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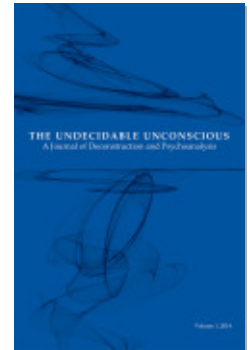
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Undecidability in the Act . . .

GREGG LAMBERT

Under given conditions, once a protocol has been established, naming can become a historical and political act responsibility for whose performance is inescapable.

—Derrida, “Geopsychoanalysis: ‘. . . and the rest of the world’”

I begin my remarks with the above quotation simply—perhaps not so simply, in typical Derridean fashion—to call attention to the perilous act of founding a new journal under the name *The Undecidable Unconscious*. Such an “act” could have fateful, if not fatal, consequences, and someday—that is, if this new area of inquiry is indeed *well founded*—we may all be summoned before the public tribunal of some institution—critical or clinical—and asked to provide an account of our involvement in this act, what we intended by it, what we hoped for, and what we really sought to inaugurate with this name (and even those, like myself, who assume only a passive responsibility by merely accepting an invitation to speak). At the same time, I would say that there is something absolutely indubitable (i.e., “inescapable”) in the act of associating the history of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, but also their prospective futures, independently or united together, to a certain unconscious undecidability that has determined the character of the politics and the institutions of both “movements.”¹

For example, has not the name “deconstruction” always served as a metonym for a nomadic institution that has been difficult to

locate at various moments of its migration from Europe to North America, and to “the rest of the world”? Has not the name “psychoanalysis” followed a very similar trajectory, though much earlier and by means of different routes and institutional alliances? As the result of both nomadic histories, moreover, has there not been the constant assertion that, in each case, the institution was never properly established, especially in North American universities where both psychoanalysis and deconstruction first emerged as dominant hermeneutic paradigms for the interpretation of literature and culture? Consequently, here we also find that the history of both movements has been equally remarked by a repeated efforts, not only by adherents and disciples (or practitioners) but also by the founders themselves, to reconstitute the name by reattaching it to its specific protocols, proper authorities, disciplinary sites, its proper association or “Society.”² At the same time, it is precisely in view of these often repeated and, more often than not, failed acts of restitution that the full weight of Derrida’s statement can be felt today as well—“once a protocol has been established, naming can become a historical and political act responsibility for whose performance is inescapable.”

If psychoanalysis and deconstruction can be said to share a similar, if not identical, problem of “destinerrance,” what interests me here is that it is precisely around the institutional forms of the “critical” and the “clinical” that these movements have diverged, even to resist one another interminably. As Eric Anders has reminded us, it is this “resistance to psychoanalysis” (and the Freudian-Lacanian institution, in particular) that is actively performed by “deconstruction” (i.e., by Derrida himself), even if only to properly maintain a necessary critical distance from the clinical frame of the analytic session, and from the authority of the analyst, especially.³ In other words, as if to protect the integrity of its own name, which can only be performed in the act of maintaining its own proper protocols that also define it as a certain practice of “critique,” *deconstruction must never let itself be placed under analysis*. In fact, I would hazard the thesis that it is the performance of the “resistance to psychoanalysis” that can be

said to be one of the proper names of deconstruction itself. Otherwise, in each encounter with the concept unconscious, which it must first of all appropriate from the writings of Freud, deconstruction could never maintain its own identification with a certain post-Kantian tradition of critical philosophy. From this tradition, accordingly, Derrida would charge that psychoanalysis would not always be critical enough of its own institutional protocols, that is, its own manner of establishing the name, and would even be guilty of fetishizing the name of psychoanalysis in a form of secrecy that is "personified," and thus cannot ultimately be grounded in reason, except in the form of unreason that belongs to reason itself.⁴ Here, one would also locate the role of transference and countertransference in the transmission of authority through the training analysis; however, it was Foucault who first called our attention to this dimension that problematizes the pretension of science itself that has troubled the Freudian institution, even though he would also privilege this dimension as a "counter-science" that would lead to a more dynamic epistemological frame that must be articulated across the unconscious of both individuals and cultures (Foucault 1970, 415).

On the other side of this critical and clinical divide, deconstruction's very early appropriation of the concept of the unconscious has been open to the proper-improper accusation by the analyst. Therefore, as if by a mirror image, though inverted, according to its own proper protocols and authorities, *psychoanalysis must also never allow itself to be deconstructed*. This is especially true in the case of the question concerning whether the concept of the unconscious can play a critical role outside the protocols of the analytical session, or even whether it loses its specific meaning when translated from the domain of metapsychology, which was originally intended to serve as a theoretical knowledge (*savior*) for practicing analysts. But what tradition of the "critical" can authorize this translation of the analytical concept to the field of culture (or politics), more generally? Of course, we already have examples of such translation from Freud's own writings, such as *Totem and Taboo* and *Group Analysis and the Ego*, but these works

have come under attack historically precisely for being too allegorical and for creating a formal metalanguage that universalizes the unconscious as perhaps *the* modern myth. (Of course, this will become the argument of Deleuze and Guattari as well.) Although deconstruction can be said to participate in and extend a post-Kantian framework of the critical, as Alan Bass's writings have demonstrated, Derrida's writings privilege metapsychology exclusively, especially *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which he claims as the source of a "speculative power" that defines his own singular "resistance to psychoanalysis."⁵

Yet, even while I have been invoking these two traditions of the "critical" and the "clinical," it occurred to me that there is yet another equally nomadic tradition that nevertheless remains strangely absent from both orthodox schools of psychoanalysis and deconstruction—that is, from the works of Derrida himself—and yet it is this tradition of the "critical" and "clinical" that *haunts* the very space in which we are speaking today. Of course, here I am referring to the critical tradition represented by members of the Frankfurt School, many of whom found a location for their teaching in an earlier incarnation of the New School, the University of Exile in 1933, renamed after the war as "the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science," a name it bore until the recent branding of "The New School: A University in New York City." Whether or not "this institution," with its multiple and inconstant names, is related in any way to this journal and thus to this "act" of naming cannot be arbitrary—at least, no longer, since it was Freud who first claimed that there are no accidents in the unconscious. Moreover, as my precedent for invoking the name of this tradition in our current discussion of the critical and clinical genealogy of the undecidable unconscious ("between psychoanalysis and deconstruction"), I would simply recall the fact that Derrida was extremely sensitive to ghosts and to all manifestations of "hauntology." Let us imagine, then, *as if he were speaking here today*, in this place, that there could be no other possibility than a scenario in which he would be historically and politically "responsible" to this name as well, and might even be

forced to speak to this particular ghost whom he had sought to ignore throughout most of his writings on psychoanalysis, or on Freud. Accordingly, it is in this third tradition that we might find a concept of the “critical” that must, like deconstruction, also be understood strictly in a neo-Kantian sense of the critique of the limits of representation; however, the distinction will concern a method of empirical analysis that is combined with psychoanalytic theory in order to construct a critical analysis of the role of group fantasy in the politics and institutions of modern societies. Consequently, in this tradition the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious is translated from its clinical frame and adapted more directly to historical and sociological analysis following the rise of fascism in Europe and in its transplanted site in the New School during postwar period, especially to the empirical and psychological studies of authority and prejudice in the family, particular among new immigrant groups.⁶

In conclusion, I would like ask the following question: What is the relationship between this concept of the unconscious and the one found in Derrida’s early writings, especially in the writings from the period of *Writing and Difference*, where the Freudian concept of the unconscious is first proposed in both a quasi-psychoanalytic and a quasi-Marxist sense (and, of course, a quasi-Nietzschean sense also)? Here, I would like suggest that one of the historical and genealogical projects of this new journal might be to reexamine the affiliation of both psychoanalytic theory and deconstruction with the earlier *Tel Quel* pretension for creating a “science of the Subject” by combining a Lacanian theory of the unconscious drives with the Derridean science of the “grammé,” or *l’écriture*. In the reception of both the Frankfurt School and deconstruction in North America, the notion of the “critical” has often been reduced to a simple generic procedure, or technique of “decentering the Subject”; nevertheless, it is around the particular social role assigned to the unconscious that these two post-Kantian traditions of “critique” couldn’t be farther apart—that is, unlike the relation between psychoanalysis and deconstruction, they have never quite been on speaking terms.

Given that this conference is to inaugurate a discussion that could very well, in some incalculable future, become another institution of psychoanalysis and deconstruction in North America, let us also remember that there have always been more than one—or even two—traditions of the “critical” and “the clinical,” and this fact also contributes to the name of *the undecidable unconscious*.

NOTES

1. I use the term “movements” intentionally, first, because there have been (or there already are) multiple institutions of both psychoanalysis and deconstruction; and second, to echo a sense of migration, emigration, and immigration that are at the basis of the history of these institutions and their geopolitical dispersion.

2. As I have noted elsewhere, it was out of concern for a certain abusive or “wild” (i.e., violent) appropriation of the “name of psychoanalysis” that Freud first founded, in the spring of 1910, the International Psychoanalytic Society “in order to be able to disclaim responsibility for the acts of all who do not belong to us and who call their medical practice ‘psychoanalysis’” (Lambert 2007, 202).

3. I will henceforth use the term “deconstruction” interchangeably with the proper name of Derrida himself.

4. Although the themes of “unreason,” or a “history of madness,” belong exclusively to Foucault, in “‘To Do Justice to Freud’: A History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis,” Derrida appears to accept many of Foucault’s later arguments from *The Order of Things* (1966)—in many ways recanting some points of the early debate—especially concerning the “pivotal” role that psychoanalysis plays in opening a dialogue with the forms of unreason that were summarily excluded (“foreclosed”?) by classical reason since Descartes, even though Derrida will maintain his distance from Foucault’s own historiographical account and especially from the pretension to distinguish between a “good” and “bad” psychoanalysis.

5. Although I do not have the space to develop the relationship drawn between the powers of speculation, the speculative concept of the death drive in Freud’s later writings on metapsychology, and the Kantian limits of critical reason, Derrida claims that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “psychoanalysis finds . . . its greatest speculative power, but also the place of greatest resistance to psychoanalysis (death drive, repetition compulsion, and so on, and fort/da!)” (2013, 215).

6. In particular, Fromm’s major revision of Freudian libido theory was the simple thesis that individual and familial psychology derived from so-

cial structure rather than vice versa, a revision that earned him permanent excommunication by the orthodox Freudian school and also caused Horkheimer to distance himself from Fromm in his appeal to Jewish benefactors for the institute (Wheatland, 2009, 28). This episode was significant for the future of both psychoanalysis and Marxist theory in the United States, and the somewhat orthodox composition of the early Freudian School in the United States should be a topic of historical research for this journal as well.

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