

Lacanian Biology and the Event of the Body*

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translated by BARBARA P. FULKS

I. EXAMINING THE ALGORITHMS OF LIFE THE CONCEPT OF LIFE

Finding myself again with the work of Freud, Lacan, and the practice of psychoanalysis, I see that I have carefully circumvented an explanation of the coordinates of the concept of life. I must say that this is an eminently problematic concept, and one of which Lacan said, in his 1955 Seminar: "The phenomenon of life remains in its essence completely impenetrable. It continues to escape us no matter what we do." One might ask if Lacan knew at that time of the decisive step of Watson and Crick's truly epochal discovery of the structure of DNA. Their very brief initial article, "Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids," appeared in the journal *Nature* in 1953 and inaugurated the triumphal years of genetics. We are today at the dawn of the century which will see the sensational practical consequences of this step.

Is the phenomenon of life therefore penetrable after the discovery of this structure? Quite the contrary. In 1970, one of the crafters of the triumphs of molecular genetics, François Jacob, could say, in his book *The Logic of Life*: "We do not question life any more in the laboratory; we no longer try to encompass its contours. We only try to analyze living systems."¹ It is a fact that, when we

analyze the living being, not in its superb stature—its unity evident at the macroscopic level—but rather at the level of the molecule, the processes in play highlight the physics and the chemistry involved but do not at all distinguish themselves from the processes which unfold in inanimate matter, in inert systems.

Lacan's statement, then, is perfectly true in spite of the progress of molecular biology. As François Jacob said, the decline of the concept of life does not date from the middle of this century, but from the advent of thermodynamics: "The operational value of the concept of life had to decline after the birth of thermodynamics."

This perspective is perfectly coherent with that explained by Lacan in the beginning chapters of his Seminar *The Ego*,² where he pointed out that Freudian biology is first of all an energetics. This is the route he would take up, in his own way, as he resumes that year and afterwards the lessons of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Because Freudian biology is first of all an energetics, Lacan allows himself to say that Freudian biology is not a biology. This is so if we understand by biology a discipline which has life as its object, but it is certainly less correct now that we have in some way a biology without life, a biology which has as its object—this is one of Jacob's expressions, but it could just as well be Lacan's—"the algorithms of the living world." This expression reveals the notion of a procedure, marked by a certain vagueness, central to biology. In this context Lacan formulated in *Encore* (1972)³ what could pass for an analytic concept of life which seems to define life as *jouissance*: "We don't know what it means to be alive except for the following fact, that a body is something that enjoys itself (*cela se jouit*)."⁴ It is that a definition of life? It is rather the opposite. We do not know what life is. We only know that there is no *jouissance* without life. And why not formulate the principle in this way: life is the condition of *jouissance*. But that is not all. It is precisely a matter of life under the form of the body. *Jouissance* is unthinkable without the living body, itself the condition of *jouissance*. This point of departure justifies reopening the biology dossier.

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I. LIFE AND THE ONE OF THE BODY

In our discipline, which is clinical, life presents itself to us in the form of the individual body, and we can remain there. We are even obliged to remain there.

It is there that one can make a distinction between life and body, as in the expression "living body." Life is not reduced to body in its beautiful and evident unity. There is evidence of the individual body, of the body as One, which is a sign of the imaginary order.

Let us take care to be a little flexible in questioning the status of the individual in regard to life, and especially the status of this One who appears in some way natural. All of Lacan's Seminar called *Encore* is pervaded by this insistent interrogation: must we think that the One comes to us from the pretext of this imaginary evidence of the unity of the body? What is the value of the other position, the thesis that the One comes to us from the signifier and not from the One of the body? Lacan did a lot to test this evidence. In particular he wrote a sentence about zoology which merits attention and development. "Zoology can proceed from the pretense of the individual to make being (*être*) of life (*vivant*), but the individual is diminished by this discipline to the level of a polypary."

When we are dealing with animal, with the living (*vivant*), it is the individual, the body-one. We can say that the living being is realized in an individual. But what can we then make of the polyps, the polyparies that inspired our 18th century materialists—Trembley's famous polypary which was conceived as simultaneously mineral, vegetable and animal? What to make of the colony of coral in which corporeal individuality becomes eminently problematic? We find ourselves before a sort of collective semi-individualized being which seems to be there in order to fill the gaps in the chain of beings.

D'ALEMBERT'S DREAM

A whole line of thought has been devoted to the notion that everything is continuous in matter, leading us from the inanimate to the

living without addressing the problem of continuity. Diderot's *d'Alembert's Dream* was written to show at what point life exceeds the poor One of body and appears to the contrary like an extraordinary drive of proliferation. D'Alembert's dream, properly stated, Diderot and d'Alembert's conversation, begins with the image of a swarm of bees described as a clump that appears as a being, an individual, an animal. It is evidently an illusion. It is an assemblage, but, if we blur the little legs the bees are holding on with, if we pass insensibly from contiguity to continuity, we can see a whole and an animal-one. We know it, not from d'Alembert, since he's dreaming, but from Doctor Bordeu who narrates d'Alembert's oneiric deliria to Melle de Lespinasse. Hence, he imagines the swarm of bees transformed into a veritable polyp and dreams, in the same vein, the human polyp. This puts you in the atmosphere of d'Alembert's dream where you see progressively the One become multiple in nature and the multiple as one, finally a perpetual reversibility from one to the other.

All this elides enormously at the end of d'Alembert's dream, since everything is found in the general flux: everything changes, everything passes, only the all remains, culminating in the One-all which stops at the boundaries of the world. Ultimately there is only one huge living animal which is nature itself: "And you speak of individuals? None exists. There is only a sole great individual, it is the all."

It happened that Lacan, precisely during the years when he was trying to give *jouissance* its stature, while he was presenting his lectures and pursuing his avocation of buying old books, looked through this materialist literature. He evoked Maupertuis.

This marks the distance we have come from the monism of matter, of a matter which includes life. Take, for example, Diderot, with his vitalist Spinozism in which everything, even stone, is supposed to be sensate. Thus he begins his conversation with d'Alembert, who says to him: "But you are not going to tell me that stone is sensate—But why not? It cries, we just don't hear it."

By degrees he demonstrates, appealing to nutrition, that mineral contributes to the growth of vegetable, and vegetable, absorbed by herbivore, finds itself in the living body. Thus we have an extraordinary continuity of sensibility, the same principle shared by the philosophies of nature which oblige us to distinguish two states of sensibility: one inert and one active, in which the inert (stone) may become active. This leads us also to the sensational 19th century lucubrations of Schelling on the ages of the world, in which consciousness is already encompassed in the notions of the inanimate, so that, in this world, the death of the individual is reduced to nothing more than an illusion.

HYLOZOISM

Says Diderot: "And life? Life, a series of actions and reactions. Living, I act and react in mass—mass of my body, the animalcules that form me. Dead, I act and react in molecules. Thus I don't die at all. No, without doubt. I don't die at all in this sense, neither myself nor whatever I'm made up of." It is a vision of life eternal if one doesn't stop at the imaginary form of the body, but rather allows the animalcules, the fibers, the molecules to continue their little journey.

In this way life and also *jouissance* are everywhere in nature. *Jouissance* is coextensive with omnipresent life. Citing Diderot: "There is nothing in nature which does not suffer or feel pleasure." There we have *jouissance* understood as all of nature and as each of its states. The word "hylozoism" dates from around 1760 in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*. This erudite word derives from hyle (matter) and *zoe* (life) and refers to the doctrine of living matter made God. And, as Lacan said, for the materialists of the 18th century, their God was matter.

Amazingly enough, the idea of the great living and immortal All was also the doctrine of the stoics, the very ones who invented the difference between the signifier and the signified. How could they, on the one hand, use language to articulate and disarticulate, while on the other hand adhere simultaneously to this doctrine of the great animate world and of life everywhere? Here we

have proof that they apprehended the unity of the signifier One at the level of language, because in nature, they only apprehended the unity of the All. And this supports Lacan's thesis that one apprehends the One from the signifier and not from nature. The closer you get, the more you see what One is made of. We have every reason to use hylozoism as a point of reference in the question we are advancing, since it is clearly the implicit basis of Sade's theory elaborated by Lacan in the section of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*⁴ on transgression and *jouissance* in transgression. Sade refers to the system of Pope Pius VI, the criminal Pope whose postulate is that nature itself desires destruction, death. Sade distinguished in this regard two deaths: that of the individual, who is already *jouissance*, having finished with the other, and that of the matter itself, of the cadaver which results from the death of the individual. You find Sade's text on pages 210-211 of his Seminar VII. The radical criminal wants not only to be the other at the level of life, of the individual body, but also in the matter that subsists after the first crime. Diderot's hylozoism is the basis of the theory of two deaths.

The idea of two deaths is like the two sides of Diderot's double life: "Living, I act and react in mass. Dead, I act and react in molecules." Diderot's system is the exact reverse of Sade's. Sade gives us the first and second death; Diderot the first and second life.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE BODY IN PIECES

DESCARTES AND SUBSTANCE-JOUISSANCE

Lacan refers to Descartes to introduce life-*jouissance* or what he calls substance-*jouissance*. This is the opposite of hylozoism, because there is no question of living matter. He is not going to look for it in Diderot's *jouissance*, which is everywhere, universal, in every point in nature. We do not lack different levels of material in Diderot's work; we have continuous praise of the infinite possibilities of *jouissance*, from the most minuscule and insensible to the most vast. Descartes, however, reduces matter to thought, and this reduction excludes by principle the *jouissance* of body, since body emerges from thought.

And so Lacan can say, in his text "De la psychanalyse dans ses rapports avec la réalité"⁵ that the body, reduced to thought, was profoundly misunderstood by Descartes. The constitutive misunderstanding of the reduction of matter and body to thought is separating the body from its *jouissance*. But one must state at that the misunderstanding is also found in the operations to which we currently submit the body more and more frequently.

I read a kind of prophesy in what Lacan wrote in 1967 on this subject: "with the shocks of the imminent excesses of our surgery, we are disposed to make the body into its own pieces." It is not only that the being of life is not the One of the individual, but also that the being of life, when the body is a speaking being, is this body in pieces. This is not the profusion of Diderot: "We are all polyparies, we are all colonies of animalcules badly individuated." It is the One put in question by the body in pieces.

AN ESSAY OF SWIFTIAN INSPIRATION

The body in pieces—we know it at the level of *fantasme*. It is the expression Lacan coined in order to put in parentheses the imaginary phenomena on which Melanie Klein insisted. We are talking about the body in pieces as realized through surgical operation. Biology, having celebrated the unity of the living over a long period of time, now distinguishes itself every day with the dismemberment (*morcellement*) of this unity.

Just today I came upon an extraordinary essay in this week's *Time* magazine. You know that we can transplant the most important organs, since the epochal heart transplant of Dr. Barnard. The problem today is that we do not have enough of these organs to transplant. 62,000 Americans are waiting for organs in order to survive! Who will give them these organs?

The author of this *Time* article has an idea—we must buy them. Of course there must be someone to sell them. So, a sensational proposition: authorize families to sell the organs of their deceased.

There is an objection. Only the poorest people will be tempted to sell the kidneys and the hearts of their dear departed for

\$300—the value the author proposes. The response to that is: all suffering in the world affects the poor more than the rich. The poor live less well, they dress less well, they have the most dangerous jobs, and they have the smallest cars. Thus, if one insists, we can pay them \$3,000 rather than \$300. The audacious author admits a limit: he doesn't propose buying the organs of the living, because that would be an affront to human dignity.

This little text which happened to fall into my hands by accident is of Swiftian inspiration. You know Swift's *A Modest Proposal*: "how to ease parents and the nation of their charges and use these children for the public good?" Swift's text proposes that one year old children contribute to the public good, to the diet and in part to the attire of several thousand people. He proposes that they be eaten. Swift's work is a satire on the cynicism of the wealthy of his time; it is strikingly similar to the American essay which seriously approaches such action.

FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL GOOD

Thus we announce the emergence of the body in pieces. We can say *au revoir* to what has been the celebration of the unity of the body, since what is in progress is the contrary, its cutting up, evidently for the greater good. Every day we have news of the body in pieces. A more amiable form of cutting up permitted by genetic genius. We speak of genetic genius because we cannot stop at the image of the beautiful form of the body, since we know how to operate on the real of the body. Tissues can be engineered. Skin has been made and sold since May of 1998. Last year fabricated skin was approved for sale. Cartilage and bone can be produced with the help of semi-synthetic material. Ligaments and tendons are at the ready, but the great object of study now is the creation of complete internal organs, neo-organs.

These phenomena impart a special seriousness to what we can articulate about our relationship to body, which is not transhistoric, and our work will be more and more conditioned by this emergence of the body in pieces. It is no longer a matter of the nasty Marquis de

Sade who is going to cut up poor Justine. It is evidently for the public good and the individual good, that is to say it is irresistible.

The assemblage of some elements of Lacanian biology should be useful here. Let us take a look at the algorithms of life.

THE BODY-MACHINE

The Cartesian element here is what is anti-Aristotelian. The former proceeds from a perspective that dissects the unity of the living, while the Aristotelian view emphasizes the unity of living, the soul as a form of the body. In his Seminar *Encore* Lacan contrasts these two perspectives by referring repeatedly to Aristotle's *On the Soul* and at the same time measuring developments in biology which influence the philosophical form of our imaginary of the body, already out of date because of the effects of the algorithms of life.

This Aristotelian perspective is hopelessly dated. Lacan considered, regardless, that a whole branch of contemporary philosophy was devoted to reinflating, to redesigning this Aristotelian perspective for current consumption. Gestalts, the psychology of form, Goldsteinism, and even being-in-the-world, or the phenomenology of perception, consistently attempted to return to the harmony of the soul and its body. Descartes in other words was a brute to have made two separate substances and they were going to occupy themselves sewing it up to recover the unity of life.

Lacan, neither progressive, so he says, nor nostalgic, knows that one will go always too far in the Cartesian sense, that is to say to operate on the body, to dismantle it like a machine.

Following his Seminar II, he underlines the decisive character of reference to the machine as the foundation of biology. This dismantling, this cutting up proceeds essentially from distancing what is the marvellous harmony of the living organism in its milieu in order to operate and dislocate, dismember and disarticulate.

Surprisingly François Jacob writes: "Molecular biology corresponds to a new mechanical age." Conceptually, we are not in this mechanist scheme because we have new information or because we are operating on the molecular level. There are sensa-

tional changes in biology, but at the same time some phenomena have persisted for a long time and this scheme is one of them. Something proceeding from Descartes' animal-machine is still there.

We will see how Freud oriented his biology in essential background research. The facts of dismemberment question the identity of the body in a much more probing way than the hylozoist lucubrations or the Aristotelian soul which is only, as Lacan says on page 110 of *Encore*, the supposed identity of the body.

THE SPEAKING BODY EMERGES FROM HAVING

We have learned something fundamental about the status of the body, of this body which gives the imaginary model of One. We identify the body and the being of life in some spontaneous, imaginary way. Lacan describes this in passing while talking about the rat in the labyrinth in the last chapter of the Seminar *Encore*. We can identify there the body and the being (*être*). This identification is in Aristotle's initial analysis of being. Today, on the contrary, we try to confuse the poor little rat, immersing it in the knowledge of the experimenter, a knowledge which has nothing to do with its life.

If we can identify being and body for the animal, we cannot do the same for the human species. As far as the speaking body is concerned, it does not emerge from being but from having.

Lacan puts a surprising touch on the formula "man has a body," which is incarnated in English law under the formula of habeas corpus. He expounds on "man has a body" in one of his last texts, "Joyce-the-symptom,"⁶ but you find it already in Seminar II, page 73. He notes moreover that one has always had a body, but it is clearer today, because we have gone very far from the identification of man with his knowledge.

Here we can make sense of the background of Cartesian dualism. The dualism here is of knowledge and of body. The question of being for "man" is posed on the side of knowledge, while the body is on the side of having. This identification of man with his knowledge is what made Lacan culminate with the con-

cept of the algorithm of the subject. His position is on the order of being, even if it is formulated as lack-in-being.

One can say again more simply that the subject, from the moment in which it is subject of the signifier, cannot identify itself as its body, and it is precisely from there that its affection for the image of its body proceeds. The enormous narcissistic bombast, characteristic of the species, proceeds from this lack of subjective identification with the body. The lack of corporeal identification is especially in evidence in hysteria. Lacan constantly critiques, implicitly or explicitly, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty who tries to restore the co-naturalness of man to his world, who centers on the corporeal presence, who studies presence in the world in, by, and through a body. This presence is also evident in Heidegger's philosophy of the *Dasein*, where it is displaced in accordance with what it has circumvented. The presupposition, as Lacan says, for Merleau-Ponty, is that there is somewhere a place of unity, which is the identification of the being and body, and which has as result the effacement of the subject. If one sees things in this perspective, behaviorism is susceptible to the same critique. Even if the phenomenologists and the gestalt psychologists make sport of Watson, the idea of describing behavior in terms of stimulus-response, leaving aside all introspection, rests finally on an equivalence of being and body. Psychoanalysis makes its space in the lack of this identification between being and body, in maintaining that the subject has a relationship of having with the body.

3. FREUD'S BIOLOGY

Freud put a lot of hope in biology. I quote: "Biology is truly a land of unlimited possibilities. We may expect it to give us the most surprising information and we cannot guess what answers it will return in a few dozen years to the questions we have put to it."

THE OTHER SIDE OF LIFE OPEN TO THE SPEAKING BODY

Lacan, in the context in which he examined speech, posited that Freudian biology was not biology. Death, which is a matter of the

death drive, is not biological death; it is not the simple return of the living body to an inanimate state. Death is the other side of life. A biology which includes the death drive is a biology of the other side of life, an other side which is open to the speaking being through language. This other side of life is materialized through the sepulcher, since the human species is the only one in which the dead body keeps its value. Sade himself is the example of this other side of life which is open to the speaking body. He dreamed of the death of molecules. He dreamed of a criminal who could, beyond the individual, kill molecules. Practically, as we know, he demanded in his will that his proper name be effaced on his tombstone.

What is specifically of man must last, not in the form of molecules, but in the form of signifiers. Sade wanted to attain this signifying margin on the other side of life and disappear. Sade's demand, and even his injunction, his death drive, has a bearing on the signifier and has nothing to do with biology.

WEISMANN'S CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

But Freudian biology is all the same a biology. At least it supported its speculation with biology, and it did not make a bad choice with Weismann and his theory of germ plasm. The great reference is chapter VI of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

We must recognize the relationship between Weismann's germ and the present-day genome. Doubtless the germ and the genome are inscribed in different discourses. Weismann's is pure speculation and Freud is interested in the attempts to show Weismann's theory as experimentation. Watson and Crick are truly inscribed in a science, molecular genetics. The science leads to practice and emerges with genetic genius. The same scheme between Weismann's germ and Watson and Crick's genome is of no hindrance to us. The same conceptual scheme is at work between the research that Freud chose in biology, our present biology, and that of the future.

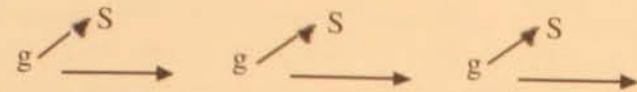
I found this fact pleasantly confirmed in the beginning of a reading of a slightly iconoclastic epistemology, André Pichot's

L'histoire de la notion de gène. Weismann had no idea that *mutatis mutandis* the substance which transported heredity, the chromosomes, would be part of the same conceptual scheme that remains in the work of biology decades later. After some purely physical considerations on statistical laws, Erwin Schrödinger, in a small popular book of 1944, *What is life?*, anticipated exactly the concept of molecular genetics. Pichot says that Schrödinger gives the theoretical basis ten years before the elaboration of the structure of DNA. Departing from Weismann, enriched by chromosomal theory, Schrödinger deduces what will take form in 1953 in the double helix of Watson and Crick, putting us in the perspectives of the next century in which the relationship of the body and its dismemberment will be expanded.

Freud is brought to the central axis of biology as if by divination. Even the neo-Darwinists of today refer to Weismann. The talented popularizer, Richard Dawkins, the author of *The Selfish Gene*, writes at length: "The central idea that I have used has been outlined by Weismann." What Freud deduced is truly the point of departure of the central route of biology today. In chapter VI of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud explains the theory of the two categories of drives: the death drive seeking to restore the inanimate state and the life drive, or sex drive, tending toward sexual conjunction and to "the coalescence of two germ-cells which are differentiated, tending to assure reproduction, to prolong the cell's life and to lend it the appearance of immortality." He finds an analogy of Weismann's to support his elaboration of the life drive and death drive. "The greatest interest attaches from our point of view to the treatment given to the subject of the duration of life and the death of organisms in the writings of Weismann. He was he who introduced the division of living substance into mortal and immortal parts. The mortal part is the body in the narrower sense—the soma—which alone is subject to natural death. The germ-cells, on the other hand, are potentially immortal, in so far as they are able, under certain favorable conditions, to develop into a new in-

dividual, or, in other words, to surround themselves with a new soma."⁸

What is the notion in question? There are two kinds of differentiated cells, those specializing in reproduction, the others developing into individual bodies. On the one hand, the germ cells of reproduction persist and are transmitted in some way as an autonomous lineage. Jacob himself says: "The reproduction of unicellular beings is by simple fission, and each is capable of giving birth to a body, of encompassing an individual body, a soma, which is in some way an end in itself." A lineage is perpetuated while the individual body is grafted in some way on this lineage:



This is intuition along with Weismann's conceptual scheme, with reproduction entirely dependent on nature and the properties of the germ. And everything that happens to the individual body in the point of view of heredity is completely indifferent to lineage and disappears with it, while "natural selection operates on the hidden dispositions of the germ cell." Heredity appears here separated from any incident, and, adds François Jacob, "from all desire."

The royal road of biology proceeds from this simple scheme. It is surrounded by Weismann's philosophy, a philosophy of biophore (he thinks there are particles carrying life in germ-cells) but these are just flourishes which add nothing of force to the scheme. In effect, in a whole other context, what one finds as the structure of DNA comes from Weismann's germ.

THE NARCISSISTIC GERM-CELL

What interests Freud here is the analogy which has him impose the life drive on the germ and the death drive on the soma. He situates his theory of the drives here. Of course he notes that psychoanalysis is not interested in the life substance but in the forces that operate in the life substance, and these are the drives. He presents the theory of the drives as the dynamic that completes Weismann's

morphology. He is interested in detail in the trials of experimental demonstrations of this thesis. What disturbs him is very striking. What disturbs him is that Weismann shows unicellular organisms in which the soma and the germ are not different, are potentially immortal. It is a well supported concept today: the immortality of the initial bacteria, of the mother of all bacteria. What disturbs Freud is that the somatic death only intervenes in the pluricellular, that is to say that death is a late acquisition. He says: "There can be no question of there having been death drives from the very beginning of life on this earth."⁹

We must follow in this chapter Freud's really hair pulling reasoning to try to show that the protozoans could very well sustain the death drives from the beginning without being perceived as doing so. It is a truly refined demonstration, but it shows that what counts for him is the doctrine of life itself. The question of *jouissance* which inhabits this matter of the death drive has to be linked for him to life as such. Thus the importance of remembering, with Lacan, we are interested in *jouissance* as linked to life but under the form of the body.

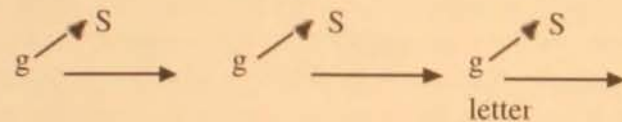
Freud's whole effort wants to show that these drives are already present independent of the constitution, not only of a body, but even of a multicelled organism. He manages finally, maneuvering, to validate his analogy with Weismann. He invents the egoist gene. He invents neo-Darwinism. The idea of the potentially immortal gene which uses individual bodies to self-perpetuate—the chicken appears as the means the egg has found to produce another egg, according to the philosopher Butler quoted by Jacob—is such a Freudian framework that he even speaks of the narcissism of the germ: the germ cells act in an absolutely narcissistic way in the sense of psychoanalysis. The notion of the narcissistic germ is the prefiguration of contemporary neo-Darwinism found in Dawkins' bestselling *The Selfish Gene*.

What is the idea of the selfish gene? Dawkins has the gene speak. The gene tries to survive and to reproduce, so it programs bodies to that end. So far, so good. But, it becomes star-

ting when the genetic population is dispersed throughout numerous individuals, creating a genetic solidarity. He then studies the behavior of the body while deducing from it the egoism of the gene. If parents protect their children, it is in order to protect the genes. And on from there to love and social life. The gene that moves everything to self-perpetuate and achieve its goals is everywhere. In the same vein, you have, after the 70s sociobiology.

In a short circuit, in his introduction to what would become the Department of Psychoanalysis, Lacan curiously qualifies the imaginary and the real as "space of life" (*lieu de la vie*): "My imaginary and my real, through which are distinguished two spaces of life that science to this date strictly separates." How can one say that the imaginary and the real are spaces of life? The concept rests on the distinction germ/soma. The imaginary is tied to the individual body, while the germ, and especially the genome, is the space of life, the real of life.

Perhaps even more startling as a short circuit is Lacan's analogy found on page 90 of *Encore*: "The function I give the letter is what makes it analogous to a germ." Lacan reworks the following scheme, making the letter analogous to the germ. It is Weismann's germ Lacan brings to molecular physiology. It has surpassed this term "germ" since he speaks of the germ separate from the bodies for which it is the vehicle for life and death together.



This analogy of the letter and the germ is evidently made to give us the notion of a reproduction of the letter, but which supposes the exteriority of knowledge (*savoir*) in relationship to being, in relationship to body. It is a transmission of the letter, but in a position of exteriority. Thus Lacan says: "Knowledge (*savoir*) is in the Other. It is a knowledge which is supported by the signifier and which owes nothing to the knowing (*connaissance*) of life (*vivant*)."

II. LIFE AS CONDITION OF *JOUISSANCE*

translated by JORGE JAUREGUI

My sole interest for life is its connection to *jouissance* in as much as it could be that life is what deserves to be qualified as real. I believe Lacan's propositions do not object the formulation that life is the condition of *jouissance*. If life is condition of *jouissance*, it is a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. I've been careful to distinguish life as such, to not say as force, and the body. Life overflows the body. What obliges you to attest there isn't *jouissance* unless life appears under the form of a living body.

1. BODY CONDITION AND SIGNIFIER CONDITION

Let's examine the proposition. What that the living body says to us? It says that the case is not only the imaginary body, under the form of its form. The case is not the body image, the one we know, to which we refer to since it is operative in the mirror stage—the specular body that doubles the organism. It is neither the symbolic body, the one whose persistent recurrence prompts the heraldry metaphor under Lacan's pen. Coat of arms are codes. Body parts can certainly be represented, beside with other natural elements, yet they account for signifiers. They are imaginary signifiers whose matter is taken from the image. When we say "the living body," we leave aside both the symbolized body and the body image. The body affected by *jouissance* is neither imaginary nor symbolic, but a living one. Nothing prevents locating *jouissance* as an affect of the body, and the question is to give this adjective that cannot be elided, its sense, alive, for us so less precise than the imaginary or the symbolic adjective. These echo Lacan's teaching and may after all be founded under epistemology and even under the works of history of science that he used to support his distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, whereas the living enters our discourse without being the least endowed with that incomparable precision.

The question is to give this adjective of the living its sense and also of detecting in which way, through which incidence, the

affect of *jouissance* starts in the body. We have then, if we admit this perspective, the condition of the body.

I can at once mention a second condition that adds to the condition of body so that something like the sufficient condition be attained. It is the signifier condition, if we settle for Lacan's formula that the signifier is cause of *jouissance*. Thus the perspective—life as condition of *jouissance*, the condition of body, the condition of signifier—I will explore in this Lacanian biology.

At the end of it there is a clinic that revolves on a definition I believe has been neglected from the symptom, thus fundamental, that must be addressed. It is the one of the symptom as event of the body, which appears at least once in Lacan. If it has been neglected, it's for sure that it looks partial. The symptom as event of the body seems to neglect evidence, as in the case of the obsessional symptom excelling as symptom of the mind, even though the obsessional symptom of the mind is always accompanied by corporal symptoms. And then, the definition of the symptom as event of the body stands for an impasse on every other symptom that, in the different clinical structures, affect par excellence the mind, the uttered, language. It is thus a logical definition of the symptom, of which we are not prone to escape much as we apprehend the symptom as *jouissance*, even when we apprehend it in the Freudian terms of *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety*, as drive satisfaction. If the symptom is drive satisfaction, if it is *jouissance* as conditioned by life under the form of the body, that implies that the living body prevails in every symptom.

This is the horizon of what I call Lacanian biology: the recapture of the symptomatology from the body events. However, this will demand some redefinitions, certain precisions that seemingly prevent the definition to be considered as operative.

2. FROM DRIVES' DUALISM TO DRIVE'S MONISM

THE SPLIT OF DEATH

To well measure what I have spoken apropos life and its materialistic myths, I'll say something about death. In relation to death, it

is the right moment to settle up Lacan's saying that Freudian biology has nothing to do with biology. Let's clean up Lacan's distinction between Freudian biology and biology in strict sense. It led Lacan to identify two deaths from the system of Pope Pius VI which appears in Sade's Juliette. The first death, in this cogitation, is the one to strike life off the individual body and transform it into a corpse. The second is the one that will strike the molecules of the body reduced to corpse. You should reread this split of death. The Lacanian split is not the Sadean split. It finds support on the Sadean split, but is not subdued by it. The two deaths existence supposes the existence of two lives or of two forms of life: the first one takes place under the form of the body and the second one under a form infra, infra-corporal, a molecular life. The Sadean speculation relies on this materialistic vitalism, encouraging what we may call "the crime", which would be the desire to strike not only to the first life but also to the molecular life.

If we distance ourselves from the criminal passion animating the above mentioned speculation, the scheme of the split is outlined this way: a death beyond death, a life beyond life. Nevertheless, both in Diderot and in Sade, the double life and the double death belong to the biological register. A dreamed biology. The dichotomy thus introduced affects the actual difference (that exists) between life and the death. The split Lacan canvasses in his Ethics of Psychoanalysis is based on the fact that life as such overflows the life of the individual body and that the body is but a transitory form, a perishable form of life. Sade's *Wunsch*, which ultimately Lacan calls death drive, aims at life as such beyond the body. When we speak of Sade, who is the carrier of such a name? It is the subject that assumes, that takes for itself the death drive, subjectifying it as a crime, and extending it up to the elements of the rotten body of which it desires its disappearance, its annihilation. Do we find something similar in Freud? If Lacan looked in Sade for the biological split, he did so because there is no track of this split in Freud. Freud does not distinguish between life and the body.

REPETITION, A FACTOR OF MALADJUSTMENT

Let's look into chapter V of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where Freud develops what he will term in 1925 an extreme line of thought, one susceptible of amendment and rectification.

What is this extreme line? It consists, firstly, in attributing the clinical compulsion to repetition to the living body, to the living organism as such, or even to the living substance; secondly, envisaging this repetition as a tendency towards the re-establishment of a previous state; thirdly, in identifying this state anterior to death as (with) no-life, that is biological death in as much as the non-living was there before the living. The demonstration attempted by Freud in chapters V and VI isolates a movement towards death that would affect the living as such. For him the individual body obeys (follows) the same logic (rationale) that governs life as such. Besides, it is what leads him to look for the manifestations of these drives since the origin of life. What comes up in Freud as the initial state, the natural state, is the inanimate state, as far as it is a state without tension, and life appears as an exterior disturbance arising in the inanimate. Freud says it explicitly in this extreme speculation: "The properties of life were roused in the inanimate matter by the action of a force." He asserts himself that this force is truly unthinkable for us. He is still arguing with the vitalism that haunts the biology of his time. Lacan, coherent with his point of departure, at once denies biological relevancy to death, conceived as the return of the animate to the inanimate. He develops it in Seminar II.

What forces Freud to think about death as fate of the living seized by a repetition which entails a bias towards death? What forces him to introduce this conception? What forces Freud to think of that, says Lacan, it is not the death of living beings but human life. By this expression he deems human exchange, intersubjectivity, the fact of language. On the one side Lacan admits repetition as a clinical phenomenon, yet, on the other, he bestows a complete different meaning to the connection between repetition and death.

Where Freud, in his extreme speculation, perceives repetition as an originally vital phenomenon, Lacan doesn't. The Lacanian repetition is not coming from the behavior of the living organism. It is not a vital phenomenon but an anti-vital one, much as according to Freudian speculation in the human species repetition opposes adaptation. Repetition and adaptation are two important registers at times pursued with difficulty, yet persistently, along this paper of Lacan.

All animal psychology celebrates the adaptation of the animal organism to its milieu. Von Uexküll enliven reference is permanent with Lacan: he shows for instance the way the fly owns a world to itself by apprehending from the environment significant spaces to which it appears gloriously adapted. Adaptation culminates there in harmony. Therefore adaptation, fitting, or, as Lacan argues in "L'étourdit," trait by trait rapport between the *Umwelt* and the *Innenwelt*, between the exterior world and the animal's interior world. Thus, a perfect inside/out between the organism and its milieu.

It is in relation to this important experimental concept, arising from observation, that repetition, by contrast, takes on its dimension. It's in relation to this wonderful, harmonic adaptation, that Freudian repetition re-read by Lacan takes on relief, to the extent that you don't have to be a witch doctor to show that repetition is, for the human kind, a factor of failure to adapt; that repetition such as it originates in the clinic, appears fundamentally as determining a maladjusted behavior in relation to life requirements, to the well-being of the body.

What Freud calls need of repetition, far from being a need like any other one appears on the contrary as an disharmonic constraint concerning the living being as such. In this respect Lacan admits the fact of repetition. He demonstrates that with regard to adaptation, repetition belongs to a register which is not at all biological, yet can only be thought in the register of language. This is already outlining, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the place of the superego as principle of anti-vital repetition.

THE SUPEREGO'S DRIVE

This is what leads Freud to introduce his concept of the superego—till then related to what suited self-preservation in the living being—in the exact lieu of the ego. Thus he equates the drives of the ego to the drives of the living being sufficing its subsistence. In chapter V of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* you see Freud's embarrassment with the term of the ego drives; throughout his difficult argumentation the drives of the ego become the drive of death. He starts putting the drives of the ego in brackets. He states, nevertheless, about 1925, in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, that it is just a provisory appellation simply rooted in the first Freudian terminology. The drive of death, as it looms in Freud's text, is the drive of the superego. Self-preservation, in itself a prerogative of the ego and a reissue of the Aristotelian soul, is dissolved. What emerges instead is a drive that restores the living to death—the opposite of self-preservation. Lacan reads it like detours of the signifying system, which is the Freudian name for the superego. There is in Freud, supported and valued as such, a dualism of drives. There is death drive, which I translate as drive of the superego, and there is the sexual drives, life drives adverse to the drives that lead to death—hence they are not drives of self-preservation, but of reproduction. Freud bases this dualism on Weismann's biology, on the difference between soma and the germ-cell.

A REUNIFIED DRIVE

Here we can question the place of libido between the death drive and the sexual drives. This place seems particularly complex since, on one side, libido is present in so called self-preservation drives that refer to the ego as reservoir of libido, yet on the other it is equally present in the sexual drives that preserve life. To this effect Freud remarks that the opposition between drives of the ego and sexual drives proves to be inadequate, and he intends to rebuff the inconvenience which consists in locating the libido inside the dualism and replacing this opposition by that of life drives and the death drive.

You must notice the striking transformation that Lacan performs on this theory of drives allegedly grounded on biology. When we say drive we are not taking into account, in spite of Freud's repeated warnings, the dualism of the drives: Lacan's perspective outclasses the dualism of the drives. Lacan takes great pains to extract the drive as such from what Freud accepted under the form of this dualism. Besides he surrounds it with all the precautions so as to render infeasible its avoidance so pretext that by doing so you would fall down into Jungism, pansexuality, etc.

Often I spoke about the drives in Lacan without underlining the evident and major fact that he annuls the Freudian dualism of the drives. He says it his way, discreetly, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*: "The distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive. But all the sexual drives bring out death as signifier."¹⁰ He is even clearer in the contemporary *écrit* to the above mentioned Seminar, "Position de l'inconscient" where he argues that "every drive is virtually drive of death."¹¹ This means but the annulment of the Freudian dualism. He represents it to us under the form of his myth of the lamella, which is a mythical representation of the libido. He draws his inspiration from the reference Freud takes from Plato's *Banquet* so to fashion his myth from that of Aristophanes. He represents for us the libido as an organ, as an object, but an object endowed with a deadly sense. He defines the libido under the form of the myth, as a being carrier of death.

Lacan's complex exertion touches on both death and libido. It consists in showing that death is by no means the prerogative of the death drive, that it is present in the sexual drives and, symmetrically, the libido is present in the death drive. This double demonstration, scattered along Lacan's teaching, finally results in the annulment of the dualism of the drives as well as allowing us today to say "the drive." Freud himself indicates that the libido is found in the death drive when he defines, in chapter V, repetition as repetition of a primary satisfaction, a somehow washed out and

inadequate repetition. Straightaway he posits failure as the foundation of repetition. The satisfaction attained by repetition is not equivalent to the mandatory satisfaction. There is always a deficit. Here Freud perceives the origin of what shoves ahead the human being, of what precludes satisfaction in any established situation, forcing him to move ahead in his path towards death, before the aim of a complete satisfaction could be attained.

The essential Freudian dichotomy is re-absorbed somehow by Lacan who evinces that death and the libido have close links. This is the real sense of his myth of the lamella: the libido is a deadly being. This formula distorts, gets over the boundaries Freud established for the dualism he drags with him ever since the difference between drives of the ego and sexual drives, and life drives and death drive. This monism of the drive is certainly a moment of consequence in Lacan's teaching. His point of departure is eminently binary: language and libido, symbolic and imaginary. The very movement of his teaching rolls towards the production of monist categories. Somehow we witness entire sections of his teachings collapse when these monist categories arise, the first of which is that of a reunified drive.

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