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A Brief Introduction to the Work of Jean Laplanche

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The author proposes an introduction to the work of Jean Laplanche, a well-known figure of psychoanalysis who recently passed away. He foregrounds what he views as the three main axes of Laplanche's work: firstly, a critical reading method applied to Freud's texts; secondly, a model of psychic functioning based on translation; and, thirdly, a theory of general seduction. Far from being an abstract superstructure, the theory of general seduction is firmly rooted in the analytic situation, as the provocation of transference by the analyst best illustrates. The analytic situation indeed consists in a revival and a reopening of the 'fundamental anthropological situation' which, according to Laplanche, is the lot of every human baby born in a world where he or she is necessarily exposed to the enigmatic and 'compromised' messages of the adult other. Thanks to the process of analytic de-translation, the analysand is therefore granted an opportunity to carry out new translations of the other's enigma - translations or symbolizations that might be more inclusive and less rigid than the pre-existing ones. Incidentally, such a model brings together the purely psychoanalytic and the psychotherapeutic aspects of the treatment.

Jean Laplanche died on 6 May 2012, a few weeks before his 88th birthday. His name is undoubtedly familiar to many psychoanalysts around the world who from time to time must have consulted *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, an indispensable reference work written in collaboration with J.-B. Pontalis and translated into many languages. The book not only includes the most reliable definitions of the main concepts of psychoanalysis, it also - and perhaps primarily - proposes a comprehensive survey of the Freudian sources as well as a critical examination of the concepts, their development and their place within the whole corpus. This book's ability to account for Freud's ideas with rigour and cogency should not make us lose sight of the other side of Laplanche's work, Laplanche's 'faithful unfaithfulness' to Freud as he liked to put it. In fact, such exceptionally deep knowledge of the founder's work was used by

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Laplanche as a basis from which to carry out an uncompromising yet appreciative critique of Freud's ideas. Laplanche often specified that he was no ‘Freudologist’ and that his goal never consisted in putting Freud-the-man on the couch. The only Freud he was interested in was Freud as featured in his written work, work that Laplanche took it upon himself to put to the test by “stabbing it with a knife”

[1] *Translated from the French by Dorothée Bonnigal-Katz.*

or “hacking it with a pickaxe”, as he put it, in order to verify the solidity of the Freudian edifice. When this edifice proved to be wobbly in places, Laplanche undertook to consolidate it by working “on the underpinnings”, in other words, not by destroying everything so as to yield some ‘new psychoanalysis’ but by patiently taking up the research again, by steadying the Freudian edifice, providing it, as it were, with more solid foundations.

Laplanche thus did not seek to distance himself from Freud at all costs. On the contrary, he professed deep admiration for the inventor of psychoanalysis, especially for what he referred to as Freud's *exigency*, that is, Freud's relentless pursuit of his research object - the unconscious - which Freud was compelled to track down despite its enduring elusiveness, and at the cost of “going astray”, according to Laplanche. Freud's ‘goings astray’ were used by Laplanche as evidence of the need to resume the work of reflection, with great confidence in the fact that, because of his faithfulness to his object, Freud would go astray for some definite reason, some reason that had to be identified so that, on its basis, Freud could be put to work again.

Having acquired a solid background in philosophy as the former student of three great thinkers (Jean Hippolyte, Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty), Laplanche undertook an analysis with Lacan in the late 1940s. Lacan advised him to embark upon medical studies, which he did, and in this context he wrote a dissertation on the schizophrenic poet, Friedrich Hölderlin (Laplanche, 1961). He attended Lacan's seminars and, along with Pontalis, started translating a few texts by Freud into French. In the meantime, the institutional crisis over Lacan's analytic practice led Laplanche and a few others to break with him at the beginning of the 1960s. As summed up by Laplanche and Pontalis (1985), the main reason for such a break coincided with the moment when they realized that the ‘return to Freud’ was in fact a ‘no return’ endorsement of Lacan. Both colleagues did carry out their return to Freud all the same but following a very different path. At Daniel Lagache's instigation,

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they spent several years working on *The Language of Psychoanalysis* which was published in 1967. This work, combined with the translation of Freud's texts, endowed Laplanche with deep and intimate knowledge of the *whole* of Freud's psychoanalytic works. Having looked through Freud's corpus from all angles, Laplanche became adept at gauging the equilibria and the breaks, the advances and the dead-ends, on the basis of which, as I will expound, he was able to carry out a most effective critique of Freud.

In what follows, I make no claim to account for Laplanche's work in any comprehensive way. Obviously, only the reading of the original texts can adequately convey the wealth of Laplanche's ideas and the multi-faceted dimension of his knowledge, as well as the subtlety and rigour of his method. What I merely offer here is a necessarily brief survey, in the hope of successfully arousing the interest of readers who will then be inclined to go and see for themselves.

A Threefold Corpus

Jean Laplanche's impact on psychoanalysis consists in at least three major, highly interdependent contributions: Laplanche firstly designed a rigorous

method for a critical reading of Freud's texts; in so doing, he was secondly led to ascertain the key role of *translation*, not only in terms of the exploration and the actual translation of Freud's work into French, but also as a fundamental mechanism in the process of psychic differentiation; in the wake of these first two attainments, Laplanche ultimately proposed, through his theory of general seduction, a *refounding* of the whole psychoanalytic field on a new basis.

It is highly likely that Laplanche developed an original research method in relation to Freud's texts in the context of the meticulous research work required by the writing of the *Language of Psychoanalysis.* Indeed, such a comprehensive survey of the founding texts can only be carried out with an awareness of what psychoanalysis has to teach us about 'official discourse' and its underpinnings. In fact, psychoanalysts cannot have an innocent reading of psychoanalytic texts, even if Freud is the author. Laplanche's undertaking thus consists in applying the Freudian method to its creator's own work. But in order to do so, Laplanche had to make adjustments to the psychoanalytic method so as to apply it - *mutatis mutandis* - to the text, not the man. Laplanche (2006[1968]) explains this method in a text that can be seen as programmatic: *Interpreting*

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(with) Freud. The term ‘with’ in brackets suggests that one must ‘interpret Freud with Freud’. Such bracketing, which forces us to read the title twice so as to understanding its meaning, is undoubtedly indicative of the kind of work that Laplanche set about pursuing - the rule being always to look twice at least in order to discern, even in the most familiar texts, the detail, the overlooked contradiction, or Freud's second thoughts as they arise within a few lines, paragraphs or years of one another, and to consider such ‘accidents’ as the textual equivalents of slips of the tongue and parapraxes in the course of an analytic session. On this basis, the key is to proceed patiently, to refrain from rushing into any interpretation but map out cross-references and draw comparisons and oppositions instead. Once single elements have thus been located, they may be used as signs marking out the sites of ‘excavation’ where perhaps more serious problems or clues to solutions until then overlooked might be unearthed.

As early as during the composition of *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche and Pontalis (1968[1964]) were able to draw the concept of *primal fantasies* from their reading of Freud, to develop the implied theory of fantasy in general and circumscribe its role in the development of Freud's ideas. This was a simultaneous opportunity to provide an enlightening critique of it. Furthermore, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* itself includes many genuine discoveries such as, explicitly, the concept of *leaning-on* [*Anlehnung, anaclisis* in Strachey's translation] which had remained ignored until then and was not thematized by Freud himself, despite the undeniable significance of a concept by now impossible to overlook (Freud, 1905).

Life and Death in Psychoanalysis

As I have suggested elsewhere (Scarfone, 1997), Laplanche's research can be said to proceed via a series of unfurling Freud's theory - akin to the

analyst's listening with evenly suspended attention - followed by condensing or narrowing the scope during which Laplanche somewhat clarifies matters and draws his own personal conclusions, even if it implies unfurling these conclusions all over again by initiating a new cycle of work. The *Problématiques* series (Laplanche, 1980-92) thus accounts for many years of Laplanche's research and teaching in the context of the University of Paris VII and led to the important volume entitled *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*(Laplanche, 1989[1987]). Prior to that, the long research process underlying the writing of

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The Language of Psychoanalysis, a kind of opening out of all Freud's texts, was similarly condensed, a few years later, in the form of an important personal book written by Laplanche alone, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*(Laplanche, 1976[1970]). In all these books, Laplanche noticeably applies the method he proposed in his 1968 article, *Interpreting (with) Freud.*

Life and Death in Psychoanalysis offers a close investigation of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, the *Project for a scientific psychology, Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and other major texts by Freud. But Laplanche does not merely read, he *problematizes* Freud's ideas, he examines them critically. The combined chapters of *Life and Death* draw a curve which, from the vital order in its relations with the genesis of sexuality, leads to a questioning of the function of the death drive in the general structure of Freud's texts. Laplanche raises the following questions: while Freudian psychoanalysis is obviously positioned in contiguous ways with biology, can it be reduced to the latter all the same? If not, how is the specific field of psychoanalysis then organized in relation to some of the basic notions operating at its borders such as life and death?

To Laplanche, the first chapter of Freud's *Three Essays* on ‘sexual aberrations’ thus indicates how psychoanalytic thought has extricated itself from a psychology of adaptation. The sexual drive has little or no relation with the instinct for reproduction. Laplanche suggested that this chapter might have been subtitled ‘The Lost Instinct’. But through his discussion of sexual aberrations, Freud does not aim to describe some accidental loss of instinct. On the contrary - as Laplanche clearly shows - Freud's point is to conceive of the whole of human sexuality as devious. The sexual domain, in humans, is itself an ‘aberrant’ domain with respect to a well-regulated vital order. This is the human exception and it is the specificity of psychoanalysis to distinguish its field from the domain of adaptation.

The concept of *leaning-on* [Strachey's *anaclisis*], identified during the preparation of the *Language of Psychoanalysis*, will be used as a delineating notion between the adaptational vital order, on the one hand, and the drive-related sexual order, on the other. One thing is often misunderstood regarding leaning-on: its function is *not to delineate what pertains to the psychical and what pertains to the biological.* On the contrary, psychic elements and biological elements operate on both sides of the delineation provided by the notion. Therefore, at a time when attachment theory was not as popular as it is now, Laplanche never doubted that the adaptational side involved the implementation of some psychological dimension. The key is not to confuse the psychological sphere in general with the psychic sphere

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as tackled by psychoanalysis. *Psychological reality* can ultimately be subsumed within human or animal brain functioning; *psychic reality*, on the other hand, coincides in psychoanalytic terms with a reality that is strictly human and in which, as I will discuss, the primacy of the other prevails along with the other's message, insofar as it conveys, unbeknownst to its sender and in the midst of its well-defined meanings, enigmatic signifiers endowed with decisive importance. Such psychic reality, which Laplanche conclusively refers to as 'the reality of the message', will be held as a third category of reality in which psychoanalysis is interested since this is the kind of reality that impacts the psyche-body of the *infans.* As we can see, leaning-on does not imply that the psychic sphere should be disembodied in relation to the somatic; it does not pertain to the relations between psyche and soma. In fact, according to Laplanche, whereas the field of ethology - whether animal or human - is concerned with instincts [*Instinkts*], leaning-on is a first step towards a possible theorization of the emergence of the drive [*Trieb*]. Laplanche later criticizes the concept of leaning-on and upholds seduction as its truth. Yet the study of leaning-on remains a good illustration of Laplanche's work method: it is one of these nodal points that first had to be highlighted in Freud and later undergo a necessary critique. As Laplanche (1993) would put it, it is a concept in relation to which it is easy to go astray. Meanwhile, it contributes to one's understanding of an important point in Freud's ideas, that is, the delineation of the sexual field (understood psychoanalytically) as opposed to the vital, psychobiological domain. But delineation is not synonymous with origin and the issue of origin is precisely the premise of Laplanche's critique of the 'biologizing' dimension of leaning-on and of his advocacy of a theory of general seduction in its stead (see below).

Such a critique of leaning-on started as early as *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* in Laplanche's discussion of the last section of Freud's *Three Essays* which could have been subtitled 'The Regained Instinct'. For as a natural mechanism, leaning-on soon appears as conducive to a view of the sexual sphere and its origin that could easily be subsumed within the instinctual domain despite their former distinction from it. Laplanche thus underlines how leaning-on fails to account for the origin of the drive-related, sexual sphere on the basis of the vital order: taken as it is, leaning-on gives the impression that sexuality arises from self-preservation, rather as the flower blossoms forth from the bud. Yet self-preservation in humans reveals itself to be severely deficient and this very deficiency ensures that the sexual takes over. If leaning-on operates, it does so in both directions (from the vital to the sexual and vice versa) insofar as the sexual, in its many guises, is evidently led to compensate for the deficiencies of

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self-preservation. The debility of self-preservation in fact requires the intervention of an other, of a helping other (the *Nebenmensch* or 'fellow human-being' invoked by Freud in the *Project*), thus necessarily giving a prominent role to the sexual. Indeed, while this other's intervention is attuned, as best as possible, to the needs of the *infans* in a state of *radical helplessness* [*Hilflösigkeit*], this other is also, necessarily, the bearer of a repressed unconscious that somewhat interferes within the relation of mutual adaptation

between adult and child. A repressed sexual 'contaminant' thus passes through as a stowaway passenger on the carrier wave of the relation of attachment. If leaning-on therefore operates, as Laplanche suggests, it can only be as an incidental mechanism occurring alongside the intervention of the helping other. From the simple dividing line between the adaptational and the drive-related sphere (the sexual), arises what Laplanche later refers to as the 'fundamental anthropological situation', the situation in which every human being finds himself or herself inserted by the mere fact of being born in a world saturated with enigmatic signifiers, with compromised messages, compromised, that is, by the repressed sexual of the other, of the adult. In human beings, the sexual order thus always already overlies the vital order. I will return to this point.

The Ego and the Death Drive

I will further discuss the theory of general seduction which began to emerge as early as in this 1970 book. But, for the time being, let us focus on two main themes tackled in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis.*

The Ego

After having related and contrasted the sexual and the vital order, Laplanche set about locating the ego in relation to the vital order in question. As *The Language of Psychoanalysis* already revealed, the ego holds a crucial place in Freud's reflection and, accordingly, in Laplanche's reading. It is especially true of the ego's double status: an ego standing for the body as a whole and positioned as such before the world (metaphorical ego) and an ego as a specific agency of the psychic apparatus (metonymical ego). Laplanche shows that both understandings of the ego can be found as early as in the *Project for a scientific psychology* (Freud, 1895). I will not embark on a detailed discussion of the ego itself but will merely stress the fact that, regarding the ego, Laplanche is further

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developing an argument he introduced in the context of his examination of the sexual as the buttress of deficient self-preservation.

Where instinct seemingly fails to ensure the survival of the human baby, the helping other and therefore love take over, as stated earlier, love meaning the sexual as tied to the ego. If, at the outset, the ego thus appears as the quintessential representative of the vital order (let us bear in mind, for example, that Freud did not distinguish between self-preservation drives and ego-drives), the ego also seems to be running on love, that is to say on libido. Looking at Freud's theory as a whole, Laplanche points out that *two* sexual regimes are to become distinguished from the vital-adaptational sphere: a drive-related regime strictly speaking, a kind of foreign body experienced as an internal assailant and another regime representative of the 'quiescent' libidinal cathexis, to use Freud's term. This second regime is the regime of the narcissistic libido, the cement of the ego as a relatively stable structure. The ego thus does not appear as siding with biological self-preservation and the vital order, as Freud had first argued, but it appears as invested with libido from the outset, with this narcissistic libido - i.e. self-love - which constitutes the true grounds for human self-preservation. Metaphorically

speaking, therefore, the ego presents itself under the form of a living organism, at the pole of life; but it does not blossom forth from biological functions any more than drives do: "It is formed from perceptions and primarily from the perception of a fellow creature, and, on the other hand, it takes over libidinally, as its own, the activity of perception. I perceive, just as I eat, 'for the love of the ego'..." (Laplanche, 1970, p. 128 [1976, p. 83]).

The Death Drive

Narcissism is so crucial in Laplanche's view because this is where he locates the great turning-point in Freud's ideas rather than in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Such a turning-point seems to have been immediately repressed by Freud himself when, after the introduction of narcissism, he started writing the *Metapsychology* papers without seeming to take full stock of the impact of his new theorization. Yet, posited as the quiescent regime of the libido within the ego, narcissism indicates the form under which the sexual relays self-preservation to ensure the survival of the individual organism. Laplanche shows, however, that this subject occasions some serious theoretical wavering on Freud's part. In fact, under the generic term of libido, Freud ends up conflating the drive-related sexual, i.e. the internal assailant, and the

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narcissistic libido: under the aegis of Eros, Freud merges the two - once most sharply contrasted - libidinal regimes. The sexual thus finds itself unified while being viewed as essentially unifying (Eros is what creates and multiplies links). This dispenses with the 'demonic' aspect which Freud had, until then, applied to the sexual drives. Laplanche suggests that this is what compels Freud, ever driven by the exigency of his object, to find some conceptual balancing and posit the death drive opposite Eros. The point is to re-introduce the 'demonic' sexual which the libidinal 'quiescence' of narcissism had overly pacified. Far from being an absolutely new discovery, the death drive is, in Laplanche's view, a rediscovery of what the great turning-point of narcissism had in fact obscured for Freud. As he equates the death drive and the drive-related sexual, Laplanche suggests the term '*sexual* death drive'. Indeed, there is no point in following Freud in his meta-biological speculations as developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920). It is only through a metaphoric-metonymic derivation, under the form of the ego, that life, or the vital, partakes in the psychoanalytic domain, which implies that the vital in question no longer pertains to the one studied by biologists. Similarly, the death drive does not refer to biological death but to the process of psychic unbinding generated by the emergence of the drive, jeopardizing the ego's binding action (the nature of this binding action will be discussed later). As clearly implied by the title of the book, Laplanche aims to tackle life and death *in psychoanalysis*, not in general. The 'death' in question actually pertains to the differentiation that can be made within the pleasure principle and refers to one of its poles. For, as Laplanche reminds us, Freud already viewed the pleasure principle as split in two, distinguishing between the constancy principle (on the side of life drives) and the zero-point energy or nirvana principle (on the side of the death drive).

Seduction, Translation and Fundamental Anthropological Situations

A closer look at Laplanche's work reveals how deeply interrelated all its various aspects are, whether Laplanche is reading Freud, theorizing or translating. Yet translation can be regarded as the leading thread. The reason is that, in Laplanche's case, translation intervenes not only in the context of the French edition of Freud's texts (*Les Œuvres complètes de Freud*); translation is also involved as a fundamental model of the constitution and functioning of the psychic apparatus and, consequently, as a key to an understanding of the work during the analytic session. Let us begin by clearing up a misunderstanding

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regarding the latter point. When invoking the central function of translation in the psychic apparatus, Laplanche does not imply that the analyst would in any way be ‘translating’ on the analysand's behalf in the course of the analytic session. Things are rather more complex and in fact lead to the exact opposite of what the word ‘translation’ might suggest. It is best, therefore, to follow Laplanche's reflection on the subject one step at a time.

Let us stress, firstly, that Laplanche's metapsychological thought is inseparable from his observations on the analytic situation and on what takes place between analyst and analysand. Having established, in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, the necessary delineation between the vital-adaptational field and the psychoanalytic field strictly speaking, i.e. the drive-related/sexual field, Laplanche underlines that such a partition exactly matches the one which the analytic method reinstates with each new analytic session. The analyst suggests that the analysand proceed following the rule of free association and, for his part, listens with evenly suspended attention, suspending the ‘purposive ideas’ - as Freud put it. In so doing, the analyst in effect excludes anything that pertains to the discourse of everyday concerns and needs from the frame of the session, allowing the scoria of self-preservation to settle, so to speak, in order to free up the work of the drive-related sphere. Each new session requires such a reinstatement of the analytic space through a subtraction of the adaptational field. Yet the process is less arbitrary than might seem insofar as it is less a matter of taking anything apart than of remaining consistent with the fact that, for human kind, the sexual always already overlies the adaptational field.

The reinstatement of the analytic space is thus not a forced process; it consists, rather, in an acoustic openness to that which remains unnoticed in everyday life. The analyst therefore authorizes himself to hear the analysand's statements on another plane than the plane of ‘common sense’ motives. For this purpose, the analyst must perform some ‘refusals’ - Laplanche's preferred translation of the Freudian term *Versagungen* often translated as ‘frustration’. In fact, the analyst's *Versagungen* do not consist in frustrations strictly speaking, insofar as the analyst's refusal to proceed in the vital or adaptational order applies to himself as much as it applies to the analysand. And the first thing that the analyst denies himself is knowledge: the knowledge, for instance, of what is good for his patient, or the advance knowledge of the outcome of the analysis. The analyst denies

himself the suggestion, even implicitly, of a normative plan of action, however ‘psychoanalytic’ it might be. In this sense, Laplanche challenges the adaptive

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designs of *Ego Psychology* which Lacan opposed in the 1950s. Yet he equally challenges Lacan's idea that the end of analysis would consist in 'assuming one's castration'. According to Laplanche, remaining absolutely Freudian implies suspending *any* purposive idea and thus never subjugating the analytic method to any pre-established end whatsoever. As Laplanche upholds, the bracketing of the adaptational end and the refusal to subject the analytic process to any kind of predefined aim merely refers to the first meaning of the term 'analysis', namely 'decomposition'. Obviously, such a process of decomposition in no way consists in a process of translation, quite the opposite: it can in fact be construed as a process of 'de-translation'. But what is being 'de-translated'? This is where the interrelatedness of the various aspects of Laplanche's work becomes increasingly visible.

As stated earlier, the delineation of the analytic situation effects, for practical purposes, the very differentiation which was pointed out, within Freud's theory, between the adaptational (or self-preservation) and the drive-related (sexual) sphere. But in what way is this differentiation more than the mere outcome of Laplanche's reading of Freud, a choice that Laplanche made? How can it be said to have an actual premise?

Let us return, at this point, to Laplanche's aforementioned 'fundamental anthropological situation'. This situation characterizes the human baby who comes to the world in a state of helplessness [Freud's *Hilflösigkeit*], a state which, under normal circumstances, is adequately made up for by the mother or her equivalent. Self-preservation is then somewhat ensured by the nurturing environment within which the by now well-documented functions of attachment operate, along with other functions contributing to the child's integration into the culture of origin. In other words, unless the situation is catastrophic, the self-preservation needs are not the issue for the *infans.* The messages coinciding with the exigencies of adaptation are easily 'understood' and are integrated without too much trouble into a context of optimal mutual attunement with the adult. What can, however, fail to be understood and integrated harmoniously into the relational structure is a surplus, an excess, a communication 'noise' that stems from the fundamental asymmetry in action between the two partners, however 'attuned' to each other they might otherwise be. Such asymmetry has to do with the sexual for which no code of translation or adaptation is available to the *infans.*

A simple illustration of the general process can be given in the context of breastfeeding. If words (in addition to nipples!) could be put in the *infans*' mouth, they would be: "What does this breast want from me as it gets excited in suckling me and excites me though I cannot understand why?" For, as

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Laplanche points out, it is highly surprising that the basic fact of the breast as a powerfully erogenous zone for the maternal other should have been overlooked in the theory of the mother-child relation, as well as in the theory of libidinal stages and erogenous zones! Granted, this is but an example and one quickly gets to the question of what happens when the mother bottle-feeds exclusively. The answer lies in the metonymical displacement and the metaphorical substitution between breast and bottle that

is effective in the mother's psyche, if not in the baby's. Regardless of the implemented feeding method, the mother interacts with a little subject who, by definition, is intimately tied to her condition as a sexual being, exciting in her (as in other adults) libidinal desires that only sufficiently effective repression is likely to moderate appropriately.

Let us specify at once that the communication 'noise' is unrelated to the child's more or less developed language skills. It is not a matter of linguistic polysemy either. The issue primarily resides in the enigma that is conveyed via even the most articulate messages. Such enigma consists in the adult's repressed sexual, even when, incidentally, the adult takes care of the child in the most normal way. This repressed sexual is bound to 'contaminate', as it were, the channels of communication, conveying an enigmatic meaning for the child as well as for the adult insofar as the adult unconsciously causes this process of contagion. Let us also underline that this does not imply a transmission of the parental unconscious in the direction of the child's unconscious. The parental unconscious has an impact on the child, under an enigmatic form. Yet it does not flow as such into the child's psyche. The child is on the receiving end of this impact, indeed he or she is excited by it but the codes eliciting its translation or the formulation of its meaning are missing. The *infans* must however come up with a version of this impact, yet this can only be achieved through partial failure. In this case, the adult cannot be helpful in any way insofar as the latter is equally unable to integrate the unconscious dimension of communication inherent in the nurturer's attuned care. Therefore, there is an inevitable failure of translation which, strictly speaking, denotes a process of repression as specifically understood by Freud in a letter to Fliess on 6 December 1896 (Freud, 1896). In this letter, Freud expounds a theory of the multiple inscriptions of memory. Between such successive inscriptions, translations or transcriptions, a failure of translation occurs, writes Freud, which corresponds to what we clinically refer to as repression (p. 235). Laplanche returns to this model and applies it to the theory of seduction that Freud was to abandon in September 1897. By combining the notion of seduction and the mechanism of translation,

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Laplanche thus succeeds in setting up a model of the origin of the unconscious that is strictly premised on a critical reading of Freud.

Conceived of as a failure of translation, repression is therefore characterized by two dimensions: (1) a *translating* dimension thanks to which the child, in keeping with his abilities, produces a version of what affects him in the asymmetrical relation with the adult (this translation will be dispensed on the side of the developing ego); (2) a *repressing* dimension in which whatever fails to be integrated into the translation process is left behind as residues, as an 'irritative thorn' that will carry on demanding attempts at translation in the child's psyche. Laplanche refers to such residues as the 'source-objects' of the drive. According to Laplanche, therefore, the human child clearly does not come to the world with a preformed repressed unconscious neither are the sexual drives present from the outset. What preexists, however, is the adult sexual repressed whose manifestation - under normal circumstances - is mitigated, 'aim-inhibited', as Freud put it, but likely to prompt, all the same, the child's perception of a signifier (in the

sense of 'signifying to'), which necessitates an attempt at translation, at integration. Something akin to excitation is conveyed by the interactions with the adult and it obscurely disrupts the attachment relation: this is what Laplanche refers to as the *implantation* of the sexual into the child's psychobiological 'skin'. Something is implanted permanently into the child's psyche, something the child must, from then on, try to metabolize to the best of his abilities, while always leaving out inassimilable residues: foreign bodies, internal assailants resulting from the process of implantation that the adult unwittingly carries out.

As a result of the attempt at translation and according to the two planes of the repression process, the child's psyche thus splits into two distinct areas. On the plane of formed (translated) meaning are the nuclei of the ego in a process of gradual integration. (This brings us back to the view of the ego as binding, under the aegis of Eros - see above). On the plane of the untranslated residues, conversely, are the 'source-objects' of the drive-related sphere which, by now, are permanent features in the child's psyche. They are foreign bodies that cannot be jettisoned, constant sources of excitation which will be reactivated and intensified by all the other interhuman exchanges of the same order. From the starting-point of the fundamental anthropological situation, we are therefore led to the simultaneous formation, in the *infans*, of an ego and a repressed sexual unconscious. The sexual in question is to be understood in the

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extended sense Freud (1905) endowed it with in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. The unconscious, therefore, is to be understood in a systemic sense, that is to say as made up of those inassimilable remnants, the residues of the failed translation of the other's message which, as a result, defy the laws of common meaning. Such a process of implantation is what Laplanche refers to as general seduction, the inevitable result of the adult-*infans* interaction, considering the asymmetry between their respective psychic structures.

In abandoning - somewhat justifiably - the seduction theory *as the aetiological theory of hysteria*, Freud abandoned, by the same token, the possibility of developing a more general and fundamentally accurate view of the genesis of the individual unconscious. This view is linked to a basic fact that Laplanche underlines, in so doing following in Lacan's footsteps: namely, the primacy of the other in the psychic formation of the subject. Failing to take such primacy into account - insofar as it is actually involved in the formation of the human psychic structure - psychoanalysis can be said to have partaken in a 'Ptolemaic view'. Indeed, just as Ptolemy's astronomical system placed the earth at its centre, psychoanalysis, once the seduction theory was rejected, took on as its new centre the solipsism of a subject that henceforth had to be endowed, from birth, with an unconscious and with fantasies - both pre-constituted and already in operation, so to speak. Yet, despite its shortcomings, the seduction theory stated something essential: the fact that the unconscious sexual comes from the other and that it is present long before the advent of biological sexuality. Granted, the seduction theory formulated such a fact in a way that now seems overly limited to us, since its upshot was that there would not be any infantile sexuality without a process of seduction instigated by a perverse adult. In this sense,

the *Three Essays*(1905) are consensually seen as making an advance through their assertion of the existence and decisive role of infantile sexuality. What is objectionable, however, according to Laplanche, is to consider infantile sexuality as a natural, innate constituent, without understanding how it responds to the inducement sent out, unwittingly, by the 'caring' adult in the context of the most 'normal' of relations. Granted, Freud (1905) does mention that the mother acts as an inadvertent seducer in the course of nursery care but such involuntary seduction is merely incidental and in no way accounts for seduction as a central and determining fact occurring within the asymmetrical adult-*infans* situation. Freud is thus far from conceiving of seduction as a fundamental constituent.

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The theoretical dead-end yielded by the abandonment of the seduction theory is revealed, in Laplanche's view, by Freud's felt necessity to resort to phylogenetics in order to account for unconscious organizing fantasies. This is yet another example, among others, of one of the balancing shifts that Freud was led to make in his theory but, this time, Freud was headed for a 'biologizing going-astray' (Laplanche, 1993). The mechanism of phylogenetic transmission became required by the need to solve the new issue of origins which arose from the 'innatist' view of infantile sexuality. Freud apparently abandoned a 'real' scene (the scene of perverse seduction), at least as the general model of the origin of the infantile sexual; yet the fantasmatic scene that replaced it was itself in need of explanation and foundation. Another real scene thus had to be summoned, going back, this time, to prehistoric times: primal fantasies were to account for it as phylogenetic inheritance.

Which Reality?

I previously mentioned an essay on fantasy - now a classic - published by Laplanche and Pontalis (1968[1964]). This study highlights the theory of primal fantasies that is featured in Freud even though it had never been foregrounded explicitly until then. This already occasions a critique of the status of fantasy, especially when the latter is viewed as inherited through phylogenesis. With the development of the theory of general seduction, Laplanche eventually lays bare two facts: on the one hand, he points to Freud's 'exigency', that is Freud's unrelenting pursuit of a solid reality behind the psychic facts (e.g. the reality of perverse seduction, then the reality of prehistoric facts, the objects of phylogenetic transmission). On the other hand, Laplanche shows how the theoretical sequence developed by Freud repeats the very sequence of events as experienced by the *infans*. Freud's 'going-astray' can thus be understood in the light of the reaction that any psyche has in response to the impact of the other. The other has primacy and installs the 'irritative thorn' on the basis of which the human child is forced to construct his or her own translations. As stated earlier, this results in a primal psychic split: the simultaneous birth of the ego and the repressed unconscious. What follows is an inevitable process of 'Ptolemaic' closure: the advent of the ego and the series of personal 'theories' that arise from the child's attempt at translation make up the subjective centre which requires, in order to be established as the ego, that the primacy of

the other be essentially misconstrued. Freud's theoretical progression therefore basically follows the very progression of the child's psychic development. His

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theory equally closes in on itself around a ‘self-centred’ subject, forcing Freud, who pursues the ideal of a scientific account all the same, to trace the ‘factual’ origin ever farther, back to humanity's prehistoric times.

For his part, Laplanche points out that such a giant speculative leap into phylogenesis was not warranted in any way. The reality at stake is here at hand, conspicuously so, as it were, provided one bothers to consider the elements of the fundamental anthropological situation, some of which consist in elements observed by Freud himself over time. Featured among these elements are: the state of ‘helplessness’ [*Hilflösigkeit*] characterizing the *infans* and the necessary intervention of the other [*Nebenmensch*]; the necessary ‘failure of translation’ which implements the process clinically known as repression (Freud, 1896) and, last but not least, Freud's creation of the analytic method and frame which, relatively speaking, draws on the elements of the fundamental anthropological situation. What the analytic situation sets up indeed is in many ways akin to the adult-*infans* situation. A comparable asymmetry is created on account of the invitation to free associate that is addressed to the analysand. The latter does not know that he knows and he is lacking in words (the etymological meaning of *in-fans*); he credits the analyst with knowledge (the fantasy of the ‘subject supposed to know’ as expounded by Lacan). On the other hand, the analyst's ‘refusals’ ensure that he remain ‘the guardian of the enigma’, thus reinstating, for the sake of the analysand, the infantile situation of confrontation with the other's enigma, the enigma of which the analyst is the guardian - not because he knows but because he denies himself knowledge and offers to listen and analyse. The sole *reality of the message* and its enigmatic dimension apt at provoking transference are thus set as foremost in the efficacity of analysis as should become clear in the following section.

Filled-In Transference, Hollowed-Out Transference

The theory of general seduction is therefore not a purely theoretical construction; it is a model based on the strong convergence between the analytic situation and the condition of the human baby with regard to the fundamental anthropological situation. This leads Laplanche to a close scrutiny of the pivotal term in any analysis - transference - regarding which important distinctions are made. Firstly, in keeping with his theory of the primacy of the other, Laplanche does not view transference as some kind of spontaneous production on the part of the analysand. He posits that the analyst provokes transference (Laplanche, 1998a) - ‘provokes’, that is to say, neither ‘causes’ nor ‘suggests’. The provocation at stake is unintentional and occurs wherever the

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elements of the original adult-*infans* asymmetry happen to coalesce, that is to say wherever the enigmatic share in the other's message becomes operative. The reason why transference holds such a prominent place in analysis undoubtedly stems, firstly, from the emphasis it has been given by psychoanalysts themselves, beginning with Freud. Furthermore, psychoanalysts are the only ones who have understood the central part played by transference in a

relation where a demand is being made. I think that on this subject Laplanche works in the wake of Lacan, and that his views unambiguously converge with those of Aulagnier (1967), that is, the offer precedes the demand, whether in analysis or in the mother-child relation.

More importantly, the central place of transference results from the fact that the analyst adopts a position and an attitude based on what could be referred to as an ethics of refusal. By first denying himself knowledge, the analyst, according to Laplanche, offers the analysand a space, a 'hollow' in which the latter may place either something 'filled-in' or another hollow. Laplanche thus distinguishes two modalities of transference. Filled-in transference consists in "the positive reproduction of forms of behaviour, relationships and childhood imagos" (Laplanche, 1989[1987], p. 161 [1987, p. 157]); this is transference as commonly described, i.e. as the repetition of archaic situations. In hollowed-out transference: "We again have a reproduction, but this time it is the childhood relationship that is repeated; it regains its enigmatic character" (Laplanche, 1989[1987], p. 161 [1987, p. 157]). Laplanche promptly specifies that the two modalities of transference inevitably coexist but if there were nothing but filled-in transference - that is, mere repetition - there would be no resolution in sight. Hollowed-out transference, conversely, implies that "the enigmatic messages of childhood are reactivated, investigated and worked through thanks to the situation itself as it facilitates the return of the enigmatic and secondary revision" (Laplanche, 1989[1987], p. 161 [1987, p. 157]). We can see how, from another standpoint, the analytic situation is indeed a process of re-instatement, this time not simply as an exclusion of the adaptational dimension as theorized by Laplanche in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, but mostly as a revival of the fundamental anthropological situation. This situation confronts the analysand with the enigma of the other whom the analyst comes to embody at this point, conferring, as was the case for the *infans*, the hollow, the open space where new translations of the enigma may be issued, so that one is not doomed to the sheer repetition of the same.

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The ‘hollow’ offered by the analyst has been likened to an ethical position and attitude on the part of the analyst insofar as the latter is the guardian of the enigma. As far as the analyst is concerned, “it is maintaining the dimension of interior alterity which allows alterity to be set up in the transference”, notes Laplanche (1998b, pp. 228-9). This endows the notion of the ‘neutrality’ of analyst with substance and depth, pointing to what I have tentatively compared to a form of ‘passivity’ inherent in analytic listening, i.e. an openness bestowed upon the other, akin to the kind theorized by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas or, alternatively, to the notion of ‘passibility’ as developed by Lyotard (Scarfone, 2010). This consists in a particularly interesting disposition insofar as it requires that, in his offer of a ‘hollow’, the analyst respect his own enigma. As a result, it is fully congruent with the fundamental anthropological situation: the analyst's enigma places the analysand in an equivalent position to that of the *infans* while positing the analyst as equivalent to the seducing adult. In this sense, the analytic situation is *de facto* - and inevitably - a situation of seduction.

I have quoted this essay by Laplanche at length because it appears to me as one of the best illustrations of what the theory of seduction may have to

contribute in relation to analytic practice. It also reveals the extent to which the theory of general seduction is rooted in the analytic practice itself. In fact, Laplanche seems fully aligned with Freud who was able to combine metapsychological, clinical and anthropological concerns within a single intellectual step. Although such a dimension of Laplanche's reflection must remain unexplored due to limited space, let us merely mention that, according to Laplanche, psychoanalysis dwells in at least four sites of experience or domains of practice: (1) the practice of psychoanalysis in the context of the analytic session, obviously, but also (2) the practice of ‘extramural psychoanalysis’ as Laplanche liked to put it, rather than ‘applied psychoanalysis’, when referring to the engagement of psychoanalysis with cultural phenomena; (3) the history of psychoanalysis; (4) psychoanalytic theory itself, as a locus and an object of experience, which “obviously implies a refusal to grant theory any definitive status of its own, either on the grounds that it is a tool (the expression ‘conceptual tool’ is sometimes used; ‘it has to be of some use’) or on the grounds that it is, to a greater or lesser extent, a useless scaffolding” (1989, p. 12 [1987, p. 16]).

In actual fact, Laplanche's view of theory could be said to be quite ‘embodied’. Laplanche shows how various levels of theorization operate within human beings who are thus distinct from all other animals in their very capacity for

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self-theorization. Thus the patient in analysis is the bearer of theories on the subject of his life, his history, of whatever assails him (infantile sexual theories, fantasies, or even delusions). Analysis will be apt at highlighting such theories and at analysing, that is to say 'de-translating', insofar as the theories in question arise from previous translations carried out by the subject on the basis of the other's enigmas during childhood and thereafter. Let us not forget, indeed, that the child is an investigator and a theoretician who develops infantile sexual theories in order to acquire an acceptable version of the sexual enigmas with which he is faced. Such theoretical constructions simultaneously make up the framework of the subject's ego and are the organizing principles of his lived experience and psychic life. Yet, *mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to the 'patented' theoretician, that is for the researcher: "All real theorization is an experiment and an experience which necessarily involves the researcher" (1989, p. 12 [1987, p. 16]). On the subject, Laplanche points out that his model is no other than Freud and he wonders, when evoking Freud's major texts referred to as "theoretical monuments": "How can we approach these monuments, except by seeing them as living experiments in analysis?" (1987, p. 13). This is what authorizes Laplanche to apply his own theoretical practice to Freud's texts for they are not a superstructure, a backdrop or a mere tool but sites of experience: "These experiences and experiments must themselves be analysed. We have to go further than Freud himself could go. We have to go into them in minute detail, even if it does mean taking them apart, breaking them down and putting them together again" (1987, p. 13). Theoretical practice is therefore very much like the work in the analytic session: the analyst remains an analyst wherever the work of psychoanalysis justifiably applies, even though, in some cases, the analytic thinking might move in different directions. This is the case of the analytic session itself in which the model of

translation allocates very specific roles: the analysand is the translator, firstly because he comes to analysis as the bearer of translations that were already carried out throughout his life; such translations are precisely to be analysed and therefore decomposed. Secondly, because, based on the process of analytic decomposition, the analysand still carries out new translations. For his part, the analyst only works, in principle, on the side of de-translation.

Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy

Such a view of the work in the analytic session gives Laplanche a chance to intervene quite elegantly in the perennial debate over psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Against the grain of all the positions that either radicalize the

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differences or claim that both are one and the same, Laplanche points out that, in any analytic treatment, the analyst performs a work of analysis whereas *the patient is the psychotherapist* as he is in charge of the process of re-composition:

> *The only psychotherapist is our 'patient' and more generally any human being who constitutes himself from his first days as subject of a story, by temporalizing himself, by memorizing, by 'writing' or rewriting his history in a more or less coherent way.*
>
> *(Laplanche, 2011, p. 281 [2006, p. 271], original italics)*

Therefore, within a session and in the course of a treatment, especially in the analysis of neuroses, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are involved, but psychotherapy corresponds to what Freud referred to as 'psycho-synthesis' - not the analyst's concern, according to Freud, as it is automatically achieved by the patient. Most of the time, in fact, the psychotherapeutic aspect holds centre stage, with the punctuation of proper analytic moments. There is therefore no real need to choose between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy: if the analyst analyses methodically, the moments of analytic de-translation are bound to set off the process of psychotherapeutic retranslation - i.e. the patient's work. Naturally, as in the case of psychosis, for example, one must gauge how permissible such a process of proper analytic unbinding may be as opposed to supporting the patient in the work of psychotherapy: "Here the perspective changes radically: the psychotherapist is apparently invited to take part 'creatively' in construction, by bringing his schemas, even his own materials" (2006, p. 283 [p. 273])

Seduction and Psychopathology

Freud's first theory of seduction pertained to the aetiology of hysteria and therefore tackled an essentially psychopathological mechanism. By generalizing the theory of seduction, Laplanche no longer deals with the formation of neurosis; he accounts, instead, for the constitution of the psychic topography itself. The process of implantation and of subsequent translation (along with its inevitable failure) in fact accounts for the advent of primal repression which begets the differentiation between the ego and the unconscious and instigates the forthcoming differentiation of the psychic

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apparatus without regard to pathology. The basic traumatic impact left by the implantation of the *sexual*[2] does not determine any specific pathological form: it is a somewhat 'structuring' trauma insofar as it prompts the process of psychic differentiation. When it comes to theorizing the pathogenic vicissitude of seduction, a variant of the general phenomenon is therefore required, an alternative likely to account for a traumatic effect that no longer structures but cripples development and differentiation instead.

This is what Laplanche comes to refer to as *intromission* as opposed to implantation:

> *Implantation is a process which is common, everyday, normal or neurotic. Beside it, as its violent variant, a place must be given to intromission. While implantation allows the individual to take things up actively, at once translating and repressing, one must try to conceive of a process which blocks this, short-circuits the differentiation of the agencies in the process of their formation, and puts into the interior an element resistant to all metabolizations.*
>
> *(1998a, p. 136)*

Intromission is thus the violent variant of implantation. While ordinary seduction implants its enigmatic signifiers into the "psychophysiological 'skin'" and refers to the surface of the body, the perceptive periphery of the *infans*, intromission "relates principally to anality and orality" (1998a, p. 136) By putting "into the interior" elements that are "resistant to all metabolization" and thus fundamentally resistant to all translation, intromission performs a kind of hijacking, crippling the apparatus of translation itself and generating enclaves which will strain the subject's psychic development. Such a crude intrusion on the part of the adult replaces what should have been but a mere 'proposition', however unconscious. In this case, the reference to perverse seduction is relevant even if, on a manifest level, there are no instances of sexual behaviour as such. In this light, we see how the theory of seduction might apply to the theorization of borderline phenomena, false-self organizations, frozen affects, failures of mentalization, as well as a number of psychotic states (Fletcher, 2007; Scarfone, 1994). Let us bear in mind, however, that this violent variant of implantation, which seems fundamentally pathogenic, is not completely at odds with the ordinary role played by seduction. Something akin to this violence is unavoidably operational in the process of normal structuration, resulting in the formation of the superego: "I have no doubt that a process related to intromission also has its role in the formation of the *superego*, a foreign body that cannot be metabolized" (Fletcher, 2007; Scarfone, 1994).

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Temporality, Mourning and the Working-Through of the Enigma

From the theory of translation stems one of the key terms in Laplanche's thought: i.e. the issue of afterwardness (Strachey's ‘deferred action’) in temporality. I discussed how primal repression, viewed as the failed translation of the enigmatic signifiers, leaves out the ‘source-objects’ of the drive in the form of non-translated remnants. These do not consist in inert residues.

[2] *Translator's note: Laplanche used the German word sexual to differentiate the object of psychoanalysis from sexuality in general, as the author later discusses on p. 21.*

The drive-related nature of such residues implies that they operate as constant incentives to translate, or de-translate/re-translate former translations. On this basis and in the light of such a translative model, one is well equipped to better understand the inaugural case by which, in his *Project for a scientific psychology*, Freud (1895) accounts for the occurrence of afterwardness in temporality. Indeed, the by-now pubescent 13 year-old girl has developed a phobia of shops as a result of the re-reading she is now able to have of an episode she experienced five years earlier. This new translation has a retroactive effect, leading both lived experiences - which both occurred in a shop but, each in itself, lacked sufficient traumatic weight -to become pathogenic through the translative link that conflates them: at the age of 13, the young woman now possesses the capacity to comprehend, *afterwards*, the full sexual meaning of the sweet-shop keeper's assault when she was 8. The signifiers left hanging at the time of the former trauma therefore acquire their full drive-related force by means of traumatic afterwardness. This consequently prompts the defensive manoeuvres of the young woman's ego, resulting in the formation of a phobia with the aim of guarding against the sexual meaning now linked to her desire to “go into a shop”. This meaning has now become an internal assailant which the ego's defences of the young woman try to drive out and reinstate as external via the mechanism of phobogenic projection.

The theory of general seduction and the notion of a message in need of translation, in close relation to afterwardness in temporality, furthermore enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of mourning. Let us remember that in *Mourning and melancholia* Freud uses mourning as the normal prototype in the light of which melancholic depression may be understood: yet, according to Freud, the work of mourning itself requires no explanation since, in

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mourning, “there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (Freud, 1917, p. 245). In other places, however, Freud states that mourning remains a great riddle and that its painful nature remains to be accounted for:

> *But why it is that this detachment of libido from its objects should be such a painful process is a mystery to us [...]. We only see that libido clings to its objects and will not renounce those that are lost even when a substitute lies ready to hand.*
>
> *(1916, pp. 306-7)*

On the subject, Laplanche's commentary starts as follows: “It is a scandal for a realist for whom the dead are really dead” (Laplanche, 1998b, p. 250). Laplanche then shows how the work of mourning in fact relates to the *message* of the other, of the dead person. The dead go missing but their messages remain. If one seeks to ascertain the nature of the libidinal ties that mourning is led to un-weave, this is what will essentially be found: for the person in mourning:

> *[The] message [of the deceased] has never been adequately understood, never listened to enough. Mourning is hardly ever without the question: what would he be saying now? What would he have said? hardly ever without regret or remorse for*
>
> *562*
>
> *not having been able to speak with the other enough, for not having heard what he had to say.*
>
> *(1998b, p. 254 [p. 379])*

Thanks to the theory of seduction and the model of translation, Laplanche is therefore able to offer a reading of Freud likely to further Freud's thinking. In the present case, some light is shed on the nature of the reality of the libidinal ties so that the modalities of the work of mourning may be further understood, bearing in mind that the latter is generally held as the prototype of any form of psychic working through. Mourning requires time and is a painful process because it engages the totality of the ties woven with the lost object: such ties are communicational; they are the bearers of the other's message, a message laden with meanings in need of translation. Translation is compulsory because the content of the message is that which is spun by the web of relations of tenderness, affection, attachment, but also, at times, of passion and violence. Regardless of the emotional charge, the only way the tie can endure beyond

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death, beyond the loss of the object, of the other, is as a message. A message that remains only partially translated because its enigmatic part was transmitted unconsciously by the lost object. The enigma, Laplanche explains, is an enigma for the transmitter himself.

Repression and the *Sexual*

With a spelling preference only perceptible to Francophone readers, towards the end of his life, Laplanche suggested that the German term *sexual* be used (as opposed to *sexuel* in French), to refer to the sexual tackled by psychoanalysis. The *sexual* is the infantile polymorphous sexual, regarded by Laplanche as one of Freud's greatest discoveries. It is the pre-genital sexual, distinct from the sexual in general and even more so from sexuality as a repertory of developmental sexual behaviours. Thanks to this spelling preference, Laplanche therefore aims at dismissing any misunderstanding as to what is at issue when discussing the repressed. As established earlier, repression is featured as one of the modalities of the translation apparatus which the human subject deploys when faced with the enigmatic fraction inherent in the other's message. Furthermore, translation necessarily entails a share of success and a share of failure, a failure of translation which Freud himself conceived of as constitutive of repression. In keeping with this line of thinking, it becomes easy to understand why the *sexual*, i.e. the infantile sexual, should necessarily be subject to repression. Inherent in the message of the adult other wherein the enigma of the sexual is carried over as a kind of stowaway passenger, a segment will fail to be fully inscribed in the infantile psyche as a result of the asymmetry inherent in the fundamental anthropological situation (see above). The ‘hollow’ of such an enigma makes up the implant, the ‘internal foreign body’ constitutive of the *sexual.* Repression is thus not an *ad hoc* mechanism applied to some sexual content. From the outset repression works hand in glove with the *sexual* insofar as the translation-repression process in fact *creates* the *sexual.*

A lengthy - yet impossible in the context of this brief account - digression would be required in order to clarify Laplanche's original position when, with

the concept of *sexual*, he intervenes in the debate over *gender*(Laplanche, 2011 [2003]). Let us merely point out that, to Laplanche, gender amounts to an allocation, i.e. a primary identification in which the child does not identify but *is identified* by the adult. Subsequently, the discovery of sexual duality forces the

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child to interpret (to translate) the meaning of this allocation according to the binary code of the phallic logic: presence/absence, +/-, 1/0. From this translation (also known for being concurrently repressive) arises the *sexual* as "repression-symbolization of gender by sex" (2011, p. 159 [2003, p. 153]). Elaborating on the basis of the allocated gender (which can be multiple, polymorphous) and according to the observed fact of sexual difference, the child 'creates' the infantile sexual as the residue of what failed to be symbolized. This *sexual* will intervene in a variety of ways in the course of the subject's childhood, during the formation of the psychic configurations specific to the vicissitudes of each individual's life. Such configurations will be endowed with more or less pathogenic value, depending on the degree to which intromission prevails over the more common implantation of the sexual.

As we can see, Laplanche proposes a theoretical elaboration which proceeds step be step, methodically, but is not wary of tackling new problems, even if it means broadening the scope, in the process, with issues arising from other fields (in this case, *gender studies).* Along the same lines, there would be cause for an account (impossible in the present context) of Laplanche's intervention as a third term in what appears to him as a false debate or, in any case, as a skewed debate, between the advocates of what is referred to as the solipsistic position and the advocates of relational or intersubjective psychoanalysis. To some extent, in the light of the thinking tools bequeathed by Laplanche, psychoanalysis is relational from the outset insofar as it fundamentally takes the other's input into account; yet does not slip towards intersubjectivism because the unavoidable adult-*infans* asymmetry, which the analysand-analyst asymmetry reinstates, however relatively, is held as essential, even foundational. Regarding the 'solipsistic' position, as established earlier, Laplanche considers that the 'Ptolemaic' closure of Freud's theory is essentially a reinstatement of the necessary process of subjective closure undergone by the child when he begins to conceive of himself as an 'ego'. Yet such a closure is precisely what analysis, if it aspires to be consequential, is led to reopen. Opening and closing are moments featured in an anthropological situation which is bound to evolve. Once it is acknowledged, the 'Ptolemaic' closure in no way annuls the primacy of the other; yet, if it were not for this closure, there would be nothing to analyse.

Laplanche's Message

When Laplanche (1989[1987]) published the *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, his emphasis lay on 'new foundations', not on 'new psychoanalysis'. Laplanche

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never wished to found a new school. To him, psychoanalysis is first and foremost a procedure invented by Freud who thus opened up a new domain of knowledge (Laplanche, 2011 [2006a], p. 260). This domain must, in his view, be examined from all angles in order to catch sight of what necessitates a critique or even a revision of its underpinnings, and to

supply more solid epistemological foundations; this is what Laplanche consistently did throughout his life as an analyst. His trust in Freud, that is. his belief that the central edifice would not crumble even if it was struck with a "pickaxe" underlies his bequest of a psychoanalysis that is more vital and more apt to tackle new questions.

Laplanche's practice, the application of the three main components of his psychoanalytic work ([Freudian] reading method applied to Freud; theory and practice of translation; theory of general seduction) imply that, by working at the level of the first two registers, Laplanche is also a 'translator' - in the same way any subject is when finding himself on the receiving end of an enigmatic message. In his turn, Laplanche sets out on a quest for the object which Freud tracked down and pursued all his life. In this sense, Laplanche's work is obviously not final, bequeathing a myriad of signifiers, couched in his 'theoretical messages', which it is our turn to tackle in an attempt to translate them better. Laplanche's transference to Freud's work is transferred in turn: we are now invited to bear the cost, if such is our wish, of this transcendence of transference, of this passing of the baton,[3] as we strive to put to work again not only Freud, but Laplanche himself as well. This is undoubtedly the best way to pay tribute to him.

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[3] *Translator's note: The French word for a relay baton is 'témoin', which also means 'witness'.*

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