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Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel

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Abstract

This essay explores the vicissitudes of resistance as the central concept of both Freud and Hegel. Read through the prism of psychoanalysis, Hegel appears less as a philosopher of inexorable progress (the infamous cunning of reason) than as a thinker of repetition, delay, and stuckness. It is only on this seemingly unpromising basis that the radical potential of both thinkers can be retrieved.

Keywords

Freud – Hegel – Derrida – resistance – repetition – transference – psychoanalysis

“the most beautiful word . . .”

There’s an arresting passage towards the beginning of “Resistances” (an essay of 1991), in which Derrida offers up a startlingly un-deconstructive sounding confession and a question. “Why have I always dreamed of resistance?”

Ever since I can remember, I have always loved this word. . . . This word, which resonated in my desire and my imagination as the most beautiful word in the politics and history of this country, this word loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if, at any cost, I would like not to have missed blowing up trains, tanks, and headquarters between 1940 and 1945—why and how did it come to attract, like a magnet, so many other meanings, virtues, semantic or disseminal chances? I’m going to tell you which ones, even if I cannot discern the secret of my inconsolable nostalgia—which thus remains to be analyzed or which resists

analysis, a little like the navel of a dream. Why have I always dreamed of resistance?¹

Despite appearances, Derrida is not really dreaming of a lodestone of untrammelled political engagement—a molten core of existentialist commitment, collective solidarity, unimpeded emancipatory action—prior to its practical adulteration, ideological cooptation, envious deflation, or theoretical complication. Or if he is, he has immediate second thoughts. In any case he will speak no more of the matter, declaring such a fantasy to be both in need of analysis and strictly unanalyzable. He will devote the rest of the essay to exploring the “other meanings, virtues, semantic or disseminal chances”—distinctly less lovely meanings—that will have clustered annoyingly around this “beautiful word,” like iron filings around a magnet, obscuring its lovely contours and muffling its clarion call to action. This is no ordinary navel. It’s not that the fantasy of having blown up trains, tanks, and headquarters during the Occupation necessarily or obviously eludes analysis. It’s rather that analysis would have no practical import in this instance. It would neither dissolve the grip of the fantasy nor alleviate the “inconsolable nostalgia” such a fantasy elicits. And analysis would do nothing to ward off all those other pesky meanings, considerably less jubilant, that keep swarming around to ruin it.

Magnets are a bit like earthworms: even when you cut them up into tiny pieces, they keep on wiggling. The magnet retains its polarity, it continues to exert its force of attraction, no matter how many times you break it up or try to *analyze* it. In what follows I want to explore some of these *other* meanings of this beautiful and not-so-beautiful word: resistance.

Primal Words

There’s an antinomy implicit in the word itself: resistance signals both impediment and impetus. It can either disrupt or sustain the equilibrium and steadiness of every state of affairs or setup: either a force of transformation or a bulwark against innovation, either conservative or transformative—and at times, disconcertingly, both at once. Resistance shares many of the semantic tensions of its close cognate, *stasis*, with its contradictory senses of immobility

1 Jacques Derrida, *Resistances—of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

and upheaval.² *Stasis*, in Greek, has the ambiguity pertaining to all things “standing” (both *resistance* and *stasis* derive from *histemi*, from which came the Latin, *stare, sistere*, from which also came, eventually, *existere*, to step out into being, to stand forth, to exist), a verb that pivots on the grammatical tension between its stative and its dynamic usage, between the condition of standing and the act of standing up, between situation and event—steadfastness, constancy, and stability, on the one hand; interruption, instigation, initiation, on the other. It points to that which is stationary, static, persists, which stands up over time, which withstands the corrosive and erosive forces of antagonism and entropy, which is consecrated to status, consistency, and standing, for example the installation of a statue, the establishment of an institution, constitution, legal statute, or sovereign state (the state, like every institution, is tautologically bound to its own status and stability). But it also gestures to that which insists, takes a stand, stands apart or against, stands up to or rises up against the existing state of affairs, defies the status quo, desists from consensus, dismantles statues and institutions, defies laws and constitutions, introduces dissent, division, discord into the stable order of the state itself. *Stasis* means steadiness, constancy, permanence—and it also means sedition, faction, rebellion, civil war.

There’s thus an internal dissensus or *stasis* in the very meaning of *stasis*. Nicole Loraux, who has done more than anyone to explore this antinomy, speaks of a *Gegensinn*, alluding to those “primal words” that Freud loved to draw on when demonstrating the imperviousness of the unconscious to the law of non-contradiction.³ Barbara Cassin finds the word “Freudian-Hegelian,” which immediately raises the stakes: it resembles those special words Hegel delighted to stumble on in his own mother tongue (words like *Aufhebung*,

2 P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots* (Paris: 1968), s.v. “*stasis*.”

3 Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), esp 104–8; Loraux, “Cratylus et l’épreuve de l’étymologie,” *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 5 (1987): 49–69. Compare Freud, “On the Antithetical Sense of Primal Words,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 11:154–61; hereafter cited as *SE*, followed by volume and page; translation is sometimes modified. On *stasis* as a “theological-political goldmine” (and Derrida’s pointed critique of Schmitt’s own narrowing of the concept), see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 122f. and 149f., and Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 108ff. and 113f. See also Dimitris Vardoulakis, “*Stasis: Beyond Political Theology?*,” in *Cultural Critique* 73 (2009): 125–47.

notably, with its antithetical and even incompatible range of meanings), and that he took as evidence of the pulsating negativity of thought (and being).⁴

Stasis forces us to reconsider the opposition of motion and rest. It puts the very antithesis of stasis and kinesis into question. Too much stability can be destabilizing, while excessive mobility produces deadlock. In a medical register, stasis refers to digestive sluggishness, circulatory constriction, gastric blockage, constipation, the toxic coagulation or clogging of bodily humors, a stagnation that will eventually throw the whole organism into crisis. In a political register, stasis is a kind of hardening or rigidity that can precipitate upheaval precisely because in its obduracy, its one-sidedness, its refusal to adapt to circumstances, to go with the flow, it exposes the rigid armature sustaining the status quo, provoking violent counter-reactions and thus forcing latent antagonisms to the surface. We are *in a state* when our confinement, our stuckness, becomes explosive.

Conversely, too much agitation can be immobilizing. The sixth century poet Alcaeus speaks of a stasis of the winds, as when a ship—a sailing vessel, a ship of state—is caught between countervailing gusts, buffeted from one side to another, marooned in constant motion, as if becalmed. We are *at sea* when too much turbulence becomes constricting—when we become immobilized by internal conflict or trapped in the ceaseless vortex of opposing forces. This also happens in a political register when protracted conflict produces oppositional gridlock—the stalemate of prolonged civil war, the repetitive circle of revenge, the collapse of time and history into an endless cycling of provocation and reprisal. This historical paralysis can leave as its legacy yet another blockage. The future dissipates before the traumatic persistence of a past that will not pass but lingers on as a stony impediment arresting both thought and action.

This is why stasis, for the Greeks—the civil war at Athens, for example, when the unified city found itself convulsed by internal dissension (at once paralyzed by strife and spinning out of control: simultaneously agitated and frozen)—why stasis poses such a problem for the re-establishment of subsequent rule and the return to history. It also poses a fundamental crisis for the archive. Nothing short of enforced amnesia, an indelibly inscribed erasure, could break the traumatic hold of the past and suspend the deadlock of inter- and transgenerational violence. This amnesia often took a paradoxical form: legally mandated forgetfulness, the paradoxical injunction not to remember, *me mnesikakein*—to take an oath, to make a promise, committing

4 Barbara Cassin, "Politics of Memory: On Treatments of Hate," *The Public* 8, no. 3 (2001): 9–22; compare Hegel on the pleasures of speculative polysemy in *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 82.

oneself not to remember: that is, to *remember not to remember*, or more accurately, to *remember to not remember*—the official oblivion decreed by the law of amnesty of 403 BCE, which will be the blueprint for so many subsequent amnesties, from the Edict of Nantes through the Treaty of Westphalia to the postwar legislation in France forbidding the prosecution, or even the naming, of collaborators in the Vichy regime.⁵

But amnesty is itself a kind of freeze, stasis supervening upon a previous stasis—a kind of shock administered to an inert or emptily gyrating body politic. Everything is arrested, everything starts up again, history is resumed, but only after a “deep freeze”—an instantaneous and hyperbolic freezing: the world is suddenly *surgelé*, like a frozen supermarket product—a sudden standstill that interrupts stagnation precisely by intensifying and repeating it.

Antinomies of Resistance

“Resistance” is a kind of “primal word” in just this sense. An oppositional and repetitive stance and standing (there’s an “again” lurking in every “against,” just as there’s a *Wieder* spilling out of every *Wider*), resistance straddles the line between persistence and insistence. Resistance points at once to a kind of conservatism—a reluctance, inertia and even paralysis—and to a restlessness that needs to push every situation to breaking point and to leave nothing standing. The point is not that resistance is ideologically amorphous or that it

5 The oath was instituted in 403 to secure the transition to democracy after the atrocities of civil war and tyranny: “let the memory of [these things] remain extinguished and dormant as something that has not occurred.” See (pseudo-)Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* (London: Penguin, 1984). See Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), and Edwin Carawan, “The Meaning of *Mê Mnêsikakein*,” *Classical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2012): 567–81. Nicole Loraux demonstrates that the civic ban on memory was foreshadowed by the earlier theatrical ban, described by Herodotus, on staging the tragedy of *The Capture of Miletus* and echoed by comparable institutional erasures such as the elimination of commemorative dates from the calendar. On some of the paradoxes of legal amnesia, see Loraux, *The Divided City*, 145–69 and on the theatrical proscription, Loraux, “On Amnesty and its Opposite,” in *Mothers in Mourning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) on the various paradoxes of amnesty from the Treaty of Westphalia through to the 1971 presidential pardon of Paul Touvier for his collaboration with the Nazis. On some of the blockages in the archives pertaining specifically to the French Occupation, see Sonia Coombe, *Archives interdites: Les peurs françaises face à l'histoire contemporaine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).

inherently lacks political motivation, as is often charged. But there's a fundamental instability in the concept that makes it both intriguing and awkward as a political resource. Although it's always tempting to think of resistance as a good thing—defiant, courageous, on the side of liberty and justice—it can be sobering to recall that its earliest expressions tilted decidedly towards the right: think of Edmund Burke. Everybody wants to claim it—and everyone needs to deflate it.

There are some uncomfortable historical issues. One need look no further than to the mother of all resistances, the movement that claimed the name as its very own—the Resistance, *la Résistance*, to see how quickly the waters become murky. It's not simply that the extent of the French Resistance turned out to have been woefully exaggerated; that, like any other historical event, it so quickly came to be overtaken by myth and fantasy; and that the line between resistance and collaboration could be blurry (the so-called “Vichy syndrome” that shook France in the 1970s).⁶ The Resistance was fraught with political tensions from the outset, and its legacy remains painfully divided. The patriotic sentiments inflamed by the French resistance to the German occupation would be harnessed by de Gaulle almost immediately after the war to refuel France's own war of colonial aggression in north Africa—a violence that would in turn help spur the Algerian war of independence, with its own vicissitudes and vengeful aftermath. The historical details are engrossing, but it's the structural issue that I want to engage here.⁷

It's become a little routine to disparage resistance, to doubt its efficacy, or to deplore its reactive and even reactionary aspects (this deflationary project can sometimes be an exercise in *schadenfreude*). A cursory reading of Adorno, Foucault, Agamben, Arendt, Hardt/Negri, or Žižek might suggest that resistance is futile, that it is coopted in advance, that it is toxically contaminated by what it opposes: it is a byproduct and accomplice of power; it has been snuffed out by the forces of total domination, ensnared in the web of administration, devoured by this thing called Empire, or absorbed like oil in the machinery of global capitalism. The gist of these arguments (the details are of course diverse) suggests that hegemonic power not only accommodates but even demands resistance. Every regime requires for its own maintenance a reserve of thuggish negativity to absorb or overcome: capitalism's need for

6 Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy—de 1944 à nos jours*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

7 Howard Caygill explores some of the political complexities of resistance in considerable theoretical and historical depth, and I recommend readers to consult his *On Resistance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), as well as Françoise Proust, *De la résistance* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997) and Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013).

crisis, liberal democracy's need for (at least a show of) contestation in order to prove the resilience of the system, the "totalitarian" need for a steady supply of dissidents that it can scarily suppress by a show of force.

Resistance thus seems to be parasitical on what it opposes. It is caught up in the repetitive vortex of action and reaction—the circle of reciprocal solicitation described by Hegel in the third chapter of the *Phenomenology* and elaborated in his exposition of reflexive determinations in the *Logic*—the reciprocal binary logic of inside and outside, position and opposition, and so on. Or, to speak in a Lacanian-Nietzschean register, resistance is frozen in the imaginary. Mesmerized by its antithesis, caught up in the mirror-play of endless mimetic doubling, it is condemned to reactivity and *ressentiment*. In its desire to challenge existing conditions, but without the means or will to overcome them, resistance is committed to reproducing these conditions, borrowing its energy, tactics, and even objectives from extant social models.

Either every image of the future is forged in the crucible of the present (the standard Marxist argument against utopian socialism)⁸ or there can be no vision of the future, not even the aspiration to have one, because every future will have collapsed into the orbit of an eternal present. Resistance, as its suffix suggests—intransitive, uninflected, sheer participial endurance—is always on the verge of becoming autotelic, self-fulfilling, formalistic, dedicated solely to its own perpetuation. This is also the Leninist argument against "left wing communism" as an "infantile" (that is to say narcissistic or auto-affective) disorder.⁹ But the problem can haunt any form of activism: you can get so captivated by the struggle that you never want it to end. This was also Hegel's critique of abstract negation: the problem is not that it's too radical but that it's ultimately reactionary. Like all skepticism of the less-than-"thoroughgoing" kind, it invests everything in its own powers of contestation, in this way conveniently obscuring its own unwavering commitment to the status quo.¹⁰ In short, the negativity of resistance is either too determinate or too abstract. Or rather, its own determinacy itself is an abstraction: determinate negation is

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- 8 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 1:98–137, and Friedrich Engels, "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 3:95–151.
- 9 V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder," in *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 31:17–118.
- 10 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §79; henceforth cited as *PS*, followed by paragraph number, using Miller's translation (occasionally modified).

reduced to the endlessly reversible polarities of opposition and antithesis—the slave logic of reactivity and revolt.

This ambiguity produces the discomfort that so often arises when emancipatory political projects (feminism or anti-colonialism, for example) come into contact with psychoanalysis: a disruptive and even revolutionary concept of resistance as a practice of insubordination confronts a seemingly regressive and repressive concept of resistance as a technique of self-subjugation. Resistance can be either a struggle against or a secret collusion with domination: either a challenge to oppression or an instrument of repression. It can be either a pressure to change or a stubborn investment in not doing so. At times, irritatingly, it can seem to be both at once—simultaneously the opening and the greatest obstacle to transformation.

Interminable Resistance, or, How to Avoid Talking about Hegel

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud defines resistance capaciously: “Was immer die Fortsetzung der Arbeit stört ist ein Widerstand”—translated by Strachey as “anything that interrupts the progress of analysis.”¹¹ More precisely translated: whatever impedes the work from proceeding—from keeping on going—is a resistance. Freud sets the bar pretty low: to speak teleologically of thwarted *progress*, to set the terms of productivity, or even to define the goal or direction of the cure is already to beg the question. Freud is talking about

11 “Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious. One of its rules is that whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance” (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, in *SE* 5: 517). Freud acknowledges that sometimes the whole world can conspire to “interrupt” the progress of analysis. So many events outside the analysand’s control—war, illness, death in the family—can distract or interfere with the schedule. Freud addresses this issue head-on in a provocative footnote added to the 1925 edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*. “The proposition laid down in these peremptory terms—‘whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance’—is easily open to misunderstanding. It is of course only to be taken as a technical rule, as a warning to analysts. It cannot be disputed that in the course of an analysis various events may occur the responsibility for which cannot be laid upon the patient’s intentions. His father may die without his having murdered him; or a war may break out which brings the analysis to an end. But behind its obvious exaggeration the proposition is asserting something both true and new. Even if the interrupting event is a real one and independent of the patient, it often depends on him how great an interruption it causes; and resistance shows itself unmistakably in the readiness with which he accepts an occurrence of this kind or the exaggerated use which he makes of it” (*SE* 5: 517n).

the bare minimum of momentum in an almost Beckettian sense—*Fortsetzen*: keeping on going, going onwards, going forth or further; it's uncertain whether we can even say going forward. Resistance is what breaks the rhythm of what Freud will continue to the end to call the *work*—the repetitive, accumulating scansion from month to month, from session to session, from moment to moment, from word to word. *Whatever interrupts or impedes the continuation, the going on, of work is a resistance.*

This, as you know, pretty well covers everything: quitting; missed appointments; wasted appointments; lateness; forgetting between appointments; stalling over procedure; complaining about the schedule, or the fees, or the furniture; distracting the analyst with your charm, or with your annoyingness; doubt, dissent, disagreement; obstinate stupidity; excessive knowingness; quibbling over interpretations; acquiescing readily to interpretations but only so as to forestall discussion; assenting sincerely, even with conviction, but in such a way that the idea is somehow quarantined from any further association; assenting to interpretations but only through a dusty cloud of memory whereby you are able, sort of, to recognize the truth, yet somehow manage to keep it sealed off in the museum of the past, as untouchable as a mummy under glass;¹² assenting to interpretations while remaining stubbornly impervious to their implications; assenting to interpretations but in the mode of fetishistic splitting or disavowal: *je sais bien mais quand même*, I know very well that this is true, but nonetheless I will continue to believe (and to organize my entire life as if) the very opposite is the case; preempting the analyst's interpretations by coming up with them first; cheating analysis by doing it on your own, over-preparing for sessions, figuring out everything in advance, always rehearsing everything beforehand; constantly doing extra reading; diligently writing down your dreams every morning instead of just remembering them patchily the way regular people do; diluting the analysis by talking about it all the time with your friends and family; shadowboxing over theoretical minutiae in order to prove your intellectual superiority; offering up theoretical subtleties to flatter the analyst's acuity or to establish your own collegiality; refusing to get better in order to demonstrate the analyst's incompetence or to show the uselessness of psychoanalysis itself (a classic example of bad faith, according

12 Freud is referring to the experience of so-called *fausse reconnaissance* (aptly labeled in French): the past is recalled but is so disconnected from the present that it might as well have been written in a foreign language. See Freud, "Fausse Reconnaissance ('déjà raconté'), in PsychoAnalytic Treatment," in *SE* 13: 201. I'm grateful for Alenka Zupančič's remarks on this topic at the "Actuality of the Absolute" Hegel conference at Birkbeck College, London (2013).

to Sartre); getting better too quickly so as to prove his (and its) redundancy; clinging to symptoms in order to display the moral profundity of your suffering, to torment the analyst by obliging her to witness the carnage, to force her to confront her own voyeuristic investment, or simply to get out of doing the dishes; miraculously shedding these symptoms so you get to go home earlier.

And then there are the dreams. You start producing dreams that seem custom-made to prove the analyst wrong, for example, dreams so manifestly unpleasant that their only possible purpose could be to refute Freud's theory of the dream as wish-fulfillment.¹³ Or you come up with dreams that seem designed to prove the analyst right, but only in a vulgar, winking way, dreams lifted straight from the textbook, bursting with prefabricated *symbols* (as Freud designated these seemingly universal signifiers)—cigars, stairways, rotundas, trains: items drawn from the common stock of ready-made signs, each wearing its meaning on its sleeve, so blatantly obvious that anyone can surely offer up the correct interpretation immediately, automatically, “without any assistance.”¹⁴ Or you dream up dreams so dense with autobiographical significance, so knotted with allusion, with all these associative pathways sprouting off in so many directions, that they are simply impossible to disentangle, unpick, unpack, or analyze—the much-admired “navel of the dream.”¹⁵ Such tangles seem to be written in a private language that defy commentary altogether.

I'll come back to these last two examples. The dream symbol and the dream navel are not usually spoken of in the same breath. In fact, following a cue from Freud himself, Freud's readers rarely discuss the symbol, perhaps because of its embarrassing phylogenetic overtones, while the navel tends to

13 See *Interpretation of Dreams*, in *SE* 4: 148, on the dream of the “witty butcher's wife,” and Cynthia Chase's insightful commentary in “The Witty Butcher's Wife: Freud, Lacan, and the Conversion of the Resistance to Theory,” *MLN* 102 (1987): 989–1013.

14 “This dreamer belonged to a type whose therapeutic prospects are not favorable: up to a certain point they offer no resistance at all to analysis, but from then onwards turn out to be almost inaccessible. He interpreted this dream almost unaided. ‘The Rotunda,’ he said, ‘was my genitals and the captive balloon in front of it was my penis, whose limpness I have reason to complain of’ (*SE* 5: 375). On dream symbolism generally, which Freud himself initially declares to be merely supplementary to the dream work but to which, with every new edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, he will invest greater and greater attention (the number of additions to the symbolism discussion greatly outstrip any other additions to the *Interpretation of Dreams* over the course of its many editions), see *SE* 5: 345–414, and also Strachey's remarks in *SE* 4: xii–xiii on the editorial issues.

15 Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, in *SE* 4: 111n and *SE* 5: 525.

be more appreciated than explored, perhaps because it's so gorgeous.¹⁶ But they're intriguing as a pair. Each presents a limit-case of resistance—a blockage to association that appears to be unmotivated and impersonal, a structural impediment rather than one serving any obviously strategic defensive purpose. Their contrast is also dialectically suggestive. The symbol is too universal to be informative, while the navel is too idiomatic to be understood—either an empty Esperanto or a blind idiolect, either too public or too private, either too transparent or too opaque. Combined, they present the outer limits of intelligibility and stake out the obstacle course through which every analysis must wend its way. I'll come back to this in a few moments.

Resistance is the stagnant, dead time accumulating between and within sessions, the Sisyphean cycle of obstinate regressions, false remissions, idle precipitations—the repetitive recycling of the same material, boring both the analyst and yourself with endless reiterations of the same complaint, or fascinating both of you with manic efforts to fill the time with entertaining anecdotes, amazing theories, or penetrating observations. It's about the breakdown or atomization of time. Unmodified by intervening history, removed from circulation, the past intrudes as a static, isolated remnant; unconscious repetition takes the place of conscious memory, and the present evaporates from view. Or, which might amount to the same, it's the present that impinges: everything is happening here and now, as if there were nothing and no one outside the room, no time outside the session, only the infinitely dilating now, a moment of pure immediacy inoculated from every context, untrammelled by antecedent or aftermath, expanding infinitely to fill all time.

Above all resistance is the breakdown in language when the chain of associations comes to a halt, or never gets off the ground, when nothing comes to mind, when speech fails to spark, when despite or because of your best

16 For some notable exceptions, see the outstanding discussions of the dream navel by Shoshana Felman, "The Dream from Which Psychoanalysis Proceeds," in *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 68–120, Samuel Weber, "The Meaning of the Thallus," in *Legend of Freud* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 101–20, and Elizabeth Bronfen, "The Navel of Freud's Inaugural Dream," in *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 53–98. As for the dream symbol, two of the very few readers who have taken Freud's account of the symbol seriously at both a theoretical and a clinical level are Maria Torok and Nicholas Rand, "Dream Interpretation: Free Association or Universal Symbolism?," in *Questions for Freud: The Secret History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For an excellent discussion of resistance to interpretation more generally, see Elizabeth Rottenberg, "Resistance to Interpretation," *Philosophy Today* (2006): 83–89.

efforts the whole thing sputters and stalls and goes off the rails; or when, fleeing silence, you fill the air by telling stories or by concocting theories about language's own inevitable failure. It's always tempting to think of resistance as a failure of productivity: the *work* gets interrupted because the analysand goes on strike, stops talking, stops generating *material* (strange industrial language) for analysis. But resistance can also take the form of a crisis of overproduction: there can be an endless proliferation of material that keeps forestalling any possible resolution; every interpretation generates new material to work through, new dreams demanding interpretation, new symptoms to consider, including the vicissitudes of resistance itself. Either way: the analysis gets mired down in a search for resolution that is either preempted or kept dangling forever out of reach.

Resistance is the refusal or inability to obey the "fundamental rule" or "ground rule" of analysis—that oxymoronic, impossible injunction, a double bind really, that inaugurates the analytic contract by constraining or forcing you to speak "freely"—to communicate whatever comes to or "falls into" the mind, *Einfälle*, without selection, omission, evaluation, or concern for connection, sequence, propriety, or relevance. Like a passenger on a train (that's Freud's own somewhat Proustian analogy), you're to report the changing mental scenery as it passes by, merely looking on, like Hegel's phenomenological observer or even like Husserl's, suspending judgment and leaving understanding and explanation to another (day, or person).¹⁷ "Free" association is not a matter of self-expression or catharsis; the point is not to alleviate tension, to discharge pressure, or to tap into an archaic stew of primary process ideation. In fact, the apparent spontaneity of so-called stream-of-consciousness can be yet another stalling tactic—a way of plugging the void with noise. The point of the "free" association method is not to achieve freedom in any immediate or obvious way, and certainly not in the sense of autonomy, freewill, or self-expression. It's about suspending the official rules of language but only so as to allow the real constraints to reveal themselves in their unembellished tyranny. The aptly named chain of signifiers is anything but uncoerced.

These examples were all more or less drawn or extrapolated (sometimes mildly embellished) from Freud's own case histories—from Dora's belligerent defiance to Wolf Man's lusterless compliance—including the snippets of Freud's own self-analysis in the *Interpretation of Dreams* and elsewhere. My point in running through this laundry list is simply to underline the protean versatility of resistance, its indefatigable inventiveness, as it keeps shuffling unpredictably from negation to position, from affirmation to refusal, until

17 Freud, "On beginning the treatment" (1913), in *SE* 12: 135.

the very distinction becomes unclear: every denial can mask an affirmation, every acquiescence can harbor a sly repudiation. The comedy of the exercise shouldn't blind us to the seriousness of the stakes. That's a lot of work to get out of work, and a lot of energy and ingenuity invested in prolonging suffering. The inventory doesn't begin to exhaust the repertoire of evasions, obfuscations, and prevarications that block the pathway of associations and interrupt the continuation of what Freud will continue to the end to call the analytic *work*.

There are also the ever-expanding social and institutional barriers—the panoply of resistances to psychoanalysis in the broader cultural arena (medical, religious, scientific), which Freud will also describe in consistently military terms—a beleaguered garrison, a fortified enclave, a frontier outpost—and which like the individual resistances, and reinforcing these, run the gamut: suspicion, ridicule, embarrassment, scientific incredulity, intellectual irritation, professional jealousy, moral outrage. But resistance to analysis can equally manifest itself as a disconcerting absence of resistance—disingenuous credulity, vulgar pragmatism, stupid optimism, the very traits that Freud found most annoying about America, as it happens, the place where psychoanalysis seemed to be most easily assimilated, provoking least shock or outrage, and where he consequently saw the whole project to be on shakiest ground.¹⁸ He notes that the very tolerance of the Americans betrays a discomfiting disengagement: like the labile libidinal types whose excessively mobile or vaporous libido prevents attachments from adhering, their whole existence is a slippery surface to which nothing sticks.

Above all, as psychoanalysis acquires cultural capital, resistance to psychoanalysis will increasingly come to focus on the very concept of resistance. Among the many irritations induced by psychoanalysis, vastly outstripping the more obvious shockers (infantile sexuality, incest, etc.), none is more maddening than the assurance with which it seems to court objections, rewriting its own vulnerability, its tendency to attract detractors, as the signature of its greatest strength. “My expectations were by no means disappointed,” writes Freud of his most noxiously recalcitrant patient, Dora, “when this interpretation of mine was met by a most emphatic negative.”¹⁹ Every rejection is a tacit acquiescence, the very objection to a theory a perfect confirmation of its cogency, if only because it shows the speaker's investment in denying it. Negation in this sense functions, rhetorically, as a form of preterition—an admission by way of denegation—the negative operator providing a kind of

18 Cf. Todd Dufresne, *Tales from the Freudian Crypt: The Death Drive in Text and Context* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 7–8.

19 Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905), in *SE* 7: 58.

invisibility cloak under which the inadmissible material can elude the censorship and enter consciousness unscathed. In stating “not-p,” I allow “p” to be put into words, if only at the level of propositional content. The negative prefix allows the truth to be admitted but as an empty formula: a pure *énoncé* handed over to the analyst like a specimen under glass, immunized from interpretative elaboration, recited as if suspended between quotation marks, both referentially and pragmatically opaque. The more vehement the refusal, the more certain the cogency of the intervention. “*It’s not my mother . . .*”²⁰

This kind of thing is of course exactly what’s always contributed to the bad reputation of psychoanalysis as a science—its seemingly flagrant disregard for protocols of proof and legitimation: refusing falsifiability, it relinquishes verifiability. That’s the standard Anglo philosophical reproach, and Freud gleefully courted this reaction; but intriguingly similar objections arise also from the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum. Nietzsche-inspired critics will also take issue with the priests of lack (as Deleuze and Guattari describe Freud and Lacan) on oddly compatible grounds. Obviously this is precisely the kind of indignation that Hegel has always provoked as well: the dialectical machinery always waiting in the wings, the evil genius parrying every resistance in advance, anticipating every objection as its own invention, converting failure into triumph, the slave ideology of the loser wins . . .

But Freud is of course being deliberately provocative. We’ve just seen that negation comes in all colors, shapes, and sizes, each one modulated by the vicissitudes of tone, mood, inflection, syntax, timing, context. Negation runs the entire gamut: disagreement, refusal, disavowal, aversion, fear, excitement, desire, hallucinatory foreclosure. It can also, as it happens, mean acceptance. “No” is not a word you can look up in the dictionary or in a dream book: it’s neither a stable lexical unit nor a formal operator guaranteeing the conveyance of forbidden content. Nor is “yes,” for that matter, a guarantor of affirmation, however many times you repeat it: we’re not all Molly Bloom—a point driven home by Sydney Morgenbesser’s legendary riposte to J. L. Austin. (During a lecture at Columbia, Austin had been musing on the fact that whereas a double negative always implies a positive, the reverse is not the case—there is no language in which a double positive can possibly signify a negative—whereupon, from the back of the auditorium, someone could be heard already darkly muttering, “Yeah, yeah . . .”).

The point is that “no,” like “yes,” is strictly speaking a shifter or indexical: it draws its entire energy and significance from its site of enunciation. Peeling

20 Freud, “Negation,” in *SE* 19: 235.

away the negation as if it were a price tag²¹ does not in itself, says Freud himself, lift or overcome (Freud actually uses the philosophically charged word *aufhebt*) the repression,²² just as lifting repression in turn does not necessarily remove the symptom, and just as, for that matter, naming the resistance does not automatically dispel it. In fact it usually has the very opposite effect. This is because truth is not, as Hegel had said, a freshly minted coin (*PS*, §39)—it's not a blind lump of theoretical or pre-critical positivity but a practical *result*. Intellectual acceptance of the truth has no bearing on its affective or pragmatic import. Even the analysand's more-than-simply-intellectual *conviction* of the correctness of a given interpretation does not guarantee the clinical validity or efficacy of this interpretation, however you might measure this efficacy. The Wolf Man will relapse almost immediately after Freud's last-ditch intervention, despite unflinchingly (even if, it must be said, at gunpoint) endorsing Freud's interpretation, and will end up spending the remaining decades of his life in virtually uninterrupted therapy, handed on from one analyst to the next, generating more and more archival paperwork, more files, more case studies, more memoirs, and more deadlines, until his death. This is because any content that can be presented at a purely propositional or theoretical level, dissociated from the context of analysis, can only function as an extraneous piece of information and is thus tantamount to a suggestion—strictly speaking a piece of “wild analysis”—and a subjection of the analysand to the mystical authority of the analyst.

Sometimes “It's not my mother” can be a decoy to get the analyst off your back. It can be a way to avoid saying, for example, “It's not, ahem, my father . . .” This is a twist on the old Jewish joke Freud likes to tell: you say you're getting off the train at Cracow, in order to trick everyone into thinking that you're actually getting off the train in Lemberg, so that they're all the more outraged when, in fact, you get off (or for that matter when you *don't* get off: it doesn't really matter by this point) the train in Cracow.²³ The logic has affinities with what Derrida (citing Koyré) calls the “old Machiavellian technique”—speaking the truth on the premise that you won't be believed anyway—which is actually a sort of newish technique: Arendt identifies this as the basic logic of the modern

21 Freud compares the negative operator to the commercial “Made in Germany” certificate of authenticity, where the place of manufacture would in this case be the realm of unconscious desire (“Negation,” in *SE* 19: 236).

22 Ibid.

23 For Freud's own slightly different telling of the joke, see *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, in *SE* 8: 115.

lie.²⁴ Which is to say that negation, like every other molecule of language, like every other aspect of our lives, is not a natural kind but a historical artifact.

In fact, as Freud knows perfectly well, by the time he writes his essay on negation, the phrase “It’s not my mother” will have become a recognizable “Freudian” trope, the grammatical equivalent of a cigar in a dream, and is perfectly capable of functioning wildly, that is, as a piece of frozen theoretical (mis)information. By this point Freud will have long stopped treating resistance as an obstacle to be removed through the coercive power of magic, touch, suggestion, or argument—whether through hypnosis, by a shamanistic laying on of hands (the “pressure technique”), by the power of priestly charisma, or by force of intellectual persuasion. This is because the agenda of psychoanalysis will have irreversibly shifted from a hermeneutic of unveiling to a pragmatics of working-through. It’s no longer simply a question of undoing repression—bringing the unconscious into consciousness or dissolving illusion—but rather about examining the ongoing investments that make any such undoing either impossible or ineffective or both.

Resistance is not simply a resistance to the lifting of repression; it cannot be cleared away like a roadblock or dissipated like a mirage; the model of consciousness-raising or critical *Aufklärung* is entirely inappropriate. There is no stable position from which the act of demystification could be undertaken, because this very act will have been invested with all the ambivalence directed towards its object: the unconscious is no longer simply the object of investigation but will have invaded the entire analytic setting, including the walls and furniture. Resistance must for this reason ultimately be registered as a resistance to the figure of the analyst and ultimately to Analysis itself, which somehow keeps on getting personified, allegorized, mythified—a big Other that needs to be continually impressed, placated, flattered, seduced, ignored, defied. Resistance is in this sense less a stable or stationary obstacle than the endlessly reversible slippage or sliding, *Übertragung*, from content to context, from story to “setting,” that will define the transference proper. This is why the issue of time—tact, timing, rhythm, frequency, velocity, duration—will become so decisive as a technical consideration and also why time itself (the sheer length and lack of it) will become such a killer. I’ll come back to this in just a moment.

24 Jacques Derrida, “History of the Lie,” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 63; the original formulation, quoted by Derrida, is by Alexandre Koyré, *Réflexions sur le mensonge* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1996), 30. See also Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers,” in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 3–47.

Five Plus or Minus One

In an Addendum to "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety," a latish essay, Freud tries to enumerate and classify the resistances topographically with a view to dividing and conquering (as has been often noted, his whole vocabulary is military-imperial-conquistadorial from the outset).²⁵ As his catalogue accumulates, however, the obstacles take on increasingly molecular dimensions, becoming ubiquitous, protean, and directionless—less an organized army fighting on a unified front than a ragged and dispersed troop of guerilla warriors, launching their bombs and barricades unpredictably and from everywhere—and the prospects of mounting a successful counter-resistance seem to dwindle.

Derrida remarks on the uncertainty of Freud's arithmetic as well as the oddness of the list. There are the explicit refusals of the ego, as an agency motivated by strategic considerations of self-defense: the reality-driven need to maintain repression at all costs, the inhibiting and distracting effects of the transference, the almost-prudential investment in the secondary gains of illness itself, not least of which the unquenchable thirst for recognition. (That adds up to three sub-divisions, more or less, all more or less on the side of law and order, although the dysfunctionality of each of these mechanisms will quickly become apparent.)

Then there is the purposeless obstinacy of the id, in its fixity and incorrigibility. It's hardwired to last. Structurally impervious to modification, indifferent to contradiction, the unconscious is the embodiment of motiveless intransigence in its purest form—"timeless" in its indifference to progress, the sequential order of before and after, cause and effect, ground and consequent and, as such, invulnerable to argument, induction, or the erosive force of habituation. Repetition is in this sense a bulwark against the wear and tear of repetition. (That's a fourth, although the count is starting to blur, since this same obstinacy surely attaches equally to the ego, already itself half submerged in the swamp of the unconscious and therefore prone to the same repetitive insistence.)

And finally, most unfathomably and most intractably, there is the grinding ferocity of a superego hell-bent on ruining everything, ripping up achievements, undoing or reversing progress, undermining therapeutic alliances, administering punishment not so much for the purpose of discharging guilt, as a retaliation, as a deterrent, or for any other even remotely instrumental purpose, but for the sole purpose of provoking even more guilt, Kafka-style, that

25 Freud, Addendum A to "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety," in *SE* 20: 157–60.

is, as a pretext for administering even more punishment, inflicting suffering to create the opportunity of inflicting even more suffering, prolonging illness for the sole purpose of prolonging illness, no special benefits attached, violence for the sake of violence—a kind of pure, disinterested un-pleasure, in a quasi-Kantian sense. To speak, by way of determinate negation, of *displeasure* or *Unlust*, with its sublime promise of moral profit, is very possibly to assume too much. Freud is of course referring to the death drive.²⁶

Analysis will eventually therefore come to circle around a core of purposeless suffering—a suffering that will shed even the veneer of rationality, functionality, or sacrificial payoff, and that will seek to prolong itself for the sake of . . . prolongation itself. A strange conatus, void of teleology or purpose: this defines the essential drivenness of the drive itself, without which no analysis, or any other project, for that matter, could ever get off the ground. If analysis is literally to be understood as a dissolving or untying—this is the original meaning of ana-lysis: an unbinding or loosening of the tightly wound knot of punishment and desire—the *resistance* to analysis consists of an incessant reweaving of this fabric of oppression and repression. Any attempt to loosen the weave, to unpick, unbind, or *analyze* the knot of suffering is Sisyphean, or more precisely, counter-Penelopean; the very act of unweaving is itself silently knitted back into the mesh, seamlessly reintegrated into the pathology, like an invisible scar. This is, incidentally, one way—of course not the standard one—of understanding Hegel's most infamous statement that the “wounds of spirit heal and leave no scars” (*PS*, §669).²⁷

Depending on how you're counting, if you're still counting, this might add up to five distinct species of resistance. But the categories have by now broken down: everything is pounded and pulverized by repetition, everything is spinning around its own axis, which means there is no hard and fast way of determining the specific locus or motivation for any resistance or even that it makes sense to speak of motivation in the first place. This also means, and here we are coming to the most difficult kernel, that the “cruelty” of the death drive must be considered in its most formal, unembellished abstractness—prior to any specific tendency to aggression, untethered from any libidinal investment in pain, withdrawn from visibility, “silently” diffusing itself, unbound from the pleasure/power complex in which Foucault, for one, located psychoanalysis

26 Cf. Freud, *Ego and the Id*, in *SE* 19: 53, on the super-ego as the “pure culture of the death drive.”

27 I explore some of the ideological ambiguities of this invisible mending in “Terrors of the Tabula Rasa,” the last chapter in *Mourning Sickness* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

and where he identified its most insidious disciplinary collusions.²⁸ In the *Postcard* Derrida identifies this recursive, repetitive structure as the “transcendental tautology” that defines the drivenness of the drive as such.²⁹

This conceptual leakage between the various resistances *might* indicate, suggests Derrida, a common conceptual or genetic core. But if you try to introduce repetition as the mother of all resistances, that is, as the unifying principle or genus of resistance, the very principle of resistance breaks down. That is to say, it no longer functions as a principle, insofar as the logic of repetition ruins conceptuality, exerting an atomizing pressure that disintegrates the coherence of resistance not only as a category but also, and here the stakes become more than simply theoretical, as an effective force. If there can be no coherent concept of repetition, it follows that there can be no unified concept of resistance, which means that resistance itself, Derrida hazards to say, is at the limits a non-resistance, that there is no resistance in the sense of *la résistance*, a singular, focalized, capital R-resistance³⁰—which also means, and Derrida is explicit here, that “psychoanalysis itself, *la psychanalyse*,” does not exist either, that there is strictly speaking no such thing as psychoanalysis either.³¹

Freud's list, then, is either redundant or incomplete or both: “five minus or plus one,” by Derrida's reckoning.³² With this enumeration Derrida slyly suggests that the count is off: it's either inflated or truncated or both at once. Freud is either cheating by double-counting or he's leaving off the most important item on the list—which is to say, the list itself. By omitting from the catalogue

28 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and see Derrida, “To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis,” in *Resistances*, 116–18; see also Derrida, “Au-delà du principe de la pouvoir,” in *Rue Descartes* (2014): 3–14 (thanks to Elizabeth Rottenberg and Elissa Marder for sending, at short notice).

29 Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 403.

30 Dina Al-Kassim reads here a thinly veiled riposte to Gilles Deleuze's somewhat rarefied (and reified) affirmation of resistance in his reflections on “R as in Resistance,” in *Abécédaire*, the series of interviews conducted by Claire Parnet in 1988–89 and broadcast posthumously on French television in 1996. See “Resistance, Terminal and Interminable,” in *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*, ed. Gabriele Schwob (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), at 108–22.

31 Derrida, *Resistances*, 20.

32 Derrida, “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty,” in *Without Alibi*, 246. This lecture of 2000, almost a decade later than “Resistances,” is worth considering in detail for its slight shift in focus to the institutional conditions of psychoanalysis as well as for its marked hesitancy regarding the viability of the concept of resistance itself.

of resistances the motivation for the inventory in the first place—that is, the strictly “lytic” or “philolytic” drive to divide, classify, itemize and atomize—Freud leaves out of the picture, or at least conspicuously in the shadow, the auto-resistant or auto-immune thrust of analysis itself, torn as it is between its obsessional desire to break up or dissolve organic unities (its stubbornly dismembering or dispersive attachment to the work of detachment) and its archaeological, regressive, or “anagogic” longing for the atomic, the indivisible, the simple, the original, the archaic. This split, which is equally a knot, simultaneously constricts or inhibits the work of analysis, holds it back from what it does best, that is, from *analyzing*, and unravels it by setting it on an endless Penelopean labor.

Too Slow, Too Fast

I want to return to Freud’s early discussion of the dream symbol and the dream navel. Resistance to interpretation seems to oscillate between the two extremes of impossibility and redundancy. Either there’s an excessive opacity that blocks interpretation or there’s an excessive transparency that makes interpretation superfluous. On the one hand, the dream is bristling with idiomatic meaning, a knot of tendrils reaching ever deeper into the unknown but in their knottedness stubbornly blocking access to this unknown. On the other hand, the dream is coated with a veneer of socially acquired significance, its elements borrowed from the public domain, a mass-produced readymade produced by the dreaming collective. It’s either so thickly woven that it’s closed to further penetration or so thin that there’s nothing left to penetrate. Either murky depth or shiny surface, the dream repels interpretation either by refusing exegesis or by offering up its own elucidation with such alacrity that it pre-empts even the desire for further investigation.

The navel is the magical detail that crystallizes everything, but only for the individual dreamer and only at the point of dreaming. It knots together the entire network of associations but so tightly that it becomes inaccessible to every observer, including even the dreamer herself, at least by the next morning, or by the time she brings it to the appointment. Shared by no one, it escapes intelligibility altogether. The dream symbol is the breakaway detail that escapes the texture of the dreamwork—it seems to defy the principle of hermeneutic holism whereby each element will be woven together with every other and eventually tethered to the central organizing dream wish. The symbol impinges from the outside as a kind of extraneous “day residue” from the collective patrimony: it can be explained without reference to the network

of associations that belongs exclusively to the individual dreamer and that is peculiar to her idiolect alone. Shared by everyone, it reveals nothing about anyone. In its prosthetic exteriority the symbol has the incantatory or hypnotic—strictly citational or spectral—impact of a message from the beyond.

Either there is too much to interpret or there is nothing. In both cases the archaeological or “anagogic” model—interpretation as excavation, elucidation, uncovering, unveiling—is rendered ineffective; there can be no passage or mediation between depth and surface because it’s either all depth or all surface. Everything is either too obscure or it’s too obvious, either too hidden or too exposed: the act of interpretation is either thwarted or pre-empted because it has always already been performed. These extremes mark the outer limits of analysis but also expose its intractably social and political stakes: the whole thing takes place along the shifting continuum of privacy and publicity, veering between the two extremes of an impossible individuation and a forced collectivization, between the two abstractions of the “I” and the “we.”³³

There’s also a crucial temporal dimension (I’m cutting to the chase). Interpretation either takes too long, that is, forever, or it doesn’t take nearly long enough. Everything is happening in the limbo staked out by the two poles of “interminable” (or “infinite”) analysis and “wild” analysis: between an analysis mired down in the thicket of endless hermeneutic hesitation and an analysis that keeps racing ahead of itself to the finish line, between sluggishness and haste, between obsessional deferral and hysterical precipitation. Either you can’t get to the end because you never even make it past the starting gate: the pathway is cluttered with obstacles and you can’t cut through the tangle of interpretative possibilities. Or you can’t get to the end because it’s always already behind you: you know the outcome from the very beginning, and the tale has always already been told. Either you can’t cut the umbilical cord: like *Tristram Shandy*, you can’t get born; analysis is either stillborn or the moment of parturition is eternally prolonged. Or you miss the end because you’ve already managed to get beyond it: like *Hunter Gracchus*, you can’t die; the moment

33 Doesn’t this tension afflict every attempt to narrate any dream? In his 1908 essay on “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” (but the basic principle applies all the more stringently to the night dream), Freud comments on the peculiar impediment to recounting one’s own dreams to others. The dream is intrinsically either too boring or too repellent to be narrated (sometimes both at once)—and yet it must be told. This simultaneous compulsion to and inhibition against witnessing is the very ambivalence that marks our minimal social bond. The “true *ars poetica* consists in overcoming the feeling of repulsion in each of us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that arise between each single ego and every other” (*SE* 9: 152).

of conclusion has been always already overreached, and the analysis is over before it's started—every analysand is an all-knowing Oedipus, already certain of the outcome, reciting formulas of an already ossified tradition. Either way, you can't terminate: either you never get there or you've always already gotten there, and in any case the very fantasy of the "there" will prove to have been the ultimate impediment to reaching it.

This brings us to the central paradox of psychoanalysis, which also happens to be the essential paradox of the dialectic and part of its ongoing provocation. On the one hand, resistance is the fundamental obstacle to analysis. With their incessant digressions, diversions, and prevarications, the resistances to analysis are always on the verge of derailing it forever. On the other hand, without resistance, without delay, there would be nothing but "wild analysis"—which is to say there would be no analysis at all, only the shadow cast by the all-knowing authority of the analyst or even by analysis itself qua personified subject-supposed-to-know. Any truth that presents itself immediately, without impediment, is itself an impediment—an empty abstraction, a fetish of pure meaning marooned from history, a blind bit of theory thrust upon the analysand with no means of mobilizing it. Meaning must be postponed in order to be articulated: judgment must be deferred; every decision about truth, value, or signification must be suspended. This is another way of describing the so-called "free" association method and points to its strictly phenomenological (in every sense) restraint. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes analysis as a process of *travailler comme une bête* (he's quoting Claude Bernard's description of the scientific work ethic), a "beastly," inhuman project, undertaken without regard for a final result or answer.³⁴ Without this suspension, nothing could ever happen because it would have already been achieved: everything would be frozen like a fly in the amber of the always-already accomplished past.

But at the same time, meaning and direction must be preemptively assumed. Even the decision, which will need to be continually repeated, to start analysis, to make that initial, insane commitment of time, money, mental energy is premised on the presumption, very likely a phantasmatic one, that there will have been a final truth and purpose, that there will have been someone or something to ground the entire undertaking. Without that commitment, that mad transference attachment, nothing would ever get off the ground. Transference is not only the repetition or reactivation of familial or ancestral prototypes. It's also the pre-theorized, predigested, and pre-formalized investment in the process and person of analysis itself: the mimetic compulsion attaches to the very activity of interpretation. Every analysis is conducted in the tracks of previous

34 Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, in *SE* 5: 523.

analyses, every dream the citation of a previous dream, every couch the replica of a previous couch (as Plato already somehow in his own way surmised). The mimesis, or anamnesis, is triggered the moment you walk in and see the *Standard Edition* lined up on the bookshelf, the little portrait of Freud hanging there on the wall. The transaction is not only between individuals but with the very institution of psychoanalysis itself—which is another way of saying that psychoanalysis has an implacable political dimension.

Freud coined the captivating term “wild analysis” in 1910, upon the founding of the International Psychoanalytic Association. He was getting annoyed by everybody who kept on ventriloquizing psychoanalysis, who kept invoking Freud’s own name in order to hurl interpretations at patients without possessing the institutional credentials, without establishing the clinical context, and above all, without tethering a given intervention to the specific vicissitudes of the transference. The wildness in question consisted not, as one might think, in an unbridled spontaneity or enthusiasm but, on the contrary, in a kind of scholasticism or academicism that construes the truth of psychoanalysis to reside strictly in its propositional correctness. We could in fact describe such wildness as a vulgar sort of “textualism.” If psychoanalysis really were just a *theory*, writes Freud, “listening to lectures and reading books would be enough to cure” people—the equivalent, he adds, of “handing out menu-cards in a time of famine.”³⁵

“Misappropriation of property by attempted impersonation,” Freud goes on to write, in 1914, of those who practice in the name of psychoanalysis without subscribing to its central tenets, namely, the “facts” of transference and resistance.³⁶ Even as Freud kept on writing in this vein he knew perfectly well that that the border could never be secure. The wildness was never really on the outside; it was not a function of lack of training or unprofessionalism but, rather, haunted the science from the inside and was even essential to its disciplinary momentum. For “resistance” and “transference” are of course precisely the technical tenets most vulnerable to codification, to mechanization, and thus to all the vicissitudes of bad timing—that is, most prone to working like a suggestion. Freud will playfully acknowledge this fact himself when he officially welcomes the self-declared wild man Georg Groddeck to the fold, writing provocatively in 1917 that “anyone who recognizes that ‘transference and

35 Freud, “‘Wild’ PsychoAnalysis,” in *SE* 11: 25.

36 Freud, “On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement,” in *SE* 14: 16.

resistance are the pivots of the treatment' belongs irredeemably to the wild army [*wildes Heer*]."³⁷

There is a point at which every analysis threatens to turn into a wild analysis: it must get ahead of itself; it must be jump-started if only to get started. And there's a point at which every analysis threatens to become interminable: it must forever lag behind its own presuppositions.

Time's Up

At least in its formal structure, the contrast between "interminable" and "wild" analysis corresponds to what Hegel identifies at the very outset of the *Phenomenology* as the two inevitable temptations to be avoided (ultimately the two resistances to be resisted) as the project of speculative philosophy gets off the ground. Either the work never gets started or the work gets finished all too soon. These are two sides of the same coin, which for Hegel stake out the outer limits of German Idealism—the evil twins, roughly speaking, of Kant and Schelling: the tepid waters of endless critical reflection versus the skyrocketers of rapturous revelation; the bad infinite of interminable postponement versus the "bad finite" of instant gratification; delay versus haste. This last antithesis already conjures up the antinomy of the master-slave: either everything has to be consumed immediately, without deferral, and the meal is over before it's even started; or the preparations take forever, nothing is consumed, and the menu replaces the meal.

On the one hand: there is the "natural tendency" to procrastination (*PS*, §73). You delay the beginning, you pile on the obstacles, you invent endless make-work projects so as to avoid the hard labor of the concept—sharpening your pencils, reading the instruction manuals, the endless propaedeutic prep-work that will culminate in Kant's critical philosophy, with its obsessional need to inspect the apparatus, to check the equipment to make sure everything's in working order, brakes and safety features installed so that you don't overstrain the engine or veer out of control and end up crashing on the rocks of the antinomies.

On the other hand: there is the (equally "natural") tendency to precipitation or abbreviation. We seek the "royal road" of instant gratification (*PS*, §70). We grab for results, we race to the end, we want the whole truth given to us instantly in its unelaborated immediacy. Like a reader rushing to the last page

37 Freud, letter to Groddeck, June 5, 1917, in Georg Groddeck and Sigmund Freud, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Strömfeld Verlag, 2008).

we want everything summarized or paraphrased in advance. We need the result delivered to us in one concentrated aphoristic burst, compressed into a single instantaneous abridgment, without remainder or delay. *"The true is the whole."* *"The True is a Bacchanalian revel."* *"Everything turns on grasping the true, not only as substance but equally as subject."*

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel underscores the essentially phobic structure of consciousness: the critical fear of error conceals a far more paralyzing fear of truth (*PS*, §74), where truth itself amounts to the infinite abandonment or "sacrifice" (*PS*, §807)—the relinquishment of every last shred of positivity—that will eventually define absolute knowing. To lose everything straightaway, to cut to the chase immediately, would be like dying all at once, without mediation, so we do our dying in bits and pieces. We forestall the inevitable, we hold back from getting there, even if this means getting mired down in the exhausting process of negotiation and prevarication (which is, of course, only another kind of mortification), which is life as such. Life, as Freud will show, is nothing but an infinite detour to death, a way of dying on our own terms, an avoidance that is just as forcibly a confrontation in that we court death in the obsessional efforts to postpone it.³⁸

Or we try to discharge everything before we have anything specific to discharge: we cut our losses by cultivating loss as such—pure intransitive loss in advance and excess of every possible lost object—a kind of melancholic strategy of preempting disaster by making sure it's always already over and done with.³⁹ Hegel manages to demonstrate that these two strategies are two sides of the same coin. Like Achilles and the tortoise, we manage to forestall the encounter by continually overleaping it.

The *Phenomenology* is often read as a bildungsroman: the story of the steady accumulation of insight regarding the world, my place in it, and above all regarding my own normative commitments in securing that place, including the social conditions necessary for making and sustaining such commitments. As such it tends to be read as the story of progressive demystification or consciousness-raising—the gradual but inexorable overcoming of illusions or blind-spots, the clearing away of impediments to rationality, including the new impediments inevitably generated in the course of overcoming these impediments, and above all, those impediments generated by reason itself, the ultimate obstacle to enlightenment turning out to be not the opacity of things, the inscrutability of other minds, the recalcitrance of the passions, or

38 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *SE* 18: 38f.

39 Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

the unruliness of the body, but the resistance mounted by reason itself to its own inexorable demands. The ultimate obstacles to reason are those generated by reason.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel compares the pathway of consciousness to a ladder (*PS*, §26). What he describes is actually more like a game of snakes and ladders, where the snakes vastly outnumber the ladders, where at any moment you might find yourself sliding back to the beginning, and where the outcome is as often as not a function of chance more than skill. It's for this reason that the *Phenomenology* is such a long book: it's a kind of anti-bildungsroman. It's not so much that there is so much wisdom to amass, so much experience to digest that it will take forever to tell the tale (although Hegel will of course often talk that way). It's precisely because there will be so much to have unlearned. If consciousness won't stop accumulating experiences, if it can't stop archiving, collecting, stockpiling, this is not for the purpose of eventual recollection, not for the sake of having a story to recount or a history to remember, but precisely in order to have had something to disremember and dismember.

The *Phenomenology* announces its own trajectory as an “unhalting” [*haltlose*] or unstoppable progress towards rationality (*PS*, §80)—an “irresistible” movement.⁴⁰ What it depicts is a thicket of evasions that seem designed to halt any such progress: every stopping point is on the verge of becoming permanent, every “station” (*Station*: the Christian allusion is of course explicit [*PS*, §§77 and 80]) a place of interminable stasis and stagnation, every stage a stumbling block to further progress. Everyone always remarks on the bloated, engorged dimensions of the *Phenomenology*: the thing keeps swelling, the chapters keep getting longer and longer, the material keeps proliferating, the book keeps expanding, as if Spirit can't stop accumulating until it has managed to take in the whole world as its material—the horrible digestive tendency that Hegel's critics, from Nietzsche to Adorno, have never ceased reviling. “The system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each and every idealism.”⁴¹ In the final pages of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel speaks of the inertia, the *Trägheit*,

40 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), §81 Addition, p. 130

41 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23. For a magisterial reflection on Hegel's metabolizing logic, see Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma—Reading in Hegel* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). I develop some further thoughts on this matter in “Hegel's Last Words: Mourning and Melancholia at the end of the *Phenomenology*,” in *The Ends of History*, ed. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (New York: Routledge, 2013).

of the entire preceding trajectory—"a sluggish movement," he calls it. "Spirit moves so slowly because the self has to take hold of and digest the whole of this wealth of its substance" (*PS*, §808).

The landscape of the *Phenomenology* is littered with corpses that, like Polyneices, won't go away—a heap of defunct structures persisting long after their authority, legitimacy, utility, enjoyment factor, and even antiquarian picturesqueness have disappeared. There's an almost Baroque clutter to Hegel's stagecraft (I'm thinking of Benjamin's description of the desolate settings of the German *Trauerspiel*).⁴² Even as the scene keeps changing, the stage is never fully cleared, the old props and costumes accumulating long past their expiration date, abandoned attitudes constantly returning, refuted arguments continually reasserting themselves, relinquished desires resurging, everything crammed together in some kind of impossible simultaneity. The whole thing has elements of an eighteenth-century *capriccio* (Hegel must have seen them)—one of those architectural fantasias, sometimes sold as souvenirs, in which all the landmarks are crammed together without regard for geography, chronology, or logic, the ruins of the Coliseum jammed right up against the Pantheon, the Villa Borghese on the same block as the Domus Aurea. (This is, of course, precisely how Freud will describe the "eternal city" of the unconscious in *Civilization and its Discontents*: a jumble of relics jostling together in an impossible phantasmagoria of space and time.)⁴³

Even more striking than the profusion of the material is the prodigious inefficiency of the narrative: the incessant stalling and backsliding, the meandering and repetition, the stubborn obliviousness, the self-censorship, and the constant blackouts. Consciousness proves to be a virtuoso at forgetting what it learns—disparaging its significance, disarming its impact, or drawing inferences that can be counter-intuitive and even perverse. What's most unstoppable is the relentless pressure of resistance itself, which proves to be anything but inert. Or rather, inertia, if that's what we want to call this principle of delay, finds itself capable of endlessly reinventing itself: consciousness will come to reassign the very categories of motion and rest; it will learn to redefine the terms of historicity as such. Hegel's most brilliant insight is that the category of "change" is in itself an empty abstraction—it provides the perfect alibi for its own denial—while the resistance to change can be the greatest impetus to transformation. In its refusal of the new, consciousness shows itself to be a genius at innovation, if only in its ability to keep generating ever

42 Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977).

43 Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," in *SE* 21: 9.

more surprising strategies of avoidance. Hegel accounts for this clearly in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

Such hesitancy is not confined to the beginning; or rather, since Hegel will have established on logical grounds that every moment is strictly speaking a beginning, the work can get stalled at each and every moment, and all too frequently does. Every setback is an obstacle to continuation; every transition has the unpredictability of an *ex nihilo* beginning; the hiatus between every station on Spirit's journey is always on the brink of becoming impassable. This is why, at a narrative level (to return to the literary analogy, for what it's worth), the *Phenomenology* presents itself less as a novel than as a series of interlinked short stories. The connective tissue between the individual shapes is often tenuous; each moment threatens to become an isolated episode, a set piece waiting to be ripped out of context, quoted, excerpted, anthologized, recycled. Which is how the *Phenomenology* is usually read and is almost always taught, as if it can be transmitted only as a compilation of greatest hits—"Sense-Certainty," "Master-Slave," "Antigone," "Beautiful Soul" . . . Every shape is on the verge of becoming disconnected and encysted, every moment spinning on its own axis, always on the brink of dismemberment, dissociated from ancestor and successor, oblivious of its antecedent and incapable of going further—a fragment bristling uncomfortably against its own context, like a Romantic hedgehog.⁴⁴ This is one way of understanding Hegel's famous image of the "circle of circles."⁴⁵

This is not a contingent result of misreading or misappropriation. Hegel shows how an ineluctable fetishism is built into the very protocol of reading.⁴⁶ Hegel spells this out very clearly in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. Thinking demands a constant dilation with the material—the famous "tarrying with the negative" (*PS*, §32)—a stoppage and suspension that can come perilously close to a Kantian-style exercise in procrastination. Hegel will identify this deferring, disaggregative, interruptive—strictly death-driven—rhythm of thinking with the work of *analysis* itself, the unsung hero of the entire undertaking. "The activity of dissolution is . . . the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power."⁴⁷

44 Cf Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragment* §206, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

45 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 751.

46 "One must *linger* at every stage on the way, for each stage is itself an entire individual shape" (*PS*, §29).

47 Slavoj Žižek has repeatedly drawn attention to Hegel's astonishing encomium, in the Preface, to the atomizing or mortifying—strictly counterspeculative—power of the *Verstand*. See, for example, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), 30f.

We can read the entire *Phenomenology* as a catalogue of resistances. Vastly outweighing its stockpile of rational achievements is Spirit's arsenal of ever more ingenious ways of erasing, preempting, deflecting, or brutishly ignoring these accomplishments. Here are just a few of the techniques in Spirit's tool kit. Sense-Certainty can't retain a thing it learns. Chronically unable or unwilling to apply its hard-earned lessons, like a schoolchild condemned to keep writing the same lines forever, the subject is continually thrown back to the beginning: it keeps stumbling to the same trap, keeps relearning and forgetting the same lesson, mulishly persisting (*PS*, §109). This inaugural forgetfulness will set the tone and tempo for the entire narrative. Perception specializes in tactics of isolation. Stymied by its own antinomies and yet doggedly intolerant to their implication, the subject constructs an elaborate linguistic architecture of partitions and corridors designed to siphon off contradictions that if left unchecked would bring consciousness to the point of implosion. The idiom of Perception is a bristle of adverbs and conjunctions: "*insofar*," "*also*," "*essentially*"—tiny little syntactical fetishes invented for the sole purpose of allowing consciousness to sustain its own incompatible commitments at least long enough to buy more time (*PS*, §131). The Understanding finds refuge in mindless tautological repetition. Failing utterly to meet its assignment and too tired to experiment further, consciousness reclaims its legitimacy by reciting empty formulas—a kind of whistling in the dark undertaken in order to reassure itself of its own continuing existence (*PS*, §§154f.). Skepticism tries to disarm the deadly force of contradiction by turning its own incoherence into a form of entertainment: internal dissonance is externalized as pugnacity and trivialized as a spectator sport—"like the squabbling of self-willed children, who by contradicting *themselves* buy for themselves the pleasure of continually contradicting *one another*" (*PS*, §205). This loser's-win tactic will be developed into a full-blown aesthetic strategy by Rameau's Nephew (or his exemplar) a few episodes later, who will come to monopolize the entire session with his verbal antics: consciousness will learn to outwit cognitive dissonance by harnessing it to theatrical ends. The list continues; you can take it from here.

I've been dwelling on language in these last few examples. Above all, resistance is registered at the level of the sentence. Hegel's philosophical enterprise stages an encounter with the obstacle of grammatical form itself. Every sentence is a struggle against resistance: not simply the stony recalcitrance of the facts, or the stupid persistence of dogma, orthodoxy, or opinion, but the blockage, within language, against its own illusory momentum. With the speculative sentence the movement of predication is reversed, the grammatical flow is turned back, the fluency of speaking and thinking is interrupted: this choking of speech marks thought's recoil at its own precipitation (*PS*, §62). To speak philosophically—to learn to read every sentence as a *speculative* sentence—is

like driving with both the brake and the accelerator pedals down at once. To think philosophically is to dash again and again against the same wall, digging the same hole, skipping and turning like a stuck record, forever repeating.

Doorknob Communication⁴⁸

All this interminable stalling and stoppage might suggest that the prospects of change are bleak. And of course they are. But then again: it's only at moments of symbolic breakdown that history sheds its veneer as inexorable second nature. It is the experience of stuckness that forces us to reinvent the entire field.⁴⁹

48 There's an interesting behavior sometimes referred to in the clinical literature as "doorknob" or "door handle" communication. The session is officially over, farewells are said, the analysand is on the way out, hand on doorknob—and suddenly: "Oh, and by the way, I'm pregnant." "I had a dream about you last night." "It's not my mother." The academic version of a doorknob communication is usually: "Time prevents me from exploring further..."

49 This essay is based on talks given at the "Hegel and Resistance" conference at University College, Dublin, the Collegium Phaenomenologicum session on "Law and Violence" in Città di Castello, Italy, the "Political Concepts" workshop at Columbia University, and the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar; many thanks to Bart Zantvoort, María del Rosario Acosta, Stathis Gourgouris, and Frank Ruda for inviting me, and to the speakers and audiences at each event for exceptionally engaging discussion. Some of my comments on Derrida and Freud were developed in my talk at the "Unpacking Derrida's Library" conference at Princeton University; I thank Eduardo Cadava and Avital Ronell for inviting me, and everyone there too for great discussion. I'm particularly grateful to Elissa Marder and Elizabeth Rottenberg for their trenchant comments and to Frank Ruda for ongoing Hegel conversation. And many thanks to Natasha Hay for her assistance and to Nancy Fedrow for meticulous copy-editing.