

Elizabeth Rottenberg\*

**Intimate Relations:  
Psychoanalysis Deconstruction / La psychanalyse la déconstruction<sup>1</sup>**

Abstract:

This essay will concentrate, somewhat voyeuristically, on a particular and very special textual encounter. For if there is *one* text in the psychoanalytic tradition that will have caused Derrida to spill more ink than any other. It's Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). For ten years, from 1970-1980, Derrida returns not once but three times, on three separate occasions, in three different contexts, to Freud's text on repetition compulsion and the death drive, each time devoting more time and energy, that is to say, more pages to it. As we will see in this essay, what emerges from this textual encounter is not only a new kind of pleasure; it is also a chance event of repetition that brings with it something strikingly new.

*Keywords:* Fort/Da, Freuderrida, Play, Pleasure, Speculation

Psychanalyse et déconstruction: double modalité de l'inoriginaire.  
(J.-L. Nancy, *Double plongée aux abîmes*)

*1. Setting the Tone*

*Psychanalyse et déconstruction:* this will be my topic. Or perhaps I should say, in a more focused and philosophical way, *la psychanalyse et la déconstruction*, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Or better yet, as I have written it in my title, psychoanalysis deconstruction, *la psychanalyse la déconstruction*. *La . . . la*. Not «*La . . . le*» or «*Feminine . . . masculine*»<sup>2</sup>, as in the opening line of Jacques Derrida's *La bête et le souverain, Volume 1*, but *lala*, two *la*'s, a couple of *la*'s, a kind of same-sex pairing (and I can already hear the exasperation in French *oh là là!* and the titillation in English *oooh la la*). But what would it mean to say that *lala donne le la*, that *lala* sets the *tone* or gives an *A* to the difference between psychoanalysis deconstruction? By getting rid of the "et", the "and", I am not suggesting and this will hardly surprise you that psychoanalysis and deconstruction do not form two, or that «the one [is] not the other of the other»<sup>3</sup>, but rather that something else is at stake (*en jeu*) when it comes to their relations. From *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1967) to *Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul* (2000), by way of *The Post Card* (1980) and *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1996), not to mention *Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok* (1976), *Metapsychology* (1979), *Telepathy* (1981), *Geopsychology* (1981), *My Chances / Mes chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies* (1982), *Let Us Not Forget Psychoanalysis* (1990), *Archive Fever* (1995), and *And Say the Animal Responded?* (1997) and I am only including those texts that focus explicitly on psychoanalysis that is, from his very first essay on Freud presented in March 1966 at the Société psychanalytique de Paris at the invitation of André Green to his keynote address to the International Psychoanalytic Association at the Estates General of Psychoanalysis on July 10, 2000 in the Grand Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, Derrida will have had *a thing* for psychoanalysis. A thing for Freud, that is. With *La-can*, it's another thing, a different story. It's the story of «phonocentrism, logocentrism, phallogocentrism, full speech as

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\* DePaul University, Chicago.

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this text appeared in *Derrida Today* 11, n. 2 (2018), pp. 178-195.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida (2009), p. 19 [Derrida (2008), p. 1].

<sup>3</sup> *LD*, p. 1 [p. 19].

truth, the transcendentalism of the signifier [*et tout ce tralala*]<sup>4</sup>; with *La-can* and it's not a pretty expression, it's the story of the "same old, same old".

In other words, I hope it is clear, I will not be speaking about Derrida's "love" for Lacan («*nous nous sommes beaucoup aimés, Lacan et moi* [we loved each other very much, Lacan and I]»)<sup>5</sup>. Rather I will be speaking about the historic coupling of Freud and Derrida. I know, I know; you must think that, as an analyst, I have a one-track mind. But so, then, does Hélène Cixous. In her book *Philippines: Prédelles* (2009), Cixous suggests that the encounter between Freud and Derrida was much more than a dalliance. By joining the two names around a common "d" and using the single-double word-name «Freuderrida»<sup>6</sup>, she intimates a change in their relationship status. Theirs was not just some meaningless hook-up. On the contrary, and her term could not make it more explicit: the two men were officially an item. Freud and Derrida never met, of course (Derrida was nine in 1939 at the time of Freud's death), but they form a couple, precisely because of this, because of their «singular anachrony»<sup>7</sup>. Freud is, for Derrida, along with Heidegger, one of the «two great ghosts of the "great epoch"»<sup>8</sup>. But the reverse is also true: Derrida's work has utterly transformed the way we or at least some of us read Freud today.

Now, there are many ways of describing Derrida's involvement with psychoanalysis. Some, for example, have suggested that we divide Derrida's writings on psychoanalysis into three large groups: «those concerned with Freud and the metaphysical tradition; those belonging to the controversy with Lacan; and those promulgating the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok»<sup>9</sup>. Others, compellingly, have argued that everything changes with *Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok* (1976), that "*Fors*" is a kind of *texte charnière* for reading Derrida's «complex and ambivalent relation to the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis»<sup>10</sup>. Starting with "*Fors*", it is argued, Derrida is no longer reading Freud's texts «through his own interest in the question of writing»; rather he is reworking, in his own way, words such as «crypt», «phantom», «introjection» and «incorporation», words that come from the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok<sup>11</sup>.

In what follows, I am not going to dwell on the history of Derrida's many analytic relationships. Nor am I going to discuss his lifelong commitment to Freud. Instead, I will concentrate, somewhat voyeuristically, on a particular and very special textual encounter. For if there is *one* text in the psychoanalytic tradition that will have caused Derrida to spill more ink than any other, it's Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). For ten years, from 1970-1980, Derrida returns not once but three times, on three separate occasions, in three different contexts, to Freud's text on repetition compulsion and the death drive, each time devoting more time and energy, that is to say, more pages to it. Thus, in his 1970-71 seminar *La psychanalyse dans le texte*<sup>12</sup>, Derrida devotes two sessions to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (or approximately 40 double-spaced manuscript pages); in his 1975-76 seminar *Life Death*, he devotes four sessions to *Beyond* (or approximately 80 double-spaced manuscript pages); finally, in *To Speculate – on "Freud"*, he devotes 12 sections (or 4 x 3 sections, approximately 160 printed pages) to the same text. In other words, there is something, *un je-ne-sais-quoi*, about this 66-page text by a 64-year-old man, that gets Derrida's juices flowing.

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida (1996b), p. 54 [Derrida (1996a), p. 73].

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 42 [p. 60].

<sup>6</sup> Cixous (2009), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida (1987), p. 191 [Derrida (1980), p. 206].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Ellman (2000), p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> Marder (2012), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> This is an unpublished seminar from 1970-1971. All references to this unpublished seminar will be abbreviated *PT*, followed by session number; all translations are my own. For more information on Derrida's unpublished seminars, see <http://derridaseminars.org/seminars.html>.

Indeed, as we will see, Derrida's first engagement with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a rather pleasurable affair. Of the two sessions<sup>13</sup> devoted to *Beyond* in *La psychanalyse dans le texte*, the first (session 6) focuses almost exclusively on pleasure and the dominance (*Herrschaft*) of the pleasure principle; it loses itself in Freud's discussion of pleasure in Chapter 1 of *Beyond*. In the beginning was pleasure, you might say. Though it would be more correct to say pleasures in the plural, or even polymorphously perverse pleasures: for there is not only the pleasure of speculation, the pleasure of speculative play; there is also, as we will see, textual pleasure, speculative pleasure as textual pleasure. Five years later, in *Life Death*, things have gotten a little more complicated; Derrida is a man in mid-life and his focus is more autobiographical. Needless to say, the issue of children has come up and there has been some disagreement about the *fort/da* game. By the time we get to *To Speculate – on "Freud"* however, Derrida has come around to Freud's way of thinking, and his writing has taken on some bulk (*To Speculate – on "Freud"* elaborates on *Life Death* and there are references to new texts, among them Abraham and Torok's *Cryptonymy* and Plato's *Philebus*).

But if I play up the erotic nature of Derrida's engagement with Freud, it is not only because I think *Beyond the Principle Pleasure* offers us a rethinking of Eros and the life drives; "life" is "life death", and that's life! It is also because I think Derrida's repeated encounters with *Beyond* allow him both to repeat, to bear witness to, and simultaneously to break from, to depart from, the death drive<sup>14</sup>. And thus also to repeat, in the form of a new autobiographical event, the «chance opportunity»<sup>15</sup> that is Freud's in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

*La psychanalyse la déconstruction. Lala.* In English, of course, we would say not *lala* but *la(h)-la(h)* . . . and here my first association, which is a quintessentially American association, is to "la-la land". To be in la-la land is of course to be "out to lunch"; it is to be "out of touch with reality" (OED), the way one is in LA, say, or Laguna Beach. And it is true, at least historically, that both psychoanalysis and deconstruction seem to be in "la-la land" – too much textual play? – when it comes to the practical considerations of academic life. I don't think there is anyone who works on Derrida, anyone whose *orientation* is deconstructive, who needs to be reminded that the "D word" should be used only in moderation when applying for fellowships (say, a SSHRC, a Chateaubriand, or a Guggenheim).

Of course, both Freud and Derrida were spoiled when it came to hostile receptions and academic incivilities. Both "conjured up", and here I am using Freud's words, «the most evil spirits of criticism [*die bösesten Geister der Kritik*]»<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, when Derrida speaks, in his 2001 interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco, of the «compulsive and often pathetic efforts, desperate or fearful, to *discredit* at any cost and not only my work . . . but [also] an entire configuration to which it belongs», when he reminds her of the «stubborn and relentless aggression» he has had the «unfortunate privilege» of attracting<sup>17</sup>, it is hard not to be reminded of Freud's statement in *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914): «psychoanalysis», Freud writes, «brings out the worst in everyone»<sup>18</sup>.

And we certainly did not need Steve Bannon (or his phrase «deconstruction of the administrative state») to tell us that deconstruction brings out the worst in everyone. Here I can speak a little from personal experience. When I first met Derrida in the 1990's, the Great Purges were underway. Deconstruction was being eliminated from all major universities and – this being another sign of the times (besides, of course, the publication of David Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*) – DC Comics had just published a series of comic books in which Justice League Europe

<sup>13</sup> The seminar itself is eleven sessions long.

<sup>14</sup> See Caruth (2013), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *SE* 18: 14 [*GW* 13: 11].

<sup>16</sup> *SE* 16: 284 [*GW* 11: 294].

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, Roudinesco (2004), p. 3 [Derrida, Roudinesco (2001), p. 15].

<sup>18</sup> *SE* 14: 39 [*GW* 10: 79].

battles and ultimately defeats a dastardly villain called Deconstructo (the titles of the comic books were, and there were three of them: *Doomed by Deconstructo*, *A League Deconstructed*, *It All Comes Apart!*)<sup>19</sup>.

Now, if I bring up the recent history of psychoanalysis deconstruction, it is not in order to depress you. No, if I bring up these stories, it is in order to remind you that what is at work in the play of psychoanalysis deconstruction may always be out of tune with reality (let alone academic reality). In the case of Derrida's play with *Beyond*, however, it might be better to say out of key<sup>20</sup>, since what will emerge from this particular encounter is not only a new kind of pleasure; it is also a chance event of repetition that brings with it something strikingly new.

## 2. Textual Relations: Textual Pleasure

So, I begin with pleasure. When Derrida turns to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *La psychanalyse dans le texte*, the context is pleasure. Derrida has just described Freud's approach to works of art and literature (his "aesthetics" or "poetics")<sup>21</sup> as a kind of "hedonism"<sup>22</sup>. Whether Freud is describing the preliminary pleasure, the "fore-pleasure", produced by the purely formal, aesthetic qualities of a creative work or the final pleasure that proceeds «from a liberation of tensions in our minds»<sup>23</sup>, the bottom line is pleasure: «[Freud] analyzes the work [of art] as a *means* in the service of the pleasure principle»<sup>24</sup>.

Thus, it is in this context, the context of Freud's hedonistic analysis of the work of art that Derrida makes his appeal to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *La psychanalyse dans le texte*. He appeals to *Beyond* because *Beyond* is the text that challenges and displaces the pleasure principle «C'est donc le principe de plaisir qui va être "mis en question" . . . dans *Au-delà*»<sup>25</sup>. And yet, as we will see, Derrida remains very attentive to Freud's pleasure. Freud's pleasure is his pleasure, you might say. Derrida takes pleasure in reading a text that Freud takes pleasure in writing. What is more, this attentiveness to pleasure persists in all of Derrida's texts on *Beyond* and, if anything, becomes more acute over time (what is released in *La psychanalyse dans le texte* remains active in both *Life Death* and *To Speculate – on "Freud"*). Thus, if I begin with pleasure, if I insist on pleasure, it is not because Freuderrida is all fun and games. It is because pleasure is *key* when it comes to Derrida's reading of Freud's speculative play.

Of course, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not just any text in the history of psychoanalysis. *Beyond* is the text that marks the final phase in Freud's thinking about the drives; it is the text that leads Freud to conclude that «besides the drive to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another . . . drive seeking to dissolve those units and bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state. That is to say, as well as Eros there [is] a death drive [*Todestrieb*]»<sup>26</sup>. But perhaps above all, *Beyond* is the text in which Freud speculates. And Freud doesn't just speculate a little in *Beyond*; we are not talking about some itty-bitty speculation. No, when Freud speculates in *Beyond* – and I am quoting Derrida from *La psychanalyse dans le texte* – he engages in «the most wide-ranging speculation on pleasure, repetition, life, death [*la plus vaste spéculation sur le plaisir, la répétition, la vie, la mort*]»<sup>27</sup>. What begins as «a supervised speculation [*une spéculation surveillée*]»<sup>28</sup> becomes a speculation that is

<sup>19</sup> *Justice League Europe*, DC Comics, n. 37-39 (1992).

<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank David Maruzzella for making the difference between "out of tune" and "out of key" clear to me.

<sup>21</sup> *PT*, session 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, session 5.

<sup>23</sup> *SE* 9: 153 [*GW* 7: 223].

<sup>24</sup> Derrida (1981), p. 248, note 52 [Derrida (1972), p. 279, note 44].

<sup>25</sup> *PT*, session 6.

<sup>26</sup> *SE* 21: 118-119 [*GW* 14: 477-78].

<sup>27</sup> *PT*, session 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, session 6.

«unbridled or almost without bridle [*effrénée ou presque sans frein*]<sup>29</sup>. In short, Freud's speculation is a speculation «unleashed . . . as unleashing»<sup>30</sup> the unleashing of death and destruction.

And yet, as Freud himself will acknowledge, speculation did not come easily to him. It was only in the work of his later years (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Group Psychology*, and *The Ego and the Id*) that he was able to speculate at all. This is because he always associated speculation with philosophy. And philosophy was something dangerous, that is to say, dangerously seductive. In response to Ernest Jones's question as to how much philosophy he had read in his youth, Freud's answer was: «Very little. As a young man I felt a strong attraction toward speculation and ruthlessly checked it»<sup>31</sup>. Or again, as Freud says in *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*: «I learnt to restrain speculative tendencies and to follow the unforgotten advice of my master, Charcot: to look at the same things again and again until they themselves beg[a]n to speak»<sup>32</sup>.

Freud's impulse to speculate is something that must be inhibited, repressed and ruthlessly so. Curb your (speculative) enthusiasm, we can hear Freud's scientific superego saying. Do not let psychoanalysis become a «speculative system»<sup>33</sup> or a «speculative theory»<sup>34</sup>. Avoid «any contact with philosophy proper»<sup>35</sup>. Do not erase – in the name of the system, a flawless and complete theory – the observed facts, that is to say, «what [is] accidental and personal»<sup>36</sup> in psychoanalysis. You *may not be* like this (like philosophy). Remember: the foundation of psychoanalysis lies in «observation alone»<sup>37</sup>.

So speaks the (scientific) superego. And yet, as we also know, the superego has a double aspect, for its task is to repress the ego's earliest identifications. Thus, the superego's relation to the ego is not exhausted by its prohibition: You *may not be* like this (like philosophy). It also comprises the precept: You *ought to be* like this (like philosophy). That is, Freud's striking gesture of denegation, his quasi-phobic avoidance of philosophy cannot help but reflect the force of his attraction to philosophy.

And this brings me to Derrida, the analyst. Again and again, in all of his texts on *Beyond*, Derrida returns to Freud's avoidance of speculation/philosophy. And each time he does, his language becomes more analytic, that is to say, more phantasy-driven and more economical, more laconic those at the École freudienne du Québec would probably say more Lacan-ic. I will quote Derrida's three texts in chronological order so you can hear the *shrinkage*:

This tendency to speculate, which Freud says he suppressed . . . was it that he only considered it to be a risk for theory, for science? Though he often presents it in this way, it is hard to see why a risk like this would have to be “suppressed [*réprimée*]”: in such a case, one sets aside, one avoids, one criticizes, one does not suppress [*on écarte, on évite, on critique, on ne réprime pas*]. Perhaps, then, there was something else at risk/in play [*en jeu*] in this relation to philosophy and to speculation, something along the lines of Freud's desire [*quelque chose de l'ordre du désir de F.*]<sup>38</sup>.

The avoidance (. . . of philosophy) . . . must not, it seems to me, be interpreted too simplistically. On the one hand, if there is such a persistent avoidance of both philosophy and what Freud calls . . . “speculation”, if there is such a persistent

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *LD*, p. 263 [p. 324].

<sup>31</sup> Jones (1957), vol 1., p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> *SE* 14: 22 [*GW* 10: 60].

<sup>33</sup> *SE* 16 : 244 [*GW* 11: 250].

<sup>34</sup> *SE* 14: 77 [*GW* 10: 142].

<sup>35</sup> *SE* 20: 59 [*GW* 14: 86].

<sup>36</sup> *SE* 14: 63 [*GW* 10: 109].

<sup>37</sup> *SE* 14: 77 [*GW* 10: 142].

<sup>38</sup> *PT*, session 6.

avoidance, it is, of course, because there is temptation, tendency, inclination [s'il y a évitement si insistant, c'est bien sûr qu'il y a tentation, tendance, envie]<sup>39</sup>.

But let us not be too quick to interpret. If there is avoidance, if it [ça] is avoided with so much insistence, it is because there is tendency, temptation, inclination<sup>40</sup>.

By the time we get to *To Speculate – on “Freud”*, there is no beating around the bush: *where* there is avoidance, *there* there is desire. *Un point c'est tout*. But there is also – and this is where Derrida is already a kind of “forward-edge” analyst – the possibility of pleasure.

In the opening paragraphs of *Beyond*, Freud reminds us that psychoanalysis has always assumed – in a way that is “speculative” – the dominance of pleasure principle: «In the theory of psychoanalysis we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle . . . We have arrived at these speculative assumptions in an attempt to describe and to account for the facts of daily observation in our field of study»<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, it is this association, the association between speculation and the pleasure principle, that Derrida begins by underscoring in *La psychanalyse dans le texte*:

In Freud's eyes, the speculative . . . marks not only what will lead him beyond the pleasure principle but also already the establishing [*l'établissement*] of the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle can no longer be inferred from experience but already presupposes a speculative lift-off [*décollement*], a certain excess of reflection over observation . . . . Freud recognizes, thus, at the very moment that he denies he is doing philosophy . . . that the assumption of the pleasure principle is a speculative assumption aimed at giving an account of experience. Obviously, if this assumption is already speculative, the assumptions that will put the pleasure principle in question will be even more speculative: what we will get is a speculation that is unbridled or almost without bridle. What we will get, ultimately, is pure play, done only “for the sake of pleasure” [*un pur jeu, fait uniquement “pour le Plaisir”*]. And it is remarkable that, when it comes to the “formal” . . . status of this text, its “textual” status, it is remarkable that this text, which treats, as we know, of both pleasure and play [*et du plaisir et du jeu*], which will place a reflection on play [*jeu*] at its very beginning, also presents itself as thought's experience of play [*comme une expérience de jeu de la pensée*], engaged in for the sake of pleasure [*tentée pour le plaisir*]<sup>42</sup>.

We move, in other words, from Freud's speculative assumptions about the pleasure principle to «pure speculation»<sup>43</sup>, the pure play of speculation, «done only ‘for the sake of pleasure’». And yet what Derrida finds so remarkable, indeed what seduces him in *Beyond*, is not that Freud should have indulged in pure speculative play for the sake of pleasure; what Derrida finds so remarkable is that this play should also be textual, a scene of textual pleasure<sup>44</sup>.

And so Freud plays. For three whole chapters. Advancing and withdrawing his examples (of traumatic dreams, of children's play, of the transference neuroses). Until – finally, in Chapter 4 – we get the money shot: «What follows is speculation, often far-reaching speculation [*weitausholende Spekulation*], which the reader will consider or

<sup>39</sup> LD, p. 226 [p. 283].

<sup>40</sup> SoF, p. 272, modified [pp. 289-90].

<sup>41</sup> SE 18: 7 [GW 13: 3].

<sup>42</sup> PT, session 6.

<sup>43</sup> LD p. 239 [p. 297].

<sup>44</sup> In *To Speculate – on “Freud”*, Derrida's emphasis is more on the scene of writing than on the scene of pleasure: «I am alleging that speculation is not only a mode of research named by Freud, not only the oblique object of his discourse, but also the operation of his writing, the scene (of that) which he makes by writing what he writes here, that which makes him do it, and that which he makes to do, that which makes him write and that which he makes – or lets – write». See SoF, p. 284 [p. 304].

dismiss according to his individual predilection»<sup>45</sup>. Of course, when Freud goes all the way, when he finally gives in to his long-suppressed inclination, his speculation is not easy to contain; it is far-reaching, *effrénée ou presque sans frein, de grande envergure*.

When speculation returns, you might say, it returns *with a vengeance*. A vengeance that is both figurative and literal. For Freud's speculation culminates in the hypothesis of «a death or destructive drive»<sup>46</sup>. When Freud finally speculates in Chapter 4, he speculates that «the aim of all life is death» and that «the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion»<sup>47</sup>.

Paradoxically, however, Freud's speculative hypothesis of the repetition compulsion and the death drive breathes new life into psychoanalytic theory. This is because dissolution (*Auflösung*) and disintegration (*Zerfall*) provide Freud with a new solution (*Lösung*) to the problem of the drives: «I have given free rein to the inclination . . . to speculation, and I have also contemplated a new solution to the problem of the drives»<sup>48</sup>. Freud's speculative hypothesis of death and destruction brings new life to the theory of the drives, that is, to what is «the most important . . . portion of psychoanalytic theory»<sup>49</sup>. And with this new life come new pleasures. And it is precisely to these new pleasures that Derrida will turn in *Life Death* and *To Speculate – on “Freud”*.

In the penultimate chapter of *Beyond*, Freud wonders just how seriously he takes his own speculative hypotheses. How convinced is he? How seriously does he believe what he is saying?

It may be asked whether and how far I am myself convinced of the truth of the hypotheses that have been set out in these pages. My answer would be that I am not convinced myself and that I do not seek to persuade other people to believe in them. Or, more precisely, that I do not know how far I believe in them<sup>50</sup>.

In other words, Freud stages his own uncertainty. He goes back and forth with himself, *fort* and *da*, somewhat «narcissistically»<sup>51</sup>. In this way, Freud stages his uncertainty but also, ultimately, as Derrida claims, his pleasure.

So, if I say “pleasure”, it is not only because of this narcissistic turn, this lifting of a long-suppressed repression. If I say “pleasure”, it is also because Derrida draws attention to what he, Derrida, understands to be Freud's pleasure in this line of thought. Freud takes pleasure in thinking beyond the pleasure principle. In both *Life Death* and *To Speculate – on “Freud”*, Derrida seems pleased by this new pleasure; he goes so far as to imagine Freud defending himself (that is, this new pleasure) against his would-be critics. Here is what Derrida says in *To Speculate – on “Freud”* where he plays at imitating Freud's riposte to his critics:

[A]llez donc vous faire voir . . . . L'hypothèse de la pulsion de mort, moi j'aime ça.  
[Y]ou can all go to hell [and not “go look for yourself”, as the translator mistakenly translates *allez donc vous faire voir!*] . . . . This hypothesis of a death drive, that's what I like<sup>52</sup>.

But *To Speculate – on “Freud”* is already the polite version of Derrida's imaginary scene. As we now know from *Life Death*, there was an earlier, an unexpurgated, version of Derrida's formulation of Freud's expression of pleasure.

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<sup>45</sup> SE 18: 24, modified [GW 13: 23].

<sup>46</sup> SE 20: 57, modified [GW 14 : 84].

<sup>47</sup> SE 18: 38-39 [GW 13: 40-41].

<sup>48</sup> SE 20: 57 [GW 14: 84].

<sup>49</sup> SE 7: 168, note 2, modified [GW 5: 67, note 1].

<sup>50</sup> SE 18: 59 [GW 13: 63-64].

<sup>51</sup> LD, p. 278 [p. 341].

<sup>52</sup> SoF, p. 385, modified [p. 411].

[A]llez-vous faire foutre, moi ça me plaît, l'au-delà du plaisir tel est mon bon plaisir, l'hypothèse de la pulsion de mort, moi j'aime ça.  
Screw you all, I myself am rather pleased with this, the beyond of pleasure, that's my pleasure; the hypothesis of the death drive – that's what I like<sup>53</sup>.

There is no need to excuse Derrida here or rather to excuse his French. For whether we screw ourselves or go to hell, one thing is clear: speculative play, the hypothesis of the death drive, gives Freud – and Derrida – pleasure. Though perhaps I can put it this way: Derrida's language, its exuberance, and its color remind us that there is always an element of play in the death drive that keeps the very possibility of pleasure alive. To which I will simply add: there (*là*) where Derrida finds new pleasure in Freud, there (*là*) he takes his pleasure in Freud (*là là*).

Still, to imagine a Freud who would take pleasure in the hypothesis of the death drive, «one has to have ideas», «il faut avoir des idées»<sup>54</sup>.

### 3. Textual Play: Playing Fort/Da with Fort/Da

And this brings me to Derrida's ideas about Freud or rather, in this case, his ideas about the *fort/da* game. But before we get there, I should tell you that the game is completely absent from *La psychanalyse dans le texte*. In the early seminar, Derrida simply dismisses the *fort/da* chapter (Chapter 2) out of hand. In fact, he refers to the entire chapter as a *nullité*: «Je veux insister sur la nullité, si on peut dire, de ce chapitre 2», «I would like to insist on the nullity, so to speak, of Chapter 2, which is certainly the most celebrated chapter in *Beyond* and the one that many overhasty readers [*beaucoup de lecteurs pressés*] often take to be its essential contribution»<sup>55</sup>. This is because, as Derrida tells us, Chapter 2 is *un chapitre sur rien*. Nothing happens in it. And so Derrida «plays “gone [*fortsein*]»<sup>56</sup> with the *fort/da* game in *La psychanalyse dans le texte*. He puts the game at a distance (*fort*) . . . in order to bring it back (*da*) in *Life Death* and *To Speculate – on “Freud”*.

Now, the *fort/da* game is about difference and translation: the difference in German between *fort* and *da*, or rather between «a loud, long-drawn-out “o-o-o-o”»<sup>57</sup>, which Freud takes to be the German word “*fort*” (“gone”), and a “joyful ‘*da*’” (“there”)»<sup>58</sup>. But it is also a Game of Zones; it is a symbolic representation that repeats an unpleasurable experience as a pleasurable one by throwing a reel *fort*, that is, by banishing it to the “gone” zone, and then bringing it back again, into the *da*-zone. I will briefly quote Freud's description of the game in order to bring out what is *en jeu* (at stake and in play) in Derrida's modified translation of this passage in *Life Death*. Here is what Freud says in Chapter 2 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (I have Americanized Strachey's English translation):

The child [this of course is Freud's grandson Ernst] had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it *along the floor* [*am Boden*] behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained crib [Strachey famously says cot but a cot in American English is a collapsible bed; it is not a crib], so that it disappeared into it [*so daß sie darin verschwand*], at the same time uttering his expressive “o-o-o-o”. He then pulled the reel *out of the crib again* by the string [*zog dann die Spule am Faden wieder aus dem Bett heraus*] and hailed its reappearance with a joyful “*da*” [“there”]. This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return. As a rule, one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in

<sup>53</sup> *LD*, p. 280 [p. 344].

<sup>54</sup> *SoF*, p. 317, modified [p. 337].

<sup>55</sup> *PT*, session 6.

<sup>56</sup> *SE* 18: 15 [GW 13: 12].

<sup>57</sup> *SE* 18: 14 [GW 13: 12].

<sup>58</sup> *SE* 18: 15 [GW 13: 12].



itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act<sup>59</sup>.

Just to be clear, because I think it is very clear, both in English and in German: Ernst is not pulling the reel along the floor behind him (this is Freud's fantasy). Rather, he is standing and throwing the reel over the edge of the curtained crib in such a way that the reel disappears behind the curtain; he is making "gone [*fort*]" with it. That is the first part of the game and sometimes even the whole of the game, even if it is not the complete game, according to Freud. The complete game includes hailing the return of the thing: reeling the reel back in, out of the crib. In other words, what is thrown *into the crib* is *fort* and what is pulled *out of the crib* is *da*.

Here, now, are Derrida's comments on this passage in *Life Death*:

Freud seems surprised by the fact that the child never had the idea to pull the reel along behind him and play at its being a carriage. Freud's problem is this: why does he not play at its being a carriage, which would be normal, pulling the thing behind him? That is Freud's problem, who would have apparently preferred to play at its being a carriage and who is surprised that the idea never occurred to Ernst . . . Freud finds Ernst's choice to be strange, but you have to admit that Freud's desire is no less strange when you consider that all this is taking place *in a crib* and that it has only ever taken place *in a crib with curtains*. One has to wonder how Ernst would have gone about playing at the reel being a carriage by pulling it behind him *in a curtained crib*. In order to have the reel – or the vehicle or thingamajig – behind oneself *in a crib*, one has to have ideas . . . What is surprising, then, is not that Ernst never had these ideas but that the Pépé considers them the most natural<sup>60</sup>.

What is surprising and strange, says Derrida, is how natural the idea of playing at the reel being a carriage seems to Freud. What could be more natural for an analyst who is always sitting behind his patient than to imagine a scene in which the Re(a)l remains out of sight, uninscribed in the Symbolic? But how are we to read Derrida's strange idea here, his insistence that the play take place *in a crib* (*dans un lit*), *in a crib with curtains* (*dans un lit avec des rideaux*), *in a curtained crib* (*dans un lit à rideaux*), that is, to put it simply, *in bed*? In fact, when I first read this passage, I thought it was a joke: all this is taking place *dans un lit*, in a bed, and perhaps between the sheets. How do we end up *in bed* with Derrida when Freud's idea was precisely to drag the reel "along the floor [*am Boden*]?" Has Derrida just missed the boat here?

I will not analyze Derrida's (conscious? unconscious?) desire, his desire to challenge Freud's strange idea with his own strange idea. Nor will I interpret the fact that where Freud «might have wished that Ernst had played more seriously on the floor . . . without attending to the bed»<sup>61</sup>. Derrida makes all the world a bed, and Ernst a *player* in it. Instead, I will point to a strange French idiom, one that seems to have crept into Derrida's translation of Freud's text. One can only speculate that it is the proximity of the verb *jeter* (to throw) and the word *bord* (edge) that has pushed the translation over the edge here. I will quote Derrida's translation of Freud (in my own translation):

The child had a wooden reel, with a string tied around it. Not once did the idea ever occur to him, for example, to drag the reel behind him, that is, to play carriage with it<sup>62</sup>.

I will continue now in French so you can hear the idiom (and as far as I know, this is Derrida's own translation – he is not quoting Samuel Jankélévitch's translation here, as he does elsewhere):

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, modified, my emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> *LD*, pp. 250-251, modified, my emphasis [p. 310].

<sup>61</sup> *SoF*, p. 315, modified [p. 336].

<sup>62</sup> *LD*, p. 249, modified [p. 309].

mais il jetait la bobine avec une grande adresse par-dessus bord, le bord de son petit lit entouré d'un rideau [but with great dexterity he threw the reel overboard {*par-dessus bord*}, over the edge {*le bord*} of his curtained crib]<sup>63</sup>.

The French idiom “*jeter par-dessus bord*”, like the English idiom “to throw overboard”, does not take an article; one does not throw over *the* board but simply *overboard*. Indeed, one might say that everything hinges on the disappearance of the definite article here. For when the article disappears – “overboard” – the reel goes in one direction and one direction only: out of the boat (or crib). Hence Derrida’s strange idea of having Ernst play carriage with the reel in the crib. Only if Ernst is *in the crib* can he throw the reel *overboard*. So how are we to read Derrida’s move here? What does it mean to make (a) game of the game, to play *fort/da* with Freud’s/Ernst’s *fort/da*?

Now, I want to quote the published version of this passage in *To Speculate – on “Freud”*. In the published text, as you will hear in a moment, Derrida replays the scene; he playfully corrects his own (mis)reading of the *fort/da* game in *Life Death* by distancing himself from it. He takes himself out of his text. Just like Ernst who, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, not only plays *fort/da* with the reel but also plays at making himself “gone”, *fort*, by crouching down in front of a mirror. Derrida too, I will suggest, «plays at being *fortified* . . . by his own disappearance»<sup>64</sup>:

[Freud] seems surprised, adding to this surprise a confident regret that the good little boy never seemed to have the idea of pulling the reel behind him and playing at its being a carriage . . . why doesn’t he play train or carriage? Wouldn’t that be more normal? And why doesn’t he play carriage by pulling the thing behind him? For the thing is a vehicle in motion [*La chose est un véhicule en translation*] . . . Too bad that the idea never occurred to him (for example!) to pull the reel behind him on the floor, and thus to play carriage with it . . . Instead of playing on the floor (*am Boden*), he insisted on putting the crib into the game, into play, on playing with the thing over the crib, but also in the crib. *Not in the crib as the place where the child himself would be, for contrary to what the text and the translation have often led many to believe, (and one would have to ask why), he is not in the crib at the moment when he throws the reel, it would seem.* He throws it from outside the crib over its edge, over the veils or curtains that surround its edge<sup>65</sup>.

Derrida may have pulled Ernst from the crib and returned him to solid ground, but he, Derrida, is still occupied with, not to say “cathected on”, the crib. Much like Ernst who insists on giving it a pivotal role in his game. You might even say that Derrida and Ernst are *in the same boat* when it comes to putting the bed into play.

But let us also note Derrida’s somewhat cryptic (though humorous) remark about his own earlier interpretation. Derrida takes himself *out of* the picture when he takes the child *out of* the bed. He mentions only the “many” who *may have gone overboard* in interpreting what it means “to play with a reel in a crib”. I hate to say it, but Derrida is right, even when he’s wrong. People have often assumed that the child was *in* the crib. The question is why: why might we think or want to think that Ernst is inside, rather than outside, the crib? I don’t have the answer to this question, but I will suggest that there is something about the playful movement of this game, about the “long-drawn-out ‘o-o-o-o’” and the “joyful ‘da’”, something about this *awakening* to language, that places the child – and his words – at the centre of the scene: inside, rather than outside, the

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 249-250, modified [p. 309].

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 252, my emphasis [p. 312].

<sup>65</sup> *SoF*, pp. 314-15, modified, my emphasis [pp. 335-36].

crib. Yet these words also drive us from the comforts of the crib. They throw us outside the language we thought we were in. Where *da* was, there *fort* shall be, they say.

So where does that leave us? Are we to remain hopelessly *at sea* over this *fort/da* with Ernst? But perhaps we could pause for a moment and take a step back. What if we read the relevant sections of *Life Death and To Speculate – on “Freud”* as a kind of double session with Freud, one in which Derrida was acting out – playing out his relationship with Freud? For we must remember that, just as Derrida plays *fort/da* with Ernst, putting Ernst both inside and outside the crib, so he plays *fort/da* with himself, placing himself both inside and outside Freud’s text.

There is something else, at any rate, that we cannot blind to. And that is that the *fort/da* is not just a game. It is also an example of the repetition compulsion and thus, ultimately, an expression of the death drive. What this means, and Derrida puts it quite explicitly, is that the play of *fort/da* is the work of the death drive: «The death drive is there, in the pleasure principle, setting the *fort/da* in motion [*La pulsion de mort est là, dans le PP, qui agit le fort/da*]»<sup>66</sup>.

The death drive is there *in* the pleasure principle: this is because there is no opposition between the death drive (or the repetition compulsion) and the pleasure principle. Without contradicting or opposing the pleasure principle, the death drive undermines the pleasure principle; «it hollow[s] it out», says Derrida, «en abyme from an originary that is more originary than it and independent of it»<sup>67</sup>.

In a way, then, the death drive, as the beginning of the repetition compulsion, has the last (and the first) word. The death drive is *there* in the play between Freud and Derrida. It is *there* in the *fort/da*, which it sets in motion. And yet one cannot help but wonder whether the play that takes us beyond the pleasure principle or, more precisely, the play *in* this play, Derrida’s *fort/da* with Freud’s *fort/da*, does not hint at another kind of pleasure. This pleasure would be neither before nor beyond the pleasure principle but it would be *there*, *there* in Derrida’s speculative play with Freud.

#### 4. “The Chance of an Autobiographical Event”

I will just say a few words about what Derrida calls the «exemplary auto-biographical content of th[e] *fort/da*»<sup>68</sup>, its abyssal auto-*bio*- or auto-*thanato*-graphical structure (for there is always that death element in the *fort/da*). Now, what interests Derrida in the *fort/da* game, you may remember, is not its demonstrative value (whether or not there is a repetition compulsion or a death drive or a limit to the pleasure principle). What interests Derrida is the value of the game as a «repetition en abyme» of what Freud *does* in *Beyond*, his way of writing what he does: «One can see in the description of the earnest game of Ernst, the eldest grandson of grandfather Freud, not a theoretical argument . . . but an auto-biography of Freud, not simply an auto-biography of Freud writing his life but a living description of his own writing»<sup>69</sup>.

Which raises the question of Derrida’s *fort/da*. Might there be more to say about Derrida and the scene of writing? And here I will describe what might be called «the chance of an autobiographical event [*chance de l’événement autobiographique*]»<sup>70</sup>. For, how else to put it? An event of an autobiographical – indeed, of a «domestico-familial»<sup>71</sup> – nature slips into Derrida’s writing on *Beyond*; in fact, it appears quite literally, in black and white, in the typescript of *La psychanalyse dans le texte*.

Before I describe it to you, however, I should tell you that the phrase I have used – «the chance of an autobiographical event» – belongs to Derrida. It is Derrida’s gloss on the autobiographical nature of the *Gelegenheit*, the chance opportunity that presents

<sup>66</sup> *LD*, p. 254 [p. 314].

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

itself to Freud in Chapter 2 of *Beyond*. The context is none other than the *fort/da* game: «I have been able, through a chance opportunity [*Gelegenheit*] . . . to throw some light upon the first game played by a little boy of one and a half . . . It was more than a fleeting observation, for I lived under the same roof as the child and his parents for some weeks»<sup>72</sup>.

I turn now to the chance of Derrida's autobiographical event. You might say – and here I am quoting Derrida but I am replacing the name Freud with the name Derrida – «It is a question of an experience of which [Derrida] was not only the concerned witness but which took place in his family . . . and as for the child in question, he was his . . . [father]»<sup>73</sup>. It's a very familiar, familial scene. You will have no trouble imagining it. Derrida is sitting at his desk, typing out his seminar, when his young son decides that he too would like to compose. He climbs on to his father's lap and, with his father's help (he's only three years old), he types out his name in lower case letters: «jean derrida»<sup>74</sup>. He types in the middle of the line, as if to continue Derrida's thought. And he plays this game not once but twice in the seminar. One session later, the boy is at it again. Though he plays at writing more seriously this time. This time he writes everything in capital letters and adds a little something to his name. Just as before, he types out the name «JEAN DERRIDA» but then he begins a new line. And on this line, at the very bottom of the page<sup>75</sup>, he types the word – it is very clear; the letters are bolded – «PAPA»<sup>76</sup>.

I don't need to remind you that these textual events appear in the typescript of the seminar that plays “gone” with the *fort/da* game. Indeed, his seminar, you will remember, excludes not only children's play but also the *Pépé* who interprets this play. Here, then, in the very same seminar (precisely in the two sessions that follow the dismissal of Chapter 2), we get JEAN DERRI-DA instead of *fort/da*, and instead of *Pépé*, PAPA. That is, we get another child another game, another «great scene of descendancy»<sup>77</sup>, another loss (our loss), but also, as it were, another scene of writing, a literal scene of the play that is at play in writing. And perhaps, in the end, it is this scene of writing/this scene of play that keys us into what, for a good ten years of his life, will have been Derrida's devotion to Freud and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

But I want to end this piece on a high note. So let me suggest that we hear this language of devotion, of Derrida's devotion to Freud, not as *pépé* or *papa*, but as something more originary, something more like *lala*.

### Abbreviations

- LD Derrida, J. (2020), *Life Death, Seminar of 1975-1976*, Eng. trans. by P.-A. Brault and M. Naas, University of Chicago Press, Chicago [*Séminaire. La vie la mort (1975-1976)*, ed. P.-A. Brault and P. Kamuf, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2019].
- PT Derrida, J., *La psychanalyse dans le texte*, in *Jacques Derrida papers*, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries, MS.C.001 (box 11, folder 1-4). The abbreviation PT will be followed by session number.
- SoF Derrida, J. (1987), *To Speculate – on “Freud”*, in Id., *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, Eng. trans. by A. Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 257-409 [*Spéculer – sur “Freud”*, in Id., *La carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et*

<sup>72</sup> SE 18: 14 [GW 13: 11].

<sup>73</sup> LD, p. 245 [p. 304].

<sup>74</sup> PT, session 7.

<sup>75</sup> It should also be noted that Jean Derrida's second intervention (where he writes both his name and “PAPA”) immediately follows a quotation from Freud's essay *The Uncanny*. In the passage Derrida quotes, Freud has just claimed – and it is immediately following this claim that Jean Derrida makes his intervention – that «there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life». See SE 17: 249 [GW 12: 264].

<sup>76</sup> PT, session 8.

<sup>77</sup> LD, p. 258 [p. 319].

*au-delà*, Flammarion, Paris 1980, pp. 277-437].

- SE Freud, S. (1953-1974), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Eng. trans. by J. Strachey in collaboration with A. Freud, assisted by A. Strachey and A. Tyson, 24 vols., The Hogarth Press, London. The abbreviation SE will be followed by volume and page number.
- GW Freud, S. (1940-1968), *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 vols., Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. The abbreviation GW will be followed by volume and page number.

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