

## Eros and Psyche: Freud's Configuration of the Sexual Drive and the Body-Ego

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*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*.

— Jacques Lacan

### 1.

The linchpin of Freudian psychoanalysis is sexuality, as Sigmund Freud is acutely aware when he declares that the Oedipus complex as the peak of infantile sexuality is the shibboleth of psychoanalysis (*TE* 92). Although anatomy is not yet its destiny with a breast-sucking infant, Freud still contends that its first experience of pleasure is a sexual one. Perhaps more disturbingly, he believes that the friendly feelings of an analysand, in case of the positive transference, “rest ultimately on an erotic basis,” going on to conclude: “[A]ll the feelings of sympathy, friendship, trust and so forth which we expend in life are

**Key Words:** Sigmund Freud, Sexuality, Freudian Subject, Instinct, Sexual Drive, Eros, Ego, Id, Super-Ego

genetically connected with sexuality and have developed out of purely sexual desires by an enfeebling of their sexual aim, however pure and non-sensual they may appear in the forms they take on to our conscious self-perception. To begin with we knew none but sexual objects” (“Dynamics” 112). If this statement peculiarly casts the developmental model of sexuality in the timeless realm of psyche, Freud's focal point is that regardless of whether we have affectionate feelings toward an object in our earliest or later stages of psychosexual development, that object has been and always will be a *sexual* aim insofar as our unconscious is concerned. What assumptions and implications does this daring proposition involve?

According to Laplanche and Pontalis, Freud's concept of sexuality does not only refer to “the activities and pleasure which depend on the functioning of the genital apparatus”; more significantly, it refers to “a whole range of excitations and activities which may be observed from infancy onward and which procure a pleasure that cannot be adequately explained in terms of the satisfaction of a basic physiological need” (418). Touching on the peculiar enigma of the concept of sexuality in Freud, this definition both clarifies and obfuscates at the same time. Nancy Chodorow, in her foreword to the recent new edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, indeed points out the “curious lack of cohesion in psychoanalytic thinking about sexuality,” which she supposes is considerably attributable to the “completely fragmentary” nature of the essays themselves (xvii). Despite what Chodorow calls the “threatening” originality of the essays, such a lack of cohesion is perhaps why it is imperative for any student of Freudian sexual theory to complement them with the rest of the thinker's wide-ranging corpus. Further, *Three Essays*, taken apart from Freud's other theoretical works,

tends to reinforce the misleading impression that Freud's theory of sexuality is grounded on biologically-determined sexual differences, as the focus of the essays is mainly on sexual development. Accordingly, *Three Essays* may lead to the commonplace accusation that Freud's theory impinges on essentialist notions of sexuality and the long-standing feminist critique that they underpin such key concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis as penis envy, castration complex, female genitals as uncanny objects, and so on.<sup>1)</sup>

In this regard, I want to draw on Teresa de Lauretis's illuminating re-reading of Freud in conjunction with Foucault. De Lauretis points out that Freud's "allegedly essentialist conception of sexuality" has been opposed to the alternative view (often represented by Foucault) that sexuality is constructed and discursive, and therefore, "would *ipso facto* be amenable to change by means of individual agency – the change designated by such terms as *reappropriation, resignification, subversion, rearticulation*" (857). Challenging this facile dichotomy between essentialist and constructionist notions of sexuality, de Lauretis delves into the shared ground of Foucault and Freud in their conceptualizations of the body, sexuality, and the subject so as to extend the Freudian notion of the death drive to the public fantasy created by films and its relations with spectators.

Following de Lauretis's lead, this essay seeks to analyze Freud's theory of the drive as a particularly rewarding site for mapping the complex and multivalent significations of sexuality in Freud.<sup>2)</sup> If Freud's

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1) Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* may be seen as one of the most powerful feminist responses to Freudian theory of sexual difference. In the following work *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray further offers an alternative reading of Freudian psychoanalysis on this subject.

early hypothesis is that the sexual drive forms a binary opposition to the ego-drive, Freud later merges both into the concept of Eros, finalizing two classes of primal drives [*Urtriebe*] as Eros and Thanatos (the death drive). As I shall show in the following pages, this major shift in the theory of the drive is deeply bound up with Freud's re-formulation of the structure of the mind, namely the tripartite psychic apparatus comprised by the ego [*das Ich*], the id [*das Es*], and the superego [*das Uber-Ich*].

Jacques Lacan's dictum that "*desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*" astutely captures the pivotal convergence of sexuality, the drive, and the subject in Freud. While Lacan himself elaborates the three terms into the notions of desire and its crucial function in constituting the inherently split subject, his emphasis on the desiring subject in Freud suggests that what Freud proposes as the new structure of the mind needs to be thought in the interwoven terms of the sexual drive and the subject. Although Lacanian re-inscriptions of the drive into desire tends to gravitate toward psychic functioning away from biological determination, it is important to note that the liminal realm between them is the very location of the Freudian drive. By the same token, the Freudian subject always impinges on the material existence of the body just as the ego is always a body-ego in Freud. While the sexual is certainly not to be confused with the genital, as is explicitly noted in Laplanche and Pontails' above-cited definition, we may say that the crux of matter in Freudian theory of sexuality is its liminal positioning

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2) While Freud himself distinguishes *Instinkt* from *Trieb*, the standard English edition of Freud's works tends to erase the distinction by translating both words into instinct. Since I cite the standard edition in the present essay, I use both 'instinct' and 'drive' in the same sense as equivalents of *Trieb*.

between the sexed body and its psychic activities and manifestations.<sup>3)</sup>

In addressing such a vexed terrain of Freudian sexual theory, this essay will proceed in three parts. First, I want to foreground the metonymic dispersion of Freud's notion of sexuality in *Three Essays*, arguing that this particular Freudian tropic reaches its climactic point in the allegorical arrival of Eros as a primal drive. In the second subsection, I will retrace the complicated route of Freud's drive theory in order to examine the ways it already tends to implode its own theoretical basis, which is the polarity between the subject and the object, prefiguring and preparing the emergence of the three agencies of psychic apparatus. My focal point in the last subsection will be the intriguing master/slave dynamics between the three agencies and what implications they have for our further inquiry into the Freudian configuration of sexuality and the subject.

## 2.

In his concluding remarks on sexual aberrations in *Three Essays*, Freud notes: "sexual instinct itself may be no simple thing, but put together from components," which also can come apart (28). Regarding the notion of partial drives [*Partialtriebe*], he brings to the fore the "somatic sources," whose locations are so-called "erotogenic zones," as well as the "internal sources" (71). What strikes us here is that each erotogenic zone forms a metonymic relation with the sexual drive as a whole. For instance, the eye corresponds to an erotogenic zone in the mechanism

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3) See *Three Essays* p. 46.

of scopophilia and exhibitionism, and therefore, tends to be a metonymic part of those particular sexual drives. Briefly speaking, the concept of the partial drive allows Freud to substitute a metonymic part for the sexual drive *per se*. The following passage exemplifies what ensues from such a fundamentally tropic move:

All my experience shows that these psychoneuroses are based on sexual instinctual forces. By this I do not merely mean that the energy of the sexual instinct makes a contribution to the forces that maintain the pathological manifestations (the symptoms). I mean expressly to assert that that contribution is the most important and only constant source of energy of the neurosis and that in consequence the sexual life of the persons in question is expressed — whether exclusively or principally or only partly — in these symptoms. As I put it elsewhere, *the symptoms constitute the sexual activity of the patient*. (TE 29, italics added)

It is important to note here that the “sexual activity” and the “sexual life” undergo metonymic dissections and dispersions. In Freud’s interpretation of the symptoms, the generative power of sexual energy, which is originally a part of sexual activity, once again metonymically substitutes the whole, as is vividly evidenced in the last sentence. In this light, we can say that *metonymy* is indeed a distinctive rhetorical aspect of Freud’s conceptualization of sexuality in *Three Essays*. In other words, the essays enact a sort of ruthless metonymic dispersion of sexuality. Even the teleological model of sexual development is not immune to the process:

Its [infantile sexuality's] individual component instincts are upon the whole disconnected and independent of one another in their search for pleasure. The final outcome of sexual development lies in what is known as the normal sexual life of the adult, in which the pursuit of pleasure comes under the sway of the reproductive function and in which the component instincts, under the primacy of a single erotogenic zone, form a firm organization directed towards a sexual aim attached to some extraneous sexual object. (*TE* 63)

To be sure, the dismissive gesture with which Freud acknowledges the “normal sexual life of the adult” is striking enough. More significantly, what Freud figures as sexual development is not really geared toward a kind of synthesis; it is rather the continuation of the *partial* nature of the sexual drive, or even worse, an exclusive “sway” of a single erotogenic zone coupled with the unitary function and aim. The progress into the later phases thus signals a process of subjection and impoverishment, which disrupts the commonplace teleological-developmental model that human sexuality becomes complete in its final genital stage.

If the metonymic dispersion is the primary aspect of Freud's configuration of sexuality in *Three Essays*, it inevitably sparks off the alleged pan-sexualism of Freudian psychoanalysis in general. Even though the realm of sexuality is not necessarily confined to the genital sex or even heterosexuality, the conventional way of thinking demands that it nonetheless should be manifested as something definite and complete. Within this conceptual framework, a partial drive can hardly be equated with the sexual drive. Hence, to formulate it as if it were one would be equal to substitute the part for the whole, a metonymic

confusion, so to speak. This is perhaps why the supposed sexual life of children sounds so scandalously ridiculous to a mind either alien and/or hostile to Freudian psychoanalysis.

The somber arrival of the death drive, concurrent with Freud's reformulation of the two primal drives, indicates the mirror side of the metonymic dispersion of sexuality: the allegorical substitution of Eros for the sexual drive. To begin with the question of why Freud merges the sexual drive and the ego-drive into Eros, the answer appears to be perplexingly simple. He once again emphasizes that they have no qualitative differences. Due to the dynamics of sublimation, the question of whether a drive is sexual or not is no longer ultimately important. Instead, a "qualitative distinction" is now drawn between Eros and the death drive (*EI* 42). In discussing the compulsion to repeat, Freud finds another class of "universal attribute of instincts" that he has more or less overlooked: "*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces" (*BP* 43; Italics Freud's). Naming this concept of Thanatos or the death drive and regarding this and Eros as two primal drives, Freud suggests that they are "opposite directions of physiological processes" like anabolism and catabolism. While Eros generates more and more "combination of the particles" so as to complicate and preserve life, the death drive "lead[s] organic life back into the inanimate state" (*EI* 38).

Despite their opposite qualities, it is important to note that the two classes of primal drives do not exist separately, as Freud notes: "regularly and very extensively," they [Eros and death drives] are "fused, blended, and alloyed with each other" (*EI* 38). This process is dynamic in the sense that the fused drives are also liable to be defused.



In particular, the “sadistic component of the sexual instinct” betokens the fusion of Eros and the death drive, to which destructive or aggressive impulses belong. In contrast, the sadistic part of the sexual drive tends to be independent from the other components, which presupposes the process of defusion. It is at this point that Freud posits the seemingly contradictory phrase “desexualized libido” by assuming that the ego generates the “displaceable and neutral energy” in the process of sublimation (*EI* 43). This new hypothetical concept allows Freud to keep onto the “*qualitative* distinction” between Eros and the death drive; although they can be fused and defused, they cannot be transformed into each other. For instance, when love turns into hate, this change does not mean that the erotic component in love has been de-sexualized; it rather indicates that the total cathexis of the aggressive component in love may have increased by the influx of the neutral energy (*EI* 42). In a similar way, Freud explains the progression and the regression into different phases of sexual development; while the death drive dominates in the oral and the anal phases, the genital phase means the “accession of erotic components” (*EI* 40).

In this light, we may consider Eros and the death drive in terms of conceptual polarity rather than as individual manifestations. In other words, the Freudian theorization of two primal drives does not so much devolve on their actual differences as on their structural interrelatedness, whose basis is nothing but the conceptual binary between composition and decomposition, life and death, and presence and absence. What implications, then, does the antinomy of presence and absence have for Freud’s theory of sexuality and the subject? First of all, there exists the significant parallel between the radical demystification of life and death embedded in Freud’s theory of the primal drives and the metonymic

dispersion on which Freudian configuration of sexuality impinges. The ultimate merge of the ego-drive and the sexual drive into Eros indicates the mirror-side of Freud's metonymic deconstruction of sexuality; The parameter of sexuality tends to be completely subsumed into the polarity of Eros and Thanatos, and now Freud is "compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death'" (BP 46). The effacement of sexuality at this point may appear even more paradoxical than the fundamental irony of life.

### 3.

In the preceding subsection, I examined that Freud's theory of sexuality is underpinned by the movement of metonymic dispersion, and that the absorption of the sexual drive into the allegorical figure of Eros signals nothing but the culminating point of the same metonymic movement. What implications does this strange vicissitude of the Freudian conceptualization of sexuality have for the subject?

Our starting point in addressing this question may be to clarify the two central terms interconnected with each other: libido and the drive. Libido is commonly understood as mental energy charged with a sexual aim. According to Freud's more careful definition, it is a "term used in the theory of the instincts for describing the dynamic manifestation of sexuality" ("Libido" 255). Having this "dynamic" nature as unbound energy, libido generates the "freely mobile processes" of the instinctual impulses, which Freud goes on to suggest work within the "unconscious systems as their point of impact" (BP 41-2). While libido is defined thus primarily in terms of the hydraulic energy model, Freud's

conceptualization of the drive is much more complicated. Most of all, a drive is defined as “a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body” (“Instincts” 122). In this way, Freud considers the drive as an intermediary, a kind of messenger, whose identity is neither quite somatic nor quite psychical. Given such fundamental liminality of the drive, which operates at the threshold of the body and the mind, his admission will not surprise us that a study of the drive poses “almost insuperable difficulties” (“Instincts” 125). Freud believes that it is nearly impossible to isolate a drive because of the synthesized workings of several drives. The sexual drive, in contrast, is supposed to be isolatable, and allows for explorations of its nature, owing to the “abnormalities” of psychoneuroses. What is it, then, that will distinguish one type of drive, say, the sexual drive, from other drives? Does a drive own any unique qualities of its own? In short, Freud’s contention is that drives are not only the same in their qualities but operate all in the same ways (“Instincts” 123). Now that the sexual drive is not *qualitatively* different from other drives, why is it necessary to keep the concept of libido in the first place?

To take a roundabout way of solving this conundrum, I would like to examine the four parameters of Freud’s theory of the drive: “source [*Quelle*],” “pressure [*Drang*],” “object [*Objekt*],” and “aim [*Ziel*],” (“Instincts” 122). The first two, declares Freud, lie outside the pale of psychology; therefore, psychoanalytic inquiry into the drive will hinge on the aim and the object of a drive. Yet, the parameter of “aim” also loses its significance because all drives are supposed to have the same

unitary aim: satisfaction in the Freudian sense, that is, quelling excitations in conformity with (un-) pleasure principle.<sup>4)</sup> Hence, the object of the drive becomes a sole parameter, and Freud locates it on a structural grid comprised by the three polarities that he claims govern our mental life: Subject/Object; Pleasure/Unpleasure; Active/Passive.

What is particularly notable here is that Freud's configuration of the drive hinges on the polarity between the subject and the object. An external entity is always considered as an object, that is, a means through which the subject wants to satisfy its instinctual impulses. Within this framework, Freud initially proposes the self-preservative drive or the ego-drive and the sexual drive as two primal drives, which is later reformulated into Eros and Thanatos as above-discussed. Despite such a conceptual distinction, however, the ego-drive and the sexual drive in fact operate intertwined with each other. Freud notes: the "sexual instincts in their first appearance are attached to the ego-instincts"; even when the former is detached from the latter, "a portion of them remains associated with the ego-instincts throughout life and furnishes them with libidinal components, which in normal functioning easily escape notice and are revealed clearly only by the onset of illness" ("Instincts" 126). In this light, the conventional antinomy of the ego-drive and the sexual drive would be misleading in the sense that it tends to elide the 'libidinal' portion of the ego-drive. This is most likely why Freud coins the term 'ego-libido' as one way of highlighting the vestigial components of the sexual in the ego-drive.

Further, the mechanism of narcissism seriously disrupts the two

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4) This negative definition of satisfaction plays the greatest role in making Freudian configuration of sexuality extremely bleak; no room is left to explore its significance in some positive terms of pleasure-seeking.

polarities of subject/object and passive/active because in narcissism a 'desiring' subject is at the same time a 'desired' object to itself. From the very beginning of one's psycho-sexual life, the object of the sexual drive is equivocally twofold, as Freud writes: "a human being has originally two *sexual objects* — himself and the woman who nurses him" ("Narcissism" 88, italics mine). Notably, "himself" is one of two "sexual objects" of the infant while the other is the nursing woman, who does not necessarily have to be its mother. Freud thus defines the primary narcissistic cathexis as a sexual one; the omnipresent phenomenon of self-love is first and foremost 'auto-erotism.' Curiously, however, he also arranges a sort of temporal order between auto-erotism and the original object-cathexis, as he claims:

Love is derived from the capacity of the ego to satisfy some of its instinctual impulses auto-erotically by obtaining organ-pleasure. It is *originally* narcissistic, *then passes over on to objects*, which have been *incorporated* into *the extended ego*, and expresses the motor efforts of the ego toward *these objects as sources of pleasure*. ("Instincts" 138, italics added)

This passage, which may be read as perhaps the most thorough demystification of love, in fact clarifies some of its peculiar aspects regarding Freud's theory of the sexual drive. First, 'love' has only one origin, namely, the desiring subject's instinctual impulses. Second, it does not make any difference in the nature of pleasure we seek and attain whether the means of satisfaction is our own body parts or not. By the same token, auto-erotism is an essential precondition of the ability to love others; if the primary narcissism does not take place in

the first stage of one's psycho-sexual development, one cannot 'love.'

If it is the case that all instinctual impulses originate in the subject's own body, for what reasons is auto-eroticism insufficient, giving rise to object-cathexis? Freud seems to override this question by resorting to the handy word "then" in the above-cited passage as if object-cathexis were simply a matter of temporal transition in the process of psycho-sexual development. At first sight, such a developmental framework appears to contradict Freud's initial proposition that one has originally *two* sexual objects: one's own self and the nursing woman. The perspective of the extended ego, however, allows us to see that the dual sexual objects are indeed incorporated into one *by means of the psychical mechanism of the ego*. That is, the nursing woman is not so much an external object. She is rather a part of the child's unbound ego, which does not recognize any border between her and itself. Within this framework, the 'active' efforts of the desiring subject trigger peculiar dissolution of objects; they "have been incorporated into the extended ego" ("Instincts" 138).

To be sure, the infant of the cannibalistic oral stage is not yet subject to the polarization of the ego and the external world. Yet, such primordial dissolution of the object into the desiring subject has larger implications for Freudian psycho-sexual theory. Those who passed the oral stage long time ago may continue to be subject to the same strange phenomenon. That is, although the physical distance of the object causes inconvenience and disturbance, it does not prevent the desiring subject from forming the fantasy of freely 'incorporating' the body parts of the object into its own. Thus, the dissolution of the object corollary to this extremely subject-centered mechanism tends to destabilize the polarity of the subject and the object. Further, it triggers the inevitable

inner split to the subject; primary narcissism causes the subject to be reformulated into a sexual object in its relation to the desiring subject itself, thereby generating the strange symbiosis of the desiring subject 'I' and the objectified 'I.' In this regard, it is notable that Freud configures the object as the sole parameter of the sexual drives in purely structural terms. One fascinating example of this can be found in his conceptualization of sado-masochism, within which it is only the *structure* of desire that is of ultimate significance. Since the positions of the subject and the object are relationally determined, they can be transposed without causing any difference to the nature of the sexual drives themselves. It is in this light that Freud emphasizes: "in both cases [i.e. in passive scopophilia and masochism] the narcissistic *subject* is, through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego" ("Instincts" 132; italics Freud's).

Freud indeed re-figures the initial polarity of the subject and the object in a thoroughly de-humanizing way as if they were nothing but two empty slots, merely divided by the verb in a sentence. From this standpoint, it would be more than trivial to ask whether the object happens to be one's mother or father. For, in any case, auto-erotism would be even more incestuous than the Oedipus complex. Although Freud appears to theorize the whole process of the sexual drive in tandem with the binary opposition of the subject and the object, the monster called the 'extended ego' already problematizes the presumed divide between the subject and the object, both of which are ultimately emptied out into two grammatical slots. In this regard, it would not be surprising at all to see Freud ushering in the three trans-personal agencies — the ego, the id, and the super-ego that will occupy the void after the divestment of the subject.

## 4.

I am speaking of Georg Groddeck, who is never tired of insisting that *what we call our ego behaves essentially passively in life*, and that as he expresses it, *we are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces* [...] I propose to take it into account by calling the entity which *starts out* from the system *Pcpt.* and *begins by being Pcs.* the 'ego,' and by following Groddeck in calling the other part of the mind, into which this entity *extends* and which behaves as though it were *Ucs.*, the 'id.' (EI 17; italics added)

It is intriguing to see here that the fundamental passivity of “our ego” is embodied by the very sentence that enunciates it, as it takes the passive voice as if to keep intact the subject “we” in the original place of the subject. Yet, this subject “we” is split into ‘the ego [*das Ich*],’ and ‘the id [*das Es*],’ concurrent with a curious reversal in the opposition of activity and passivity. While “what we call our ego [*das Ich*]” is “essentially” passive, the new Freudian *Ich* is strangely animated with a number of verbs; it “starts out,” “begins by being *Pcs.*,” and “extends” into the id [*das Es*]. Notably, the original subject in the first polarity of our mental life is dissolved into *das Ich* and *das Es* in these new terms while the first takes the active part and the latter adopts the passive.

Although Freud grants the ego the quality of being active as well as the privileged name of the subject *das Ich*, it is not so much the ego as the id that in fact seems to occupy the place of the subject, as he posits: “We shall now look upon an individual as a psychical id,



unknown and unconscious, upon whose surface rests the ego” (*EI* 17). This statement indeed has a radical implication that the hierarchy between the conscious and the unconscious is now entirely toppled down; the subject is not even ‘*Ich*’ but merely ‘*Es*.’ That is, the unconscious, which we usually regard as a (repressed) part of a conscious ego, governs both the ego and the id whereas the conscious ego is dragged down to a mere part on the surface of the id.

This new structure of the mind might appear to have little to do with Freud’s theory of sexuality because Freud hardly uses the word drive and he claims that his primary concern is with the “internal perceptions” of the ego. It is nevertheless notable that the “feelings and the sensations” which arise “in the deepest strata of the mental apparatus” and which need to be seen as “more primordial, more elementary than perceptions arising externally” indicate nothing other than drives (*EI* 14-5). Freud’s point is that those inner sensations become conscious by reaching the perceptual apparatus, mediated by the ego, which thereby activates the instinctual impulses. The ego thus plays the crucial role of psychically representing the internal stimuli as drives. Regarding the function of the id, it might be tempting to assume that the id is the storage of libido. However, this new structure of mind, within which Freud implicitly reformulates the two primal drives, is indeed more complicated than that.

What impedes our understanding above all lies in the multivalent ways Freud conceptualizes the three agencies. Even though they are supposed to be *functional* entities, Freud goes on to construct them in genetic and topographical terms. Within the genetic framework, the ego is defined as the “part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world.” (*EI* 18-9). At the same time, this

modification is not complete, as “the ego is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it” (EI 17). This topographical overlapping of the two entities gets another expression by way of a metaphorical analogy:

Thus in its relation to the id it [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check *the superior strength of the horse* with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way *the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own*. (EI 19; italics added)

The strength of the id/horse flows into the ego/rider, and it is this transference of the somatic energy from the id into the ego that binds the two entities. This dynamics corresponds to the topographical overlapping between the ego and the id; the former withdraws the energy out of the latter to hold it in check in the way that reason masters unruly passions in the original Platonic analogy. However, a peculiar reversal takes place as the id/horse is in fact master while the ego/rider is servant. The id decides which way to go while the ego has to obey the id. Devoid of its own desire and will, the ego is thus “in the habit of transforming the will of the id into action as if it were its own,” which means that its motor force is the object-cathexes that arise from the id. Moreover, as numerous lost objects of desire are thrown into the ego, it is now not really a sort of mediator between the external world and the id, but rather a sort of repository, subject to

constant alterations. Freud calls this process the mechanism of introjection, noting that “the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices” (*EI* 24). Another striking aspect of the constantly changing ego is its narcissistic move toward the id. As a result of psychic compromise with the external reality, the ego provides itself as an alternative “love-object” to the id (*EI* 24).

At this point, we find an intriguing move in Freud’s libido theory, as is evidenced in the statement that “the transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido which thus takes place obviously implies an abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualization — a kind of sublimation, therefore” (*EI* 24-5). Freud suggests that the ego performs this process of sublimation by redirecting the object-cathexes of the id into non-sexual aims. In contrast with his earlier concept of narcissism, he now suggests that “narcissistic libido” is *desexualized*, which would be oxymoronic unless there is a qualitative change in his definition of libido itself. In any case, it is unclear whether the above-quoted claim means a significant change in the theory of narcissism, that is to say, whether Freud now proposes the third type of narcissism following the primary and the secondary. What is clear, nonetheless, is the idea that the ego, in its functioning as a sexual object in binding the doomed object-cathexes of the id, mediates the desexualization of the narcissistic libido.

This mechanism of sublimation deserves our attention primarily because Freud’s conception of the super-ego devolves on it. It is also important to note that due to the complicated formulation of the super-ego, the new tripartite psychic system allows Freud to elaborate the Oedipus complex in a far more nuanced way. As to these