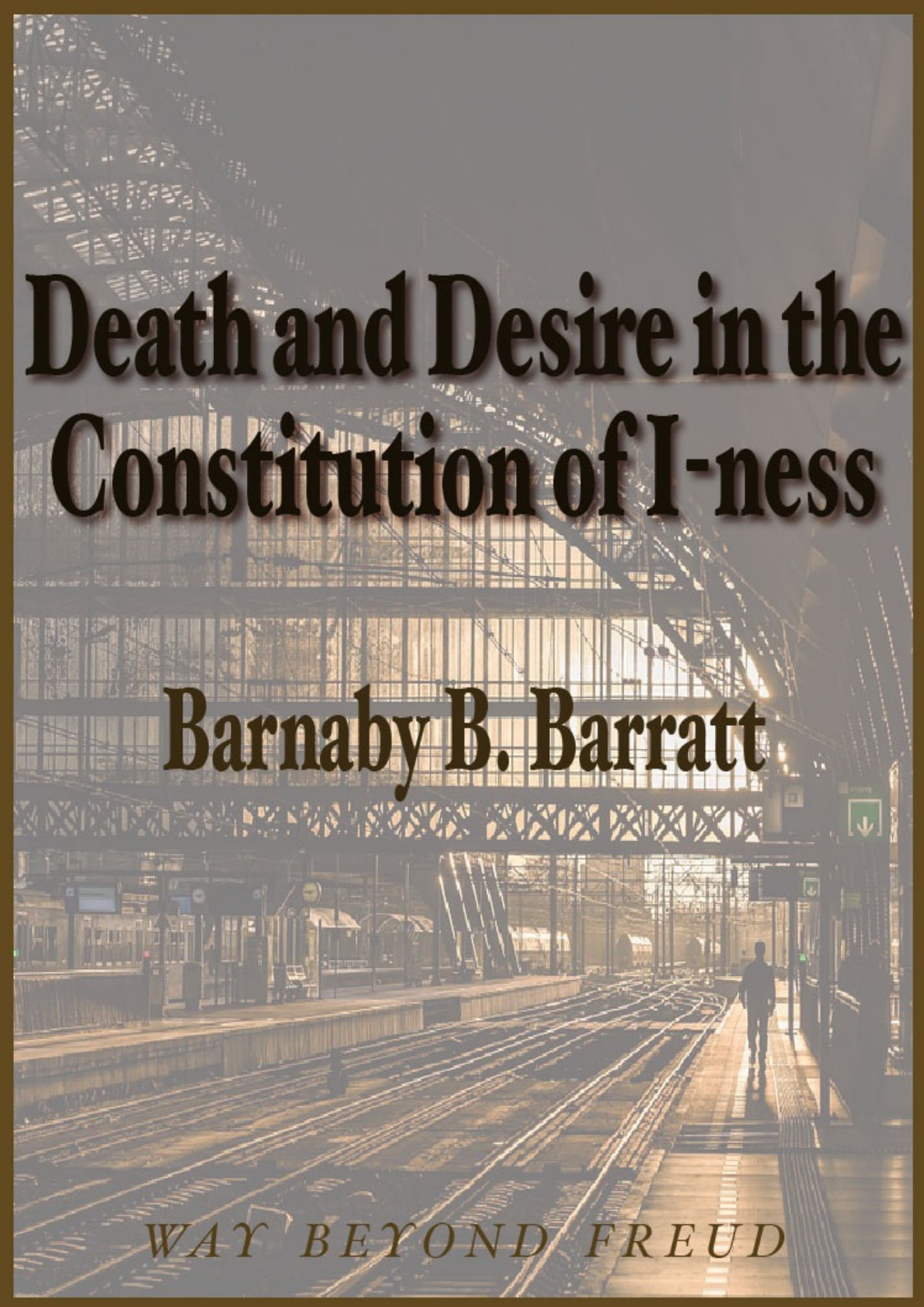

Death and Desire in the Constitution of I-ness

Barnaby B. Barratt

WAY BEYOND FREUD

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Desire and Death in the Constitution of I-ness

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As I now understand my practice, psychoanalysis is a spiritual-existential discipline involving a process of discourse that heals the fractured relations of our psychic realities. That is, psychoanalysis is a discursive performance addressing the contradictoriness and the conflicts that operate between the dimensions or various components of our "bodymind." This definition encompasses the three distinguishing features of psychoanalytic discourse as a "postmodern" practice.

First, the "shibboleth" of the repressed unconscious, our governance from "elsewhere" and the inevitable fractionation of the human subject as constituted in its "encounter" with castration and death. (My exploration of these notions of "castration" and "death" will occupy this paper.)

Second, the libidinality of our embodiment, which creates pervasive and ongoing contradictoriness between the identities or positions of our narrative life as structured by repetition compulsion, and the kinesis of desire that is always "otherwise" than narration—that is, the bodymind's contradictoriness between the compulsive repetitiveness or "judgmentalism" of our "mental constructions" and the spiritual energies of our "sexual body." (For reasons

which need not be explored here, I shall use the term "judgmentalism" to include the decisions involved in any representation.)

Third, the processive notion of healing as an ongoing discourse that cannot abolish the pain and loss involved in being human, but that reorients us to these inevitabilities in such a way that we become able to bear our suffering while retaining our capacity for happiness. This third aspect follows from the first two, and expresses the interminability of psychoanalytic process (which is *not* the same as suggesting that the relationship between a particular psychoanalyst and a particular patient should not have a beginning, a middle, and an end).

From his earliest writings, Freud knew that the twin "discoveries" of the "repressed unconscious" and of the "sexual body" comprised the revolutionary impetus of his discipline. However, throughout his clinical career, there is a gradually unfolding awareness of the significance of his notion of "resistance," which we might define as the tenacity with which we cling to our suffering, because of our mind's refusal to bear the pain of our "castration" and "death." And, as is well known, it is with a contemplation of the "interminability" of healing that Freud's writings leave off, and so it is at this critical edge that our contemplation of the "postmodern" character of psychoanalysis may embark.

When I write that psychoanalysis "heals," I do not mean that it unifies, homogenizes, or obviates contradictoriness and conflict, but rather that it diminishes the obstructions to flexibility and fluidity between the body-mind's dimensions and components. When I describe this process as a discursive performance, I intend to emphasize that the condition of psychoanalytic healing is free-associative expressiveness, which is an ethical process that unlocks or opens the bodymind's relations within itself, releasing us from the governance of repetition compulsion. (I distinguish here and elsewhere between "ethicality" as a cracking opening of judgmentalism to what is otherwise, and "morality" as a procedure of arbitration between judgmental positions.)

Although the body is always indirectly at issue, psychoanalytic discourse works and plays more directly with what we might call "the mind's relationship to its own expressions." Practicing psychoanalysis does not necessarily shift the mental content of our enunciations—our identities, positions, and stories—so much as it invites a profound shift in what we might call our mind's "attitude" toward itself and toward what is otherwise than itself, that is, the nature of its attachment to the content of its own utterances.

This issue of "attitude" is not so much a matter of epistemology as of ontology and ethicality. That is, psychoanalytic healing occurs not so much

through epistemological procedures arriving at formulations about how our mind operates, nor so much through ontological procedures of a relationship that coaches me toward a revised assimilation of my narratives of love and hate—the identifications, positions and stories, by which I conduct my life. Rather, psychoanalytic healing occurs most profoundly through an ethical process that opens or releases me to listen to myself as a compassionate witness—and not as an advocate attached to, and strenuously invested in, the productions of my judgmentalism. Thus, psychoanalysis invites us not so much to acquire faith in new knowledge—the security of which would, in any event, prove spurious—nor to trust in the "goodness" of our psychoanalyst, but rather to accept the inevitable condition of our life as "unknowing." and to dissolve whatever obstructs the process of living fully in this life as it is. This is not so much a discipline of the "head" as of the "heart," and of what Arthur Efron (1985) has felicitously called the "sexual body" of our libidinality. Psychoanalysis is a process of meditative dancing through the plane of our thoughts and our feelings.

Engaging the psychoanalytic process addresses and heals our fractured bodymind. but it does not cure it. Through psychoanalytic practice, we find that inner unification is not possible, absolution unattainable, immortality unavailable, and the painfulness of life inevitable. There are no foundations and there is no ultimate state of harmony to be achieved. Rather, life offers us the spiritual-existential choice to struggle uselessly against the truthfulness of

this, or to participate joyfully in the process of living with this truthfulness. Engaging the discipline of psychoanalytic discourse holds us to the moment-by-moment encounter with this choice, challenging us to move ourselves out of the suffering that is caused by our delusional avoidances both of life's painfulness and of life's passions. Psychoanalytic healing is a working-and-playing process that alleviates suffering by enabling us to live in the enjoyment of what is. in any event, unavoidable and inevitable—which is. as Freud tried to describe in various terminologies, our "castration" and our "death." At least, this is my opinion—and I will now describe briefly how I arrived at it, and in what sense it is "postmodern."

PARADOXES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

We are all patients for life. Our choice is to commit ourselves to the processes of healing our lives, or to paralyze ourselves by living under the governance of repetition-compulsion. I like the term "patient" since it comes from the Latin, *patio,* which means "I suffer." I came to psychoanalysis—serendipitously—because, like everyone else, I was suffering.

I was 20 years old at the time, and in the midst of a mental breakdown for which I was hospitalized. Mercifully, I was admitted to a longterm treatment facility that was run on psychoanalytic principles (the Cassel Hospital located just outside of London and funded as an experiment by the

British National Health Service). Although there were indeed bars on the windows (a grim reminder of the facility's former incarnation as a famous hospital "for nervous and mental diseases"), there were no drugs, no electroshock, no behavioral modification, and no locked doors; just a daily regimen of community service, group therapy, and individual psychoanalytic appointments. I stayed almost a year, as an inpatient, in what was one of the more painful periods of my life, but one of its greatest blessings.

In this treatment I came to realize to my astonishment that almost all the stories that my reflective consciousness had generated about me, and my relationships—narratives about love, hate, and the sexual body—were fabrications. Perhaps they had enabled me to survive childhood emotionally, but they had become incapacitating. These realizations were shattering and, in many senses of the word, enlightening. The treatment affected my body. For example, I had been chronically constipated in childhood and adolescence, but in treatment I came to have regular, easy and pleasurable bowel movements (and have done so, more or less, ever since). The treatment affected my capacity to work. For example, I had always been a "not so bright," solidly B-grade student in school, but I came to develop scholarly interests, won a full stipend for graduate studies at Harvard, authored some rather "heady" publications, and proceeded for three decades to labor energetically along my chosen career path with some success (although episodic pseudostupidity and an imbalanced approach to my worklife are still

daily challenges). The treatment affected my attitude toward my own psyche. For example, from stumbling inhibitions, I came to enjoy my imagination (although my readiness to engage this enjoyment fluctuates). And the treatment slowly but surely affected my capacity to feel loved, loveable, and loving, as well as to be sexually ecstatic (although here there is still so much more progress I wish to make). In short, the realizations generated in this treatment were profoundly freeing, without seeming to imprison me in new co-ordinates.

It was not that I left this treatment with "better" stories about myself. Rather, my psychoanalyst, and the environment of asylum, provided me with experiences of safety, freedom and intimacy that gradually facilitated my relaxing into the understanding that my storytelling capacities are always both transiently "adaptive" or self-protective, and intractably figmentive or "delusional." I left this treatment determined to continue my psychoanalysis, determined to become a psychoanalyst, and determined to understand the functioning of our mental productions—how the fabric of our reflective consciousness is always *both* repressive *and* a disguised "returning" of the repressed.

Subsequently, along with two lengthy periods of full psychoanalytic treatment and graduation from an accredited institute, the scholarly dimension of my trajectory involved studying psychoanalysis through self-

directed reading in philosophy. This culminated in two books (Barratt, 1984, 1993). The first, rather laborious, text trekked through Cartesian-Kantian epistemologies, through Hegel toward the post-Hegelians, via hermeneutics, the romantic traditions, and phenomenology, into dialectics as well as the post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian responses of the late 20th century. The second, rather less forbidding, journey appraises the constitution of the mind as a system of signs, and the issues of temporality and desire in relation to the way these signs appear to enable us to "make sense."

This adventure is "postmodern" and tries to illuminate the extent to which Freud promulgated an inherently "postmodern" discipline of discourse. In my opinion, the notion of the postmodern is merely shorthand for whatever might succeed the interrelated convictions of all "modern" philosophies. These "convictions" have been characterized by Timothy Reiss (1988) as the "analytico-referential episteme" and can be understood both as a culmination of the metaphysics of presence (as illuminated by deconstructive writings in the debates of post-Hegelian and post-Heideggerian philosophy), and as an accretion of western patriarchal acculturation (as illuminated by feminist critique, particularly in France since the late 1960s). These "modern convictions" include the notions: that knowledge can have absolute foundations; that unity of knowing and being is achievable, if not now then, in principle, ultimately; that time is a singular, linear dimension; that harmony operates holistically or universally; and that

the body is an instrument beholden to the mind (or, at the very least, locked into a "master/ slave" dialectic with it). Whatever "postmodern" is, it is not programmatic. Rather, the postmodern is an impulse, a critical indictment, and a realization of the terminality of all that is "modern"—an intimation of whatever will come as this analytico-referential episteme collapses, which it now seems to be doing.

Today I comprehend psychoanalysis, which I practice and in which I am a patient, both through my readings in poststructuralist philosophy (which mostly means the deconstructions of Jacques Derrida and his followers, as well as the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray, and others), and through my experiences with Buddhist meditation (as well as the philosophies of yoga and tantra). I understand psychoanalysis as the process that, by privileging free-associative discourse, brings the human subject into confrontation with the abyss inherent within it, the inherency of our "castration" and "death." Psychoanalytic process frees us to be—what some Buddhists call—a compassionate witness to our chattering mind's repetition-compulsive judgmentalism, and to understand this chattering as a futile reaction against the inherency of our emptiness. I have called this futile reaction the "narratological imperative"—the compulsive repetitiousness of our mental constructions as an effort to build-over the abyss inherent within us (Barratt, 1993).

Free-associative interrogation, rather than repositioning us within the prison of an intractable attachment to our own judgmental productivities and capabilities, deconstructs this attachment (cf. Barratt, 1988,1990, 1995, 1999). This is a spiritual-existential undertaking, conducted with the ethicality of compassion, appreciation, and grace. In sum, psychoanalysis does not offer us an "improved" autobiography—one that can be judged to be more "Real, Proper, Right, True, and Effective"—rather it emancipates us from our attachment to our own autobiographical preoccupations.

THE HUMAN SUBJECT AND ITS CONSTITUTION

As is well known, a problem with "psychoanalysis" today is that there is a multiplicity of theories and terminologies with little concordance, scant coherence, and less than convincing philosophical articulation. In this context, I prefer to resurvey the groundwork of the discipline, rather than presume a common language of discussion.

Let us consider the human mind as a fabric of representations, and of rules that govern the formation and transformation of representations. The content of these representations, whether literal or figurative, can be threefold. They may appear to be about the self, about something or someone other than the self, or about a linking affect/action. Representations cannot be established singularly, so typically they appear in constellations with self-

aspects, other-aspects, and affect/action-aspects. Indeed, much psychotherapeutic clarification (which is an ingredient of every psychoanalysis) involves parsing or translating the complex ways in which representations that appear to be about the other may reflect something about the self, affects that appear to be about the self may reflect something about the other, and so forth.

Along with all these matters of representational content and transformation of content, the human mind has a highly significant feature, which we know to be the result of our linguistic competences (that is, the way in which our thinking is constituted by "second-order" symbolic systems). This feature is the reflexive maneuvering of representational expression that permits us to reflect on our own representational contents. For example, not only to represent a "me" (self-aspect) that is enjoying typing (action/ affect-aspect) on this keyboard (other-aspect) for you to read (another other/ action aspect), but also to reflect on the manner in which these representations have just been performed or enunciated by an "I" and an account of them has just been reflexively inscribed "in my mind."

Note that, on reflection, I am aware that *I enunciated* these representations. But "I" did not author them. In actuality, I am not capable of creating a representation *de novo,* nor am I capable of specifying the rules of representational transformation that I appear to be able to use (but which in

a certain sense “use” me). The human subject is *subject-ed* to language, rather than possessing language as an instrument of its use. Following the structuralist insights of Jacques Lacan and others, we know that representational productivity and the rules that govern it are, so to speak, given to me from “elsewhere." The “I" merely traces their enunciation in words, images, or actions.

But here is the salient point: When I enunciate representations—or more accurately track their enunciation—I always “know" there is an “I” inscribed along with the enunciatory procedures. The “I" is attached to all three types of representation (self, other, and affect/action), and it seems, so to speak, to make the manifestation of the representation “hang together" (as you will see, I intend the pun). Yet we are philosophically confused as to the sense in which this “I" means I exist or have “being”—for example, it might mean that “1" am existing without necessarily being a substantial entity or existent—herein lies all our Cartesian and post-Cartesian confusions. Three issues concerning this “I" seem especially interesting.

First, it may be that this “I" hangs utterances together in some sort of “(quasi)unification" and permits us to maneuver self-reflectively, but on reflection we find, to our metaphysical horror, that it is as empty as an abyss. Not only does it merely enunciate rather than produce its meaningfulness, it adds nothing to the substance or content of the representation to which it is

attached. This “I” is, to borrow Leszek Kolakowski's phrasing, a “black hole" (Kolakowski, 1988).

Second, we come to realize that the “I”—like the experience of the “now” and the “is"—is a trick of the representational system. This “system” is not produced by the “I,” but conveys the “I” along its pathways of enunciation. The “I," the “now.” and the “is” all prove to be concomitantly “empty.” “Now" has no meaning in cosmological time (the time studied by physicists). Rather, it is a phenomenological experience precipitated by the narratological structuring of our representations. Narratives are always organized between a beginning and an end. Representations are always, figuratively or referentially, both commemorative and anticipatory. They appear to represent, to re-present, the presence of a past-present and a future-present (to echo Augustine); and somewhere in between there supposedly hangs the present-ness of the present, a “now" that “is." From Hegel to Derrida, via Husserl, we have been shown how the here-and-now of the present absents itself in the moment of its designation. The “point” of “I-now-is"—like the geometrical point that appears to be “there” but has no extension—“realizes itself' only repetitively in perpetual penultimacy or deferral, always disappearing as the *differance* in which presence cedes to absence. (Here I shall employ the Derridean term for philosophical reasons that are explicated in my 1993 book, but which cannot be reexamined in a brief paper such as this.)

Third, as complex as this might seem, it explains the uniqueness of psychoanalytic discourse. Several ways of talking psychoanalytically intimate this point. We can discuss the alienation or estrangement of the energies of our sexual body in the formation of our judgmental faculties. Or we can discuss the way in which consciousness is always a "returning of the repressed," such that it always expresses disguisedly what it represses from its reflections on itself. Or we can discuss the prevalence of human malice, our seemingly intractable resistance to love and our attachment to suffering, despite the context of bountiful provisions and of beauty. But all these discussions of the unique insights of psychoanalysis into the human condition point toward the way in which our representational reality is motored by repetition compulsion. That is, the way in which our mental functioning organizes itself *as if* it could avoid what Buddhists call "emptiness," what Derrida calls the *differance,* and what I shall call the "castratedness" and the "deathfulness" that is inherent to the constitution of the human subject as "I." (To discuss the relatedness of these notions would require a dissertation on which we cannot here embark.)

WHAT IS CALLED "CASTRATION"

There can be no doubt that Freud grasped the significance of what he called "castration" in the formation of our experience. He wrote that the "castration complex" has "the profoundest significance in the formation of

character”— that is, the personality of both men and women. Yet he may have been confused over the full implications of his discovery, for he is less decisive whether this “complex” involves the ubiquity of fantasies about genital mutilation, or something equally ubiquitous but more abstractly powerful and “symbolic”—or both. Even those of us who acknowledge the profound significance of Freud’s discovery have often perpetuated the confusion over its implications. There are many questions to be addressed on this issue, but as a preliminary I think it may be helpful to distinguish three “levels” of meaning.

First, the "castration complex” implies that experiences of our self are always forged in the crucible of our individual, often long forgotten, fantasies —if not actualities—of genital mutilation. Freud assumed both the priority of visual experience, and that we are “hard-wired” to interpret difference in terms of domination and defect: Boys are more visibly protuberant than girls, “more” means "better,” and the “less” must be a defective version of the "more.” It may be empirically true that we all tend to think this way, and that such visual interpretations of childhood have, by way of their repression, a lasting impact on our experiences of gender and sexuality. However, it remains an open question whether this dynamic of human development is necessarily so—whether visibility has to be so impressive, and whether we are capable of considering differences in terms other than domination and defect.

Second, the “castration complex” implies that these concrete fantasies of genital mutilation are the prototype of a general system of myth-themes about diverse matters such as bodily lack, helplessness, retribution and subjugation. It implies not only that our mind is virtually incapable of constructing difference in terms other than domination and defect. It also implies that our experiencing of “my basic self’ as “my own body” is always complexly cast in terms of individual narratives that can only unfold around culturally inscribed and repetitiously iterated myth-themes about our psychological relations with the symbolic and imaginary functions of “the mother’s breast” and "the father’s penis.”

To express this another way: All psychological development unfolds in our encounters with the “law of laws,” which is the law of incestuous boundary—the foundational law of prohibition and taboo—and these are articulated in the context of our specific experiences with maternal and paternal sexuality. Our entire descriptive psychology is richly endowed with accounts of separation-individuation struggles, pleasure-punishment sequences, oedipally triangulated conflicts, and so forth. And all these can be comprehended as permutations of the way in which the human subject is inducted into the fantasy-systems that precede it and that determine the possible contents of its experiences. Such fantasies are central to the formation of all personhood—that is, the formation of our mental functioning and our set of identifications, positions or stories, as men and as women.

Third, inherent to and going beyond these content-full and psychologically descriptive aspects, the "castration complex" implies something profoundly existential and poignantly spiritual. Our "castration" means that the "I" of human experience—both of men and of women—is irreparably insufficient or inadequate, precisely because "I" am never actually the author of what I take to be "my own meanings." This is akin to what has been called the "basic fault" of the human condition. Here Lacanian theorizing has developed the indispensable notion of the "phallus." This phallus (like Shiva's Lingam, or the Word of Yahweh) is the abstract point-of-origin that makes possible the meaningfulness of representationality, the ultimate author from which other meanings are merely derivative. Our human condition is such that the "I" articulates meanings that I can never author, and thus "I" am deluded when I believe that I speak (have spoken, or ever could speak) from the position of the phallus. We may delude ourselves that the penis is somehow phallic, but it is not, and so in this most powerful and profound sense, both men and women are always already castrated.

This is why I prefer the term "castratedness" to "castration." As was hinted earlier, the ubiquity and universality of human castratedness means that "I" can never achieve mastery over my own life's narratives, and my chattering mind will never actually prevail over anything despite all its pretensions and delusions to the contrary. The human "I" is irreparably inadequate and insufficient.

WHAT IS CALLED “DEATH"

Human subjectivity is both castrated and deathbound. Although questions about death, loss, and absence infuse Freud’s work from his earliest pre-1900 theorizing on the primacy of repetition in the formation of the subject, through his 1920 writing on the “death drive,” to his final formulations, he is provocative on the question of the relationship between fear of death and other fears. For example, he suggests as late as 1926—some years after his description of the *fort/da* experience—that our “ego” only comprehends "death” by analogy to its own “castration.”

These provocative insights are associated with widespread confusion about the implications of death in human psychology. We can divide the contemporary world of psychoanalytic theorizing according to which “root metaphor” of human tearfulness is held to be most profoundly operative in the formation of our representational life. For example, there are “schools” that describe individual development in terms of our fearfulness of loss of integrity, mutilating punishment, or “castration” (implying that our “ego organization” can only conceptualize “death” as a sort of mega-castration). This view of the *re-presentational* origins of mental life usually takes Freud’s writings of 1923 and 1926 as its authoritative texts. And there are “schools” of psychoanalysis that depict how individuals develop though their fearfulness of destructiveness and annihilation, or “death” (discussing

"castration" only as a fantasy derivative of this more basic fearfulness by which our "ego" comes to operate). This view of the origins of our *representational* life often takes Freud's 1920 text as its inspiration. And then there are many schools that offer no explanation of the origination of our "ego's capacities to represent," and thus decline to subscribe to either "root metaphor." Instead, they merely deploy notions such as "fear of abandonment" and "loss of love." These notions are descriptively compelling, but conveniently sidestep deeper questions as to why being abandoned or unloved would be formatively threatening in a manner that impacts on the structuring (as distinct from the content) of our ego organization's representational capacities.

Perhaps some of these controversies and difficulties stem not only from confusion over the different levels of meaning that accrue to the notion of "castration," but also from some confusion over the way in which "death" could possibly be an impactful psychological experience while one is still living (that is, how can it be that we live in the fear of an experience that we have never experienced?). There are many questions to be addressed here, but as a preliminary I think it may be helpful to distinguish three "levels" at which "death" might have psychological meaning.

First, there is "death" as the terminus of our life's narrative. Although this is the most common idea of death, it is perhaps not so significant for our

psychological development (in the sense of the structuring or origination, rather than the content, of our representational life). Death, in this sense, is not something experienced, and hence not something that could have a formative impact on our representational life. Rather, it is a forceful and frightening anticipation based on our emotional experience of the loss of others, and the anticipatory recognition that this too will somehow happen to "me." These ideas about my mortality may shape my life's conduct—"I am getting older, soon I will die, I want to do such and such while I still can"—but my death, the loss of myself to myself, remains un-*re*-presentable. In this context, we both fear and deny our death (in the manner described by Ernest Becker and many others). We "know" that every narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end, so we "know"—by an abstractive extrapolation—that our own life will have its definitive closure. But since we cannot actually experience the ending of our own experience, this is a sort of profoundly "incomprehensible," yet terrifying, narratological "knowledge." Such knowledge is acquired comparatively late in the psychological development of our representational capacities and through our abstractive and extrapolative understanding of life as narration. And we may note here that there is perhaps a sense in which this "knowledge" is scarcely acquired at all; for (except as an ending that is to be denied) death does not exist in the prevalent magical thinking animating many of our narrations.

Second, there is "death" as the destruction of our ego organization's

functional capacities and representational constructions. There is ample evidence that every ego experiences this sort of traumatization in the course of its development. This is not death in the sense of the termination of experience, but "death" as our potential to—in the vernacular—"lose it." Our ego organization is able to experience the loss of its own functionality, the loss of representations of others, and the loss of representations of self. These losses imply the dissolution or destruction of representational coherence, constancy or consistency, and are usually related to what is interpreted as our potential to be overwhelmed by our "aggressive drive," or our "innate destructiveness," and our "primordial envy." The potential for our ego organization to "lose it" in this traumatic manner perhaps provides us with a "death-like" experience that has profound repercussions for the development of its functions and its representational activities.

Third, inherent to and going beyond both the narratological notion of life's termination and the experiential destruction of representationality in the traumatization of our ego's organization, there is "death" as the inherent "emptiness" or *differance* of the "I" of the subject. We have already mentioned this notion of the subject's "death" as something profoundly existential and poignantly spiritual. This is "death" not as the way in which the existence of the human subject is narratologically bounded by its own nonexistence, but rather the inherency of "death" in the midst of the life of the subject itself —''death" as essential to the eventuation of every act of representation. As

Tsongkhapa, the influential Tibetan scholar, wrote some six hundred years ago, “unborn emptiness . . . is both the center itself and the central path . . . emptiness is the track on which the centered person moves.” When our “ego” observes itself maneuvering through the passage of free-associative enunciation, when the subject's reflectivity becomes mobilized, or when we develop our capacity to be what Buddhists and others call the “compassionate witness” to ourselves, there is an intimation of this “emptiness” or *differance* of the “I-now-is.” The “I” cannot formulate its own “emptiness,” but it experiences the intimations of this abyss within itself. This is death not as something that circumscribes the life of the subject, not as something toward which the subject is bound, but as an inherency that binds the subject to its representational repetitiveness.

This is why I prefer the term “deathfulness” to “death.” The ubiquity and universality of human deathfulness offers the “I” of human experience a margin of “choice” within its representational structuration. Our fearfulness of the abyss within is, I believe, what motivates the repetition compulsion, or the narratological imperative, that determines our ego organization’s incessant activity in constructing and reconstructing its representational world. When our “I” tightly attaches itself to the identities, positions, and stories, that are generated by this repetition compulsiveness, we remain imprisoned within our own mental devices. When our “I” is able to embrace its own deathfulness—as when the subject embraces its own castratedness as

irreparably inadequate and insufficient—we are able to loosen ourselves from our repetition compulsiveness, and the process of our healing occurs. This is why I suggest that psychoanalysis is not a matter of formulating "better" identities, positions, and stories, but rather of freeing ourselves from our compulsive attachment to the production and reproduction of these formulations. This is why the mobilization of free-associative expression, the dissolution of our resistances to this expressiveness, and the cultivation of our compassionate witnessing of ourselves, are the keys to psychoanalytic healing.

THE ANTI-PSYCHOANALYTIC DRIFT OF CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYSIS

In sum, we do not suffer because our narratives are "immature" according to some "scientific standard" of development, nor because our narratives are "maladaptive" according to prevailing social or cultural ideologies. Rather we suffer because, refusing to embrace our castratedness and deathfulness, we cling to the narratological imperative and to our repetition compulsiveness. Much of our hundred years of psychoanalytic history comprises a series of attempts to avoid the truthfulness of this ancient and "postmodern" insight. The antipsychoanalytic drift of contemporary psychoanalysis avoids the challenge of postmodern impulses to return to the falsifying security of "modern" theorizing. As I have already implied, there are three principal ways in which this occurs.

First, we currently have versions of psychoanalysis that seem to have forgotten the *contradictoriness* of the human subject. This "contradictoriness" is inherent and insuperable precisely because of the castratedness and deathfulness within the representational formulation that appears most complete and whole in its identity: *I is I*. Psychoanalysis demonstrates the falsity of this identitarian foundation, disclosing its inadequacy and insufficiency. But against the rigors of this discovery, many contemporary theories appeal to deceptive images of unification and harmonization. This amounts to forgetting that the "repressed unconscious" is everywhere, and replacing this insight with ideas about a "conflict-free sphere of ego functioning," an "integrated self," or the primacy of transactional "intersubjectivity."

Second, we currently have versions of psychoanalysis that seem to have forgotten the *libidinality* of the human subject. This "libidinality" is the desirousness of our embodiment that intervenes precisely in the cracking of the subject's apparent identity. Psychoanalysis demonstrates that desire mobilizes the subject in relation to its inherent inadequacy, "emptiness" or *differance,* and offers us the insight that we avoid our sexuality because not to do so requires the embrace of our castratedness and deathfulness. Against the rigors of this discovery, many contemporary theories dismiss libidinality as "speculative energetics" and discuss sexuality as if it were merely a repertoire of behaviors under the governance of our "ego organization." In this retreat

from its postmodern implications, psychoanalytic practice becomes merely a dyadic exchange of representations—a transformation of our thoughts about our feelings, or our thoughts about our bodies, rather than a movement of our sexuality that subverts the priority of these deliberations.

Third, we currently have versions of psychoanalysis that seem to have forgotten that the process of healing is far more profound and spiritually poignant than any procedure that merely installs or re-establishes identities, positions, and stories, that are more "Real, Proper, Right, True, and Effective" according to the criteria provided by extant ideologies of maturation or adaptation. Yet many contemporary theories advance these ideologies. They purport to resolve pain—which Freud knew to be impossible—rather than to offer an ongoing process of healing by which we may bear our suffering in the spirit of enjoyment.

RETURNING TO DESIRE AS THE LIBIDINALITY OF THE SEXUAL BODY

The "I" of our egotism is actually "empty," perennially deferred, delayed or penultimate, and inherently *differant* within its identity. This "I" is not the illusory "Phallus" and can never be. Rather, it is always and inevitably "castrated" but refuses to awaken to this reality. So the "I" chatters over the abyss that is within . . . as if, by means of repetition compulsiveness, it could negate the deathfulness of its own constitution.

There has been something misguided about a “modern psychoanalysis” that treats “insights” as formulations about our mental life (even as interim or approximative formulations). Against this, we must learn to live with the realization that such “insights” are as delusional as the “symptoms” they replace. There is a sense in which this realization is itself the postmodern notion of “insight.” And in this context, psychoanalysis becomes my personal journey of realization that all the identities, positions, and stories generated by my reflective consciousness are fabrications, and that the identitarianism of the "I is I” can never be an absolutist foundation—because indeed, life offers no such certainties, no such security, and no such foundations. Against the modern ambition to achieve formulations about life that are somehow more “Real, Proper, Right, True, and Effective,” psychoanalysis realizes that all such formulations are statifying, that they alienate the subject from the desirous momentum of its libidinality. Against this ambition, psychoanalysis is a personal journey that loosens our repetition compulsive attachment to the products of our thinking, and returns us to the wisdom of our hearts and of our sexual body.

There has been something misguided about a “modern psychoanalysis” that refuses to accept the inevitability of pain, and of the inadequacy or insufficiency of our “I-ness,” by confusing the penis with the Phallus, and confusing the “authoritative position” of the psychoanalyst as the locus of the phallus itself. This confuses castratedness with castration, and deathfulness

with death. For example, to the extent that a psychoanalyst might effectively tell a male patient something like "you imagined you could be castrated, but you will be healed when you understand that you were not (and when you understand how much this imagining held you back)," or might effectively tell a female patient "you imagined you had been castrated, but you will be healed when you understand that you were not (and when you understand how much this imagining held you back)," psychoanalysis becomes derailed. To hold out the promise of an "uncastrated" life is as ideologically falsifying as a promise of immortality. Such a promise, although it may preserve the narcissistic authority of the psychoanalyst, imprisons patients in the repetition compulsiveness of representationality. Against the spurious safety of this imprisonment, psychoanalysis is a personal journey that libidinally remobilizes the subject in relation to the abyss that is within us.

Healing occurs when the inevitability of our irreparable castratedness and our inherent deathfulness is accepted through the loosening of our repetition compulsiveness. This acceptance involves an embracing of our desire through the processive momentum of free-associative discourse. Libidinality cracks open the apparent seamlessness of the representational world, intimating to us that the narratological imperative can never deliver life in the fullness of our suffering. The libidinality of our desire is thus the dimension within us that subverts the governance of our bodymind by the narratological imperative of repetition compulsion. Only by moving ourselves

can we free ourselves from the compulsiveness of our mental preoccupations. This movement of paradox, irony, and parody, is the prerogative of the libidinality of our embodiment. Refraining from dancing or touching, psychoanalysis discovers the healing properties of the momentum of free-associative discourse, as a momentum that brings the bodymind into an alignment of healing that can never be complete. As psychoanalysis takes us "out of our heads" and into this momentum of our hearts and our sexual bodies, it realizes this healing potential as a postmodern impetus.

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