Review of Jean Laplanche’s *Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man*

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The legacy of Jean Laplanche seems poised to acquire a new gravity and sphere of influence in the Anglophone world, with a convergence of events in 2015. At the 2015 IPA congress in Boston, members of the scientific committee of the *Fondation Laplanche* put on a three-day course introducing Laplanche’s work to the larger IPA community. While introducing Laplanche’s work for the audience, the presenters, by and large, emphasized Laplanche’s own dialectical method of reading (as in his own treatment of Freud), of working back over the whole of a corpus, to parse out its founding binary oppositions, torsions and syntheses, to understand how an over-arching structure reflects, and is determined by, the process of its genesis over time. One of the implicit subplots of these meetings was of the challenge (in the absence of Laplanche himself) to turn this dialectical operation onto his body of work. For Anglophones, this proves difficult, as much of the corpus has not been translated. It is highly significant, then, that this IPA course coincided with another initiative of the *Fondation: 2015* marks the publication of translations of three important texts in the Laplanchean tradition (Laplanche’s *The Temptation of Biology: Freud’s Theories of Sexuality*, *Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man*, and Dominique Scarfone’s *Laplanche: An Introduction*). These publications are the first new translations published under the auspices of the *Fondation Laplanche* since Laplanche’s death in May 2012.

Released in the summer of 2015, *Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man* collects the principal essays of Laplanche between 1992 and 1999, a time in which he was also working as the scientific director of *Les Oeuvres complètes de Freud*. These essays, some of which have past English translations elsewhere, develop further our dual-visaged image of Laplanche as both an original thinker of profound rigour and unadorned lucidity, and as a faithful, yet vigilantly critical reader and translator of Freud. While this anthologizing collection does not have the precise, unfolding deliberation of his book-length studies (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* and *New Foundations For Psychoanalysis*), the scatter of these essays forms a kind of constellation around the edifice of the general theory of seduction. To take up a

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1 *The Temptation of Biology: Freud’s Theories of Sexuality* is a translation of the seventh and final volume of Laplanche’s series of *Problématiques*.

2 Published by *The Unconscious in Translation* (UIT) press under the direction of Jonathan House, these texts represent the latest achievements of a translation project whose ultimate aim is to translate the entire Laplanche corpus (as well as other important texts in the French psychoanalytic tradition), so that the afterwardly working-through of his trajectory can commence in Anglophone psychoanalytic societies.
 Psychedelic Discourse

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favoured fencing figure of his, the diversity of these engagements (the politics of training and institutional transmission, the clinical means and ends of analytic technique, the epistemological integrity of psychoanalysis, etc.) in their various lunges, parries and ripostes all seem oriented by a common tactic: in their new elaborations of his established themes they all pivot around and target the core “exigency” of the Freudian expérience. For Laplanche, the Freudian expérience is made up of the transference situation (on the one hand) and the free association/disassociation method (on the other). Laplanche often emphasized the two senses of French word expérience, as both experience in the conventionally English sense of practical engagement over time, and (with its added French sense) as an experimental endeavour. The psychoanalytic experience as Freud discovered it (situation plus method), is a laboratory that generates its own epistemological object (the repressed Unconscious).

There are essential works in this volume for readers of Laplanche and French psychoanalysis. For an Anglophone readership, they may be grouped into three categories: first, those that were previously translated and published in Essays on the Otherness (1999). These important essays find fresh new translations under the care of Jeffrey Mehlman, particularly “A Brief Treatise on the Unconscious.” A second group of essays also had been previously translated, but were in need of more scholarly English versions. A third and final category, on which I will spend the majority of my time, are a group of essays previously unavailable to the Anglophone public, and which offer new developments. Targeting as they do the various temptations and strayings of Freudian and Post-Freudian psychoanalysis, these works pose extremely relevant questions for the international psychoanalytic establishment, and for the Anglo-American context, in particular.

With the legitimacy of psychoanalysis being questioned from manifold directions, Laplanche is here characteristically unapologetic about the scientific character of Freud’s discovery, and of the ways in which this modality continues to be betrayed by psychoanalysts and training institutes of diverse orientations today. In “The Training Analysis: A Psychoanalysis on Command,” an essay ostensibly framed as a memoir of L’Association psychanalytique de France’s abolition of the category of a ‘training’ analysis for its candidates, Laplanche’s topic is the question of the “goal-representation” implicit in a training analysis, and its implications for the transmission of psychoanalytic knowledge and the maintenance of psychoanalytic institutions. A treatment oriented by preordained goals like those of institutional norms is antithetical to a psychoanalytic treatment, which brackets the definition of the ends of an analysis in the service of unfettered exploration and the scientific horizon of the analytic expérience. Laplanche comes back to this point in “Psychoanalysis in the Scientific Community”, when he suggests that any legislated analysis (including the training analysis) is “functioning as power, indoctrination and affiliation.” It is only in the context of its specific expérience (as laboratory: with its specific situation and method) that psychoanalysis can take its rightful place in the scientific community, by submitting its theories to refutation and falsification; otherwise, psychoanalysis becomes another purveyor of ideology or “myth.” On a reading of these texts it becomes clearer that
Laplanche is working to further specify the epistemological object and foundations of psychoanalysis, in order that the radical core of Freud’s discovery might be preserved.\(^3\)

As Laplanche argues throughout the collection, Freud established a distinction between two kinds of theorizing operating in psychoanalysis: the spontaneous ‘self-theorizing’ of an individual, narrativizing and symbolizing his/her experience (on the side of both the analysand, and the child with his “sexual theories”), and metapsychology, as the theory linked to and checked against the experience of the clinic (on the side of the analyst). Culture, the great repository of “myths”, supplies the individual with codes to translate experience, and to defend against anxiety. For Laplanche, if the analyst uses his/her theory (whether metapsychology or otherwise) to provide the analysand with a new code for this experience (an interpretation), the analyst is performing hermeneutic psychotherapy rather than psychoanalysis. The synthetic task of interpretations and constructions are the proper domain of the analysand, and while not excluded from the analytic treatment, they are not the primary activity of the analyst.

It is on this basis that Laplanche can argue (in what, at first, seems a startling irony) that psychoanalysis, as a method of breaking down and destructuring the analysand’s symptomatic self-theories is an “antihermeneutics.” In “Psychoanalysis as Anti-hermeneutics”, Laplanche finds a model of this destructuring mode in the early Freud of the first edition of the *Traumdeutung*, for which the notion of “universal” symbols and types of dreams are conspicuously absent, only added later (he argues) with the influence of other analysts (i.e., Jung). Analysing dreams comes of unraveling their various strands, to discover their clandestine workings. If the method is oriented towards de-composing the derivatives of the analysand’s unconscious, then the analytic situation must be secure and consistent enough to shelter and contain this destructive process. In a number of essays here, like “Goals of the Psychoanalytic Process”, Laplanche ruminates on this paradoxical character of the analytic situation, as both agent provocateur and vessel of the method, and notes that it must repeat and resume something primal in the analysand, for the primary process to emerge. The situation provokes the transference by submitting the analysand to the enigmatic address of another, within the hollow set up by the benevolently abstinent analyst’s listening.

If therapeutic action is a result of this primal exposure to the adult other and its reopening under treatment, it is because of the closure represented by repression and the institution of the ego. Orienting towards an outside of the psychic apparatus (so-called “two-body” models) or towards an outside of the analytic vessel (e.g. to “reality” or the normative), without reference to the founding closure of the psyche (and its subsequent narcissism) diverts the process away from the unconscious, as repressed infantile sexuality and its derivatives. In “Forces at Play in Psychical Conflict,” Laplanche engages with the privilege given, in certain moments by Freud (and, by association, psychoanalytic traditions which base themselves primarily on the structural model), to the central importance of external reality and adaptation in the constitution of the ego. What this kind of position misses are the ramifications of narcissistic investment for the ego and its reality: he writes, “[t]he exterior world sketches lines of force only through investment by a living being... the exterior world can be perceived solely as a function of such an investment”. In other words, after the flood of narcissism in the investment of the ego and its life world, this territory becomes forever a floodplain, always

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\(^3\) See Hélène Tessier on the notion of the “epistemological object” in Laplanche.
subject to the order of the libidinal surge: with its tides, levels and thresholds. While some psychoanalytic theories attempt to orient themselves to an external reality, the world outside, for Laplanche, is always already invaded and occupied by “the Sexual” (as he would later come to call it). On the other hand, while Laplanche’s emphasis on the role of alterity in both the constitution of the psychic apparatus and in the therapeutic action of the treatment may seem familiar to various “intersubjective” schools of thought, the ego and its narcissistic regime represent an authentic closure, that therapies of symmetry would necessarily misrecognize. It is only in terms of the dissymmetry of the analytic situation that the unconscious can be approached with analysis.

In the wake of Laplanche’s absence, the question of his work’s legacy will, no doubt, be contested at various levels, and one can see tokens of this in Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man. In the preface to his translation, entitled “Interpreting [with Laplanche]”, Jeffrey Mehlman reflects on submitting Laplanche to the Laplanchean mode of reading. As translator of the Life and Death in Psychoanalysis in 1976, Mehlman suggests that in the evolution of Laplanche’s work “the model [has] changed”. From an early “structural” emphasis on the unconscious, he suggests Laplanche turns the focus of the later work towards its genesis. What shifts in the problematic in a surreptitious manner, he argues, is the status of structure. From apparently being aligned (in Life and Death) with the unconscious contra the ego and its discourse, the unconscious (from New Foundations on) becomes associated with the primal speech act of the enigmatic message, with structure being associated with the ego. This kind of reading recalls, of course, Laplanche’s own analysis of the way shifts in the architectonics of the Freudian problematic lead to the transformation of the meaning and status of a number of fundamental concepts. However, Mehlman’s interpretation of Laplanche’s evolution misses its profoundly dialectical nature.⁴

In what is regarded as the first work of his corpus, “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study” (the Bonneval paper of 1959 authored with Serge Leclaire), Laplanche’s thesis is that the unconscious is not primarily characterized by structure; in fact, its distinct topical status (and its relative structuration), is a result of the “process that introduces the subject into a symbolic universe.” Or, as he reiterated in a 1965 postscript to the paper: “[t]he Unconscious, we said, rather than a language, is the very condition of language”. This condition of structuring, viewed in terms of the latter developments of the general theory of seduction, can then be associated with the traumatic, forced entry into the symbolic universe of culture: seduction. The emergence of the psychic apparatus, with its “structural”/topographical order, is a result of the failed attempt to symbolize this seductive address: that is to say, with primal repression. Seduction, Repression, Symbolization: these terms denote different moments in the dialectic of psychic life. With this in mind, to read Laplanche’s corpus critically is to see the architectonic shifts of its development as reflecting attempts to reckon with and symbolize the source-object of the work, in its various aspects. In what he irreverently called ‘Laplanche’s law’, Laplanche repeatedly argued with reference to the developments of Freud’s work, that “theoretico-

⁴ On the question of the dialectical nature of genesis and structure in Laplanche, it is should be noted that one of his teachers at the École Normale Supérieure was the Hegelian philosopher, Jean Hyppolite. Hyppolite was the author of the seminal text, Genesis and Structure in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit.
genesis reproduces ontogenesis”. One of the themes of this volume is to precisely delineate in what context this law can be operational: metapsychological theory can approximate and reproduce its object only within the terms of the laboratory of the Freudian experience (situation and method). Yet, as these new initiatives continue to develop our understanding of this critically important body of work, it is yet to be determined to whom it is addressed; as Laplanche writes, of the cultural address: “[the] message of the ‘creator’... is not directed at a single individual in whom he must produce a specific ‘effect’... it is potentially infinite, open to the enigmatic reception by a public ‘scattered in the future’ (Mallarmé)”. What it means to be Laplanchean will, no doubt, be found in the forms this scatter takes.

Bibliography