution within their pages.

None of the so-called metapsychology papers demonstrates this tendency to unravel better than “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915), a veritable mess that foreshadows, in marking off the limits of one line of thought, the Freudian turn to come. The paper aims to outline the basics of the aforementioned “mechanism model” of the psyche, which, as Hans Loewald aptly observes,²⁴ assumes two rigid distinctions: first, that between psyche and soma (drives impinge on the psyche from without, i.e., from the body) and, second, that between psyche-soma and world (drives arise not from the environment but only from the body). Though Freud means to uphold these two distinctions at the outset of the paper, both very quickly deteriorate. Shortly after defining drive as a “stimulus applied to the mind,” he claims that a drive “appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism.”²⁵ One must immediately wonder: is drive the stimulus or is it the psychic representative of the stimulus (or does it only “appear to us” as a psychic representative)? And how would we know the difference? As James Strachey hints already in his introduction to the piece, the definition of drive here seems to undo the psyche-soma relation it is meant to explain.²⁶ Similarly, as important as the distinction between stimuli arising from internal and external worlds is at the beginning of the paper, the external world is soon claimed to be thoroughly imbued with internal conflicts: “At the very beginning,” Freud speculates, “it seems the external world, objects, and *what is hated* are identical.”²⁷ How exactly are we to differentiate external and internal stimuli in this situation?

Not six months after completing “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” Freud would complain to Karl Abraham that it and its eleven companion pieces were little more than “war-time atrocities.”²⁸ No one could have thought more differently of these papers than Freud’s enthusiastic

Hungarian colleague and perhaps his most active wartime correspondent, Sándor Ferenczi,²⁹ who would tell “the Professor” of his metapsychology papers in general that “only now does one comprehend the structure of the psychic apparatus.”³⁰ Of the many lessons Ferenczi would learn in reading through the drafts of the metapsychology papers, he expressed particular appreciation for one in a letter from February 1915: in brief, “that the terms pro- and introjection should be taken *cum grano salis*.”³¹ Three years later, in February 1918, he would reiterate that the developments of the metapsychology papers have made it “necessary to revise *the concept of introjection* on the basis of the new findings.”³² What Ferenczi claims to have “learned” from Freud in both instances—though it is unclear who was teaching whom—was that the psyche is not so much a receiver and manager of external stimuli as it is the product of a “constant, oscillating process” of projection and introjection.³³

Five years after the completion of “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” Freud would emerge from the morass of the Great War with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), announcing in its very title a revolution of no small scale: whereas human beings had previously been understood as oriented fundamentally toward the pursuit of pleasure, Freud asserts in this text that that pursuit is conditioned by a more primary drive of all organic matter toward self-destruction. It is easy to see in this proposal of a “death drive” a product of its times: the problem of death had, after all, become *the* central preoccupation of all European thinkers, and Freud’s beloved daughter Sophie had died shortly before the text’s publication.³⁴ Much more interesting, to my mind, than the external factors involved in the genesis of the theory are the *internal* ones: metapsychology clearly ran aground with the collapse of the distinctions between psyche, soma, and world (uncomfortably on display in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”), and the floundering, unsystematic nature of everything Freud published during the war attests to a full-fledged *theoretical* crisis to complement the personal and social crises he was undergoing.

The overcoming of this theoretical crisis in *Beyond* involved a decisive abandonment of the smoking wreck produced by “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” and the formulation of a radically new psychic architecture that Loewald calls the “organism” model of the psyche. In this new model the human being is understood as “embedded in its environment in such a way that it is in living contact and interchange with it; it modulates and influences the environment by its own activity, and its activity is modulated and influenced by the environment.”³⁵ Whereas the world had no

sway over the drives in the early model, it is thus afforded no such strict externality after 1920. Similarly, whereas the drives were before understood to be external forces disruptive to an apparatus seeking repose, in this new model the drives themselves seek the quietude that was previously the aim of the psyche (Freud now claims that the aim of all drive is to reestablish a previous state). As Loewald summarizes, “the gain, from the present point of view, was that instincts and the psyche were no longer at loggerheads with each other, as they had been when . . . seen as disturbing an apparatus that wanted to be unstimulated.”³⁶ In short, the drives become “forces *within* the psychic organization and not stimuli which operate on the system from without.”³⁷ Under the influence of the organism analogy, Freud is thus compelled to arrive at a different conclusion than the one he sought in 1915: namely, that drives are *psychic* forces shaped *in relation to the environment*.³⁸

With this new understanding of drive in mind, it only makes sense that Freud would become a fervent supporter of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, hopeful that psychoanalysis might eventually explain his theory of biological adaptation. In a letter to Abraham, he expressed his desire “to put Lamarck entirely on our ground and to show that the ‘necessity’ that according to him creates and transforms organs is nothing but the power of unconscious ideas over one’s own body.”³⁹ His ambition to ground psychoanalysis in the biology of his day might be a retrospective embarrassment, given the discrediting of Lamarck’s “soft inheritance” theory, but the introduction of the organism model to drive theory is a case of new wine bursting old wineskins. For if drives are *acquired* in the early stages of life in relation to the environment, how can they be solely our “inheritance from the animal world”?⁴⁰ The environment in which the human organism comes to maturity is, after all, a distinctively human one, shaped by forces that have as much to do with culture and society as they do biology. The basic insight that drives are formed in relation to the environment need not be implicated in Freud’s misguided biologism, and one might even say that his turn to an explicitly biological metaphor paradoxically and definitively differentiates drive theory from biology.⁴¹

Although Freud would spend the rest of his life grappling with the implications of this new “organism” model of the psyche, he unfortunately did little in the way of indicating how it required a new conception not simply of what the drives are but rather of what *drive itself is*. Once again, we may follow Loewald’s lead in articulating the consequences of

Freud's "late" views. According to Loewald, drive, in the late model, is indeterminate at first and comes only to acquire aim and force in the complex interchanges of early life, i.e., in relation to the environment. We are held, caressed, cooed at, coddled, fed at the breast, or in close bodily contact and we can also be neglected and cared for in an impersonal way. Later we are encouraged, corralled, admonished, disciplined, screamed at, etc. It is in these experiences that drives are not elicited but *formed*—we *learn* what it is to love, to master, to aggress⁴²—and their formation coincides with the development of psychic life itself.⁴³

This new conception of drive thus goes hand in hand with a new conception of the psyche: instead of being *opposed* to the disturbing force of the drives, the psyche is now understood to be more primarily *composed* of the drives and the structures to which they give rise *in their conflict*.⁴⁴ We want to love that which we also want to aggress, to master that which we also want to reject, to be hurt by that which we want to hurt, and all of these conflicts *engender* the basic structures that are responsible for the existence of that special domain that Freud calls "psychical reality."⁴⁵ In a late paper, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), Freud offers the following formulation of oedipal conflict: "If the satisfaction of love in the field of the Oedipus Complex is to cost the child his penis, a conflict is bound to arise between his narcissistic interest in that part of his body and the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects. In this conflict, the first of these forces normally triumphs: the child's ego turns away from the Oedipus complex."⁴⁶ Behind the specific gendering of the conflict, one can see clearly here that the Oedipus complex, at bottom, is one of conflict between generally self-interested forces—narcissistic or ego drives—and sexual ones. The Oedipus complex is thus such a major developmental hurdle because in it the satisfaction of one of our primary drives imperils the satisfaction of another, and the same is true for every single one of the complexes, fantasies, and scenes of which "psychical reality" is composed.⁴⁷

What, then, of interpretation? In the early conception, interpretation a) names an *actual occurrence* in the patient's history b) with the aim not of affecting the drives but simply of bringing the unconscious to consciousness. In the late paper "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), Freud would upset both components of this view of interpretation. First, he admits that an interpretation is only "real" in the context of an analytic relationship: in other words, that the reality of what is uncovered in analysis is determined by its impact on the therapeutic process.⁴⁸ He might have

also said that since psychic reality is a product of conflict between the drives it need not have any *actual* reality in order to affect the course of our lives. Second, he talks about the constructions of interpretation “stirring to activity” the “‘upward drive’ of the repressed” (*der “Auftrieb” des Verdrängten*).⁴⁹ I take this to mean that interpretation does not simply uncover repressed material, leaving the drives unaltered, but rather that the drives are constantly reaching “upward” and latching on to constructions in order to find gratification in new forms of expression. When they find this new expression, the drives do not lessen or disappear in their force, but they do take on a new form, one that opens them, in Loewald’s words, “to the dynamics of personal motivation.”⁵⁰ This is to say that interpretations can facilitate not only *realization* (from hysterical misery to common unhappiness) but also *transformation* (from impersonal drive to personal motivation).⁵¹ In this new view, the task of the psychoanalyst is not, like the scientist’s, to discover an already existing unconscious occurrence but rather, more like the artist’s, to take an unfinished kind of mental life that is incessantly reaching upward, clamoring for expression, and to give it *form* (or at least, a *better* form).⁵² Psychoanalysis, in this view, is about not finding but *creating* reality.⁵³

The Wolfman Revisited

It is possible now to redescribe the case of the Wolfman with these new conceptions of drive, psyche, and interpretation in tow. It is not, as before, that Pankejeff’s early experiences *awakened* his already existent sexual and aggressive drives but rather that he *learned*—in the seduction by his sister, in the distance of his mother, in the threats of his Nanya, in the lack of his father’s affection—*how* to love and aggress in these interactions. It is the drives that were *formed* during these early years that were then responsible for his childhood “naughtiness” and later neurosis. Perhaps even more important: when Freud articulates the fantastic “primal scene” to Pankejeff, its efficaciousness lies in the fact not that it actually happened but rather that it makes sense of the conflict between two desires: on the one hand, to be a strong male, an aim threatened by many of his early experiences and yet also encouraged by social pressure, and, on the other, to be the object of his father’s love and attention, even (and, seemingly, especially) if this meant being penetrated and hurt by him.

Freud devotes the entirety of section 5 of “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” to wondering himself about the nature of the primal scene, admitting that the particular construction under examination there—witnessing coitus a tergo at eighteen months—seems rather far-fetched. He ultimately comes down in favor, provisionally, of the *actual occurrence* of the scene, but he also asserts that, even if it were a fantasy, “the carrying-out of analysis would not in the first instance be altered in any respect.”⁵⁴ Much has been written about Freud’s abandonment, in 1897, of the so-called seduction thesis—the view that all neurotic conflict can be traced back to *actual instances* of sexual abuse—for a theory that put fantasy center stage, and one might wonder if he does not return, in 1918, to his early view in asserting the actual occurrence of the coitus a tergo scene.⁵⁵ What the discussion of the reality of the primal scene in the Wolfman case makes clear, however, is that this problem—whether or not the constructions proffered in analysis actually occurred or not—*no longer mattered* for Freud: quite contentedly, he ends “the discussion of the reality of the primal scene with a *non liquet*.”⁵⁶ It is not clear, and it *does not need to be clear*, as the legitimacy of the constructions of analysis does not stem from their historical actuality.

What interpretation did for Pankejeff was thus not to name the actual moment of being overwhelmed but rather to articulate a scene that would give expression to his drives in their conflict. Freud admittedly thought that he had “cured” Pankejeff in 1914,⁵⁷ but makes a much more modest claim in the case history itself: quite simply, to have liberated “his shackled homosexuality” and thereby to have freed his “intellectual activity” from impairment.⁵⁸ It is thus not that Pankejeff came to realize the truth of the repressed scene but rather that a portion of his drives found expression in Freud’s articulation and in so doing enlivened his secondary process. Put more subjectively, instead of greeting Freud’s construct with the realization “Oh, *that* happened,” we can think of Pankejeff as instead hearing Freud articulate this wild speculation, and *even while finding it to be utter speculation*, feeling something like, “Here is something that hits upon the nature of my drives.” What Freud gave Pankejeff, in short, was not the truth but a *fantasy within which drive met thought*.

In 1973, almost sixty years after the Wolfman had finished his first treatment with Freud, the journalist Karin Obholzer found and interviewed Pankejeff, who told her, among other things, that the primal scene as Freud described it was quite “improbable because in Russia [his birthplace], children sleep in the nanny’s bedroom, not in their parents.”⁵⁹

Pankejeff offers many other recollections that impugn Freud or other analysts in some respect and conceives of himself as quite critical of psychoanalysis,⁶⁰ but his condemnation is by no means consistent: though he claims at one point to be “in the same state as when [he] first came to Freud,” at others he expresses a belief in the idea “that improvement can be made by transference” and a real appreciation for his initial analysis.⁶¹ One gets the impression throughout of a still compulsive, depressed, guilt-ridden, and frustrating person—he finds it quite normal to pay women for sex, he is obsessed with the behavior of “sluts,” he cannot see how his taking of mistresses during his marriage had anything to do with his wife’s suicide⁶²—but also one who had managed to eke out a tolerable existence in spite of his childhood difficulties—the seduction by his sister, his distance from his mother, and the disappointment of his father are all confirmed in these interviews—and adulthood tragedies.⁶³ He is able to discuss homosexuality (in an admittedly defensive and distancing manner), takes an active interest in painting and literature, and cannot help but speak about his life in psychoanalytic terms, even while taking objection to many of them.

It would be quite impossible to argue, based upon these interviews, or even his own memoirs, that the Wolfman’s analysis had been anything resembling a success, though I am not certain that either point definitively to its failure.⁶⁴ My discussion of Freud’s changing views of drive, psyche, and interpretation in the previous two sections cannot help decide the matter either way, but it *can* help us establish what we would need to affirm if we *were* to consider his analysis meaningful: namely, not that the primal scene articulated by Freud was any “more than a construct,” but rather that a previously unreflective person burdened by his own lack of satisfaction became a slightly more reflective and slightly less unsatisfied one in finding something in Freud’s discourse onto which his drives found occasion to latch.

Society and Psyche

When it comes to explaining why human beings do what they do, two options are readily available to us: a *subjective* explanation (as found in statements like “she chose to do that,” “you must take responsibility for your action,” etc.) and an *objective* one (“he has a chemical imbalance,” “it’s all determined by genes,” etc.). What I will reluctantly

call “social constructionism” has problematized both these kinds of explanation.⁶⁵ In this view, the best way to explain an individual’s choice to do X is to look neither to agency nor to brain chemistry but rather to the individual’s social, cultural, political, and economic milieu. The subjective explanation, for the social constructionist, typically does not account for the preconditions of the subject’s supposed “state of freedom”: as Durkheim said, the subject is a social product and not an ontological substratum. The objective explanation, by contrast, lends itself to a rigid fatalism in mistaking social constructions for objective facts.⁶⁶ When we see that “undesirable” human behavior is not hard-wired, we can go about changing the social conditions in which that behavior emerges.

Drive theory, in fact, shares a great deal with this mode of explanation, spurning both rigidified subjectivism and objectivism. Unlike the “subjective” explanation, drive theory does not assume total, conscious, volitional activity. And unlike the “objective” explanation, drive theory does not assume nonconscious passivity: our actions are more than the precipitates of our genetic makeup. Although it is never possible to be in complete control or understanding of either drives or social conditions, it is possible to *better* control and understand them. Drive theory is also similar to social constructionism in being primarily *narrative*: since drives are *acquired* during the early stages of life, there is a story to how they are formed, and that story is just as essential to drive theory as the drives are in themselves. Freedom *is*. Determinism *is*. But social formations and psychic drives *come to be*, and they can also *be differently*. One could say that both theories are kinds of *theodicy*, both in the etymological sense of an attempt to do justice (*dike*) to the mystery (*theos*) of human being,⁶⁷ but also in the more common sense of a narration that makes sense of various evils in the world without demolishing its affirmability and our capacity to enact change within it.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, and perhaps since Michel Foucault’s rise to patristic status in the humanities, drive theory has been edged out of contemporaneity by social constructionism. Psychological theories, in this view, are but reflections of larger discursive shifts in power relations, themselves to be explained through historicization and contextualization. The critique is both historical and substantive: on the one hand, the claim is that only at a particular historical moment—for Nikolas Rose, “one that emerges only in the nineteenth century”—and “in a limited and localized geographical space” is human being understood “in terms of individuals who are selves, each equipped with an inner domain, a ‘psychology,’ which is

structured by the interaction between a particular biographical experience and certain general laws or processes of the human animal.”⁶⁹ If drive theory has any purchase, in this view, it can only be one with limited temporal and geographical scope. On the other hand, the critique is that the object of psychology itself *does not exist*: there is no “unified psychological domain,” only “culturally diverse linguistic practices, beliefs, and conventions.”⁷⁰ Quite simply, there is no “unified self” because human beings are “heterogeneous and situationally produced.”⁷¹

I have done some work to address this latter claim in the previous sections—for the late Freud, at least, drives ought to be understood as formed in relation to the environment and in conflict in such a way as to preclude the possibility of a “unified self”—and I will also deal with the historical specificity of the psyche beginning in chapter 4. No doubt, however, the critique goes deeper: in this view, it is wrong to speak of “drives” for the same reason it is wrong to speak of “selves” or “subjects,” as if there are anything like universals when it comes to the myriad ways in which human beings conceive of their interiority (if, indeed, they do such a thing at all).⁷² In different cultures and at different times, across lines of gender, race, socioeconomic status, etc., people are formed in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, where universals *are* invoked, one typically finds them in “continually repeated, motivated, and gendered act[s] of symbolic violence.”⁷³

While I agree with the critique that a particular discourse dominant in the modern West that pretends to universality has been oppressive, imposing, and simply inaccurate, I worry in two particular ways—one historically specific, the other more global and transhistorical—that the baby is being thrown out with the bathwater here (somewhat literally in this case).⁷⁴ First, while advanced capitalist society might be able to accommodate a wide range of subjectivities, it nonetheless must re-ensure that “living labour remains integral to the process of production of society as a whole” and thus produce subjects that abide by its “abstract form of social domination.”⁷⁵ Insofar as this is true, it is premature to abandon talk of “subjects” with certain constant features, especially when it is in the interest of capitalism that its subjects see diversity and newness instead of a relentless reproduction of the same. In any event, when I turn to the language of “subject” in chapters 4 and 5 I mean it in this particular sense.

Second, I am in basic agreement with Peter Gay that “all humans share some inescapable universal preconditions”—in particular, bodies of

certain kinds and a complete dependence on caretakers in early life—that dictate that they cannot be formed in just any way.⁷⁶ What mouths and their various acts *are* to human beings differs in various places and times, but *that we have mouths*, mouths that can do a limited number of things and that *must* ingest food, *does not*, and this fact provides a constraint on the range of meanings mouths can have for human beings. Even more important: what care *is* can be radically different in different societies,⁷⁷ but *that* human beings enter life completely dependent on the responses of other human beings (and for a fairly lengthy amount of time in comparison to other animals) is invariable.⁷⁸

To be clear, I am not saying that there is some timeless bedrock of human *nature* that culture merely surrounds, but simply that there are a few important things about how we come to exist that pose particular problems for us and constrain the range of our possibilities.⁷⁹ Even though drives are formed in relation to the environment, from the existence of the “universal preconditions” of which Gay speaks it follows that there will be certain drives that all human beings share; but *how* these particular drives are formed—and, in turn, how they impact our lives and thus what they *mean* to us—as well as the *vicissitudes* available for their expression vary markedly in different societies and at different times.⁸⁰ I would thus agree with the claim that the “basic presuppositions of human life . . . imply very little when it comes to evaluating how humans, in relation to issues beyond mere survival, *lead their lives*,” but would stress that we should nonetheless be extremely attentive to and unapologetic about what little they *do* imply.⁸¹ If, thus, I dare to interpret the “death drive” in a transhistorical and universalist way, it is because I believe that *all* infants seek to maintain what I will call, in the first chapter, the “tension-within” position; but neither *how* this position is maintained, and thus what the death drive *is* for any particular individual, nor the modes of its expression are constant in the same way (the kind of death drive gratification I describe in chapter 4, for instance, is unique to the era of the culture industry).⁸² The same basic argument goes for the drive to mastery and aggressivity.

In sum then, drives are formed in relation to the environment, but they are not just formed *in* any old thing: they appear in mammals with mouths, anuses, and genitals (not to mention opposable thumbs and large brains) that would, without fail, *die* upon birth were it not for an extended period of infancy in which they are *absolutely dependent* on their caretakers. What a strange and complex situation! No wonder, then, that

“we are never sure that we are seeing [drives] clearly”: it is impossible to know with exact precision how the infinite number of bodily, familial, and social factors combine in early life to form our unconscious motivational forces, but “we cannot for a moment disregard” these “mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness,” without abandoning depth psychology.⁸³ In one of those curious assertions that sowed the seeds of its own destruction (like so many of his defenses in his later years),⁸⁴ Freud offered a very precise articulation of the stakes and difficulties of this endeavor.

In Brief

I hope that the preceding defense of drive theory in general serves as a line of entry for a reconsideration of Freud’s own drive theory, and in particular his strange proposal that all living things are driven to return to the inanimate ooze from which they sprang; in short, that “the aim of all life is death.” In chapter 1 I turn directly to sections 4 and 5 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the wild “speculative” sections in which Freud constructs a grand narrative about the origins of life on earth as a curious and, most commentators would add, confused way of making sense of the novel clinical problems he had introduced in the first three sections, problems generally relating to what he calls the repetition compulsion. Through a close reading of these two sections, I recount Freud’s understanding of how the first fledgling eruptions of life, interested only in reimmersing themselves in the primordial soup, refashion themselves into living organisms fighting against a “hostile environment” for their continued existence; that is, how the *death drive* becomes its own counterdrive, a *drive to mastery*.

This unfortunately undertheorized drive to mastery (*Bemächtigungstrieb*) is at the heart of my reinterpretation of Freudian drive theory and the key, in my view, to understanding the better-known instinctual antagonism of the late metapsychology: before the great struggle between Eros and Thanatos, there was a much more complicated self-subversion of the death drive resulting in the drive to mastery. At least as Freud describes it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the death drive is a drive to eliminate any self/other distinction, to cast off difference and be reimmersed in the environment. The drive to mastery, by contrast, is a drive to build and reinforce the living organism’s protective structures. Whereas one aims

to destroy the organism, the other aims to protect it; one seeks to stop the process of individuation, one to promote it. This is the basic form of ambivalence and the crux of this underexplored drive theory.

As biology, of course, Freud's mythological venture hardly holds water; as a theory of *psychic development*, however, it is perhaps more serviceable. In a creative interpretation of Haeckel's law, Loewald faithfully translates Freudian phylogeny into developmental ontogeny: thus, instead of a living organism, Loewald imagines an infant turning an urge to return to the care structure characteristic of the pre- and neonatal state into one for increased autonomy and mastery, into a drive to cope with the stark fact of separation that all human beings must endure. In chapter 2 I introduce Loewald's psychoanalytic vision through the lens of Freudian metapsychology with the hope of asserting the continued worth of this drive theory when rescued from biological anachronism.

No one has done more to keep the death drive in conceptual circulation than Jacques Lacan, who invokes Freud's theory at many different times in his oeuvre to a variety of effects. In chapter 3 I choose to focus on his treatment of the death drive through the notion of "specular aggressivity." By reading gestalt theory into *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* in *Seminar II*, Lacan comes to argue that the infant's aggressive struggle with a specular other is the primary motor of psychic development and that this seems to make sense of "the enigmatic signification" Freud expressed in the term *death drive*. What gets elided in this reading, I argue, is Freud's concern in these texts with psychic *mastery*, which is hastily translated into *aggressivity*. A critique of Lacan on this particular point proves to be a ripe occasion to formulate a new theory of aggressivity and thereby to clarify the distinctions between the concepts of death drive, drive to mastery, and aggressivity, which are often conflated in psychoanalytic theory.

In the last two chapters I employ the drive theory developed in the first three to sort out the critical theorists' appropriation of psychoanalysis. Chapter 4 examines Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's claim that late capitalism engenders a "new anthropological type" resulting from a dissolution of the psychic tension that held together the bourgeois subject theorized by Freud. In order to analyze this new type, they employ the structural model of id, ego, and superego while thoroughly neglecting the drive theory that undergirded it. By reworking their articulation of this psychic transformation with a stronger metapsychological foundation, it is possible more clearly to specify the nature of the drive

gratification provided by the culture industry and how that gratification works on the psyche.

In chapter 5 I look at this same process of psychic change from a slightly different angle. Throughout his work Marcuse flirted with the idea that technological progress provides an avenue for the sublimation of our aggressive and destructive tendencies toward social ends. Through a symptomatic reading of Marcuse's repeated rejections of this hypothesis, I attempt to salvage the idea of "aggressive sublimation" and to spell out its implications for thinking about psychic life under late capitalism. As the commodification of culture and aggressive instrumentalism settle into a comfortable obviousness, it is necessary to renew our efforts to understand the nature of the desire and satisfaction promised by cultural consumption and technological innovation. These last two chapters are written with this aim in mind: to break the spell of the array of programs and gadgets that are constantly being paraded in front of us by coming to a greater understanding of the drive fulfillment provided therein.

Notes

Introduction

1. More recently, thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Roberto Esposito have drawn attention to the violence that follows from an “immunological crisis” of more basic coping responses; see Jacques Derrida, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—a Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

2. Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 150.

3. Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 799.

4. According to Leszek Kolakowski, “human beings are what their behavior shows them to be: they are, first and foremost, the totality of the actions whereby they reproduce their own material existence.” Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, trans. P. S. Falla, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1:156. What is essential about human beings, on this view, is their capacity to provide material stability for themselves with their inventive tool-making and organizational abilities—in short, their capacity to *master* their environment.

Marx himself often spoke of mastery (admittedly as neither *Bewältigung* nor *Bemächtigung*) in a positive sense: he claims, in *The German Ideology*, that the “natural form of the world historical co-operation of individuals will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery [*Beherrschung*] of these powers,” and, in the *Grundrisse*, that communism will mark “the advent of real mastery [*Herrschaft*] over . . . the forces of nature” (Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 164, 246). Running with a passage from the Paris manuscripts that describes communism as a “fully-developed naturalism,” a “genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature,” Ernst Bloch understands this mastery as involving a “humanization of nature”: “the abolition of alienation in man and nature, between man and nature or the harmony of the unreified object with the manifested subject, of the unreified subject with the manifested object.” Ibid., 84; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 1:240. Although I agree with Isaac Balbus that Marx’s proposed “resurrection of nature” might have been “merely another name for its effective domination,” I prefer in this one instance to side with Bloch and thus to think that, by “mastery of the forces of nature,” Marx meant a deft and noninstrumental relation to the world. Isaac D. Balbus, *Marxism and Domination: A Neo-Hegelian, Feminist, Psychoanalytic Theory of Sexual, Political, and Technological Liberation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 275.

5. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1966), 21:112–13.

6. I would hope this way of framing my project prevents it from being seen as “an expression of an orthodox hostile to experimentation.” Axel Honneth, “The Work of Negativity,” in *Recognition, Work, Politics: New Directions in French Critical Theory*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty, Danielle Petherbridge, John Rundell, and Robert Sinnerbrink (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 128.

7. Horkheimer and Adorno were already interested in psychoanalysis by the time Fromm came to the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute (Adorno wrote his 1927 *Habilitationsschrift* on Freud and Kant), but it was largely Fromm that set the agenda for a synthesis of psychoanalysis and social theory. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 88.

8. Erich Fromm, “The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology: Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 2005), 523.

9. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), 134. Horkheimer would similarly disagree with Freud’s understanding of the death drive, at the same time agreeing with the pessimism that underlay it, attacking Fromm while nonetheless retaining his beliefs; see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 102.

10. The phrase comes from Joel Whitebook, “The Marriage of Marx and Freud: Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74–102. Beginning perhaps with Fredric Jameson’s *Late Marxism*, the importance of psychoanalysis to critical theory (attributed notably by Martin Jay) has been called into question: Freud was important, of course, but his categories were never “centrally organizing” as, say, Weber’s, or Lukács’s, or Nietzsche’s were. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), 26. This claim of exaggerated importance, combined with a retreat from the purportedly “patrocentric” implications of the critical theorists’ conception of the decline of the family (as articulated by Jessica Benjamin), has made for a dearth of studies devoted to the psychological component of critical theory, despite the fact that Horkheimer himself claimed that Freud’s “thought is one of the foundation stones without which our philosophy would not be what it is” (quoted in Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 102). The only book-length exceptions, to my knowledge, are C. Fred Alford, *Narcissism: Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); and Yvonne Sherrat, *Adorno’s Positive Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). It is thus not surprising that many works addressing the connection between psyche and society make little or no mention of the Frankfurt school: see, for instance, Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud et les sciences sociales: Psychanalyse et théorie de la Culture* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993); Kanakis Leledakis, *Society and Psyche: Social Theory and the Unconscious Dimension of the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Neil J. Smelser, *The Social Edges of Psychoanalysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Fred Weinstein, *Freud, Psychoanalysis, Social Theory: The Unfulfilled Promise* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); Kelly Oliver and Steve Edwin, eds., *Between the Psyche and the Social: Psychoanalytic Social Theory* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

11. Akeel Bilgrami offers a pithy critique of the “It’s too late” charge in *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 203.

12. As a representative smattering, see Frank Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); François Roustang, *Dire Mastery: Discipleship from Freud to Lacan* (Arlington: American Psychiatric, 1986); Richard Webster, *Why Freud was Wrong: Sin, Science, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); John Forrester, *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Frederick Crews, ed., *Unauthorized Freud: Doubters Confront a Legend* (London: Penguin, 1999); and, above all, Catherine Meyer, ed., *Le Livre noir de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2005).

13. Hans Loewald, *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 120.

14. Loewald calls it the “apparatus model” (*ibid.*, 119).

15. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 2:305.

16. In what follows, I am interested less in what “really” happened than I am in two fundamentally different ways in which we can understand the Wolfman case as Freud himself describes it. It is for this reason that I do not engage Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s polyglottal reconstruction of the case, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson’s revelation that Pankejeff had been “anally seduced” as a child (subsequently qualified by Kurt Eissler), or the many attempts to divine the precise nature of Freud’s personal overinvestment in the case. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), xvii; K. R. Eissler, “Comments on Erroneous Interpretations of Freud’s Seduction Theory,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 41, no. 2 (1993): 575–76; Mark Kanzer, “Further Comments on the Wolf Man: The Search for a Primal Scene,” in *Freud and His Patients*, ed. Mark Kanzer and Jules Glenn (New York: Jason Aronson, 1980); William Offenkranz, “Problems of the Therapeutic Alliance: Freud and the Wolf Man,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 54 (1973): 76; Patrick J. Mahony, *Cries of the Wolf Man* (New York: International Universities Press, 1984), 176. I only turn to the Obholzer interviews in the third section of this introduction to argue that the complete fabrication of the primal scene does not preclude the possibility that its articulation had some therapeutic value.

17. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 17:67; Harold P. Blum, “The Borderline Childhood of the Wolf Man,” in *Freud and His Patients*, 352.

18. The Wolfman’s analysis ended in 1914, but the war delayed publication of case until 1918.

19. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 17:3.

20. *Ibid.*, 17:44.

21. Grubrich-Simitis connects the Wolfman case and the metapsychology papers in Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, “Trauma or Drive—Drive and Trauma: A Reading of Sigmund Freud’s Phylogenetic Fantasy of 1915,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 43 (1988): 13.

22. The following is a brief history of what drive substantially *is*, as opposed to Freud’s own history of what the drives individually *are* in chapter 6 of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (see Freud, *Standard Edition*, 21:117–19).

23. “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” “Repression,” “The Unconscious,” “A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams,” and “Mourning and Melancholia” (all collected in the fourteenth volume of the *Standard Edition*). Freud would destroy the other seven papers (*ibid.*, 14:105), though a draft of the twelfth paper (meant to conclude the book) was discovered with the Freud/Ferenczi correspondence and published as *A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, ed. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, trans. Axel and Peter Hoffer (Cambridge: Belknap, 1987).

24. See Loewald, *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, 119–24.

25. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 14:118, 121.

26. Strachey generously chalks up the contradiction to an “ambiguity in the concept itself—a frontier-concept between the physical and the mental,” though it is clear from the discussion that precedes this conclusion that he thought the confusion real (*ibid.*, 14:113).

27. *Ibid.*, 14:136 (my emphasis).

28. Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, *A Psycho-Analytic Dialogue: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, 1907–1926*, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud, trans. Bernard Marsh and Hilda C. Abraham (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 228.

29. Grubrich-Simitis goes so far as to claim that “in Freud’s later friendships it is the mutuality with Ferenczi that matches the intimacy and inspiring intensity of his relationship with Fliess” (“Trauma or Drive,” 7).

30. Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi, *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi*, ed. Ernst Falzeder and Eva Brabant, trans. Peter T. Hoffer (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 2:263.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:51.

32. *Ibid.*, 2:263.

33. *Ibid.*, 2:51.

34. See chapter 1 for a survey of the reception of the death drive.

35. Loewald, *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, 119–120.

36. *Ibid.*, 122.

37. *Ibid.*, 123 (my emphasis).

38. As opposed to *somatic* forces that do “not arise from the external world,” as he had postulated in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (Freud, *Standard Edition*, 14:118).

39. Freud and Abraham, *A Psycho-Analytic Dialogue*, 261, quoted in Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind*, 275.

40. William Morton Wheeler, “On Instincts,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 15 (1917): 316, quoted in Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind*, 4.

41. John Fletcher makes a similar point in *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 310.

42. The claim that drives are formed in relation to the environment need not contradict Freud’s assertion that they are, once formed, “objectless”: drives might be formed in relation to objects, but they persist even when that relation changes and the original object is renounced. As Adam Phillips explains, when “Freud proposed that the object was merely ‘soldered’ on to the instinct, that our primary commitment was to our desire and not to its target,” “he was implying that we are not attached to each other in the ways we like to think.” Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 78. As Phillips makes clear, he was *not* implying that we are simply not attached to each other.

43. Part of the reason that Freud—the late Freud, anyways—is mistakenly read as speaking of biological instincts rather than environmentally formed drives is a lack of attendance to the history I have outlined here, but the more glaring cause is the simple fact that the German term for “drive,” *Trieb*, is rendered

by translators James and Alix Strachey in *The Standard Edition* as “instinct.” Contemporary psychoanalytic theorists nearly universally lament this choice and the misunderstandings it has produced, and I imagine that the revised standard edition of Freud’s works, edited by Mark Solms, will correct this mistake; but, before history buries another controversy, a limited defense of the poor Stracheys seems in order, if only because one of the most important lessons of psychoanalysis is that we should be wary of the aggressively obvious.

The first thing that must be said on their behalf is that Freud himself, whose English was nearly flawless, personally signed off on their specific translations of key words, and thus most certainly would have himself been aware of the fact that *Trieb* was being translated as “instinct.” One might chalk this up to his desire to gain a better scientific reception, but this interpretation does not alter the fact that Freud, who was quite sensitive to the implications of words, approved the translation “instinct.” Second, despite the fact that drives, unlike instincts, are neither innate nor determinately satisfied (hunger is only satisfied in eating, sexuality, on the other hand . . .), they are nonetheless *experienced by the subject with the force of an instinct*. Drives may be formed in the child’s relation to the environment, but once those drives are formed they bear their own autonomous and uncompromising force. Sexuality, for instance, might be a product of early development and not a constitutional given, but we are not therefore free to ignore its demands. Thus, while “instinct” is most certainly the wrong translation for *Trieb*, it does capture its real unmanageability, unlike the word “drive.” In the sentence “he has a *drive* to succeed,” for instance, we hear that this person is a hard-working go-getter, not that he is dealing with forces beyond his control.

Finally, there is, for Freud, some connection between *Trieb* and “instinct” (*Instinkt*), even if it is not one of identity. In the *Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality* he offers the following well-known example: “Our study of thumb-sucking or sensual sucking has already given us the three essential characteristics of an infantile sexual manifestation. At its origin it attaches itself to one of the vital somatic functions; it has as yet no sexual object, and is thus auto-erotic; and its sexual aim is dominated by an erotogenic zone” (Freud, *Standard Edition*, 7:182–83). In other words, the sexual act of sucking, the gaining of pleasure from the act of biologically pointless sucking, depends upon, or “props” itself upon, the vital function of eating, but it also becomes detached from that function, thus transforming into what Freud calls a “component instinct” or “part drive” (*Partialtrieb*), a part of what comes to be our basic drives. Thus the acts involved in oral pleasure, as well as their associated fantasies (engulfing, devouring, consuming, etc.), come to play an important part in the constitution of the drives more generally.

In sum: to say that drives are environmentally formed does not mean that we can reduce drive to environmental influence because a) once drives are formed, they are no more easily ignored than biological instincts for having been acquired and can be just as much a source of resistance to the environment as they can be of complicity; and b) there are constitutional factors that go into the formation of drives. Adrian Johnston, who also believes that “the complete denial of all features pertaining to instinct . . . might be too extreme, too sweeping,” offers a helpful

comparison of *Trieb* and *Instinkt* in *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 156–69; as does Laplanche in *Freud and the Sexual: Essays, 2000–2006*, ed. John Fletcher, trans. John Fletcher et al. (New York: International Psychoanalytic, 2011), chapter 1.

44. Though it is true that those structures do come to oppose the drives, they are no longer understood to be primarily opposed to them or separate from them.

45. Part of my claim here is that it is more accurate to say that psychic reality is a product of unconscious drive rather than the unconscious *tout court*, given that it is the drives that make the unconscious an effective force. Imagine a man who, at the age of six, lost his mother to cancer: if this man should have no memory of his mother—if, in other words, his memories of her had been banished by the guardian of consciousness to the depths of the unconscious—there is nothing about this act *in itself* that is cause for neurosis or unhealth. With Nietzsche's assertion of the naturally fortifying effect of forgetfulness in mind, we might even say that this man is better off with no memory of his mother. *That* we repress, that *there is* an unconscious, in other words, could be just as much occasion for happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, and presence as it is for misery, gloominess, despair, self-hatred, and absence, or, for that matter, nothing whatsoever; cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 58. What makes the man's repression of the memories of his mother effective, what makes the unconscious an active force in his life, is the fact that the drives that were formed and elicited in his early relationship with his mother remain after the memories of that relationship have been repressed. It is the drives, in short, that make the descriptively unconscious *dynamically* unconscious.

46. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 19:176.

47. Psychic reality is, unfortunately, more often than not thought to be composed simply of the complexes, fantasies, and scenes themselves (as in the Wolfman case, the conclusion of *Totem and Taboo*, or the whole of *Moses and Monotheism*). To his detractors, these essays seem typical of Freud's delusion. His defenders, on the other hand, laud him for asserting in these instances the "reality of fiction"; see Peter Brooks, "Fictions of the Wolfman: Freud and Narrative Understanding," *Diacritics* 9, no. 1 (1979): 78; Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), 202. Too much energy, to my mind, has been spent trying to justify or deny the reality of the fantasies Freud offers up under the name *primal scene*. Although I agree, for what it's worth, that they are indeed *real*, what I dislike in this conversation is that it shifts emphasis away from the reality of the drives that undergird them. When the debate is over whether the Wolfman *actually* witnessed his parents having sex at the young age of eighteen months instead of whether the Wolfman had *drives* that operated without his volition or control, it is easy for the question of psychic reality to turn into a parody.

48. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 23:255–70.

49. *Ibid.*, 23:266.

50. Loewald, *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, 105.

51. No doubt realization (bringing the unconscious to consciousness) also involves a kind of transformation. What I mean to emphasize here is that in the late view, analysis is less about robbing an overwhelming scene or thought of its unconscious power and more about an expansion of subjectivity.

52. I am deeply indebted here to Jonathan Lear's argument in *Love and Its Place in Nature* that a psychoanalytic interpretation not only expresses "archaic mental activity" in "higher level thinking" but also *transforms* it. Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 7. Though Freud, in the image of a scientist discovering an independent reality, tended to present himself as "uncovering a hidden thought," what he was actually doing in helping minds to better understand themselves was, on Lear's account, aiding a developmental process wherein nonconceptual, "primitive mental activity" raises itself to the level of concepts and judgments in overcoming "myriad inhibiting forces, which freeze much of the mind's activity at archaic levels" (*ibid.*, 8). Although I obviously agree with the general spirit of this intervention, I do worry that to speak of a developmental process pushing forward toward concepts and judgments instead of objectless and conflicting drives latching on to expression is to see teleology where Freud saw contingency. I also, and much more tentatively, wonder if this understanding of interpretation does justice to the retroactivity of meaning: an interpretation might not be picking out a previously existent reality in the "scientific" way that Freud imagined, but in finding expression for a meaningless psychic undercurrent it comes to have been the case that something like the event it recounts did happen (Freud names this phenomenon with the term *Nachträglichkeit*). In other words, in articulating the Wolfman's primal scene, Freud does something like "uncover a hidden thought," even if the hidden thought did not preexist the uncovering.

53. Albeit in such a way that that which is created appears to have been there all along—such is the strange temporality of psychoanalysis.

54. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 17:49.

55. See, for instance, Masson's well-known attack on Freud's "suppression" of his early seduction hypothesis in *Assault on Truth*. In his theory of "general seduction," Jean Laplanche attempts to recover the early seduction thesis, but within the psychoanalytic framework. Jean Laplanche, *Nouveaux Fondements pour la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1987).

56. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 17:60.

57. He would come to doubt this conclusion in 1919, when he convinced Pankejeff to reenter analysis on account of "a small residue of unanalyzed material." Muriel Gardiner, ed., *The Wolf-Man: With the Case of the Wolf-Man by Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 111. In Freud's defense, Pankejeff himself always felt that he had been helped by the first four years of analysis (though he felt nearly the opposite about everything that transpired after 1919). Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani, *The Freud Files: An Inquiry Into the History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 229; James L. Rice, *Freud's Russia: National Identity in the Evolution of Psychoanalysis* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1993), 108.

58. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 17:70–71.

59. Karin Obholzer, *The Wolf-Man: Conversations with Freud's Patient—Sixty Years Later*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Continuum, 1982), 36.

60. That these interviews would constitute an attack on Freud and psychoanalysis was determined from the outset: Muriel Gardiner, the editor of the Wolfman's memoirs, who had concluded in that work that "the positive results of the Wolf-Man's analysis are impressive indeed," had forbidden Mr. Pankejeff from conducting any interviews, thus preventing the publication of Obholzer's book until after his death in 1979 (*ibid.*, 22). Obholzer's annoyance at this restriction and psychoanalytic orthodoxy more generally comes across very clearly in the interviews, but the axe grinding does not detract from a set of fascinating conversations.

61. *Ibid.*, 172, 138; Borch-Jacobsen and Shamdasani, *The Freud Files*, 229.

62. Obholzer, *The Wolf-Man*, 118, 110, 104.

63. See Mahony, *Cries of the Wolf Man*, 150.

64. I thus find little basis for concluding either that Pankejeff was simply "one of those tragic individuals who remain forever inside a gaping wound" or that debunking the "analytic myth of his 'cure'" reveals Freud's total failure (*ibid.*, 151; Frank J. Sulloway, "Exemplary Botches," in Crews, *Unauthorized Freud*, 184). The former assumes an overly rosy picture of human life, and the latter does the same for the therapeutic process.

65. My reluctance stems from the term's being at the center of a now dated culture war described by Ian Hacking in *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). By social constructionism, I simply mean a mode of explaining human behavior that privileges society and culture over agency and biology. To be clear, in none of what follows do I mean to dismiss any of these modes of explanation. In a comprehensive vision of why human beings do what they do, agency, biology, and society all have a place. My point here is only to reserve a distinct space for a theory that the present moment has conspired to collapse.

66. See *ibid.*, 6.

67. "The term 'theo-logy' implies, as such, a mediation, namely, between mystery, which is *theos*, and the understanding, which is *logos*." Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), xiii.

68. Here I am following Frederick Neuhouser's understanding of theodicy, which cannot "reconcile us to present reality—cannot guarantee that the promise of good that is hidden in the evils of our actual circumstances is or ever will be realized," but that can still offer a kind of reconciliation: "affirmation of the world in its basic structure." Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Recognition, and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6. The questions that lead to Freud's introduction of the death drive, like the questions of theodicy, ask about the root of human evils: Why do we irrationally aggress other beings? Why do we tend toward lifeless repetition? Why are we constantly attempting to shed our own existences? And his answer

to these questions, in addition to involving the postulation of a new drive opposition, is essentially narrative.

69. Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.

70. *Ibid.*, 9.

71. *Ibid.*, 9.

72. I readily adopt Jan Goldstein's "minimalist position toward the self" articulated in *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.

73. Rose, *Inventing Our Selves*, 6.

74. From a more methodological angle, I am, like both Theodor Adorno and Gillian Rose, skeptical of the reduction of the psychological to the sociological because it leads to "simplistic correlations between the individual and society." Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 92. Rejecting the possibility of unifying sociology and psychology, Adorno writes: "Our psychological analyses lead us the deeper into a social sense the more they abstain from any reference to obvious and rational socio-economic factors. We will rediscover the social element at the very bottom of our psychological categories, though not by prematurely bringing into play economic and sociological surface causations where we have to deal with the unconscious, which is related to society in a much more indirect and complicated way" (quoted in Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 230). In Adorno's view, we learn more about society through psychology than we do through a sociology that cavalierly subsumes psychology; see also Theodor W. Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology, Part 1," *New Left Review* 1, no. 46 (November–December 1967): 74.

75. Moishe Postone, "Critique and Historical Transformation," *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 3 (2004): 63.

76. Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 88.

77. Mark Poster makes this point about dependence in *Critical Theory of the Family* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 15.

78. I am responding here, in part, to Leonore Tiefer's claim that sexual drives are constituted by culture: "Your orgasm is not the same as George Washington's, premarital sex in Peru is not premarital sex in Peoria, abortion in Rome at the time of Caesar is not abortion in Rome at the time of John Paul II." Leonore Tiefer, *Sex Is Not a Natural Act and Other Essays* (Boulder: Westview, 2004), 4.

79. I am in agreement with Peter Gay both that "the reputation of psychoanalysis as responsible for a static and undifferentiated model of human nature . . . is wholly undeserved" and that the "need for years of care and tuition . . . makes the modern historian, the ancient Egyptian, the Kwakiutl Indian . . . into cousins," but do not believe this agreement entails an affirmation of his defense of the concept of human nature, which he finds less problematic than I. Gay, *Freud for Historians*, 158, 89. The universality of our "preconditions" does not entail a universality of *what we are*.

80. I might add, as a slightly different point against the reduction of drive to environment, that the external influence that does go into the formation of drives is typically conflictual (and I might even say inevitably conflictual), making impossible any one-to-one correspondence between interpellation and psychic structure. The experiences in response to which drives initially form—those of receiving a response to one’s vocalizations, of being held, of the vibrations of voice, etc., while certainly subject to social influence (adherence to the “cry it out” method, for instance), are not the same as those typically later (developmentally) ones that foster adjustment to the status quo—those of enforced individuation, of adherence to clock time, of the rules and norms of “good behavior,” etc. The “modern model mother” might be teaching her children the basic habits of good capitalist subjectivity, but in the care environment, established even before birth, she is also ingraining in them a model of gratification that is at odds with the cold alienation of living in a world dominated by economic rationalism. In other words, there is no contradiction between Christopher Lasch’s family as “haven in a heartless world” and Wilhelm Reich’s family as “factory of ideology”; thankfully, the family is still *both*; see Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Norton, 1995); Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1963), 38.

81. Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 30. I thus disagree with Jaeggi that alienation critique can only be culturally specific, only an “element of the critical, evaluative self-interpretation of a modern culture that has made freedom and self-determination its core values” (*ibid.*, 41).

82. According to Terry Eagleton, the fact that “transhistorical truths are always culturally specific, always variably instantiated, is no argument against their transhistoricality.” Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 410.

83. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 22:95.

84. For instance, in *The Future of an Illusion*, where he entertains the possibility that psychoanalysis itself is an illusion.

1. Death, Mastery, and the Origins of Life

1. I emphasize, with Samuel Weber, the narrative aspect of the late metapsychology both to indicate that it is the plot of a story as much as the basics of a theory that is being outlined in what follows, but also because the “structural” elements of id, ego, and superego, too often described topographically or schematically simply as components of the mind, must be understood as parts of a developmental story. That Freud himself thought of the structural model as a natural outgrowth of his drive theory is to me without question: indeed, he refers to *The Ego and the Id* as a “sequel” and a “continuation of ‘Beyond.’” Sigmund Freud