

## REVIEW ESSAY

### THE UNCONSCIOUS IN TRANSLATION: JEAN LAPLANCHE

*Laplanche: An Introduction* by Dominique Scarfone (D. Bonnigal-Katz, Trans.). New York, NY: The Unconscious in Translation, 2015. 144 pp.

*The Temptation of Biology: Freud's Theories of Sexuality* by Jean Laplanche (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: The Unconscious in Translation, 2015. 140 pp.

*Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man* by Jean Laplanche (J. Mehlman, Trans.). New York, NY: The Unconscious in Translation, 2015. 304 pp.

*Freud and the Sexual* by Jean Laplanche (J. Fletcher, J. House, & N. Ray, Trans.). New York, NY: The Unconscious in Translation, 2011. 318 pp.

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### Introduction

“I like the titles of articles: they are often more interesting than the content” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 154). In the spirit of Laplanche’s attention to titles, his own included (which he carefully crafts even for his collections of papers, and which we will have occasion to study), I will begin by explicating this one.

The first meaning is simply that this paper reviews the first books in a series devoted to the work and thought of Jean Laplanche published by The Unconscious in Translation, a new publisher headed by Jonathan House. Intending to translate “works that otherwise would not be available in English” (Laplanche, 2015a, book cover), The Unconscious

in Translation on Laplanche includes *Freud and the Sexual* (2011), *Laplanche: An Introduction* (Scarfone, 2015; this includes a retranslation of Laplanche and Pontalis's seminal and earliest paper originally translated in English in 1968 in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*), *The Temptation of Biology: Freud's Theories of Sexuality* (2015a), and *Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man* (2015b). These translations, other than the retranslation of his very early work, cover Laplanche's later work spanning lectures and essays published from 1992 through 2006, thus just about completing the translation of his oeuvre that includes such seminal books as *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1977; *Vie et Mort en Psychanalyse*, 1970) and, with Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1973; *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*, 1967), among others.

The Unconscious in Translation is particularly well suited to Laplanche's thought, because both "the unconscious" and "translation," as well as the unconscious "in" translation, are some of its most central features in a variety of overlapping combinations. Here are just a few:

- To begin, he headed the French translation of Freud's collected works, a project Laplanche saw not as a straightforward translation of the texts but as a way of relating intellectually to Freud, of putting Freud's thought to "work," and of having the translator and the reader "work it over."
- The act of translation requires close readings and becomes a method of studying, and hence of sharpening fundamental psychoanalytic concepts, e.g., the unconscious.
- For Laplanche, the task of translating the unconscious lies at the center of the human condition. He refers to it throughout his work as the "drive to translate," and we find it on the last pages of one of his last publications (Laplanche, 2011, p. 310) as if to punctuate the importance of the concept.
- The above begs the question, what is the unconscious? Short answer: the untranslated "residue" of the "enigmatic message." And to translate it from what to what? Short answer: from enigmatic message to "englobing" narratives.

Before we flesh out these concepts in more detail, I conclude this introduction with why it is important for "us," particularly us American relationalists, to read Laplanche.

Not only do the concepts embedded in “the unconscious in translation” lay out a path to the fundamentals of Laplanche’s thought, they also highlight some of the most important reasons why I believe we should read him.

The first is to be found in his unique “return to Freud” (very different from Lacan’s). In contrast to our own tradition, where the not uncommon attitude is that Freud has either been disposed of or left behind, Laplanche’s return to Freud is a literal return through careful rereadings of Freud’s texts in order to “work” (and rework) them by engaging the challenges of translation. This close study of his texts lead him to revisit some of “our own” cherished aspects of Freud’s thought, the seduction theory and its abandonment for instance, and to rework them in ways that are very different, and complementary, to our tradition. At the heart of these developments is the concept of “the enigmatic message” (the parents’ verbal and nonverbal communications that are freighted with messages that are unconscious, and hence “sexual”, to the parent) that are then incompletely “translated” by the infant/child. This “remainder” of translation (now the child’s unconscious) then becomes the impossible nut to crack for each individual life project and each individual analysis.

Laplanche therefore positions the unconscious (and its forever incomplete translation) at the heart of psychoanalytic intellectual and clinical endeavor, *something* we have too often “forgotten.” Reconsidering such concepts as the unconscious, analytic neutrality, analytic and/versus therapeutic action, sexuality, and seduction from the perspective of a Laplanchean “idiolect” (a term he uses to mean an intellectual dialect) will provide us with a fresh perspective on our own relational English. There is nothing like learning a foreign language to better appreciate one’s mother tongue. With this in mind, an important feature of this article will be to review the English translations. Paying close attention to the challenges of translating Laplanche is something we can imagine would lie close to his heart and mind.

In the following, I begin with the topic of translating Freud and how that challenge permeates and lays the foundations for his thought. I will then review the translations of Laplanche’s work sequentially (as they were originally published in French), and finally I will conclude with a question raised in a prior review article in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* (Aron & Atlas, 2015): is Laplanche’s thought relational?

## Translating Freud

Laplanche devoted an important book, *Traduire Freud* (Laplanche, Bourguignon, Cotet, & Roberts, 1989; translated excerpts are to be found in Laplanche, Bourguignon, Cotet, & Roberts, 1992), and several papers in the present collections to exploring some of the many challenges of translation. He borrows the concept of “the test of the foreign” (Laplanche, 2015a; p. 30) from Berman’s (1984) book title, *L’Épreuve de l’Étranger*, to capture the complexity of the “work” of translation. In fact, the very translation of this phrase speaks to the concept. Although “épreuve” can be translated as “test,” it can also be translated as “challenge” or “task.” In addition, “l’étranger” is also best known to English readers as “the stranger.” These additional meanings are therefore to varying degrees folded into the original word and may get “lost in translation”; conversely, the English word may carry additional meanings in the word “test” not explicitly present in the original French. The polysemic nature of the words in play may lead to making manifest meanings in one language that were only secondary or latent in the other. The translator can therefore expand or refine concepts, or truncate and impoverish.

On the one hand, Laplanche (2011) sees his role of translator as “resisting unceasingly and to the greatest extent possible the adage according to which ‘every translator is a traitor’ and ‘every translation an interpretation’” as he aims towards the “fidelity of the translator” (p. 275). On the other hand, it is clear that translation is not a mere transposition of meaning but rather requires “work,”—or a “working over”—of the original text. Indeed, he expands on this in the paper from which the above quote is taken. The paper’s title, “Freud tel que je le fréquente” (Laplanche, 2007, p. 265), is in and of itself a demonstration of the intricacies of translation. It is translated as “In Debate with Freud” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 275). Although Laplanche does indeed debate Freud and uses close readings and translations to do so, “fréquenter” is used to mean “going out” or “getting to know” (as in a sustained relationship), so a more literal translation would be “Freud as I have been going out with him,” perhaps a bit ponderous but it reflects the complexity of Laplanche’s relationship to Freud’s oeuvre.

It is precisely this complex relationship that is expressed in the act of translation. Although it is clear that Freud is the master, he in no way intends “to transform [his] oeuvre into a sacred text” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 275). In fact, “‘doing justice’ to a great text means not masking but

restoring its contradictions, its weaknesses, its moments of hesitation and imprecision, and even its incoherences" (pp. 275–276), and presumably this is something that only someone who "knows" Freud (intellectually) can truly do. Laplanche (2015b) describes his translation as part of a larger project "'to work Freud' (and to put him to work) which means 'to do him justice' in his discoveries, but also in his errors and, even more, in the way in which his thought proceeds" (p. 171). Jonathan House (personal communication, November 15, 2016) suggests the additional meaning in Laplanche's notion of "work": that it intends to fix something that is broken in order to make it work again.

*Translating "Anlehnung" and "Nachträglichkeit"*

For Laplanche, these two words, when careful attention is paid to their translation, set off extensive theoretical reflection of foundational psychoanalytic concepts. "Trieb" and "Instinkt" are also studied in detail by Laplanche (as by many others), but the former, particularly "Anlehnung," are almost unique to Laplanche. He returns to them frequently over the course of his oeuvre, working them (and Freud) over to refine his own unique perspective.

"Anlehnung" refers to the relationship between sexual drives and needs for self-preservation (hunger/thirst). Among Laplanche's preferred Freud passages is the following: "the satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated, in the first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to one of the functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later" (Freud, 1905/1953a, second sentence added 1915). It is clear that in this passage the original state of the infant, as it takes in nourishment, is object related or object attached. So, when Strachey translates that a "method for finding the object . . . is the 'anaclitic' or 'attachment'" (pp. 221ff), he has it all wrong. The object need not be "found" from a monadic state because the infant is immediately in relation. This misinterpretation begins with Strachey's "invention of the barbaric and pseudo-scientific term 'anaclisis'" (Laplanche, 2011, p. 33) in lieu of a careful study and translation. This kind of reflection would go a long way to question the received dogma of the anobjectal polymorphously perverse infant and replace it with much more complex, nuanced, and even contradictory readings of Freud's texts.

So how does Laplanche translate "Anlehnung?" "Étayage." Translators either use the French word or translate it as "leaning-on." The sexual

drive leans on hunger in order to eventually detach itself and follow its own independent path. “Étayage” is often used in construction, where structures lean on each other to build an overall more complex one. So, what begins with a relatively uncomplicated hunger–food exchange eventually becomes subsumed into a much more complex sexual web. “Within individual evolution, sexuality has a tendency to cover over like a net and to coopt the totality of inter-human relations” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 50).

According to the Freud passage selected above, infantile sexuality therefore does not begin as self-enclosed autoeroticism. So, in his seminal 1968 article (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968), Laplanche makes the point that “*autoeroticism* in psychoanalytic writings is often misunderstood to be a category of object relations, considered as a first stage, enclosed within itself, from which the subject must regain the world of objects. . . . He [Freud] clearly indicates that the drive *becomes* autoerotic only after having lost its object. . . . Thus the ‘origin’ of *autoeroticism* is the moment in which sexuality detaches itself from any natural object, gives itself over to fantasy, and by that very process creates itself as sexuality” (Scarfone, 2015, pp. 111–112). So, where does the infant’s sexuality come from?

Here, the term “Nachträglichkeit” is crucial to clarify Laplanche’s (2015a) proposition, “the seduction theory alone explains the true nature of leaning-on” (p. 32). What Laplanche has in mind is that the sexual drive leans on the hunger–food exchange so hard that it infiltrates itself and takes over, perverts it. The sexual drive comes from the adult. This seduction is the initial “universal” trauma that affects every parent–infant relation and sets the parameters of the human condition. It is this trauma that haunts our adult life and that is continuously revisited (the return of the repressed), and is embedded in the concept of “Nachträglichkeit.”

“It is the French reading and translation of Freud that gave the concept of *après coup* its importance” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 49), and Laplanche attributes that to his analyst, Lacan. Although the French “*après-coup*” has often come to be used in the English, Laplanche has also suggested “afterwardsness” as a workable alternative. A literal translation of “*après-coup*” could be “after-shock,” which “is closely tied to the theory of seduction: it implies the deposit of something that will be reactivated only later and will thus become active only in a ‘second phase’—which constitutes the theory of seduction” (p. 51). As we will see below, this leads Laplanche to one of his central concepts: the generalized theory of seduction.

He again disagrees with Strachey's translation, "deferred action," which suggests a "delayed determinism of the present by the past" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 4). The shock of the initial seduction is too unformed, too unclear (we will see he uses the term "enigmatic") to have a precise determining effect on the individual's development. That is because the seduction comes from the adult's unconscious (the parent knows not what he does or says) and overloads an uncomprehending infant/child. The full measure of the "effect" of the trauma can only manifest itself when the older child/adult begins to *try* to make sense of it all the past unformulated exchange when triggered by experiences in the present. But this retroactive sense making is not a "sovereign retroactive attribution of meaning, the casting into hermeneutical narrative form of the past by the present" (p. 4). He rejects the "relativism . . . and even the 'creationism'" (p. 246) consistent with postmodern approaches. The retroactive attempt to make sense of the parent's unconscious seduction is limited by the specifics of the parent's unconscious—which in the end remain unknown for the most part.

As we will see, the significance of the translation of these two words infiltrates all of Laplanche's work. What does it mean to "make sense of the unconscious?" This is the question that Laplanche develops throughout his work through the concept of "translation of the unconscious," which is the ultimate unattainable goal of human life. The translations, "étayage" and "après-coup," are intricately linked with the translation of the unconscious, and in turn, with his unique definition of the unconscious as I attempt to put the "unconscious in translation" into action below.

#### *Laplanche: An Introduction* (Scarfone, 2015)—1964

This book includes a primer by the Laplanche scholar Dominique Scarfone, a retranslation of Laplanche and Pontalis's (1964) early seminal article, "Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origines, origines du fantasme," initially translated in 1968 as "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" with an added "Post-Scriptum" introduction by the authors from 1985, a translation of Laplanche's preface to *Au-delà du Principe du Plaisir* (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), and finally a complete bibliography of Laplanche's published works and their English translations.

Although the bibliography is of considerable practical value, I find primers that do a fly-over of an entire oeuvre in sixty-four pages of

limited interest, and this is no exception. The real interest and substance of this book lies in the retranslation, by Jonathan House, of his seminal article with Pontalis.

But why retranslate? One reason could be that the second translation is superior to the first, and this is certainly the case here. If that is the case, then another reason for including this retranslation in the collection is that it could serve as an intriguing foreshadowing of the more fully developed themes and concepts of the “later Laplanche.”

Let’s begin with the title. As we saw, Laplanche paid close attention to titles, and it is obvious that a lot is going on in the original “*Fantasma originaire, fantasmes des origines, origines du fantasme*,” much more than in the initial translation, “*Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality*.” Indeed, House’s translation “*Primal Fantasy, Fantasies of Origins, and Origins of fantasy*” is certainly closer to the original, and as he explains his intent throughout the translation was to stay close to the authors’ “provocations and playfulness” (Scarfone, 2015, pp. 71–72), and he characterizes the initial translation as “inexact” (p. 13). House (2016) continues, “this is not simply a matter of style” because it expresses the “authors’ principled refusal, following the example of Freud, to force their thinking onto the procrustean bed of academic/scientific style” (pp. 71–72). I would go further and suggest that “style” is an integral part of the thinking, and that when the style is lost in translation so is much of the thought. It is in that spirit that Lacan (1966, p. 9) opens his *Écrits* by quoting Buffon (1793)—“le style c’est l’homme même” (the style is the man himself). Put in a different way, style is not simply something that dresses up the concept, the concept is inseparable from its stylistic expression. This is particularly clear in the use of metaphors, and being able to convey the specifics of a metaphor in the translation (not change it into a different metaphor) is just about equivalent to conveying the concept itself (something I will point to over the course of this article).

Let’s continue with the opening sentence to illustrate this point: “Depuis ses origines, la psychanalyse brasse le matériel des fantasmes” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1985). The first translation reads, “from the earliest day, psychoanalysis has been concerned with the material of fantasy,” whereas House translates, “from its origins, psychoanalysis has brewed the material of fantasy.” To begin, House keeps the word “origin,” which is clearly intended to evoke its multiple repetitions in the title, and which is lost in “from the earliest day.” Further, the richness and evocativeness

of “brewed” retains much of the French word “brasser” that is completely lost and even distorted in the flatness (and even deadness) of “has been concerned with.” “Brewed” retains the action of “brasser,” a verb that is also used to mean “to mull over” or “to churn over,” which captures the authors perspective on psychoanalytic theory as a dynamic event rather than a fixed doctrine, and that sets the stage not just for this particular article but for the whole of Laplanche’s thought, not to mention his “relationship” to Freud that we have already touched upon.

Another reason to include this translation in the series is that we find in it the “origins” of Laplanche’s thought, a thought that he later describes as developing in the form of a “spiral, meaning that I continually return to the same points, but by way of a curve, seeking so as possible to progress” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 9). An important component of this spiral involves close readings of specific passages of Freud’s work, something that is part of what Laplanche calls “putting Freud to work” (Scarfone, 2015, p. 171).

One of the legs that this work rests on is what the authors refer to as a ‘return to Freud,’ an expression popularized by Lacan (1966). Although Laplanche was an analysand of Lacan, the authors made clear at this early juncture that by proceeding in their “‘return to Freud’ entirely in our own way we demonstrated our refusal to buy a one-way ticket to Lacan” (Scarfone, 2015, p. 72).

One of the passages that Laplanche will often return to is the famous letter to Fliess where Freud declares “I no longer believe in my neurotica” (Freud, 1954, p. 215 [letter no. 69 of September 21, 1897]) and seemingly abandons the seduction theory to eventually replace it with the Oedipus complex, as conventional psychoanalytic doctrine would have it. “Historians of psychoanalysis, repeating the official line of Freud himself, tell us that Freud, by facing facts and abandoning the seduction theory, cleared the ground for the discovery of infantile sexuality, they simplify a much more ambiguous evolution” (Scarfone, 2015, p. 87).

Laplanche takes the view that Freud failed to bring seduction theory to its fully mature and generalized formulation rather than rejecting it altogether. Hence Laplanche sees remnants or residues of Freud’s “*intuition* of it (seduction as a quasi-universal fact”; Scarfone, 2015, p. 87; emphasis in the original) in texts subsequent to its supposed “abandonment.” One of these important texts that Laplanche returns to many times is *Three Essays on Sexuality*, where he makes use of the specific passage where

Freud explains that the mother, in the course of tender nursing her infant, “quite clearly treats him as a substitute for a complete sexual object” (Freud, 1905/1953a, p. 223).

Laplanche considers Ferenczi’s “Confusion of Tongues” (1949) one of the early developments of this line of thinking whereby the “‘language’ of passion is introduced by the adult into the infantile ‘language’ of tenderness” (Scarfone, 2015, p. 85). The authors refine this notion characterizing this “introduction” of one language into another as a violent and intrusive event, even in the most normal and tender of child-rearing practices. “Sexuality literally bursts in from outside, breaking and entering a ‘childhood world’” (p. 83). This adult sexuality bursts “into” the infant and becomes a “‘foreign body’ encysted within the subject” (p. 83). A quick note on House’s use of the term “encysted”: Although it is certainly in keeping with Laplanche’s later more mature and evocative metaphors to describe the origins of the unconscious (which we will encounter below), the phrase in the original “exclu à l’interieur” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1985, p. 55), literally “the excluded on the inside,” is a more straightforward, and less metaphorically evocative, early characterization of the unconscious.

So, if you will, the letter to Fliess can be seen as a “wrong turn” by Freud, and Laplanche, “like a detective on the trail” (Scarfone, 2015, p. 92) intends to pick up from that point on the trail to pursue those original insights. This brings us to the next book in our review, which is precisely about that wrong turn.

*The Temptation of Biology: Freud’s Theories of Sexuality*  
(2015a)—1991–1992

This book is drawn from the notes of a class he taught in the winter of 1991–1992, and its central thesis is that “the danger of going astray after the abandonment of the seduction theory can be summed up in one word: instinct” (Laplanche, 2015a, p.14).

But how is it determined that Freud went astray? Astray from what? Here, Laplanche expands on a notion found in Freud whereby psychoanalytic truth presses itself (in, however, hidden the ways) upon the seeker. He explains to his audience/reader that it “forces itself upon you” (Freud, 1916/1963a, p. 79) and he suggests a kind of surrender to the material in that you “let it work on you” (1916/1963b, p. 243).

Laplanche shifts to a metaphor that emphasizes “guidance” rather than “force.”

He uses the phrase “the exigency of the object” to capture how “it is the ‘unconscious’ object itself that guides the development of thought” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 6). Instead of the thinker guiding his/her thoughts, and like a novelist or playwright whose characters guide the writing, so the psychoanalyst’s “search is guided by a persistent aim” (p. 7). In the French, Laplanche (1993) wrote “un but qui insiste” (a goal that insists; p. 8), which captures the notion that the activity is located in the object rather than the aim of the seeker. The overriding metaphor of the psychoanalyst is that of a mountain climber who is drawn by the “exigency of the summit” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 8). “*Going-astray (le fourvoisement)* is inseparable from exigency, and indeed is a consequence thereof. A mountain climber fixated on the summit but lost in the mist may suddenly take a wrong turn and find himself at an impasse” (p. xii).

This is an interesting metaphor that Laplanche (2011) insists upon and returns to regularly all the way into his latest work. It is explicitly present in the French title of this book, *Le Fourvoisement Biologisant de la Sexualité chez Freud* (1993), of which a close, albeit cumbersome, rendition is *The Biologizing Wrong Turn of Sexuality in Freud*. In the translated title, *The Temptation of Biology: Freud’s Theories of Sexuality*, the interplay of “temptation,” “biology,” and “sexuality” is pregnant with provocative possibilities, of which the cover art of the translated edition (“Jules being dried by his mother) of a naked child and his mother is a titillating extension (in particular, the overlapping of the language of tenderness and passion). Although this translation is consistent with Laplanche’s overall thought, it fails to convey the view of psychoanalysis as a journey in theory construction, which is found in the metaphor of the psychoanalyst as mountain climber. It is found not just in the title but also in the cover art of the French edition, “Voyage of Ferdinand de Saussure to the Summit of Mont Blanc,” which portrays turn-of-the-century mountain climbers on their journey. Psychoanalytic theorizing is portrayed as a journey, similar to that of the analyst’s.

We now (re)turn to the specifics of this “wrong turn.” How is the concept of “instinct” a going-astray? In a prefatory cautionary note, Laplanche insists that denouncing “Freud’s biologizing tendencies by no means implies a dismissal of biology’s role in the human being. On the contrary, it

restores biology to a positive place, a place that is no longer mythological" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 4). And by "mythological," Laplanche means "the genetic, hereditary phylogenetic theory (that) has persistently dominated Freudian metapsychology ever since Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory" (pp. 4–5).

Laplanche (2015a) recaps his work from *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* where he does a close reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where "Freud's straying ["fourvoisement," elsewhere translated as "going astray"] towards biology culminates in the dichotomy between the life and death drives" (p. 110). It is not the concept of instinct per se that he finds fault with but the mythological status (read: theoretical narrative) that is conferred upon the "wondrous term(s)" life and death, which "can cover practically anything" (p. 108) and thus come to mean nothing really.

"The terms life and death can hardly be considered biological: any biological science could easily dispense with them. Freud introduces them into his account of sexual conflict, where they have no place, save I would say, in a more than metaphorical way that is profoundly inappropriate" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 107). In their "mythological" status, these terms lose any kind of (theoretical as well as clinical) "edge" because they "dethrone, encompass, and eventually destroy the 'erotic' in the name of wholeness" (p. 103). In order to have any real significance for the *human* being "life" and "death" must be anchored in "sexuality," which otherwise "loses any real place with the antagonistic pairing of love and aggression" (p. 111).

So, what Laplanche suggests is to replace "eros" and "thanatos" with the "sexual drive of life" and the "sexual drive of death." What these concepts incorporate is the sexual, and with it, "the foundation of my thesis, namely seduction" (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 106). In turn, at the heart of seduction lies the "enigmatic message" of the (m)other who is "'compromised' by her own unconscious—by her own 'internal' other, one might say—so that the messages the other sends are themselves compromised, or 'enigmatic'" (p. 106). "Enigmatic message" and "seduction" are concepts that Laplanche had already introduced by 1993, and they are developed further in the books discussed below.

In conclusion, the concept of "étayage" (*Anlehnung*), as discussed above, provides the framework for the "positive" place of biology as the original carrier of "sexuality" through the (m)other's compromised enigmatic messages, which she seduces "into" the infant. But with the

abandonment of the seduction theory, the straying-away of biology is also the “straying-away of *Anlehnung* . . . [hence] the seduction theory alone explains the true nature of leaning-on [étayage]” (Laplanche, 2015a, p. 32).

*Between Seduction and Inspiration: Man* (2015b)—1992-1998

This is a collection of papers originally published between 1992 and 1998, and it follows a collection of papers covering the years 1967 to 1992 entitled *La Révolution Copernicienne Inachevée* (1992), where he develops his concepts with the aim of furthering the Copernican revolution that is psychoanalysis, what he refers to as a “fundamental Copernicanism” in this collection (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 44).

He expands on Freud’s claim that psychoanalysis follows in the footsteps of Copernicus and Darwin, “two major blows to man’s naïve self-love” (Freud, 1916/1963b, p. 284), by being the “third and most wounding blow” (p. 285). Far from being original to Freud, the linking of Copernicus and Darwin was well-known at the time (Du Bois-Reymond, 1883), and setting himself in that noble lineage can be seen as compelling marketing. Embedded in Laplanche’s book and work is an ironic critique of Freud’s own narcissistic grandiosity with the claim that he failed to complete the task he set for himself, namely by having taken a “wrong turn.”

What is at issue here is the “decentering” of man, the origin of which modern thought often locates in Copernicus. Since then, “man seems to have got himself on an inclined plane—now he is slipping faster and faster away from the center” (Nietzsche, 1887/1969, p. 155). In the current collection concepts such as seduction, the enigmatic message, the unconscious, and analytic action are refined and sharpened to complete this slide. Although Freud (1916/1963b) describes this “most wounding blow” as the realization that “the ego is not even master in its own house” (p. 285), the completion of this slide for Laplanche is that his “own” house is not even “his.”

This “fundamental Copernicanism” to the human condition therefore finds its origins in a “initial Copernicanism” that is found in the “gravitation of the human child in the orbit of the sexual adult” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 86), and it is precisely at this point that Freud’s theoretical venture “went astray” and lost its way due to “an inappropriate theorization in which a biological determinism—which is more invoked than proved—relegates interindividual communication to secondary status”

(p. 164). Had Freud stayed the course of his “genuinely foundational discovery” (p. 164), he might have completed his Copernican revolution, which would have led to the “taking into account of the enigmatic dimension, of alterity, on the side of the child’s adult protagonist” (p. 16), something missing both in Freud and Lacan (p. 18). This whole field of investigation is grounded in the concept of “the implanting of the enigmatic message” (p. 56).

What makes a message “enigmatic?” Although all communications, whether verbal or nonverbal, are polysemic, the particular character of an enigmatic message is not just that it carries multiple meanings, “more” than the infant/child can make sense of, but more important, “more” than the *adult* “knows” him/herself to be communicating, owing to the fact that it is not just the conscious adult who is conveying a message, but also the adult’s unconscious.

What might an enigmatic message actually look like? Here it is important to note that Laplanche uses no concrete clinical examples in his work. This can be frustrating to an English-speaking reader for whom theory is usually of value only to the extent that it is grounded in concrete empirical “evidence.” In contrast, Laplanche is part of a tradition among psychoanalytic thinkers, typically French, for whom the action of ideas, although not unrelated to “evidence,” is not dependent on it. Laplanche does give lip service to Freud’s example of the nursing mother whose pleasure (or anxiety or disgust, etc.) touches the lips of the infant, but he does not develop it. Laplanche might be dismissed in some circles as being unempirical, but that criticism overlooks his steadfast insistence on evidence—psychoanalytic evidence, that is. I return to this point shortly.

In what way is it “implanted?” The idea is, in parallel to the concepts of *étayage* and confusion of tongues, that the manifest message, “I am feeding you to satisfy your hunger,” is “freighted” with (or a host to) other both conscious, and more important, unconscious (sexual) messages. The manifest message serves as an unbidden host of other messages, or as an unbidden host of messages of the “other.” In the verbal mode, a message as common as “say thank you to grandma” usually lists with stowaway cargo.

Laplanche’s (2015b) terminology to express this kind of appropriation of the manifest message, in addition to “implant,” includes “infest” (p. 113), “inhabit, interfere” (p. 111). Laplanche uses the word “parasité,” which is sometimes translated as “interfered” and “parasitized” at others.

It has the double meaning of “interference,” as in static noise that interferes with a signal or message, and “parasitized,” as in an infection that drains the strength of the host organism—see, for instance, Laplanche (2011) where the translation is “parasited by something else” (p. 205). Depending on the passage the context suggests either one or both of these meanings. All of these terms describe how the manifest message, which is “detectable et observable” (p. 11) carries with it something “else” much less detectable and observable (enigmatic), but which is nonetheless “vaguely intuited by the baby” (p. 55) and unknown to the (m)other. In the French, Laplanche (1999, p. 65) uses the term “ressentie” that is translated here as “intuited.” The most literal translation of “ressentie” is “felt,” and I would suggest that “intuited” is too complex, or formulated, an activity for what Laplanche has in mind, which is precisely why it must be “translated.”

The mother’s unconscious speaks, “I am letting you see something that you cannot understand” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 13). This excess “something” in the message is what makes it “enigmatic,” and it presses to be understood, to be translated into “something” that can be understood. The enigma activates, better yet, creates, the “drive to translate” (p. 199). Yet, the infant/child cannot do so, at least not completely, and the enigma can be seen as a “deposit” (p. 51), “waste matter or refuse” (p. 215), or “residue of translation” (p. 68) left behind. This is the unconscious. Laplanche examines the etymology of “un-con-scious” (p. 142), not-known-together, as an illustration of the unlinked detritus of incomplete meaning making.

A side note: Because they all refer to the same “object,” it might seem superfluous to linger on the use of these different metaphors of the unconscious—one metaphor being ostensibly equal to the other. But because there is no way of directly representing, or knowing, the unconscious, it can *only* be described and “known” indirectly through metaphor. As something that reveals itself only through absence, as being elsewhere from where one is looking, as being fundamentally “other,” there is no way of “looking *at* the unconscious,” as is erroneously said in clinical settings. The royal road can only be but a road, and the construction of that road is precisely what psychoanalytic thinking is about. Assoun (2005) illustrates how all “the major concepts of psychoanalysis require that the metaphor be put to (into) work” (p. 25; “les concepts majeurs de la psychanalyse vont exiger la mise au [en] travail de la métaphore”) precisely because metaphors “hold and swaddle”

(*sert et serre*) psychoanalytic concepts (p. 19) so closely as to be mutually entangled. Metaphor “draws its pertinence from the very intelligence of the unconscious thing. It articulates the formatting (*gestaltung*) of the unconscious as thought” (pp. 19–20; “puise sa pertinence de l’intelligence de la chose inconsciente. Elle signe donc la ‘mise-en-forme’ [*Gestaltung*] de l’inconscient comme pensée”). Hence, Laplanche’s metaphors of the unconscious can be seen as “the rigorous art of the metaphor elevated to the status of knowledge” (p. 31, “l’art rigoureux de la métaphore élevé au statut de savoir”).

The issue of the scientific status of psychoanalysis is anchored in its object of study, the unconscious. He devotes two papers to this and the following collection of papers, and it is important for him (and I believe for us who live in the land of evidence-based treatment) to have a firm footing in psychoanalysis’s empirical ground. His starting point is Freud’s definition: “psychoanalysis is the name (1) of a procedure for the investigation of mental processes which are almost inaccessible in any other way” (Freud, 1923/1955), with psychoanalysis as a therapeutic technique and as a collection of specific theories getting second and third billing.

The investigative procedure and the object of investigation (the unconscious) are tied to each other. All sciences have their unique investigative procedures and must rely on the “evidence” these procedures produce. Popper’s standard of falsification is therefore achieved, according to Laplanche. Furthermore, the indirectness and uncertainty of the evidence produced is not a function of its unscientific nature: quite the contrary. Just as quantum physics relies on indirect and uncertain evidence defined by its object of study, so does psychoanalysis. Dream analysis and free association (functioning under the principles of the metaphor) can only approach the unconscious indirectly, asymptotically. That does not mean that other sciences of the mind, which have more certain and easily verifiable “data,” are any more or less valid; their procedures are simply incapable of investigating those “mental processes” that psychoanalysis dedicates itself to.

We now return to the trajectory of the enigmatic message. Having been implanted, it “presses” to be understood, to be translated. But the task of the infant/child (or patient) is the impossible task of translating the incomprehensible detritus of the adult’s unconscious message. To appreciate the full measure of this task, it is important to keep in mind that this detritus (the enigmatic message) is not a “second meaning

hidden beneath the other" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 81), it is a non-sense that presses to be made into sense. The translation is incomplete at best, and the remainder creates the infant/child's unconscious, and this "residue" continues to insist on being "integrated, metabolized" (p. 115), translated.

The infant/child takes on this task, the "treatment" of the message's detritus, using "whatever means lie at hand" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 137); these include the idiosyncratic meanings the family (subculture) uses that are themselves drawn from mythicosymbolic cultural tools (including children's stories, myths, histories, etc.) to organize the world. Again, what might this look like? The following example was provided by my wife. As a toddler, she enjoyed licking stamps and sticking them to the wall, for which she was severely reprimanded by her mother, who said threateningly, "you are destroying government property!" Using the "means at hand," the toddler concluded that a forest somewhere was spontaneously bursting into flames with each stamp she licked and stuck to the wall.

We can imagine the enigma pressing in the toddler's mind to be converted, to be translated, from non-sense into sense. These instances of hermeneutic action are then part of a larger ongoing "narrativization, temporalization [of the] deposition of untranslated residues" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 77). Of course, the "challenge of translation" does not end with the toddler coming to understand that her mother meant (consciously) that the stamp was itself government property. The toddler "vaguely sensed" that "more" was being transmitted, and now the adult analytic patient comes to realize that her "mother" was saying more than she (both the child and the mother) knew.

The psychoanalytic patient takes over where the toddler left off, not by slipping in a ready-made (psychoanalytic) meaning in the place of the earlier partial ones (e.g., "it's clear that you were enraged at your mother's implied threat and wanted to burn her down"). And here is where institutionalized psychoanalysis, by relying on "psychoanalytic myths" (Oedipus and castration for Freud, the schizoid and depressive positions for Klein, and the law of the Father for Lacan are the ones he singles out most often) actually "encumber us" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 211) because "it is symbolism that silences associations. To take things further, synthesis or encoded thought is on the side of repression" (p. 209). Let us clarify: it is *premature* hermeneutic action that leaves the nonsense untreated.

Just like the toddler who believes that a forest bursting into flames completes the translation, so does a ready-made interpretation from one's psychoanalytic school leave as much nonsense untreated.

In these cases, the psychoanalyst cuts short (castrates?) the analytic process of "detranslation and the calling into question of narrative structures" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 251) in order to reveal the nonsenses as just that, without replacing it with the psychoanalyst's "sense" (his/her myths). Psychoanalysis is an "anti-hermeneutic" (p. 203) with as its main goal the breaking apart of (incomplete) meaning. Relying on the analyst's steadiness as an "artisan of unbinding" (p. 200) all the elements of the child-now-adult's "mise en ordre"—in our example these are, forest/burst/flames—as well as the elements of the mother's manifest message (destruction/government/property) must first be unlinked from each other, torn away from their apparent coherent order and scattered about through free association (psychoanalytic as anti-hermeneutic process). Only once this has been accomplished can these elements be rearranged into a (one hopes) more complete translation (the hermeneutic process). "Every case finds itself endlessly oscillating" (p. 243) between these two hermeneutic (therapeutic) and anti-hermeneutic (analytic) poles. And for Laplanche, it is the role of the analyst *not* to interfere with the patient's process of symbolization (hermeneutic); she or he is all too motivated to do so on her or his own.

I believe there may be a more profound reason, specific to his writing and thinking, that Laplanche avoids using clinical examples. The fact that the reader is left with questions about how to apply these concepts to concrete clinical situations may reflect the analytic action he advocates. Just like the role of the analyst is to question given meanings, so the role of the text (the theoretical writings) is to put the accepted dogma into question and leave it up to the patient/reader to rearrange the material into a new, more inclusive theoretical narrative. Providing specific examples of what he has in mind would wind up being prescriptive and prematurely leading the reader to the hermeneutic work they would do anyway while foreclosing further "putting into question" (analysis) of their theoretical assumptions.

Another aspect of analytic neutrality is the analytic situation itself where the (relative) inscrutability of psychoanalyst sets up the "hollowed-out transference" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 197), which "reactivates" (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 197; though I like the literal translation of "remet en jeu" [puts back into play] [Laplanche, 1999, p. 237]) in its full emotional strength the

original seduction of the enigmatic message. “It is in the hollow of the enigma proposed by the analyst that the analysand comes to lodge and re-elaborate the resonant void of his own earliest enigmas” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 89) (here the use of “earliest” to translate “originaires” in the original (Laplanche, 1999, p. 107) misses the emphasis that Laplanche puts on “origin,” “originary,” and so forth, as we saw above). Only once the patient has returned to the original seduction can the therapeutic work of translating the seduction of the other into “me” occur; he refers to this process as the “insertion into the ego” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 172; “mise en Moi,” Laplanche, 1999, p. 193).

Of course, no translation of the enigmatic message is ever complete, and the “mise en Moi” retains a healthy dose of repression, but it can be a repression that “maintains the sting of the enigma” and can be expressed: “I’m well aware . . . but all the same, I have intuition—that never ends—that I don’t really know” (Laplanche, 2015b, p. 276). Not only can we ever know completely (hence there is no such thing as a “completed” analysis), but, in a fascinating twist, Laplanche goes on to explain how a genuine cure maintains something of the original trauma. The wound left by the (m)other’s intrusion (Laplanche suggests we use the notion of the “bad-enough” mother) lingers in the curative process in order to allow one to be open to the other(s); “opened by” (the mother’s intrusion) becomes the basis for of “being open to” (p. 336). The “wound of the unexpected” (p. 280) is the foundation for the surprise of the new, of discovery, of knowledge, of creativity, in short, of all sublimation, what Laplanche also calls “inspiration” (p. 301).

In conclusion, we can return to the title of this collection: *human* life begins with seduction, reaches forever towards inspiration through translation, and is lived somewhere in between the two, between seduction and inspiration.

#### *Freud and the Sexual* (2011)—2000–2006

In this last collection of his papers (2000–2006), Laplanche (2011) refines his fundamental concepts around the organizing theme of sexuality. In the foreword, he explains that “what I call the ‘*sexual*’ is everything that emerges from the Freudian theory of an enlarged sexuality” (p. 1). The italicization of “sexual” fails to convey the efforts Laplanche took with his terminology. In the original, the sentence reads, “ce que je nomme ‘sexual’ (par difference avec sexuel) c’est tout ce qui resort de la théorie

freudienne de la sexualité élargie” (Laplanche, 2007, p. 4), Laplanche is taking pains to mark a difference between the terms “sexuel” and “sexual.” He insists on this in the parentheses section, which is simply skipped in the translation. Laplanche uses the foreign (in French) word “sexual” (he is using the German word that translates directly to the English) to distinguish it from the French “sexuel,” and to lay the foundations for the conceptual developments of this volume. He comments later, “it is perhaps an eccentricity on my part to speak of *le sexual* and not *le sexuel*, but I do so in order to indicate clearly this opposition and the originality of the Freudian concept” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 161). Laplanche uses the French term “bizarerie” (Laplanche, 2007, p. 155) that is translated as “eccentricity,” but I would like to retain the implications of “bizarre” because of its effects on the reader. Likewise, he deliberately seeks out to make the reader question what he has just read in his title.

The original title: “Sexual: La Sexualité élargie au sens Freudien.” The French reader is immediately confronted with a bizarre word—“sexual”—that is simultaneously strange and familiar. He defines with strikingly precise imprecision right in the foreword: “le sexual” “is not exactly what we think. It is much more complex and much more repressed, sometimes within barely formulated fantasies” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 2) than what we usually think of as “sexuel.” For the English reader, it might be useful to exchange the two words, and insert “sexuel” where Laplanche uses “le sexual.” Thus, the English reader would confront, as would the French reader, “the challenge of the foreign” (read: strange, bizarre; one could add “enigmatic”) word and experience the pressure to translate, to make sense of it. I believe that in his title Laplanche is demonstrating the force of the enigmatic message, embedded in the *sexuel*, on the human subject that translates into the drive (to translate).

To certain readers, this might seem to be splitting hairs, but for Laplanche (2011) this is fundamental. “Terms and concepts are weapons, weapons of war . . . against” the “sexuel” (p. 164), not just from the culture at large, but also from within institutionalized psychoanalysis where he finds that what has been “forgotten,” suppressed, and repressed in much of contemporary theory where “the great loser is infantile *sexuality* in the Freudian sense of the term” (p. 36).

In this volume, we find Laplanche not just continuing his “spiraling” theoretical exploration but also tightening the threads and tying his fundamental concepts into a tighter, more structured pattern—these

include “étayage,” “seduction,” “infantile sexuality” (the “sexuel”), “the implantation of the enigmatic message,” “the unconscious,” and “translation.” Through his unique blend of return and challenge to Freud, he has “enlarged the furrow that was dug and then abandoned by Freud” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 31). The original site of the life of the *sexuel* is at the breast, where “from the hat of hunger” (p. 68) “the introduction of the sexual element . . . are located on the side of the breast, *the sexual breast of the woman*, the inseparable companion of the drive of ‘self-preservation’” (p. 69). The “sexuel” infiltrates and leans on hunger (and tenderness), so that “seduction is the truth of leaning-on [étayage]” (p. 47).

Laplanche takes pains to distinguish his thought from attachment theory, which he considers limited by its assumption of symmetrical reciprocity in the parent–infant interaction. Whether it is around hunger or tenderness, it is only at the cost of tremendous distortion that attachment theory ignores (or represses) the *sexuel* in order to focus on “observable” symmetrical exchanges. There is no such thing as a straightforward feeding or exchange of tenderness that is not asymmetrically infected by the hidden (only indirectly observable) adult *sexuel*, there is no such thing as secure attachment, only variations of insecure ones (much like the “bad-enough mother”). This is “‘the fundamental anthropological situation’ (adult–infans) as originary asymmetry, whose other name is: seduction” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 89).

The concept of “fundamental anthropological situation” emphasizes that seduction is not necessarily a pathological trauma that can be avoided. It is “universal” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 263). He goes on to explain that “every adult, especially in the presence of a small child, sees this “perverse” sexuality (in the most general sense of the term) awaken within him—which cannot but be channeled into the earliest messages sent to the child from the adult” (pp. 264–265), “a bombardment of messages” (p. 173), one should add. In French, there are two words for awaken, “éveiller” and “réveiller.” Laplanche uses “réveiller,” which translates best to reawakens so the *adult’s* infantile sexuality, reawakened by the presence of the child, is then confusedly (in an admixture of conscious and unconscious messages) transmitted to the infant. The presence of the infant turns the knob of the *sexuel* to full volume in the adult, and the infant becomes the receiver of the adult’s message, which is passed on transgenerationally. But this “transgenerational transmission”

(of trauma) “never occurs in a mechanical and linear way. The vicissitudes always remain individual and particular” (p. 302). This also means that this transmission cannot be decoded with a Rosetta stone; there is no internal coherence and readily available meaning in these messages, which instead form an “internal foreign body . . . under the skin” (p. 208). The unconscious, like a splinter (a metaphor he revives from *Vie et Mort en Psychanalyse*, Laplanche, 1970) must “at all costs be mastered and integrated” (p. 208), but of course it cannot be, at least not completely. Thus, a “stock of untranslated messages . . . [or a] ‘purgatory’ of messages in waiting” (pp. 212–213) are left behind as the unconscious.

The constant pressure exerted by the unconscious can therefore be viewed as an insistence of the splinter to come out, for the message to express itself, which meets the infant-subject’s drive to translate, which always fails, despite the frequent manifest coherence of the message. For instance, as far back as she can remember into her childhood, a patient remembers her mother calling her a “fat lazy pig.” Much more than the obvious pathologically abusive aspects of this aggression, the profoundly problematic (enigmatic) aspects of this message turns out, after much exploration, to be (in part) its probable “protective” intent to “save” the patient from the abuse that the mother experienced herself. She may have “wanted” to protect the daughter she identified with the most. The initial translation “my mother hates me because I am bad” that the patient elaborated both consciously and preconsciously “bears the scar of the failure” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 129) of translation because it failed to include the mother’s “love” and “identification” to her daughter, which makes the traumatic message no less traumatic—quite the contrary. The goal of psychoanalysis is allow the patient the space “to reconstitute something of the initial message, and lead us to a new translation that is a little better able to encompass the total message” (p. 129).

So, although all translations of the *sexuel*-unconscious can only be partial, “some syntheses are better than others: that is, they are more inclusive, better able to integrate the repressed” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 88). Analytic action, to break up clearly insufficient meanings (“I am bad”) has as its goal to open the way for more inclusive narratives based on more extensive (and confusing) “evidence.” Laplanche’s emphasis on narrativization rejects both “cognitivist” (p. 89) and “vulgar pragmatist” (p. 94) perspectives, but he also avoids lapsing into “the ‘psychoanalytic’ invoked to justify the ‘anything goes’ that is called postmodernism” (p. 92).

Consistent with that line of thinking, both in practice and in theory, he insists on a “minimal positivism” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 95) that relies on “evidence”; in other words, psychoanalysis is “scientific,” but on its own terms. That is, just as *direct* observation of the electron is in many important ways impossible, so it is for the unconscious (and for infantile sexuality). That does not mean that observation is impossible (only indirect), nor unverifiable (only more inclusive). Hence, in contrast to postmodern relativism, the psychoanalytic researcher as a mountain climber responding to the exigency of the object can clearly take a *wrong* turn (p. 273) from which Laplanche claims psychoanalysis has been trying to find its way back. In a beautiful parallel between psychic and scientific activity, Laplanche describes how the subject’s “drive to translate,” created by the injury of the mother’s/parent’s seduction, can only lead to a wounded/incomplete (self)knowledge; so too psychoanalytic thought can be described as a “wounded rationalism: this would be one of the possible formulas for referring to Freud’s philosophy, in knowledge that the very wound is a stimulating element” (p. 273). We should not miss the parallel here between this theoretical knowledge and self-knowledge, which is also based on a wound, the wound inflicted by the mother, as we saw above.

#### Is Laplanche’s Thought Relational?

Given his emphasis on the presence of the mother as originary to one’s life, it might be tempting to make Laplanche a relational thinker. If what we mean by relational/interpersonal is that “the dogma of the ‘monad,’ a state from which the little human being would, somehow, must exit in order to join up with the ‘object,’ is vigorously, even definitively, swept away” (Laplanche, 2011, p. 27), then yes, Laplanche’s thought is relational. But then, on that count, one could argue that Freud is as well. As we have seen, Laplanche has devoted much of his thought to clarifying how the echo of the object, not to mention the echo of the traumatizing object, can be discerned in Freud’s thought even after October 21, 1897.

In their review of Fletcher’s (2013) study, which is grounded in Laplanche, Aron and Atlas (2015), in a previous issue of the journal, correctly point out that Freud is frequently taught in the relational world in an overly simplified way as holding a presocial and asocial perspective “as Stephen Mitchell often taught” (p. 771), thus aligning themselves with

Laplanche's reading of Freud, and criticizing the conventional arelational straw man Freud. They also endorse Laplanche's rejection of Freud's notion of hereditary fantasy, introducing instead at the heart of fantasy what they refer as "the kernel of reality" (p. 773) as the bedrock for originary fantasies and their development. This kernel made me think of Freud's metaphor of "the grain of sand around which an oyster forms its pearl" (Freud, 1905/1953b, p. 90), which is used so ironically to depict "the organically determined irritation" and its psychological overlay—a metaphor turned around here. Aron and Atlas (2015) conclude that they "view Laplanche's work as a potential bridge between classical and relational theory" (p. 773), ostensibly because they equate the kernel of reality with the implanted enigmatic message (of the generalized seduction theory).

That does indeed seem to be an easy link at first blush, but that sweeping conclusion may be premature. Let's take a closer look at some aspects of Laplanche's work. He repeatedly makes the point of differentiating himself from object relations theory. For instance, he considers the Kleinian positions among the psychoanalytic theoretical myths that impede analytic action by prematurely imposing prescribed meanings. Also, whether it be the depressive relation to a full object, or other connected concepts such as mutual understanding, attunement, good-enough mothering, or secure attachment, Laplanche consistently dismisses them. The inevitable centrality in our psychic life of the enigmatic message leads to the universality of bad-enough mothering, of misattunement, of insecure attachment, and of an "understanding" that is anything but mutual and the result of an asymmetrical assignation of nonsense instead.

Laplanche equally rejects some of the conventional applications of relational theory to practice. "One can only deplore the fact that the 'handling of the countertransference' has almost become a 'shibboleth' within the most widespread circles, the very ones in which the word 'unconscious' is articulated least" (Laplanche, 2011, p. 232). These are harsh words coming from an alleged proto-relationalist.

That being said, there are some intriguing points of overlap between Laplanche and Sullivan's interpersonal theory, though it must be admitted that it is not the way Sullivan's theory is conventionally expanded upon. It would be interesting to study the links between the "implantation of the enigmatic message" and Sullivan's notion of the "induction of anxiety" by the mother as the original source of our problems in living. "The infant suffering from anxiety [is] induced by anxiety on the part of the mother.

Anxiety does not arise from danger. . . . It arises by induction from the mother" (Sullivan, 1953, p. 53). Indeed, when Sullivan says, "that which the personified infant signifies to or symbolizes 'in' the mother is clearly more than forthcoming satisfaction of the need to give tenderness or to participate in the integration, maintenance, and resolution of situations by the infant's immediate needs" (pp. 112–113). So much for maternal attunement, and Laplanche said pretty much the same thing, though in a different "idiolect."

In turn, Sullivan's (as Laplanche's) description of the mother–infant interaction as marred by anxiety is related to his emphasis on the ubiquity of "parataxic distortion." Although the goal of treatment is "consensual validation," "it would be one of the great miracles of all time if our perception of another person were, in any great significant number of respects, accurate or exact" (Sullivan, 1953, p. 167); so much for mutual understanding. This would "translate" into Laplanche's idiolect into a "great miracle" when a message is actually understood accurately or exactly, thus leaving an inevitable remainder of the misunderstood message to be thrown onto the stockpile of parataxic distortions. I am mixing theoretical languages here, but I think there is room to study this overlap, though not necessarily one with conventional relational theory.

### Conclusion

Aron and Atlas (2015) end their review by commenting that the confusion they struggled with in their readings was possibly due to the subject matter of the enigmatic message and its translation, and they point out that the number of languages implicated in their study (French, English, German, and Hebrew) with all the permutations reading and writing to and from lead to an overall confusion—a productive confusion, I would hasten to add.

For instance, imagine going back to the last passage I quoted by Laplanche in which he uses the Hebrew word "shibboleth" to criticize relational theory. Laplanche pointedly uses the word because Freud used it to establish the Oedipus complex as dogma. Now the Hebrew word has the added implication when used in English of something antiquated, which it does not have in German—quite an irony. And finally, the word itself has everything to do with the "challenge of the foreign": it was originally used to identify an enemy who was trying to pass and infiltrate himself, and because he would not be able to pronounce the word

as a native speaker, he would be put to death (as Freud would do). I propose that the study of such a word is on par with “Anlehnung” and “Nachträglichkeit” as potentially illustrating the productive confusion of translation, and in this case applying it to the history of psychoanalysis.

What I find so productive as an interpersonalist studying a foreign idiolect such as Laplanchian French is that it helps me be more conversant in my own native intellectual psychoanalytic idiolect. There is nothing like having to translate (both to and from the foreign and the native) to clarify how much is being left “out,” and to expand what can be included.

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