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This book could be described in a number of ways. First and foremost, it is a study of Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious and, in particular, what Freud called his "metapsychology." At the same time, it is a treatment of Jacques Lacan's radical reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, a treatment that seeks both to clarify key aspects of Lacan's thought and to map its relation to Freud. Then again, it is a work of philosophy that draws new implications from the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious and does so by means of introducing a number of original concepts.

It both is and is not the book I wanted to write. It succeeds in laying out the rudiments of an idea, though not always with the ease and elegance I might have wished for. The idea occurred to me in 1985 in one of those exceptional flashes of insight, vividly intense and absolutely compelling, that seem suddenly to penetrate to the heart of a problem. Yet for all its appearance of instantaneous clarity, it was an idea that required a great deal of time and labor to articulate. The lightness and transparency of the original inspiration now seem somewhat compromised by the workman-like style with which I have had to unfold it.
But I remark upon the distance between the conception and execution of my idea less to make apology for my insufficiencies as a writer than to introduce a larger point that is central to this book. For the book is ultimately concerned with the profound tension between simultaneity and succession. It is the tension between the instant flash of insight and the extended time required for its discursive elaboration, the tension between the image and the word. In one sense, everything is present with the first crystallization of the image. As Coleridge recognized, the image is the product of a seemingly magic fusional power. The image is the pregnant source of a virtually inexhaustible stream of realizations. At the same time, however, it is only through the labor of thought mediated by language that an idea, nascent in the body of the image, ripens and truly comes to birth. Only by traversing the pathways of discourse is the mute cargo of the image made available for deliberation.

Upon further reflection, this first sense of the relation of image and word, according to which the inchoate potency of the image is unfolded by the word, gives way to a deeper mystery. If the germ of the image is brought to fulfillment only by being trellised along the frame of language, it must also be said that language and its formative influence are always already there from the start. Human perception is always preinformed by the categories of speech and language. The seed of the image is sown by the word. Thus this paradox: the universe of language by means of which the human subject struggles to speak itself is at the same time the originary condition without which there could be no subject at all. The house of language is at once the destination of the human journey and also its point of departure.

Freud touched upon this paradox in his concept of Nachträglichkeit, the term rendered in English as "deferred action" and somewhat more aptly in French as "après coup." By Nachträglichkeit Freud referred to the wrinkled temporality of human destiny, the circumstance that the human subject is never fully coincident with itself but is always at once behind and ahead of itself. Nachträglichkeit describes the elemental enigma discovered by psychoanalysis: that every seeking of an object of love is an attempt to refine an object that was in fact never possessed. As our discussion unfolds, this paradoxical temporality of retroaction will increasingly emerge at the very center of Freud's theoretical construction, and we will see it related to the master problem of all his work: the complex and dynamic relation of the image and the word.
A prime objective of the book, then, is to develop a new understanding of the meaning of Nachträglichkeit and of its place and function in the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious. But the trajectory of the argument is itself nachträglich: the real import of the opening three chapters is achieved only in the fourth and fifth chapters. This is not to diminish the value of the first chapters. They develop the guiding perspective for the book as a whole and offer interpretations of some of Freud's most important concepts and case studies. Without the material they develop, the final chapters would be unintelligible. Nevertheless, the concluding chapters significantly augment and restructure the conceptual framework developed to that point. Unfortunately for those who would like to sample a section here and there, this book is understandable only as a whole. I can only beg the reader's patience to consider it as such.
This book seeks to regrasp the meaning of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and to chart its relation to some of the main currents of contemporary philosophy. But another book about Freud? Attacks on Freud’s ideas seem only to have intensified in recent years, swelling a tide of criticism that nearly scuttled a major exhibition of his papers at the Library of Congress. After five years of controversy the exhibition finally opened, in altered form, in 1998. Psychoanalytic therapy is struggling to survive under pressure from behavioral and cognitive techniques and from a burgeoning industry of psychopharmacology. Already in 1993, a *Time* magazine cover pointedly asked “Is Freud Dead?” To revisit Freud’s theories in the chilly atmosphere that now surrounds his legacy might well appear to be a quixotic enterprise. Why bother?

Amid the sound and fury of his critics it is easy to forget that Freud is the most influential thinker of the twentieth century, having left his impress on a host of fields well beyond the borders of psychology, including anthropology and sociology, film and media studies, literature and poetics, aesthetics and art history, history and biography, philosophy and
theology:

Equally remarkable, Freud's enduring presence in the academy is matched or even exceeded by the diffusion of his ideas in the popular domain, where the jargon of psychoanalysis has permeated the most everyday kinds of discourse. The very immensity of the shadow cast by Freud, in and out of the university: amply justifies continuing efforts to better understand his work. But that is not all. Precisely to the extent that we appreciate the enormity of Freud's influence, we are bound to be struck by a remarkable paradox: the most criticized and most forcefully repudiated part of the psychoanalytic theory was precisely the part most prized by the master himself—what Freud called his "metapsychology." In its premises and conclusions alike, the Freudian metapsychology has generally been rejected by posterity: both inside and outside of the psychoanalytic community: If we accept Freud's own estimate of the importance of metapsychology: then we must reckon with the possibility that we may not yet have fully grasped what Freud himself was after. If we have failed to understand the basic terms of Freud's metapsychology, can we be said to have understood Freud at all? What justifies another book on Freud is above all the unanswered question of metapsychology: In what follows, I will argue that the rejection of metapsychology is based on misunderstandings of its basic concepts. The result is a profound misconstrual of the real meaning of Freud's work and a failure to grasp its true radicality: Describing his hopes for metapsychology, Freud remarked that "when I was young, the only thing I longed for was philosophical knowledge, and now that I am going over from medicine to psychology I am in the process of attaining it." Metapsychology was Freud's answer to metaphysics. The most unfortunate consequence of rejecting Freud's metapsychology consists in losing the philosophical richness of his thought, of truncating the conceptual horizon that the metapsychology opens up. Without the wide sweep of the metapsychological perspective, psychoanalysis becomes merely one of a legion of talking therapies, distinctive merely for its thematics of the Oedipus and castration complexes.

To Recall Freud's Witch

Freud coined the term "metapsychology" very early indeed, it falls from his pen in February 1896, only a week after the first published appearance of the word "psycho-analysis." 2
defined metapsychology very generally as "my psychology that leads behind consciousness" (SE, 1:274). Metapsychology thus refers to the assumption of the unconscious itself, as well as to the structures that condition its relations with consciousness. It comprises the distinction of primary and secondary processes, the tripartite division of ego, id, and superego, and the activities of defense, repression, resistance, and symptom formation. Metapsychology is therefore the most comprehensive and all-encompassing viewpoint, one that seeks to coordinate the battery of psychoanalytic concepts into an integrated theoretical architecture. If the term "psychoanalysis" refers first of all to a therapeutic technique, a method of engaging the speaking subject in the interpersonal field of the transference, it was by means of metapsychology that Freud sought to place psychoanalytic experience within a comprehensive account of the working of the mind. It is this virtual identity of metapsychology and psychoanalytic theory that makes the repudiation of metapsychology so provocative. The question of metapsychology is nothing less than the question of psychoanalytic theory itself. To say that metapsychology formed for Freud himself the most valued portion of his theory is not to deny Freud's own ambivalence toward it. Of the twelve papers written by Freud and originally intended for a collection to be entitled Zur Vorbereitung einer Metapsychologie (Preliminaries to a metapsychology), only five have survived: "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," "Repression," "The Unconscious," "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," and "Mourning and Melancholia." The other seven papers, the existence of which became known only in the course of Ernest Jones's review of Freud's letters, were apparently destroyed by Freud himself. Jones's research has shown that five of the seven missing papers dealt with the topics of consciousness, anxiety conversion hysteria, obsessional neurosis, and the transference neuroses in general. More indirect evidence suggests that the other two papers were concerned with sublimation and projection (or paranoia). We can only conclude that Freud's dissatisfaction with the seven papers was sufficiently intense to wish them not only withheld from publication but disposed of altogether. We may readily suppose that a similar dissatisfaction with his efforts at metapsychology was responsible for Freud's attempt to suppress the Project for a Scientific Psychology of 1895 which was posthumously published a work that deserves more than any other, with the possible exception of the perhaps.
inertia, readiness for activity, and freshness. Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos, to which he refers as "metaphor," and his term for the formation of societies, "amoeba" (SE, 14:88). Finally, it was pointed out that the "anticathexis" of the drive, which corresponds to the "investment" of the Freudian "anticathexis." Inasmuch as Freud's primary and secondary drives were the foundation of the later concept of defense, it might be helpful to return to this distinction between energies.
Freud's description yet lysts of psychoanalysis and mechanized fronted the no scientific energy traced in the concept of compulsion. This is somewhat empirical. 

Example, states the one Lysted, allowing one to tightly coiled the theoretical centrality and deterministic, despite the refusal to read the word instinct, Freud's concept is not excessive and the energy is intense. Thus, the concept is highly charged, and the term compulsion is often invoked to explain a state of overwhelmed energy. In other words, the concept suggests a lack of energy, often referred to as compulsion. The term compulsion is associated with physical action, as it is often felt in a 'compulsive' manner. To compensate is to release this pent-up energy, and the concept of compulsion is often related to physical action. For example, the concept is associated with the Dementia of the History of Philosophers and is often used to explain the motto of "I am perfectly well aware that you are not driving me to distraction."

Despite the criticism of Freudian metapsychology as not being a scientific theory, the concept of compulsion is often used to explain the behavior of patients in therapy. Freud's theory is often criticized for being overly deterministic, but it is also praised for its ability to explain the behavior of patients. Freud's theory is often used to explain the behavior of patients in therapy. Freud's theory is often criticized for being overly deterministic, but it is also praised for its ability to explain the behavior of patients. Freud's theory is often used to explain the behavior of patients in therapy. Freud's theory is often criticized for being overly deterministic, but it is also praised for its ability to explain the behavior of patients. Freud's theory is often used to explain the behavior of patients in therapy.
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Freud
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works,
including
The
Ego
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Discontents,
The
New
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Lectures,
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An
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More
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I
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no
longer
think
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way" (SE,
21:119).
In
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last
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"Analysis
Terminable
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Freud
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of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, was only part of Freud’s hope for his dual drive hypothesis. He also longed to show how, beneath the level of their most spectacular effects, the two great pulsional forces are at work with one another in every microincrement of the mind’s operation. It was precisely this dream of reconceiving the hidden working of the psychical process that led Freud to liken his theory of the two elemental drives to the Empedoclean dialectic of *Philia* and *Neikos*.

**The Lacanian Return to Freud**

In setting ourselves the task of regrasping Freud’s conceptual apparatus, we will take the work of Jacques Lacan as a privileged clue. Arguably the most theoretically ambitious and sophisticated of all Freud’s interpreters, Lacan enriches psychoanalysis by bringing it into dialogue with other theoretical traditions, prominent among them phenomenology and existential philosophy, structuralist linguistics and anthropology. This theoretical refounding of psychoanalysis recalibrates the tools of analytic practice but also extends the implications of psychoanalysis beyond the consulting room, demonstrating the extent to which Freud’s theories are deeply resonant with other important intellectual movements of the twentieth century.

The basic concepts of psychoanalysis, Lacan maintains, “can only become clear if one establishes their equivalence to the language of contemporary anthropology, or even to the latest problems in philosophy, fields in which psychoanalysis could well regain its health.” Rightly interpreted, however, Freud’s text becomes itself an unparalleled resource for the enrichment of other disciplines. From a Lacanian vantage point, Freud is seen to augment and extend intellectual traditions in which he never directly participated. Through Lacan’s rereading, Freud emerges as a philosophical thinker of the first order, whose contribution is to be ranked with that of Heidegger or Hegel. “Of all the undertakings that have been proposed in this century,” Lacan claims, “that of the psychoanalyst is perhaps the loftiest, because the undertaking of the psychoanalyst acts in our time as a mediator between the man of care and the subject of absolute knowledge” (E:S, 105). And elsewhere: “They say Freud isn’t a philosopher. I don’t mind, but I don’t know of any text concerning the working up of scientific theory which is philosophically more profound” (S.II, 93–94).
If Lacan offers an especially promising path of "return to Freud," it is by no means an easy path to follow. In the first place there is the notorious difficulty of Lacan's style, which Jeffrey Mehlman has fairly described as "Mallarmean in hermetic density, Swiftian in aggressive virulence, Freudian in analytic acumen." Still more apt might be Joseph Conrad's description of the enigmatic Kurtz:

The man presented himself as a voice. . . . [O]f all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.\(^{15}\)

For many people otherwise interested in knowing what Lacan is up to, the torture of ploughing through his prose is too high a price to be paid. And indeed, Lacan often gives the maddening impression that he intentionally resists being understood. "I like to leave the reader no other way out than the way in," he says, "which I prefer to be difficult" (E:S, 146). One advantage of this choice is to prevent too easy a reading. As Lacan sees it, the masterfully lucid prose form by which Freud sought to make himself understandable, even to a lay audience, paradoxically contributed to widespread misunderstandings of his thought. The possibilities for distortion are multiplied to the extent that many of Freud's concepts appear assimilable to commonsense notions. The activity of repression, for example, is all too easily imagined as a mechanical process analogous to hiding something away in a box or cupboard—an image that, however wildly inadequate to the complexity of the psychical process Freud has in mind, is at times called up by Freud's own manner of speaking. Or again, the relation of the ego to the id and superego is too readily reduced to a conflict between the claims of base animality and duty to a higher nature. Pressed into this mold, Freud's discovery is trimmed to fit the Sunday school banality of a weak but well-intentioned self torn between its devil and its angel. The attractiveness of such notions derives precisely from their immense crudity, a circumstance that would concern us less were it not for the frequency with which they can be discerned not only in the vulgar reception of Freud's theories but also in discussions by people who ought to know better. Lacan's punishing style ups the ante for achieving a more sophisticated understanding
12 Freud

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The subject is radical. It is addressed with the ego-in-a-psychic-alienation and its associated processes, which are fundamental to Lacanian and Freudian thought. Lacan notes that the subject’s formation and differentiation are not individually controlled but are part of a system of psychic elaboration. This system is not merely personal but is also structurally bound, as evidenced by the notion of the imaginary.

It is argued that the process of laboring at the level of difference is inevitable, as it is the foundation of the subject’s identity. Lacan states that the subject is sustained by the price of the signifier, which is the recognition of the ego. Thus, the subject is always in a state of inauthenticity, as it is constrained by the signifier’s price. This process is at the heart of the subject’s identity and its relationship with the world, and it is a key aspect of the subject’s investment in the primary drives.

Indeed, the subject is in a state of tension between its desire and the reality of the world, which is conditioned by the signifier’s price. This tension is a result of the subject’s investment in the primary drives, which are conditioned by the signifier’s price. The subject is in a state of stultifying, as it is constrained by the signifier’s price and is unable to achieve the desired outcome.

The subject’s investment in the primary drives is a result of its desire for recognition, which is bound to the signifier’s price. This desire is conditioned by the subject’s relationship with the world, which is conditioned by the signifier’s price. The subject’s investment in the primary drives is a result of the subject’s desire for recognition, which is conditioned by the signifier’s price.
determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindnesses, in their end and in their fate, their innate gifts and social acquisitions notwithstanding, without regard for character or sex, and that, willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier. 19

If the first great lodestar of Lacanian psychoanalysis is a distinctive conception of the signifier, the second, equally unfamiliar to orthodox Freudians, is the concept of the Other. For Lacan, the unconscious is “the discourse of the Other.” Human desire is “the desire of the Other.” It is difficult to overestimate the importance for Lacan of this reference to the Other. Directly or indirectly, everything in Lacanian theory is bound up with it. Lacan’s entire effort is aimed at raising it as a question: “Who, then, is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is still he who agitates me?” (E:S, 172).

One of the primary objectives of the following discussions is to clarify the meaning of these Lacanian innovations and to assess their value in close readings of Freud’s own text. But we cannot fail to be struck at the outset by the magnitude of the challenge. Indeed, in reading Lacan, one can often feel that Lacan’s claim of fidelity to Freud rings somewhat hollow. The Lacanian turn to language seems closer to Ferdinand de Saussure or Claude Lévi-Strauss than to Freud. Lacan’s evocation of the Other appears less Freudian than Hegelian. Does Lacan really return to Freud’s theory or does he reinvent it altogether? The question seems especially pressing for our aim of reevaluating Freud’s metapsychology and its pivotal concept of energetics. For what could be more foreign to Lacan than Freud’s appeal to energetics? Isn’t the hallmark of a Lacanian psychoanalysis the emphasis on form over force? Does the Lacanian algebra of the signifier not render Freud’s energetic metaphor more obsolete than ever? As Lacan puts the question to analysts: “Have you ever, for a single moment, the feeling that you are handling the clay of instinct?” (FFC, 126). Yet the concept of psychical energy and the drive theory that springs from it form the conceptual spine of Freud’s metapsychology. No effort to reconsider the meaning of the metapsychology can ignore it. What, then, is the place of energetics in the context of Lacan’s claim that the unconscious is structured like a language?
Along the course of our inquiry we will have to provide an answer to this question. Yet to do so, we must be prepared to traverse a broad terrain of theory. In what follows, I will argue that what makes Lacan’s “return” possible is Freud’s complex relation to himself; the way in which Freud’s invention of psychoanalysis allowed him to glimpse something that Freud himself could not fully articulate. And nowhere is this inchoate dimension of Freud’s thought more palpable than in his metapsychology. Like the dreams he analyzed, the manifest terms of Freud’s metapsychology conceal a latent content that can be brought to light only by transposition into concepts Freud didn’t possess. The primary task of this book is to trace some of the main lines of that transposition. All the more appropriate, then, to begin by taking our bearings with respect to a point that lies outside the psychoanalytic field altogether.