Gift, Money, and Debt

> Therefore the proud man can afford to wait, because he has no doubt of the strength of his capital, and can also live, by anticipation, on that fame which he has persuaded himself that he deserves. He often draws indeed too largely upon posterity, but even here he is safe; for should the bills be dishonoured, this cannot happen until *that debt* which cancels all others, shall have been paid.
>
> Charles Colton, *Lacon* (1822)

> *mngwotngwotiki:* The Tangu of New Guinea's description of paradise, meaning a particular field of relations in which the individuals concerned are temporarily unobliged to each other.
>
> K. Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*

For someone who advocated a return to Freud, Lacan was little prone to quoting him. "Quoting," he is quoted as saying—though I can't exactly remember when and where—"is for imbeciles." So, if we find the name "Freud" in Lacan's work, it is very rarely followed by the words invoked by Marie Bonaparte so frequently that they became her nickname: "Freud-a-dit." In this respect—and I am only stating the obvious—Lacan quoted Freud far less often than other psychoanalysts do and did, and certainly far less often than, say, Lacanians cite Lacan.[1]

So the famous return to Freud is *not* a return to the letter, if only because what is commonly regarded as the letter of Freud, the text itself, is largely missing from Lacan's work. The return thus can only have been, and palpably was, to the spirit of Freud. And Lacan's own practice implied that those who return to the letter of the text are imbeciles, if that is where they think they will discover its spirit.

Yet Lacan exhorted others to return to Freud, meaning return to those very texts he himself eschewed citing. To take an example, from the last page of "La chose freudienne" ("The Freudian Thing"):

> One has only to turn the pages of his works for it to become abundantly clear that Freud regarded a study of languages and institutions, of the resonances, whether attested or not in memory, of literature and of the significations involved in works of art as necessary to an understanding of the text of our experience . . . Indeed, Freud himself is a striking instance of his own belief: he derived his inspiration, his ways of thinking and his technical weapons from just such a study.[2]

Even if you flick through Freud's pages, not bothering to read, you will see that Lacan's reading of Freud is correct. This is quite typical of one important mode of citation in Lacan's work.

The implication is: anyone can understand what Freud is saying, since it is written down in black and white, in plain German, French, or English for all to see; and yet, it is also implied, no one before Lacan has managed to do this simple thing. For example, he writes in "The Freudian Thing": "Freud's intention, which is so legible to anyone who is not content simply to stumble through his text . . ."[3] So it is somewhat surprising to discover that the most extended piece of analysis and commentary of any text of Freud's to be found in Lacan's *Ecrits* is in an appendix: "Commentaire parlé sur la *Verneinung* de Freud." The author is Jean Hyppolite.

So Lacan's reading of Freud is always something different from commentary, from the traditional art of *explication de textes.* To speculate somewhat: the diffidence and reluctance Lacan betrayed in relation to the telling of case histories may be of the same sort, have the same source, as his reluctance to quote Freud. And, we should remember, this reluctance to confront the text of the experience of reading Freud when discussing it with others, this reluctance to confront the text of his analyses when discussing the technique of analysis with others, is a distinctive feature of the theorist who proposed the transmission of the experience of analysis to others in

"la passe" (the passage or the pass) as one of the fundamental tasks for the analyst. Speculatively, then, we surmise that this analyst, whose textual indirection was so prominent a part of his relation to his colleagues and students, also felt the pressure to find some theory of how textual directness was possible—of how the experience of analysis, or of reading Freud, could be transmitted to others.

However, this is not entirely true or just. One knows that Lacan did succeed both in transmitting his own experience of reading Freud to others and in giving a clear sense of analytic practice as he conceived and executed it. How did he do this, being so firmly committed to indirection?

According to Lacan, the fundamental prerequisite for reading Freud is the principle of faith: one must place one's faith in Freud's writing, otherwise one won't know where to start. In one of the main texts to be discussed in this essay, "Le mythe individuel du névrosé, ou 'Poésie et Vérité' dans la névrose" ("The Individual Myth of the Neurotic, or 'Poetry and Truth' [*Dichtung und Wahrheit*] in Neurosis"),[4] Lacan recognizes that all of Freud's case histories are "incomplete," that they seem to many analysts to be "analyses broken off midway," and that they are only "fragments of analysis." But this, he goes on, "must all the same stimulate us to reflect, to ask ourselves why the author has made this choice, *and of course to place our trust in Freud.*"[5]

This register of *trust*—of faith not only in the other's good intentions but in his intelligence—precedes and organizes any reading of Freud which will be able to do justice to his work. In other words, in order to read Freud, one must place Freud in one's debt *before the reading starts.* One must give Freud the benefit of the doubt—and extend this seemingly temporary charitable act indefinitely.

"Trust," "have faith": this register is not only the register of the necessary cement of social life in general, not only the register of a nonrational relation to God, it is also the register of financial ex-

change. When Lacan refers to symbolic exchange, or to symbolic debt, we must not neglect to inquire into the structure of this economic system—to the point where I would suggest that the principles which govern the Symbolic system might well be called an "economics of the symbol."

So, in order to read Freud, one must postulate that he has, in effect, issued a currency, a psychoanalytic currency, and that in holding the text, we are holding the notes of credit of this economic system. Placing trust in Freud is thus like placing trust in the institution that issues notes of credit or banknotes. Freud's texts thus must be treated as promissory notes, if one is going to be able to read them properly.

We often catch such overtones in Lacan's conception of the relationship between Freud and his readers: as we have seen, his reader is anyone who can read, anyone who can turn a page. Indeed, Lacan sometimes places himself in a role where the only reason he is willing to speak is in order to help other potential readers of Freud free themselves of what is blinding them, of what is preventing them from reading Freud: "I would take this opportunity of reminding those who cannot be persuaded to seek in Freud's texts an extension of the enlightenment that their pedagogues dispense to them . . ."[6]

Lacan's "reminder" is only necessary, is perhaps only *defensible,* he implies, because it is obliged to function as a substitute, a *semblant* (counterpart), of Freud's texts. It is as if some readers, some analysts, treat Freud's texts as in need of something additional, something that, when it accompanies the text, makes it trustworthy, a proper currency. In Britain, people who have bank accounts are issued pieces of plastic called check guarantee cards, intended to supplement the guarantee offered by their signature. Lacan is, in effect, implying that readers and analysts treat Freud's texts as if they were checks issued by any private citizen, and therefore in need of a check guarantee card. If only they could recognize, through placing the appropriate trust in Freud's texts, that these are not like checks, but are instead the equivalent of banknotes issued by the National Bank, then they would give up requiring supplementary guarantees from others (such

as Lacan), in the same way that nobody requires a respected National Bank to issue a guarantee card with each banknote. The note is its own guarantee; one need look no further. Freud's text is its own guarantee; one need look no further.

However, having placed such trust in the text, Lacan then points out one fundamental condition of this trust. Freud's case histories are trustworthy precisely to the extent that they are free of doctrinal constriction, to the point where they appear to the trained psychoanalytic eye as contrary to the basic technical rules of psychoanalysis: "The successes obtained by Freud, because of the heedlessness about matters of doctrine from which they seem to proceed, are now a matter of astonishment, and the display so evident in the cases of Dora, the Rat Man, and the Wolf Man seems to us to be little short of scandalous."[7] These texts are trustworthy precisely because they are, each and every one, unique deviants. They do not obey their own rules. And therefore they can still be used to correct them, to reach down to the fundamental doctrines they embody and sink new doctrinal foundations for them to rest upon. In Lacan's 1953 lecture "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," he used the case of the Rat Man to show the limitations of the Oedipal schema precisely with Freud's own clinical evidence. Freud's case history is shown to be a resource that embodies its own curtailment and correction. This necessary deviation from Freud's own text is sanctioned by the refusal of slavish imitation. Lacan is the last person who would explicitly recommend being a slave to another master: "It is not a question of imitating him. In order to rediscover the effect of Freud's speech, it is not to its terms that we shall recourse, but to the principles that govern it."[8]

It is also not clear the extent to which Lacan viewed Freud as a sleepwalker, that is, whether he made his discoveries, acted in accordance with these principles, despite himself or in full and deliberate knowledge. It is certain that now, after Freud's death, when psychoanalytic doctrine has taken over from these principles, in order to recover those principles one cannot repeat these texts. Lacan's discourse of the Freudian golden age, forever lost to us moderns, entails

that we can only recover the essence of that age by reinventing it in an alternative mythical guise. So Lacan will not quote; he will not follow Freud; he will give something much simpler and yet more subtle: he gives us an account, a *compte rendu.*

Lacan's gifts as a storyteller have not been widely advertised. As quasi-epigrammatist, as spinner of semantic spider's webs, as tortuous and complex edifier of theories, he is well known. But Lacan as simple storyteller? Yet he opens his *Ecrits* with a seminar on a story, and much of the exhilarating novelty of his reading of Poe's story is embedded in a retelling of the tale. He was immensely gifted in this art of retelling, and with each of Freud's case histories, as well as Poe's story, Sophocles' *Antigone,* not to mention the case histories he selects and dissects from the psychoanalytic literature, he retells the story in such a way that the Lacanian point is embedded in the process of recounting. This is a gift.

Thus Lacan had the gift of making his *compte rendu* of Freud's cases or papers in the form of a story. In this way he paid off the debt he owed to Freud for this material. "The Neurotic's Individual Myth" is also the theory of the debt which is enacted in the reading. Its ethos is tragic; the debt is *impayable:* there is no settling of accounts possible—not, at least, in this life—without death. To clarify the concept of debt, I want to consider Lacan's various readings of Freud's case history of the Rat Man.

The young patient who became known as the Rat Man came to Freud in 1907. Freud's treatment of him lasted several months, and he found him a congenial and apt example of a classical, moderate obsessional neurosis. The patient acquired his name from the frightening story of a rat torture that he had heard from a captain while he was doing his military service, a torture which he felt compelled to imagine was being performed on his fiancée and his father—despite the latter having been dead for some time. The immediate cause of his coming to Freud was a bewilderingly complex set of tasks and

duties he had set himself in connection with a pair of spectacles that had been sent to him from Vienna, via the Post Office, while he was on maneuvers. But Freud found the heart of his obsessional thinking to lie in a conflict over whether or not to marry his fiancée, a conflict that resonated with the path his father had taken in life and was prompted in part by his mother's plans for his future.

Lacan's discussions of the case focus on two main themes, the first a doctrinal element, the second a question of analytic technique. The doctrine is that of *debt.* The technical point arises out of a consideration of Freud's errors. The consideration of the doctrine and the technique, which are intimately linked together, will clarify both the concept of debt and its enactment in Lacan's relation to Freud.

In his case notes on a session some two months into the treatment, Freud recorded: "I pointed out to him that this attempt to deny the reality of his father's death is the basis of his whole neurosis."[9] This interpretation that Freud offered the Rat Man after two months of treatment was not available to Lacan when he gave his 1953 lecture, yet it sums up very well the heart of Lacan's reading of Freud's published case history. If the Rat Man is attempting to deny the reality of his father's death, this explains why he is pursued by his father in his imagination. That is, he is pursued by an imaginary father. To begin with, we should recognize how Lacan's reading of Freud's text isolates the precipitating cause as the original scene of the analysis, and links it closely with its repetition, the scene of the payment of the debt—the *délire* of the repayment of the 3.80 kronen the Rat Man owes to someone for the safe delivery of his pince-nez.

The organization of the account is very similar to that more famous *compte-rendu,* "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter.*" In Lacan's analysis of *The Purloined Letter,* what structurally organizes the two scenes, and also provides continuity between them, is the letter. In the *compte rendu* of the Rat Man, it is a debt that organizes the two separate scenes, making the recent scenes the repetition of the two others, the scene of the Rat Man's father's premarital indebtedness and the scene of his marriage. In *The Purloined Letter* there is the

triangle of the King, Queen, and Minister repeated with the characters of the police, the Minister, and Dupin. For the Rat Man, however, there is no one simple scene that is repeated once; rather we find two primary scenes that are then each repeated.

The first scene is that of the patient's father's debt to the mysterious friend, which is then repeated with Lieutenant A., the lady at the post office, and Lieutenant B. The second scene is that of the Rat Man's father and two women: the rich and the poor girl. This scene of the father and the rich/poor girls is repeated with his son, in the debt repayment drama involving the lady at the post office and the innkeeper's daughter, and also in the structure that precipitated the neurosis in the first place: the scene of the Rat Man, the cousin whom it is proposed he should marry, and his lady. Lacan characteristically sums this up:

> You cannot fail to recognize in this scenario—which includes the passing of a certain sum of money from Lieutenant A. to the generous lady at the post office who met the payment, then from the lady to another masculine figure—a schema which, complementary in certain points and supplementary in others, parallel in one way and inverted in another, is the equivalent of the original situation.[10]

According to Freud, and following him Lacan, the Rat Man's neurosis began when his mother told him of her plan for him to follow in his dead father's footsteps and marry a young, rich, and beautiful member of her family.

> This family plan stirred up in him a conflict as to whether he should remain faithful to the lady he loved in spite of her poverty, or whether he should follow in his father's footsteps and marry the lovely, rich and well-connected girl who had been assigned to him. And he resolved this conflict, which was in fact one between his love and the persisting influence of his father's wishes, by falling ill; or, to put it more correctly, by falling ill he avoided the task of resolving it in real life.[11]

His father had at one point also confronted the choice with which the Rat Man's mother was now presenting her son: the choice between marrying a rich or a poor girl. In his father's case, the poor girl had been a butcher's daughter[12] and the rich girl was the Rat Man's mother, who brought with her, for the uneducated father, the security of the family business.

Lacan follows Freud's account closely in seeing this family "constellation" as being the pathogenic cause of the patient's neurosis. He also follows Freud in seeing that it had become pathogenic through its being a repetition of the father's own early experiences—through its being what Freud, in his case notes, called "his regression to the story of his father's marriage."[13] But, whereas Freud refers crucial elements of this story to "chance," adding that "chance may play a part in the formation of a symptom, just as the wording may help in the making of a joke,"[14] Lacan makes these specific chance elements effects of a structure whose existence he will put forward as being more fundamental than the explanation Freud offers, in terms of the conflict between the father's prohibition and the son's libidinal desire. The two chance elements of Freud's that are focused on are, first, the debt, and, second, the choice between the rich and the "poor, but pretty" girls.

> His father, in his capacity as non-commissioned officer, had control over a small sum of money and had on one occasion lost it at cards. (Thus he had been a *"Spielratte."*) He would have found himself in a serious position if one of his comrades had not advanced him the amount. After he had left the army and become well-off, he had tried to find this friend in need so as to pay him back the money, but had not managed to trace him. The patient was uncertain whether he had ever succeeded in returning the money. The recollection of this sin of his father's youth was painful to him, for, in spite of appearances, his unconscious was filled with hostile strictures upon his father's character. The captain's words, "You must pay back the 3.80 *kronen* to Lieutenant A.," had sounded to his ears like an allusion to this unpaid debt of his father's.[15]

Lacan places greater emphasis than Freud on this friend, and highlights—by forgetting to mention it earlier—the fact that the debt was never repaid: "On the one hand, we have originally the father's debt to the friend; I failed to mention that he never found the friend again (this is what remains mysterious in the original story) and that he never succeeded in repaying his debt."[16] Lacan displays his acute "intuition" here, since Freud himself had, in his unpublished case notes, focused on exactly this same question, in an urgent note to himself:

> He lost some of it in a game of cards with some other men, let himself be tempted to go on playing and lost the whole of it. He lamented to one of his companions that he would have to shoot himself. "By all means shoot yourself," said the other, "a man who does a thing like this ought to shoot himself," but then lent him the money. After ending his military service, his father tried to find the man, but failed. (Did he ever pay him back?)[17]

It is almost as if Freud made this note as a kick to himself, first for failing to ask his patient the question, and second as a reminder to himself to find out in the next sessions. Lacan, uncannily, having noticed the mystery of the disappearing friend in Freud's published text (not in the case notes), underlines that having noticed it and its importance, he forgot to mention it. This, it seems to me, is proof, if it were needed, of Lacan's acute sensitivity to Freud's way of working—so acute, it seems, that he knew how to forget exactly where Freud forgot, without knowing it.

Yet in a recapitulatory account of this incident, Lacan introduces a new note, that of the mysterious stranger, "the mysterious friend who is never found and who plays such an essential role in the family legend"[18]—one almost sees the black coat, the shadowy profile. Such Hoffmannesque tones would certainly not be out of keeping with Freud's focus, given the decisive advice to commit suicide which the Rat Man's father had received from this stranger-friend—and yet this passage concerning the suicide was again unavailable to Lacan, be-

cause it is only to be found in the case notes. So Lacan's tracking of the original moment of the debt to this gambling debt of the Rat Man's father's youth is entirely in keeping with the way in which Freud himself had sewn the Oedipus complex into the lining of the Rat Man's family romance.

Freud and Lacan both agree, then, that the military maneuvers of the Rat Man, with the loss of the pince-nez and the compulsion to pay 3.80 kronen to Lieutenant A., is a repetition of the primal scene of the Rat Man's father's gambling debt, in which he was saved from dishonor, prison, and worse by a mysterious friend, to whom he remained for the rest of his life in debt. The question of the debt is also present in the other primal scene that is repeated: his choice between the poor but pretty girl (the son's poor lady taking over the role of the father's butcher's daughter) and the rich heiress who brings with her professional security. In marrying the Rat Man's mother, the father was placing himself in debt to her—"status comes from the mother's side,"[19] Lacan notes.

Yet Lacan intends to place the accent elsewhere. Instead of underlining the conflict between the father's wishes and the patient's love for his lady, Lacan highlights the narcissistic rivalry with the father and the consequent dissolution and splitting of an object relationship. In this sense, Lacan makes the mysterious creditor-friend a structural feature of the "parental imago." The general principle Lacan invokes is the following: "In this very special form of narcissistic splitting lies the drama of the neurotic."[20] To back up this point, Lacan gives an account of the three terms of each scene whereby the male subject has a doubled, either/or relation to the figures of the idealized woman and the debased woman, and the woman has an equivalent relation to the alienated subject and the social representative, the friend. The splitting of the function of the male subject has as its correlative the complementary splitting of the function of the female object. Lacan insists that these are two variants of one structure; it is this conviction that underpins his rejection of the triangular Oedipal structure in favor of a quaternary structure, which is thus a

duplication of a duplication, a doubling of a double. This is the account Lacan gives of the articulation of the different characters in terms of the debt:

> In order to understand thoroughly, one must see that in the original situation, as I described it to you, there is a double debt. There is, on the one hand, the frustration, indeed a kind of castration of the father. On the other hand, there is the never resolved social debt implied in the relationship to the figure of the friend in the background. We have here something quite different from the triangular relation considered to be the typical source of neurotic development. The situation presents a kind of ambiguity, of diplopia—the element of the debt is placed on two levels at once, and it is precisely in the light of the impossibility of bringing these two levels together that the drama of the neurotic is played out. By trying to make one coincide with the other, he makes a perennially unsatisfying turning manoeuvre and never succeeds in closing the loop.[21]

Yet in a text from the same year of 1953, Lacan began to repudiate, or at least question, the element of castration in this account of the Rat Man's debt in favor of a concentration on the notion of the "social debt." The means by which he achieves this is striking, since it involves accusing Freud's text of claiming something that it is difficult to find in that text.

> Freud even goes so far as to take liberties with factual accuracy when it is a question of attaining to the truth of the subject. At one moment he perceives the determining role played by the proposal of marriage brought to the subject by his mother at the origin of the present phase of his neurosis. In any case, as I have shown in my seminar, Freud had had a lightning intuition of it as a result of personal experience. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to interpret its effect to the subject as that of his dead father's prohibition against his liaison with the lady of his thoughts.
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> This interpretation is not only factually inaccurate. It is also psychologically inaccurate, for the castrating action of the father, which Freud affirms here with an insistence that might be considered sys-

> tematic, played only a secondary role in this case. But the apperception of the dialectical relationship is so apt that Freud's act of interpretation at that moment sets off the decisive lifting of the death-bearing symbols that bind the subject narcissistically both to his dead father and to the idealized lady.[22]

As I have already pointed out, Freud had claimed that it was a conflict between the "persistence of his father's wishes" and the Rat Man's love for his lady that led to his neurosis. This "persistence" is not necessarily, not even primarily, restricted to a prohibition. But it is also clear that Freud did seek to discover the source of the Rat Man's fears about his father's death, and that he interpreted these fears, and the obsessional defenses against them, as evidence of *wishes* for that death.

> At this I told him I thought he had now produced the answer we were waiting for . . . The source from which hostility to his father derived its indestructibility was evidently something in the nature of *sensual desires,* and in that connection he must have felt his father as in some way or other an *interference.*[23]

But, in accusing him of factual inaccuracy, Lacan is imputing to Freud something beyond this insistence that the patient's fear of his dead father stems from early memories of interference with sensual desires. Clearly Lacan is perturbed by the fact that it is the mother's, not the father's, plan that constitutes the implicit prohibition on his marrying his lady. Lacan states that Freud sees the father's speech as prohibiting the marriage with his poor lady love:

> The turning-point came when Freud understood the resentment provoked in the subject by the calculation his mother suggested to him concerning his choice of a spouse. That Freud links the fact that such advice implied for the subject the interdiction of his engagement to the woman he loved to certain words of his father, when this linkage is in conflict with the basic facts of the matter, notably the prize fact

> of all that his father is dead, does surprise one, but it is justified in terms of a deeper truth, which he appears to have come upon within himself and which is revealed by the chain of associations which the subject then adds. Its justification is to be found in nothing other than what we call here the "chain of speech," which, while making itself heard in the neurosis and in the fate of the subject, extends well beyond the individual: namely that a similar lack of faith had presided over his father's marriage, and that this ambiguity itself conceals an abuse of trust in a money matter which, in driving his father out of the army, decided his marriage . . .
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> But if Freud's interpretation, so as to untie this chain, with all its latent significance, will end up dissolving the imaginary web of the neurosis, that is because, in terms of the symbolic debt which is promulgated by the subject's tribunal, this chain renders him comparable less to his legatee than to his living witness.[24]

Some clarification may help here. Lacan conflates the father's opposition to the poor girl with the mother's promotion of the rich girl. One might think that they amount to the same thing, as if the father's opposition to the one will drive him into the arms of the other. But to prohibit and to promote are very different speech acts. Now Freud observed that the Rat Man does experience this conflation between the maternal and the paternal voices: from the patient's point of view, the choice "rich girl versus poor girl" lines up his own desires against those of his family's, in particular against the disapproval the father expresses of the lady ("his father, shortly before his death, had directly opposed what later became our patient's dominating passion. He had noticed that his son was always in the lady's company, and had advised him to keep away from her, saying that it was imprudent of him and that he would make a fool of himself").[25] Yet at no point in his *compte rendu* does Freud impute to the father an *active* prohibition of the marriage to the poor lady. Lacan is, we might say, textually incorrect, but, one must immediately add, true to the entire thrust of Freud's reconstruction—because behind the mother's plan to marry her son into her family and its business is,

for the Rat Man, the coincidence of this plan with the choice his father made, marrying (his mother) for money, not love. The Rat Man's conflict concerning his father is not so much over the prohibition as over the identification that is being required of him. And, we might say, the careful term "persistent influence of his father's wishes [*fortwickenden Willen des Vaters*]" which Freud used, interpreted too readily by Lacan as "prohibition," covers both cases.

The same strange insistence occurs when Lacan addresses another of Freud's "errors" in the conduct of the case. In the second session of the treatment, the patient was about to recount the story told him by the cruel captain of the rat torture. Freud writes:

> Here the patient broke off, got up from the sofa, and begged me to spare him the recital of the details. I assured him that I myself had no taste for cruelty, and certainly had no desire to torment him, but that naturally I could not grant him something which was beyond my power. He might just as well ask me to give him the moon. The overcoming of resistances was a law of the treatment, and on no consideration could it be dispensed with . . . I went on to say that I would do all I could, nevertheless, to guess the full meaning of any hints he gave me. Was he perhaps thinking of impailment?—'No, not that; . . .' etc.[26]

Lacan comments that, by these interventions, Freud appears to be taken in by the subject's game. He seems to fall in with the patient's demand that, so that he can continue, he must be given something like a pledge. But no, Lacan says, what Freud offers the patient is not a transgression of some supposed neutrality of the analyst. What Freud offers the patient is "the symbolic gift of speech, replete with a secret pact, in the context of the imaginary participation which includes it, and whose implication will be revealed much later in the symbolic equivalence that the subject fixes in aligning his thoughts of the rats with the florins with which he recompenses the analyst."[27] Once again, what appears to be analytic confusion or wavering on Freud's part turns out to be his sure sense of the primal significance

of the interrelations between speech, debt, and the patient's rat economy. At every turn, these are the themes that Lacan will draw out of Freud's case history.

The background to Lacan's flurry of imputed factual inaccuracies and textual imprecisions is the long-term strategy of his reading of the Rat Man, a strategy that will lead to two fundamental revisions of the Freudian account. The first is the need "to make certain structural modifications in the oedipal myth, inasmuch as it is at the heart of the analytic experience."[28] This modification will require Lacan to introduce the concept of the moral master—the Absolute Master, we might say, the antecedent of the concepts of the Other and the Master in Lacan's later writings. In Freud's case history, he argues, we perceive the "fundamental conflict which, through the mediation of rivalry with the father, binds the subject to an essential symbolic value."[29] This binding occurs in relation to an actual debasement of the figure of the father; analysis takes place in the space, the gap, or the ambiguity between the debased and this other figure of the father:

> The analyst nevertheless assumes almost surreptitiously, in the symbolic relationship with the subject, the position of this figure dimmed in the course of history, that of the master—the moral master, the master who initiates the one still in ignorance into the dimension of fundamental human relationships and who opens for him what one might call the way to moral consciousness, even to wisdom, in assuming the human condition.[30]

Whereas in Derrida's reading of *The Purloined Letter,* it is Lacan who is accused of an unwarranted superposition of the triangular Oedipal scenario onto the scene of the theft of the letter (Minister, King, Queen—where is the observer/narrator of this scene? Derrida asks), in the case history of the Rat Man it is Lacan who, in effect, accuses Freud of superimposing an Oedipal triangle (prohibiting father, object mother, desiring subject). The discovery that there are

four, not three, elements involved in the neurotic's individual myth requires a revision of the founding myth of psychoanalysis:

> The quaternary system so fundamental to the impasses, the insolubilities in the life situation of neurotics, has a structure quite different from the one traditionally given—the incestuous desire for the mother, the father's prohibition, its obstructive effects, and, around all that, the more or less luxuriant proliferation of symptoms. I think that this difference ought to lead us to question the general anthropology derived from analytic doctrine as it has been taught up to the present. In short, the whole oedipal schema needs to be re-examined.[31]

The splitting of one of the three figures in the Oedipus myth is what requires this revision, and Lacan gives, as I have already noted, an account of how each of the three terms of the Oedipal triangle may be split: the subject (social subject and alienated witness), the object-woman (rich versus poor, legitimate versus passionate object) and the mediating third term, the father (debased, symbolic). However, the scene of splitting, although itself prone to being duplicated in a variety of ways, stems from a single fundamental moment, the specular moment of narcissism, imbued with aggressivity and idealization—and this is the second of Lacan's fundamental revisions of the Freudian account: "The narcissistic relation to a fellow being is the fundamental experience in the development of the imaginary sphere in human beings."[32]

Yet this discovery of the fundamental character of narcissism, usually summed up in accounts of Lacan's work under the rubric of the mirror-phase, was, we now begin to see, closely linked with the question of the position of the father in the symptomatology, the mythology of the neurotic. More than any other analyst, more even than Freud, I suggest, Lacan was concerned with the destiny of the father. The question of the father emerges in an anthropological, even culturalist register in Lacan's writings of the 1930s, already juxtaposed with, contrasted with, and correcting the myth of the primal father found in Freud's *Totem and Taboo:* "Our experience leads us

to discern the principal determinant [of the major contemporary neurosis] in the father's personality, which is always lacking in some respect: absent, humiliated, divided against himself or a sham."[33] On the basis of this phenomenology of the neuroses, Lacan suggested an explanation for the very existence of psychoanalysis:

> A great number of psychological phenomena appear to stem from the decline in society of the paternal imago . . . Perhaps the very emergence of psychoanalysis should be linked to this crisis. The sublime chance of genius does not, perhaps, by itself explain that it was in Vienna—then the centre of a State which was the melting pot[34] of extremely diverse familial forms, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, from the last agnatic groupings of Slav peasants to the most simplified petit-bourgeois households and the most decadent of unstable family menages, by way of feudal and mercantile paternalisms—that a son of the Jewish patriarchy came up with the Oedipus complex.[35]

In this culturalist account of the origins of psychoanalysis, Freud's discovery of the Oedipus complex is linked to his prior investigation of the anomie whose two principal causes are the incomplete repression of desire for the mother, and the "narcissistic degeneration of the idealisation of the father, which highlights, in the Oedipal identification, the aggressive ambivalence immanent in the primitive relation to one's counterpart."[36] At the center of the Oedipus complex, for Lacan in 1938, stands "the father, in so far as he represents authority and in so far as he is the centre of sexual revelation; we have linked to the inherent ambiguity of his imago, the incarnation of repression and catalyst of an essential access to reality, the twofold development, typical of our culture, of a certain character of the super-ego and a particularly evolutive orientation of the personality."[37]

We should not forget that the 1930s was a period when the attention of most psychoanalysts was turning more to the mother and away from the father. Lacan's early work accurately reflects these

researches, in particular those of Melanie Klein, and the importance of what he called the "separation complex," which embraced what other analysts would have called anal and oral sexualities. Yet, however modified and central the figure of the mother became, Lacan was insistent on the pivotal role played by the father—even in 1949, when he spoke in the culturalist dialect of the absent, wounded, or unemployed father:

> The maternal imago is far more castrating than the paternal imago. At the end of each of my analyses, I have seen appear the fantasy of dismembering, the myth of Osiris. It is when the father is lacking in some way (dead, absent, blind even), that the most severe neuroses develop.[38]

Lacan's reflections expressed a nostalgia for a society where complex familial structures will, "at each stage in life, become enriched by a growing complexity of hierarchical relations."[39] The themes continued into the 1960s, when he described the obligation of the small boy confronted with the symbolic burden of the phallus as the continuation of "Daddy's rules, and as everyone knows, for some time now Daddy hasn't had any rules at all, and that's where all the problems start."[40] On many occasions, Lacan returns to this grandiose figure of the father whose decline we have participated in, indeed inherited. And he is not always cast in the tragic mode that is in keeping both with Freud's vision of the murdered father at the beginnings of history, and with Lacan's invocation of the "stone guest who comes, in symptoms, to disturb the banquet of one's desires";[41] he is frequently invoked in the comic mode of Count Almaviva, condemned to be forgiven by his spouse instead of exercising his *droit,* or *dette, de seigneur.*

Thus, by the 1930s, continuing to the early 1950s, Lacan had established a doctrinal foundation in his assertion of the decline of the

father imago and its relation to imaginary narcissistic rivalry. He made it clear that the Oedipus complex was itself a culturally relative structure, linked to the familial and marital structures of modern society, and to the decline of the father. With his examination of the Rat Man case history, he found in the very symptom the patient presented the term which would allow him to take one more step toward elaborating the system of the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, with which he would be able to replace, or at least to reinterpret, the Oedipus complex. That term was "debt." As the clear doctrinal exposition of the "discours de Rome" put it:

> The paternal function concentrates in itself both imaginary and real relations, always more or less inadequate to the symbolic relation that essentially constitutes it. It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law. This conception enables us to distinguish clearly, in the analysis of a case, the unconscious effects of this function from the narcissistic relations . . .
>
> Thus it is the virtue of the Word that perpetuates the movement of the Great Debt whose economy Rabelais, in a famous metaphor, extended to the stars themselves.[42]

The English translator of the *Ecrits* helpfully provides the reference from Rabelais. Debts, says Panurge, are "the connecting link between Earth and Heaven, the unique mainstay of the human race; one, I believe, without which all mankind would speedily perish." Debts, he continues, are "the great soul of the universe."

Such a passage confirms for us how Lacan conceives of his androcentric psychoanalytic revision: one will not be able to understand or intervene effectively in the Oedipus complex if one does not recognize the "interference" of narcissistic rivalry and fascination which one finds in the figure of the imaginary father; the surest way to secure this recognition is to remain aware of the fundamental symbolic function of the father. As the Rabelais reference indicates, the

universe that the symbolic father inhabits is the universe of the Great Debt.

Let us remind ourselves that for the Rat Man, the debt in question was purely imaginary. By the time he came to Freud, the real debt had, thanks to his sensible friend, already been paid off. What was left of his *délire* were occasional impulses to find Lieutenant A. and pay the debt. And these impulses were molded in the direction of finding the doctor who would help him pay off his debt:

> His determination to consult a doctor was woven into his delirium in the following ingenious manner. He thought he would get a doctor to give him a certificate to the effect that it was necessary for him, in order to recover his health, to perform some such action as he had planned in connection with Lieutenant A.; and the lieutenant would no doubt let himself be persuaded by the certificate into accepting the 3.80 crowns from him. The chance that one of my books happened to fall into his hands at that moment directed his choice to me. There was no question of getting a certificate from me, however [*Bei mir war aber von jenem Zeugnis nicht die Rede*], all that he asked of me was, very reasonably, to be freed of his obsessions.[43]

Freud is quite certain that he will not help this deluded patient to pay off any debt whatsoever. Freud will offer him freedom; he will not help him pay his debt.

Yet this debt will, for Lacan, become something magnificent, the emblem of individual destiny, and the signifier of the social order itself. The importance of the debt makes it highly significant that Lacan overlooked this passage in Freud's case history; indeed, in one of his accounts of the case, he distorted his account of the chronology of the case history so that Freud emerges as the friend who *did* help the Rat Man pay his debt: "once the treatment is begun, he is content quite simply [*tout bonnement*] to send a money order to the lady at the post office."[44] Lacan concertinas the chronology here: the Rat Man had paid the generous lady at the post office well before coming to analysis with Freud. Through this discounting of the time that

elapsed before the Rat Man met Freud, Lacan elides the presence of the sensible friend. He in effect coalesces the helpful assistance of the sensible friend with what Freud had to offer his patient, making it seem as if Freud had something to do with the payment of the debt to the lady at the post office:

> His friend had held up his hands in amazement to think that he could still be in doubt whether he was suffering from an obsession, and had calmed him down for the night, so that he had slept excellently. Next morning they had gone together to the post office, to dispatch the 3.80 *kronen* to the post office at which the packet containing the pince-nez had arrived.[45]

In this elision, we glimpse the long-term strategy of Lacan's revision of psychoanalytic theory. Through his reading of the Rat Man case history, he will install the notion of debt as a crucial element of the quaternary structure that replaces the Oedipus complex. This debt is no longer imaginary; it will be called "symbolic debt." It is the phrase *tout bonnement* ("quite simply") that is revealing: as if starting the treatment with Freud, in his analytic role the quintessence of the symbolic function, was sufficient to release the patient from his incapacity to pay off his debt. And the fact that Lacan puts Freud in place of the friend shows how Lacan will shift the Rat Man's debt from the register of the imaginary to that of the symbolic.

This elision of the friend and the analyst in the course of the line of interpretation which leads to the centrality of the symbolic debt is associated with another curious amalgamation we find in Lacan's commentaries on this case: the rapprochement of the analyst and the patient. On two different occasions, with respect to two different elements, Lacan amalgamates the unconscious of the analyst and that of the patient.

The first of these concerns Freud's own arranged marriage. Lacan points out on two occasions that Freud was able to perceive the determining role of the mother's marriage plan in the Rat Man's

neurosis as a result of a personal experience.[46] On the second of these occasions, in "Variantes de la cure-type" ("Variants of the Typical Cure"), he specifies what incident he is referring to:

> Now it appears that Freud's gaining access to the crucial point of the meaning, in which the subject can literally decipher his destiny, was made possible by the fact of having himself been the object of a similar suggestion stemming from prudential family considerations—which we know about through a portion of his self-analysis to be found in his writings, unmasked by Bernfeld—and if, on that occasion, he hadn't responded with opposition, that might have been enough for him to have missed the moment, in the treatment, of recognizing it.[47]

Lacan is here alluding to the paper "Screen Memories," in which Freud demonstrated how his earliest memory, of playing in the field near Freiburg with his two playmates John and Pauline, was a product of the repression of two later events: his calf-love for Gisela Fluss at the age of sixteen, and his father's and brother's plan to marry him and Pauline, his cousin, and settle them in Manchester.[48] Lacan is surmising that in order to be able to recognize the determining effect of the Rat Man's mother's proposed marriage on the neurosis, Freud himself must earlier have reacted, when he was nineteen, with opposition to the plan his family had cooked up; if he had not, if he had acquiesced in the plan, he would not have been able to recognize this incident as the cause of the neurosis. This is a strong claim, despite its being couched in characteristically oblique fashion. It proposes, in effect, that the neurotic formation of Freud's that corresponds to the Rat Man's obsessional neurosis was his screen-memory, and that it was through the similarity of structure of these two neurotic formations that Freud was able to isolate the precipitating cause, the fundamental determinant, of the recent phase of the Rat Man's neurosis. What Lacan does not point out, which he might have done, is that Freud had already *analyzed* this particular neurotic symptom, his screen-memory, and therefore benefited by some knowledge of the structure that was organized around the marriage proposal, as

opposed to having been in a position to identify, or undergo an involuntary identification, with the unconscious structure in his patient.

In the spirit of Lacan's hypothesis, we might also add another element which brought Freud's and the Rat Man's personal experiences together: the analysis of Freud's own dream of *Company at table or table d'hôte,* which centered on the idea of what has to be paid for love, and the debts we necessarily incur in our friendships and family relations.[49] The desire was expressed in the dream through the theme of "beautiful eyes." Freud's crowning interpretation was that he wished to be loved for his *beaux yeux* only, he wished for love that was not *countable,* not rendered into the register of gratitude and debt—love beyond the debt principle. So when, in a murky period of work with the Rat Man, the patient had a dream of seeing Freud's daughter with two patches of dung instead of eyes, Freud applied the interpretation that had worked for him to his patient: "should he remain faithful to the lady he loved in spite of her poverty, or should he follow in his father's footsteps?" Should he marry for love or for money? Should he step outside the circle of paternal debt or honor it? However, where Freud's dream registered a protest against love always having to be paid for, the Rat Man's dream, with the alacrity born of its ironic intention, eagerly forced love into the framework of a marriage with Freud's daughter which was for her money, not her beauty. Whereas Freud, the forty-four-year-old father of six, already inhabited the register of marriage, yet regretted the curtailments that that implied, the young, single Rat Man refused to recognize the register itself, except in his dreams and symptoms, since marriage meant for him the identification with his (dead) father and the renunciation of love in favor of money (rats).

Such rapprochements between Freud and his patient are plausible. But the second of Lacan's rapprochements is far more curious, because it is so obscure and almost undetectable—if it is in any sense detectable. It occurs in the rhetorically baroque and obscure penultimate section of Lacan's 1955 paper "The Freudian Thing," the

section entitled "La dette symbolique" ("Symbolic Debt"). The title indicates that, for my reading of Lacan's reading of Freud, this is a key passage:

> Will our action go as far, then, as to repress the very truth that it bears in its exercise? Will it send this truth back to sleep, a truth that Freud in the passion of the Rat Man would maintain presented for ever to our recognition, even if we must increasingly divert our vigilance away from it: namely, that it is out of the forfeits and vain oaths, lapses in speech and unconsidered words, the constellation of which presided at the putting into the world of a man, that is moulded the stone guest who comes, in symptoms, to disturb the banquet of one's desires?
>
> For the unripe grape of speech by which the child receives too early from a father the authentification of the nothingness of existence, and the bunch of wrath that replies to the words of this false hope with which the mother has baited him in feeding him with the milk of her true despair, set his teeth on edge more than having been weaned on/from an imaginary *jouissance* or even having been deprived of such real attentions.[50]

The mention of the Rat Man's passion leads one to believe that the two allusions that follow are to *his* experience; far from it. The two references of the second paragraph are, I infer, taken not from the Rat Man's childhood, but from Freud's own catalogue of childhood experiences. The first refers to the judgment passed by his father on the son who had urinated in his parents' bedroom: "the boy will come to nothing"—a judgment which pursued Freud in his dreams for the rest of his life, obliging him to enumerate constantly for his imaginary father the substantiality of his existence.[51]

There is, it is true, an episode in the Rat Man's childhood which has some similarities with Freud's memory: when the father declares that his son's elemental fury indicates he will be either a great man or a great criminal.[52] Freud adds in a note, as if wanting to confirm the importance of such prophecies, that the father overlooked the most likely outcome of such premature passions: a neurosis. But this incident from the Rat Man's childhood could not be, despite the

obliquity of Lacan's prose, what is referred to with the phrase "the authentification of the nothingness of existence"; at most, it provided Lacan with a switchword to the Freudian allusion.

The second allusion, to the mother's despair, is, I suspect—beyond the evocation of the powerful final scene of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath,* where a famished young man is nourished at the breast of a young woman whose baby has died—to the vivid demonstration of human mortality that Freud's mother once gave him:

> When I was six years old and was given my first lessons by my mother, I was expected to believe that we were all made of earth and must therefore return to earth. This did not suit me and I expressed doubts of the doctrine. My mother thereupon rubbed the palms of her hands together—just as she did in making dumplings, except that there was no dough between them—and showed me the blackish scales of *epidermis* produced by the friction as a proof that we were made of earth.[53]

And, Freud continues, "I acquiesced in the belief which I was later to hear expressed in the words: *'du bist der Natur einen Tod schuldig'*—'thou owest Nature a death.'"[54] With this tracing of implicit associations, we have, I think, arrived at Lacan's *terminus ad quem.*

With this passage, we have stumbled upon the strangest, most allusive subtext to Lacan's commentary on the Rat Man: passing by way of an elision between the Rat Man's and Freud's childhood experiences, we come upon the unpayable debt of each speaking being, which Lacan, in less Shakespearean, less directly religious mode, will call, a page later, "the symbolic debt for which the subject as subject of speech is responsible."[55] Passing from the Rat Man, through a circuitous reading of Freud, we arrive at the final doctrinal end-point: the symbolic debt of the subject insofar as he is speaking, the debt he owes to the Other.

Debt as a fundamental property of the Symbolic is the mature Lacanian axiom. The notion of symbolic debt is indissolubly linked

to the notion of the symbolic father, whose genesis from the 1930s on we have followed:

> The attribution of procreation to the father can only be the effect of a pure signifier, of a recognition, not of a real father, but of what religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father.
>
> Of course, there is no need of a signifier to be a father, any more than to be dead, but without a signifier, no one would ever know anything about either state of being.
>
> I would take this opportunity of reminding those who cannot be persuaded to seek in Freud's texts an extension of the enlightenment that their pedagogues dispense to them how insistently Freud stresses the affinity of the two signifying relations that I have just referred to, whenever the neurotic subject (especially the obsessional) manifests this affinity through the conjunction of the themes of the father and death.
>
> How, indeed, could Freud fail to recognize such an affinity, when the necessity of his reflexion led him to link the appearance of the signifier of the Father, as author of the Law, with death, even to the murder of the Father—thus showing that if this murder is the fruitful moment of debt through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law, the symbolic Father is, in so far as he signifies this Law, the dead Father.[56]

The debt is now Lacan's manner of purifying the notion of guilt and of morality of its "instinctual" sources. The ambiguity of the Rat Man's debt—the imaginary debt to the friend as separate from the symbolic debt to his father, which can only be recognized once he ceases, as Freud put it, denying the death of his father—is now the means by which Lacan can articulate the junction of the symbolic and the imaginary. And with the register of debt, Lacan can fuse the notion of exchange, borrowed from the anthropology of Marcel Mauss *(The Gift)* and Claude Lévi-Strauss, with the exchange of words, the pure symbols that constitute the articulation of the Symbolic, and, most intriguingly, with the register of money. For can we forget that among the most common uses of the polysemic debt are

those linked to money and the system of finance? Certainly neither the Rat Man nor Freud forgot it: the first response of the patient to being told the financial arrangements involved in psychoanalysis was to think to himself: "So many florins, so many rats!" And it was surely as much on account of the curious currency he brought to the analysis as for his memorable rat torture that Freud gave the patient his sobriquet.

There is one striking passage in Lacan's writings where he draws the analogy, not infrequent elsewhere, between money and speech. The context of the passage, written in 1953 in the Rome Discours, is Lacan's denunciations of present-day psychoanalytic technique: the specific target is the mixing up of the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic that too close an attention to the dimension of the here and now can entail. The danger is the analyst's promotion, once again, of the alienation of the subject in an objectification of his ego, his imaginary point of identification. What the analyst must do, rather, is deprive the subject's certainties of support. Suddenly, Lacan evokes a deserted discourse:

> However empty, in fact, may appear this discourse, all one can do is take it at face value: that justified by Mallarmé's sentence in which he compares the common usage of language to the exchange of a coinage whose sides now only reveal effaced figures, a coinage passed from hand to hand "in silence." This metaphor is sufficient to remind us that speech, even when it has, through everyday wear and tear, reached its limit, retains its function as token.
>
> Even if it communicates nothing, discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the evidence, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is destined to deceive, it speculates on faith in witnessing.[57]

The contrast evoked by the image of the effaced coin being passed from hand to hand in silence is one between the melodramas of popular psychoanalysis—stories of grandiose identifications, horrific stories of past abuse, tempestuous bouts of transference-passion—

and a stark vision of humans deprived of all that is colorful, historical, meaningful. On the beach, stranded in a world we know from Beckett and Bergman, humans wordlessly measure out their beings-for-Death by exchanging an effaced coin, a subway token that still functions as a token even after the Bomb has fallen.

In *Seminar I,* Lacan used the same metaphor to illustrate talking to no purpose. While he obviously had Heidegger's rather coarse category of "idle talk" in mind, the image from Mallarmé is, nonetheless, a subversion of the Heideggerian put-down of idle talk. Lacan emphasizes how talking to no purpose (how could one do such a thing?—that is exactly how Freud defines free association, so that unconscious purposive ideas now come to the fore) reveals one of the fundamental truths of language:

> But even [talking to no purpose], as I've explained elsewhere, has its meaning. This realisation of language, now only serving *as an effaced coin passed from hand to hand in silence*—a phrase I quoted in my Rome report, which comes from Mallarmé—indicates the pure function of language, which is to assure us that we are, and nothing more. That one is capable of speaking to no purpose is just as significant as the fact that, when one speaks, in general it is for a purpose.[58]

The passage from Mallarmé to which Lacan is referring is the following: "to relate, to teach, even to describe is fine and although perhaps enough for each individual to exchange human thought, by taking or putting a coin silently in someone else's hand, the elementary use of talk serves the universal *reportage* in which, with the exception of literature, everything among the different kinds of contemporary writing partakes."[59] There is, we see, a significant difference between Mallarmé's image and Lacan's version of it. For Mallarmé, everyday life is simply sustained by the taking and receiving, in silence, of little coins, as if the essential structures of communications were given in the small gestures of touching and the little kisses of welcome and goodbye rather than the twittering of tongues that fills up the rest of life spent "In Company." Lacan adds

the trope of the effaced figure to Mallarmé. He adds, thereby, the dimension of a past, a past present in the signs of its having been annulled. Lacan's additional figure means that we live, not in the flat two-dimensional reality of Mallarmé's everyday life without past or future, but in the twilight zone of effaced coins, canceled meanings, historical monuments.

Strangely enough, Lacan could have found a term that uses the figure on a coin as the guiding figure of speech to describe the patient's discourse in Freud's very first case history in *Studies on Hysteria*, Frau Cäcilie M. or Baroness Anna von Lieben, who suffered from a "hysterical psychosis for the payment of old debts."[60] All the old debts had been accumulated, Freud had indicated, by her making false connections in the past: her neurotic symptoms were masks, excessive stories, covering over the true and hidden connections, which her cathartic cure would reveal. Getting the true words out, expressing them adequately, in the proper place, to the proper person: this is another way of describing her either paying off or writing off these old debts. The speech emitted can almost be counted off, on one side of the balance sheet, against the debt, the past obligations, represented, as if they were old IOUs, by symptoms.

The German word that Freud used to describe his patient is a wonderfully rich and ambiguous term: *hysterische Tilgungspsychose. Tilgung* means the deletion sign in typography; *tilgen* means "to extinguish," "to strike out," "to wipe out, to efface," "to delete" (in typography); *Schuld tilgen* means "to pay, compound, discharge, cancel"; *Anleihe tilgen* means "to redeem," and thus *Tilgungschein* means "certificate of redemption." Anna von Lieben spent much labor redeeming all her old debts, issuing certificates of redemption through the hard work of catharsis she accomplished with Freud. It took her three years of the talking cure, Freud writes, to redeem the old debts of thirty-three years.

There is little doubt that in these very early writings, Freud on occasion allowed the three registers of confession, moral sin, and financial debt to intermingle, a play made easy by the resonances of

the term *Schuld* in German. The cathartic cure is a confession of sins, and it is also a *Rechnung,* a reckoning, a toting up of the sins of the past, sometimes even the sins of the father that have been visited upon the daughters and sons. There is an equivalence between the speech of the patient, on the one hand, and the old debts that are being brought to account and finally paid off, on the other.

We are not, quite, speaking of money and speech here; but the register is not far from it. The register is that of obligation. We could coalesce them, it seems, by making a distinction between responsible and irresponsible speech. The speech of psychoanalysis appears to be speech at its most irresponsible: free association, whose relevance or social acceptability is intentionally placed to one side. The injunction is an odd one: do not take responsibility for your speech! In this way, you will discover that you are far more responsible for it than you ever realized or imagined. One starts off, as Lacan put it, in the exactly opposite direction to your intended goal: you start off mouthing nonsense, only to discover these are precious truths. You start with oaths and blasphemy, only to discover these are sacred words.

So Lacan could have looked back, as he so often had done, to Freud for the interweaving of monetary terms with the register of obligation and responsibility. But he would have found only a faint echo of the image of the effaced, annulled, *tilgt* coin in Freud. Where else do we find this figure of the effaced coin? In Nietzsche: "So what is truth? . . . truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors which have become habitual and drained of sensory force, coins which have been effaced and which from then on are taken to be, not pieces of money, but metal."[61] Truth, Nietzsche asserts, is the passing of the effaced metal coin of metaphor from one hand to another. Metaphor falls to the level of truth through the effacing of the figure emblazoned on it; truth is the effacing of metaphor. It is the effacing that allows people not to recognize what has taken place, so that they can forget and rely on the comfort of truth.

The figure of effacement introduces, for both Nietzsche and Lacan, a two-phase history: the "now" of the passage of coin from hand

to hand, which follows the "then" of full recognition of the stamp of the coin: its value, its provenance, which monarch or state issued it, under what circumstances, and so forth. For Lacan, the effacement of the coins resonates with his own theory of the imaginary: the theory of the mirror phase. One can see this clearly in the very terms he employs: "une monnaie dont l'avers comme l'envers ne montrent plus que des figures effacées" ("a coin whose obverse like its inverse now only reveals effaced figures"). To use the terms *avers* and *envers* for the two sides of a coin is, one might say, rather *pervers.* It does, one must admit, communicate clearly the stubborn indeterminacy of the Lacanian subject confronted with the mirror: which is the real image?

But a further reading of Lacan's insertion of the effaced figure shows that it follows through the distinction he was in the process of making in this passage, between full and empty speech. Full speech would be, then, the exchange of coins whose figures have not been effaced, the original inscriptions whose loss is recorded in hysterical symptoms.[62] In *Seminar I,* drawing upon his customary linguistic sensitivity, Lacan lends Freud a term borrowed from the more recent work of Lorenz and Tinbergen in ethology, the term *Prägung,* translated into English as "imprinting," but which has the connotation of the striking of a coin. This is the term, Lacan asserts, that best characterizes primal repression, when a traumatic impression forces its way upon the subject.[63] One side of the coin of the word *Prägung* leans toward the imprinting of a figure, and it captures as well the moment of the sudden appearance that is also a crystallization—the process that is usually characterized by the term *Fixierung,* fixation, with all its overtones derived from the sequence of processes by which a photographic image is produced in the darkroom. The chief difference is that the temporality of the two processes run in opposite directions. In a darkroom, one develops and then fixes the image produced; in the Freudian darkroom, the image is fixed but invisible until it is developed by the mechanism of deferred action, *Nachträglichkeit.* Nietzsche's image has the same temporal structure

as Freud's: the coin is first struck, corresponding to primal repression, but only becomes truth, becomes metal rather than currency, becomes visible through secondary repression and symptom formation, when the figure is effaced. Full speech is the restoring of the figure to the coin, the restoring of the original metaphoricity of the illusion created by the word.

The more orthodox interpretation of full speech also, as I will now try to show, brings us back to an analogy with money. A number of commentators, among them Shoshana Felman,[64] Jean Bellemin-Noël,[65] Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen,[66] and myself,[67] have pointed out the similarity between Lacan's notion of full speech, or founding speech, and Austin's theories of performatives. For Lacan and Austin, the exemplary performatives, the acts of full speech, are ritual acts of naming, of binding one person to another in a permanent and irreversible bond: "you are my master," "you are my wife." Austin stays closer to the ritual wording: "I do" in the marriage ceremony, "I name this ship" in a launching, and "IOU" in affirmations of indebtedness. The clearest example of the performative is the promise, the core of any contract, whether in its marital or monetary ritual observances. Consider the words on the English banknote—"I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of £5." This is the pure performative, a speech act which is its own guarantee, a pure commitment to the other and to the common future of subject and other.

The words "I promise to pay the bearer" correspond to the effaced figure on the coin. Part of the power of the image of the silent passing on of effaced coins derives from the solidity of the coin as a piece of metal, as if we would still treasure the coin once all the other people had silently departed, leaving us alone with no further reason for parting with it. This image of the circulating coin still has the power to revive the conviction that the metal of the coin is something valuable in and of itself, as if it were gold. With a banknote, the dimension of value is evoked more effectively through negativity, through our recognition that the worthless piece of paper is closer to

the primary function of money—that it can be exchanged for something other than itself. Lacan's image of the silent passing on of coins emphasizes the structure of exchange, at the cost of the heterogeneity implicit in the idea of an exchange economy: one object is exchanged for another, a *different* object. The promise of money is that one neutral object can give the holder of the banknote or the coin access to an indefinitely large number of other objects, corresponding to the indefinite variety of his or her desires. Empty speech, Lacan implies, remains restricted to exchanging one object for another, identical object. The silent image of money changing hands is equivalent to an affirmation of the act of promising, but with no specification of what is promised—as if one silently pressed into someone else's hand a scrap of paper with no design, no images of a sovereign, simply bearing the words "I promise."

However, I make use of the example of the banknote primarily for reasons beyond its clarity and expository simplicity. More immediately than the coin, the banknote evokes the register of debt. As we have seen, the Lacanian subject becomes a subject only in incurring a symbolic debt to the father, or to the element in the world which instantiates the paternal metaphor. The metaphor is sustained and expanded so as to include the elementary structures of all social relations, through the transplanting of Lévi-Strauss's famous hypothesis that it is the act of exchange of women by men that constitutes the fundamental cement of all societies.[68] Lacan clarifies this hypothesis by giving equal weight to the concept of a debt circulating in the opposite direction to that of the women. As a man exchanges one woman for another, he becomes a symbolic father (one only becomes a father by giving up the imaginary phallus). The woman he receives in exchange brings with her the surplus value of the child. This child's relation to the father is that of indebtedness: the positivity (the actuality) of the male child's material existence is repeated on the level of symbolic existence in the negativity of his debt, which he can only pay off by giving away a woman. This model, drawn

from the so-called elementary societies, is itself indebted to Mauss's essay on the gift. Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan all agree that the basic social fact is the stable, equilibrated system of symbolic exchanges of gifts. Lacan's rhetoric captures the assumption well:

> Identified with the sacred *hau* or with the omnipresent *mana,* the inviolable Debt is the guarantee that the voyage on which wives and goods are embarked will bring back to their point of departure in a never-failing cycle other women and other goods, all carrying an identical entity: what Lévi-Strauss calls a "zero-symbol," thus reducing the power of Speech to the form of an algebraic sign.[69]

The anthropologists' vision of the stable circulation of all goods, women, and symbols sparks off Lacan's most rapturously deterministic evocation of the force of destiny—what he will later call the combinatory of the Symbolic.

We must now ask: Is Lacan's theory of the Symbolic then one in which a theory of money and of debt coincides with the anthropological theory of exchange? Lacan certainly takes it as axiomatic that the act of giving entails obligation on the part of the recipient. Money, in this theory, is simply the objective measure of obligation, the measure of debt. Certain features of this theory can then be transferred to any exchangeable item. Lacan's axiom is that the Symbolic is grounded on the gift of one specific human property, that of speech: "it is by way of this gift [of speech] that all reality has come to man and it is by his continued act that he maintains it."[70] Hence all other symbolic elements can be, and are, exchanged via the universal medium of speech; speech itself is both medium and element transmitted. Thus, for instance, the function of symbolic love can be deduced from the theory of potlatch in Mauss: love is the gift of what one hasn't, just as one accumulates debts to the destroyers of pigs through being present at the potlatch feast in which the objects of symbolic exchange—"pots made to remain empty, shields

too heavy to be carried, sheaves of wheat that wither, lances stuck into the ground"[71]—are "the signifiers of the pact that they constitute as signified."[72]

I sense that this grand metaphor of the circulation of symbols between subjects, kinship groups, and entire civilizations has been insufficiently examined. The most seductive aspect of this theory is not the grand union between economics, kinship, the contract theory of society, and linguistics. It is the metaphor which is perhaps most familiar to us in economics, both practical and theoretical, but which has a far wider, older, and deeper hold: it is the metaphor of circulation itself. Within the natural sciences, circular motion was to Aristotle the motion of the perfect, unchanging extraterrestrial world. The Keplerian and Newtonian reforms, followed by the rational mechanics of the eighteenth century, did away with the privilege of the circle and the distinction between the heavens and earth, but installed a new version of this ideal: the equation with determinate solutions and reversible time parameters. Despite the fact that the term given to the political transformations at the end of the eighteenth century was derived from the same geometric and circular ideal—"revolution", after all, refers to the revolving of the spheres—these transformations, together with the parallel transformations of the technology of production known as the Industrial Revolution, introduced the possibility of the world being dominated by processes that are not fundamentally those of the equilibrium of the balance and mathematical recurrence.

The key response to this possibility was the device of the Carnot cycle—the uncanny return of Aristotle's metaphysics as a thought experiment, the founding moment of thermodynamics. Imagine a system which goes through a determinate number of processes which lead it back to its starting-point. This is the description of the ideal system, the ideal heat engine for Carnot. The Carnot cycle made

possible one of the most fundamental of scientific innovations of the nineteenth century: the division of all processes into reversible and irreversible ones. The impossibility of perpetual motion—the impossibility of there being such a thing as a wheel that revolves forever and produces useful work, otherwise known as the second law of thermodynamics—ensured that nature is the domain of irreversible processes, whereas the domain of science (of the ideal, the mathematical) is first and foremost that of the reversible—the ideal of circulation still ruling as an ideal type. Even within mathematical physics, paradoxes worthy of the Greeks were produced by this return of the circular: Zermelo's paradox utilizing Poincaré's recurrence theorem, which proved that, in stark contradiction of the second law of thermodynamics, any mechanical system will eventually return arbitrarily close to its starting-point.[73]

When the scientistic worldview of nineteenth-century thermodynamics was evoked to criticize Freud's hydraulic metaphors and old-fashioned science—by those claiming themselves as humanistic psychoanalysts—it was this model of the circulating, lawlike balance-sheet of energy that was at issue. Lacan's defense of Freud saw to the heart of the question: he defended Freud's hydraulics of the libido on the grounds that Freud was simply invoking a material-like substance to give body to what was more properly a network of equivalences, relations of quasi-mathematical equality. This act—giving money to a servant-girl—stands in for two other acts—defecating and copulating. The ecological sensibility, historically akin to political economy and to the balance-sheets of energy and chemical ingredients of agricultural economies, would also express such equivalences, and could provoke such grand projects (with their intendant anxieties) as the recycling of the sewage of the new English industrial towns in order to restore to the countryside the vital elements it was in danger of losing. The cycle of nature's basic currency and the circulation of goods and money could be mapped onto one another.[74]

In the twentieth century the scientism, if such it was, of the balance-sheet of energy transformations, of chemical transforma-

tions, and of the human body as a chemical engine could be replaced by the equivalence that was posited between energy and information, culminating in Brillouin's concept of negentropy.[75] The nineteenth-century metaphysics of the balance-sheet of energy and its shadowy nemesis, entropy, could be easily mapped onto the twentieth-century chart of the transmission of information in networks without loss. If Carnot's cycle provided the exemplar for the metaphysics of reversible cycles, it is the electrical circuit and then the computer circuit that have provided the technological devices, the phenomenotechnical realizations, to use Bachelard's term, for our everyday embedding and disembedding in this metaphysics of the circular and the circulation.[76]

The idea of the closed system, linked to but also independent of these developments associated with thermodynamics, can also be found in biological thought, when we trace the genealogy of the idea of the homeostatic system (Cannon and even Breuer) back to Bichat and Bernard, and forward to its development by Wiener and others in cybernetics. With cybernetics, the links between biology and thermodynamics become clear, as do the connections with developments in logic and engineering giving rise to information theory. Cybernetics offers the ideal of a pure science of the system grounded on the model of the collection of elements that always return to the same place, indicating how the circular ideal is realized in nature.

Lacan was acutely sensitive to this novel approach; his deft and astute eclecticism allowed him to combine the burgeoning structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and others with the cybernetic revolution of Wiener, Grey Walter, and their colleagues. Each of these scientific developments, though, represents the recurrence of the scientific ideal of the circular—of the return to the starting-point, and the ordering of every element of a system in relation to this fundamental ideal, which, according to the second law of thermodynamics, can never be more than temporarily real. Hence Lacan's definition of the Real: those things are real which are always in the same place.[77]

One could, of course, reinterpret this history in the opposite sense: one could argue that the history of modern science is the battle

against the ideal of the circle and the eternal return of the same. First, Aristotle's *physis* is denatured of circles. The Industrial Revolution and thermodynamics recognize the ubiquity of irreversibility and the ontological status of time—of time's arrow—in the very conceptual development that allows a powerful description of cyclical reversible processes. The project then becomes the description of open and closed systems and the conditions under which they do or do not obey the logic of circular return. Conceiving of organisms, then of societies, then of machines in such terms is a series of attempts to bring to self-consciousness and under analytical scrutiny the ideal of circularity. But the ideal of the system—self-equilibrating, self-correcting, wiping out its history as if it were a Carnot cycle in full operation in the real of society, of language, of ecology—nonetheless dominates even while it is the object of skeptical criticism and regulation. And our technology of circuits insistently reminds us that we associate the circle with life and we associate its dissolution, dispersion, and dismembering with the line going dead. It is this recurrently seductive metaphysics of the circle that reemerges in Lacan's theory of debt.

Another way of putting this is to say: it is the unique, the anomalous, the excessive, the gratuitous, the superfluous that is continually being excluded from the logic of the circular. The clearest statement of this insight can be found in Derrida's brilliant essay *Given Time,* which is addressed to the concept of the gift, especially in Mauss's classic statement. The Maussian theory of the gift is of an economy ordered by the logic of reciprocity and exchange that is included in the act of giving, in prestation (Mauss's term, meaning, roughly, "that which is rendered to the other"). Yet there is another concept of the gift, just as fundamental as that of required reciprocity, as pure gratuity—the tip that is always beyond the price that has been agreed upon by the contracting parties, the excess that is beyond calculation. Wherever the gift as pure gift in this sense exists—if it can exist—it destroys the logic of the gift in the other sense, in the sense of a countable logic of reciprocity and exchange. The gift both requires

an answer and annuls any possibility of an answer. The gift is pure act that sets in train nothing other than itself—if it does so, the sense of spontaneity and surplus beyond what is required by the preexisting obligations is annulled. The gift that requires reciprocation annuls itself as gift in that very requirement. The Christmas present that demands the thank-you letter annuls the pure gift of the gift, by pretending that the letter is not itself part of the system of exchanges that make up and, in the very act of letter writing and sending, create ever new sets of exchanges and obligations.

Is such a thing as the gift possible? This is Derrida's unanswerable question. "The truth of the gift . . . suffices to annul the gift. The truth of the gift is equivalent to the non-gift or to the non-truth of the gift. This proposition obviously defies common sense. That is why it is caught in the impossible of a very singular double-bind, the bond without bond of a bind and a non-bind. On the one hand, Mauss reminds us that there is no gift without bond, without bind, without obligation or ligature; but on the other hand, there is no gift that does not have to untie itself from obligation, from debt, contract, exchange, and thus from the bind."[78] The gift will always remain logically impossible, then, though there may be such a thing that, in its lightning appearance, suspends that impossibility—is another name for that impossibility.

> One cannot deny the *phenomenon,* nor that which presents this precisely phenomenal aspect of exchanged gifts. But the apparent, visible contradiction of these two values—gift and exchange—must be problematized. What must be interrogated, it seems, is precisely this being-together, the at-the-same-time, the synthesis, the symmetry, the syntax, or the system, the *syn* that joins together two processes that are by rights as incompatible as that of the gift and that of exchange.[79]

Derrida puts his thesis at its most clear-cut as follows:

> To reduce [the gift] to exchange is quite simply to annul the very possibility of the gift. This annulment is perhaps inevitable or fatal.

> No doubt its possibility must always remain open. Still one has to deal with this annulment, still one has to render an account of the law of its possibility or its process, of what happens or can not happen in the form of the gift, to the gift and by way of the gift.[80]

Derrida uses the term "exchangist," linked to "linguisticist and structuralist," to characterize the strategy of Lévi-Strauss, following and criticizing Mauss, a strategy that is crucial to the paradigm or episteme of French structuralism of the 1960s.[81] What is this strategy, which Lacan shared—in part, and the extent to which he participated and diverged will concern us later—with Lévi-Strauss and the others?

The strategy is to set aside Mauss's residues of magical thinking which stem from his being too closely identified with or attentive to specific terms—such as *hau,* which designates both buying and selling, lending and borrowing, giving and taking—to seek beneath the surface of social reality the iron law of circulation and exchange that regulates the ethnographic or psychoanalytic unconscious. Lévi-Strauss perceived Mauss as having been bewitched and proposed the concept of the zero-symbol in order to designate the concept of exchange that Mauss had adopted wholesale from the indigenous conception of the Maoris. Anything can come to occupy this position, he argues, so it is an empty signifier, a zero signifier. Yet in so doing, Lévi-Strauss undoes the entire drift of Mauss's argument in *The Gift,* which was concerned to *distinguish* economies founded on gifts from those founded upon money, economies ("theirs") founded upon exchange (equivalent to the creation of social bonds) from those ("ours") in which exchange annihilates all bonds except those embodied in the circulation of money.

Thus Mauss locates in *hau* what is necessarily absent in money. Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan following him, replaces the gift economy with the signifier economy. In so doing, they eradicate the distinction Mauss sought to make. All social relations—read the Symbolic—are to be understood in terms of the peregrinations of the zero signifier,

just as Marx and Simmel's analyses of the modern world demonstrate how the internal logic of money is inherently universalistic, necessarily devouring all sources of value other than money as pure exchange-value. So the linguistic reading of the Maussian political economy, which shifts the emphasis from the universal law of the gift to the universal law of the signifier, undoes the very distinction Mauss intended to make between gift and money economies, and, in so doing, requires us to identify money and the theory of the zero-signifier.

To put this another way: If we read all economies as systems of exchange, in which we cannot usefully distinguish economies that are bonded through the circulation of pigs, of *hau,* or of money, but must subsume them all under the single category of the exchange and circulation of symbols, then the speech act of promising and the coins and banknotes founded on that promise give us the founding act of all human societies. Lévi-Strauss recognizes this at times, seeing in the idea of the social contract "the most profound and most generalizable—that is, verifiable over a large number of societies—idea of what political organization can be, and even the theoretical conditions of any possible political organization."[82] The eighteenth-century foundations of the social contract, also invoked implicitly by Austin, Lacan, and Searle, are the foundations of speech acts in general: good faith, trust, and confidence.

The key notion becomes circulation, rather than reciprocity and exchange. As long as something circulates, or better, in Derridean dialect, as long as *there is circulation,* the second logic of the gift—the exchangist, the linguisticist, the structuralist, the economicist—appears to prevail over the first logic—of the gratuity, of creativity, of charity, of the givingness of giving. Mauss's essay certainly pushes in this direction, seemingly oblivious to the way in which his relentless anatomy of the *hau,* the potlatch, the *kula*—which he translates as "circle or ring, a regular movement in time and space"[83]—erodes the very distinction it is meant to provide, that between social exchange and monetary exchange. Lacan and Lévi-Strauss demolish this dis-

tinction by locating the *hau* in the zero-signifier of language, a signifier defined only by its negativity, its difference from all other signifiers. But the other register, which Lévi-Strauss will call the affective or magical register in Mauss, will also return. Let us anatomize this return—this failure of the model of circulation.

The sense that something is missing in a total system of exchange and circulation is clearly present in our intuitions about the relations between money and giving. You cannot give money in the gratuitous sense of giving, because money is pure exchange. The gratuitous gift, as opposed to the reciprocating gift, requires that it is possible for the object that is given to remain forever with the person to whom it is given. There is a promise of eternity in this gift. Those aunts and uncles who give money as presents are perceived as wanting in something: in imagination. When a father gives his son a check for a birthday present, we sense a violation of the logic of the gift that is no less fundamental than when a son gives a check as a gift to his father. What is lacking here is exactly what is evoked by the notion of the pure gift as excess beyond—or before—exchange relations. Within Marxist theory, this is captured in the contrast of use-value and exchange-value: the residue that comes before or after exchange relations—the part that cannot be assimilated to exchange, that is only use or uselessness.

The psychoanalytic equivalences provide an ironic commentary on this logic of exchange and utility: feces = penis = baby. Feces are the exemplary useless object—although, as I have already indicated, their cooption into the circuit of exchange through the cyclical utopias of nineteenth-century sewage engineering, or through the rice growers of China buying human excrement at the gates of the city in order to transport it to the fields, is by no means uncommon. Similarly, at the other end of the circuit of life and of the body, the baby is exemplary of the object that cannot be exchanged, that is pure potential use-value prior to any possible use. When asked what use

his lightning conductor would be, Benjamin Franklin replied: "What use is a baby?" There are objects, often the most prized, whose utility lies precisely in their lack of use and the promise of their inner transformation. Of the penis and the law of its exchange-value, I will have more to say later.

My concern with the inadequacies of the Maussian model and its development by Lévi-Strauss and Lacan is intriguingly highlighted by Fernand Braudel's consideration of the question of the place of the market in history.[84] He considers Karl Polanyi's Maussian view, that the circulation of goods and trade through "ceremonial exchange governed by the principle of *reciprocity*"[85] predominated over the law of the market until the nineteenth century, when the self-regulating price mechanism came to dominate the world. One must, according to this view, distinguish trade from the market, differentiate between the circulation conceived of as a total social fact and the circulation governed by the money-relations of the market. Almost as if he had in mind Lacan's revision of the Oedipus complex using structuralist analyses of kinship structures, Braudel replies:

> There is no law against introducing into a discussion of the "great transformation" of the nineteenth century such phenomena as the *potlatch* or *kula* (rather than say the very diversified trading organization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). But it is rather like drawing on Lévi-Strauss's explanation of kinship ties to elucidate the rules governing marriage in Victorian England. Not the slightest effort has been made to tackle the concrete and diverse reality of history . . . Sociologists and economists in the past and anthropologists today have unfortunately accustomed us to their almost total indifference to history. It does of course simplify their task.[86]

Instead of this ahistorical disjunction between gift-and-reciprocity-based societies and market-money economies, Braudel endorses the view that non-market exchange systems and exchanges for money have always existed side by side: "It would be more accurate to think of the market economy as being built up step by step. As Marcel

Mauss used to say, 'it was the societies of the Western world that turned man into an economic animal, in very recent times.' Not everyone is yet agreed of course on the exact sense of 'very recent.'"[87] This ironic comment concerning what "very recent" might mean—citing Mauss, whose theories he has just deprived of historical plausibility—gives a clear sense that Braudel thought that a pre-market society is something like that moment in the future when the State will wither away. The Maussian moment, like the Marxist moment, is outside history.

This does not prevent Braudel's own account, like those he criticizes, from positing an outside to the circulation of trade and the market. Alongside Braudel's historical vision of the triumphant ubiquity and protean flexibility of the market rides the consistent critique of the present, as is evident in the three-tier model he proposes. Beneath the market there lies "the lowest stratum of the non-economy, the soil into which capitalism thrusts its roots but which it can never really penetrate. This lowest layer remains an enormous one."[88] Let us call this, to anticipate a later argument, the simple barter economy. Then, above that stratum, comes that market economy whose infinitely variegated possibilities Braudel's work documents, with its horizontal communications between different markets and its automatic coordination of supply, demand, and prices. Above the market there is the modern system of the anti-market, characterized by imperialism and the manipulation of the market, "where the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates. This—today as in the past, before and after the industrial revolution—is the real home of capitalism."[89] These two other non-market strata depart from the logic of reciprocity, exchange, and circulation.

Braudel's evocation of the lowest stratum of the non-economy points us toward an outside of the humming system of trade and circulation, just as the gift's logic requires such an outside. Within theoretical economics and economic anthropology, there is a name given to this outside: barter. The classical model of barter envisages the development of a division of labor and a system of bartering

between social groups of objects, one of which eventually became the measure, the yardstick, and the medium for facilitating future exchanges: money. Barter is the prototype of exchange in that one agent's demand is matched perfectly to the other's; an exchange takes place between these two free, desiring subjects, after which they are quits.[90] From the point of view of the exchangist, reciprocating model of circulation, this transaction is not part of a system, and, most important, does not give rise to any consequences. Whether or not barter ever gave or gives rise to a system of monetary exchange, which anthropologists now doubt, it lacks a crucial feature necessary for circulation to begin: there is no residue after the transaction is completed. Of course, the farmer who trades potatoes for pigs could barter the pigs for jewelry. But the basic system of barter does postulate a demand for goods that is filled by the objects bartered, and it is the level of this demand, and nothing else, that fixes the rate of equivalence. To invoke a potential yardstick that would match potatoes, pigs, and jewelry would impose the monetary system, would include it already at the heart of barter. Thus barter, in order to *be* barter, must be characterized by this essential link between demand and goods.

To get a system of circulation going on the basis of barter, one could, of course, postulate an inherent desire for trade: a *Verkehrtrieb,* a trading drive. But one of the virtues of the Maussian theory is precisely that it avoids such a vicarious, superfluous—gratuitous—hypothesis. The total prestation of the gift is asymmetrical, in contrast to barter, and leaves one of the parties in a state of obligation at the end of the transaction. It is this residual obligation—this debt—that is the motor of circulation in the gift-economies. Gift-economies operate entirely within the framework of compulsion and obligation between social unequals or persons asymmetrical in relation to each other—in contrast, it is argued, to barter, where the symmetry of the transaction is linked to the freedom of the agents and the automatic closure that exchange entails.

This freedom of the agents in barter and the fact that they are

quits at the end of the transaction capture two crucial elements of the notion of the gift as gratuitous: first, the sense that my giving a present should not, in order for my gift to be a gift, entail an obligation on the recipient's part. My giving is free—is not under an obligation—otherwise it is not a gift, but a duty. Second, the other's receiving entails no future to our relationship. After I have given my gift, the other is richer by the gift he has received and I am poorer by what I have given, but we are still quits. We can leave without residual obligation. Thus barter includes two elements that evade the impossibility of the gift that Derrida spells out.

This observation makes one wonder whether Mauss may not have been trading implicitly on these properties of barter when he discussed the gift as prestation, even though his theory is diametrically opposed to proposing barter as the fundamental social fact. His theory goes precisely in the opposite direction: toward the recognition of universal and ubiquitous obligation, toward the concept of society as a system of reciprocal obligations. In Maussian mood, Marilyn Strathern questions the common "supposition that one can regard gift exchange as somehow a version of commodity exchange . . . [Anthropologists' concerns with the interpretation of marriage transactions] remain dominated by the assumption that there is an intention to the system as a whole, namely to enable men to obtain women. The market analogy presumably endures because it speaks so directly and strongly to Western constructions."[91] Strathern here highlights the fact that gift exchange, like commodity exchange, is immediately subsumed under the overarching descriptive-normative category of the system of circulation. It is this concept of the system and the internal dynamic of the system as being circulation that has had such a hold on anthropologists, sociologists, and, I am suggesting, certain psychoanalysts. As Strathern's critique indicates, she also wishes to find some other way to characterize gift exchange than as part of a system. Freedom and non-consequentiality (the two elements supposed by barter) are the two elements that indicate how this is

accomplished. But, as we immediately recognize, these two elements are also the ones generally held up as the virtues of money.

Barter does not have a very strong conceptual profile. Yet it has a particular interest for psychoanalysis because the barter model of sexual relations is often held up as an ideal. The woman's potatoes are exchanged against the man's pigs. Both parties go away satisfied, having given what they are prepared to lose and having sated completely their desires.[92] This model is sometimes known as "free love." The emphasis—the word "free"—is placed entirely upon the mutual exchanging of sexual pleasure between two free and equal parties, whose sole aim is satisfying their desires and who, at the end of the affair, are quits. An imagined complementarity of gender roles can be stitched or grafted onto this conception, and can be suggested as the motive for the larger structures of alliance and marriage, thus installing the barter conception of sexuality at the heart of the general relations of reciprocity and exchange. Men barter marriage for sex, and women barter sex for marriage.

To make this system work, the two agents who enter into the barter must not only be equals and be in a symmetrical position with respect to each other, but they must also conceive of each other as complementary. The goods that one has to exchange match exactly the goods that the other has. But the kinship structures that overlap the gift exchanges of the Maussian system clearly leave little room for such a model of sexual relations. The circle must not close as abruptly and completely as this. Even if such a model of sexual relations existed, it would be entirely recuperated by the stronger systemic logic of the gift as reciprocity, which, it should not be forgotten, in Lévi-Strauss's hands became entirely preoccupied with the exchange of women and goods in accordance with the same logic.

The complementary model of sexual relations is foreign to psychoanalysis, from Freud's conception of the single model of development out of polymorphous perversity, through his thesis that there is only one libido, which is masculine, to the radical asymmetry of

Lacan's theories of sexual difference. Thus we see one more reason why the logic of gift and exchange can be grafted so comfortably onto psychoanalytic theory. The logic of sexual relations for psychoanalysis is always the logic of the supplement, not the complement.[93] It is through the supplement that sexuality opens out, is disseminated, into broader social relations—most conventionally in the baby, most controversially in the penis, most graphically in the feces: "Faeces are the child's first *gift,* the first sacrifice on behalf of his affection, a portion of his own body which he is ready to part with, but only for the sake of some one he loves."[94] But, as Derrida has so often convincingly reminded us, this logic of the supplement also has two sides: the supplement that is a gift as gratuitous, as surplus, and the supplement that is intrinsic to the internal logic of the whole, the supplement that is caught in the logic of substitution and repetition. Once the feces are caught in this logic, the string of substitutions, of symbols as Melanie Klein and Hanna Segal call them,[95] is endless. The feces turn into that universal medium of the gift known as money.

There are, however, quiet moments in the development of psychoanalytic thought that do not conform to the gift as exchange and reciprocity model. Curiously enough, we have seen one of them already, in the central transferential scene with the Rat Man where his dream of Freud's daughter with cow dung for eyes converged with an interpretation that Freud had given, some seven years earlier, of one of his own dreams. Freud interpreted both his and the Rat Man's dream according to the phrase "for the sake of your *beaux yeux.*" For the Rat Man, this meant that he intended to marry Freud's daughter for her money, not for love. And in Freud's own dream the central thoughts were the contrast between "selfish" and "unselfish," between "being in debt" and "without paying for it."[96] Freud's wish was that he for once be given something for nothing. This is as apt and accurate a characterization of what we mean by a gift as one can find. The psychoanalytic theory of love is thus the wish—and is a wish itself a supplement, a beyond of the logic of reality with its

substitutions?—that one be given something for nothing. In Lacan's definition of love—love is the gift of something one does not have—we are to be given a nothing that is something.

It is this nothing that is something that tempts one to see another side to Lacan's theory of the Symbolic, a side which is not entirely captive to the logic of circulation of the signifier. The other side of Lacan's theory of the signifier is his theory of speech. Speech is granted quasi-magical powers: founding speech, as I have analyzed it elsewhere.[97] But this founding speech can always be recuperated by including it within speech act theory, which itself leads to a new quasi-magical dimension: that of faith or confidence—the faith I lodge in the other, the confidence that is inherent in and founds (how can it found that which it creates?) the promise, the contract. Yet, as we now see from the paradox of the gift, this magical power will always reappear elsewhere. In Maussian mode, we find it at the end of Lacan's Rome Discourse, when he evokes the response of Prajapâti, the god of thunder from the Bhrad-âranyaka Upanishad, to the exhortation: "Speak to us. *'Da,'* replies Prajapâti. Three times he says *'Da,'* and three times he queries whether he has been understood. The first meaning of *Da* is submission, the second, gift, and the third is grace."[98] Lacan thus ends his advice to analysts with a reminder of the other dimension of the gift of speech: gift as pure gift, as grace. It is precisely this notion of grace that Christianity developed as its name for the gift from God that is not exchangeable or transferable with another human being. Grace is the name for a gift relationship that is excluded from exchange relations. Such is the power of the concept of the gift that it is not even clear that it makes any sense to say that grace is in God's gift.

My exposition—or rather my clarification—of the Lacanian Symbolic and its debt leads inexorably to the conclusion that the signifier of signifiers, the signifier that designates the effects of the system, as Lacan describes Lévi-Strauss's zero signifier, is not *hau,* is not *mana,*

is not the quantum, is not even the phallus, but is—money. Let me briefly indicate how this new version of the classical analogy between speech and money may clarify matters.[99]

Lacan used the Rat Man's debt to put together his revision of "the general anthropology derived from analytic doctrine."[100] With the concept of debt, Lacan had found something that would harmonize equally well with the theory of the lack—whether in its existential version (*manque-à-être,* lack-in-being) or in its erotic version (the lack of the phallus)—and with the theory of speech, exchange, and death which underpinned the revision of the psychoanalytic anthropology. The reading of Freud he gave that sustained this new anthropology was certainly idiosyncratic, one might even say retroactively effective:

> In establishing, in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* the Oedipus complex as the central motivation of the unconscious, he recognized this unconscious as the agency of the laws on which marriage alliance and kinship are based . . . it is essentially on sexual relations—by ordering them according to the law of preferential marriage alliances and forbidden relations—that the first combinatory for the exchanges of women between nominal lineages is based, in order to develop in an exchange of gifts and in an exchange of master-words the fundamental commerce and concrete discourse on which human societies are based.[101]

This combinatory of exchanges—of gifts, women, and words—is quite explicitly a fundamental departure from Freud's theory. And in the 1930s Lacan had explicitly recognized it as such: the model of one primal horde, transformed into a society through the inner logic of the murder of the primal father, had, Lacan sensed, included the key (neo-Hegelian, neo-Kojèvian) intuition that the father becomes a human father insofar as he is dead; however, *Totem and Taboo*'s model of social relations was not only historically but also conceptually implausible.[102] To replace the anthropology of the father's murder, the key term in Lacan's anthropology became that of exchange. There are elementary structures of lineages, secured by the dynamic

reality of renewed and repeated exchange—of women, gifts, and words. And "the exchange that characterizes such a society has other foundations than the needs even to satisfy them, what has been called the gift 'as total social fact.'"[103]

The metaphysics of speech eventually came to underpin this system of exchange which embodied the overly formal Maussian theory of the gift as expressing an algebra of obligation and reciprocity. To found Lacan's more generalized anthropology for psychoanalysis, he turned to a theory of full speech, of the unconditional obligation and unconscious effects of every act of speech.[104] And in this theory of speech, we come back to our starting-point—the prerequisites of trust and of faith: the Good Faith of the Other invoked in the act of speech.[105] And the concept of debt also finds a natural home here; it is also a means by which Lacan brings into the circle of mediations the concept of death. As the epigraph at the opening of this essay indicates, as Freud's Shakespearean "thou owest Nature a death" suggests, the debt that over-trumps all others, the debt that Lacan implies all other debts reduce to, in a ghostly and no doubt eternal circulation of debt, is the debt of death. We owe our lives to the dead father.

This is an attempt to establish a medium of symbolic exchange for Lacan's concept of the Symbolic. The unit of account is the tautologous debt, counted out by and measured against death. Yet this attempt to find the unit of currency of symbolic debt in death is not entirely convincing. First, this currency demands illumination by our more familiar practices associated with money—what we usually call the banking system. How revealing is the analogy with the banking system? In financial reality, when we hold money, when it sits in our wallets or gets sweaty between our fingers, it is the Bank that is in *our* debt. The confidence we have in the Bank is a way of saying we actually believe the Bank when it promises that it will honor the debt represented by the banknote; it will never foreclose on that debt. The modern banking system works in large part because the social roles of creditor and debtor have become refined to the point where "the

debtor has become perfectly specific (in the guise of the state) and the creditor, completely general (in the guise of anyone who happens to have had the debt assigned to him). No one can be substituted for the debtor; anyone can be substituted for the creditor."[106] It is this feature, this extreme asymmetry in the relation between the ultimate debtor, the Bank, which is the starting-point and ultimate end-point in the circulation of money, and the ultimate creditor, who can only ever be the medium for the circulation of money, which makes it plausible to align it with the living and the dead.

It is true that money is well adapted to serve as the symbol of both life and death. As Simmel writes:

> There is no more striking symbol of the completely dynamic character of the world than that of money. The meaning of money lies in the fact that it will be given away. When money stands still, it is no longer money according to its specific value and significance. The effect that it occasionally exerts in a state of repose arises out of an anticipation of its further motion. Money is nothing but the vehicle for a movement in which everything else that is not in motion is completely extinguished. It is, as it were, an *actus purus;* it lives in continuous self-alienation from any given point and thus forms the counterpart and direct negation of all being in itself.[107]

When money stops moving, it dies, it becomes being in itself, that is, death. When it returns to the Bank, to the Treasury (of signifiers), it dies. The Bank is thus, as we all know from the iconography of our culture over the last few centuries, the place from which all economic life emanates—it is the place of death. We stopped building mausoleums because the banks, built in their image, came to serve that function of housing the most socially essential of our dead. The Bank is that exemplary institution for attempting to refute the adage that you can't take it with you.

But we should also take a step back in the argument. To talk of debt, we must be in the realm of the countable. We must always be

able to ask: "How *much* is owed?" We should take our argument from another Hegelian, Karl Marx:

> This commodity [exchange value] is the commodity as money, and, to be precise, not as money in general, but as a *certain definite sum of money,* for, in order to represent exchange value in all its variety, money has to be countable, quantitatively divisible. Money—the common form into which all commodities as exchange values are transformed, i.e. the universal commodity—must itself exist as a *particular* commodity alongside the others, since what is required is not only that they can be measured against it in the head, but that they can be changed and exchanged for it in the actual exchange process.[108]

We can take our cue from the Rat Man: he knew *exactly* how much he owed Lieutenant A. Freud's text repeats the figure on numerous occasions: 3.80 kronen. But, as Freud and Lacan are both aware, this is his imaginary debt. His symbolic debt may well have been, may have had to have been, countable in a different currency. So what is the currency of Lacan's symbolic debt?

Lacan's social theory vacillates on this point. Is he committed to the view that debt is measured in terms of a substance, like coins or papers? Or does he view debt as an accounting procedure, a system of writing which records the transactions of the parties?[109] We might view his later explorations of number theory as one way to answer this question. The theory of the *trait unaire* (unique or single trait) of his Seminars in the early 1960s, together with the theory of suture elaborated by Jacques-Alain Miller, would thus be attempts at rendering Lévi-Strauss's theory of the zero-signifier into a properly countable theory of symbolic debt.[110] If this is the case, it would seem that Lacan's theory always leaned toward the accounting procedure—toward the notion that debt is given by a mark, a piece of writing, like the first system of money of which we have records, the Sumerian bricks upon which marks register debts.

As we have seen, the balance of the metaphors and figures that Lacan employs following Lévi-Strauss and Mauss is toward the

movement of women, objects, and signifiers, a movement which reflects the inverse movement at the unconscious level of debt. But the emphasis on the good faith of the other, whether in reciprocal exchange or in speech, prompted Lacan to introduce the concept of the Big Other, and therein lay part of his conceptual ingenuity—the combining and interleaving of the discourses of philosophy, linguistics, and ethnology. The Big Other began to function somewhat like a bank—the treasury of signifiers, as Lacan called it. The notorious indefiniteness of Lacan's concept of the Other includes among its many other functions this financial function, of upholding the system of debt, of keeping it from folding in a crisis of confidence, which the symbolic father creates. And we also know the element that functions as some kind of guarantee of the system: it is known as the phallus, the gold standard of the system of symbolic debt. This is one of the bridges to the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality: the phallus is the key term by which the notion of symbolic debt is rendered workable in clinical accounts of sexuality. The phallus very neatly conforms to another of the properties of money that Marx noted,[111] that of allowing "the equation of the incompatible, as Shakespeare nicely defined money: 'Thou visible God! / That solder'st close impossibilities, / And mak'st them kiss!'"[112] In exactly parallel fashion, the phallus acts, as a famously controversial passage from Lacan asserts, by joining "la part du logos" to "l'avènement du désir" (the side of logos to the coming of desire):

> It can be said that this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent to the (logical) copula. It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.[113]

It is by now a notorious and, for many people, a risible aspect of Lacanian theory that its practitioners and theorists are obliged to

engage in neo-scholastic disquisitions on the distinction between the phallus and the penis. The implications of the distinction are most easily seen, I would argue, by comparing it to that between money and gold. Gold, like the penis, has a long, distinguished, and venerable history as the unique marker of value. Yet all economic theorists since Marx, and all bankers since the 1930s, accept that the relation between money and gold is a contingent one. We can write a history of gold that encompasses its relations with luxury, empire, mining, and colonialism, in which the desire for gold sweeps over whole cultures, transforming history—whether in the pogroms of South America or the Gold Rushes of Alaska, South Africa, and California—through to the psychotic identification of gold and wealth. The entire technology of mining in Europe, and thus the technology that introduced the steam engine into the economy, depends, according to Nef and Braudel, upon the commerce in silver of the early modern period. And out of this fetishism of gold and silver emerges modern money, which repudiates its kinship to gold, expels the figure of gold into the outer darkness of theatrical comedy and the nineteenth-century novel by creating the unforgettably sad portrait of the miser. The miser is the realist of money, overtaken by the money revolution, which introduces the dialectic of negativity into all social relations; as Keynes put it, "it is a recognized characteristic of money as a store of wealth that it is barren; whereas practically every other form of storing wealth yields some interest or profit. Why should anyone outside a lunatic asylum wish to use money as a store of wealth?"[114] Money is the negation of all other goods; it is the means through which all other goods acquire value; it is the universal medium and also the universal standard, which can only be quantified in its movement, not in its accumulation.

The contentious relation of the body's organs to the phallus can thus, I suggest, be best thought of as akin to the relation of gold to money. Having insisted on this link between the signifier of value and the circulation that constitutes the Symbolic, Lacan cashes out this theory when he addresses the relations between the sexes:

> The symbolic parity *Mädchen* = *Phallus* [girl = phallus] . . . has its root in the imaginary paths by which the child's desire succeeds in identifying itself with the mother's want-to-be, to which of course she was herself introduced by the symbolic law in which this lack is constituted.
>
> It is as a result of the same mechanism that women in the real order serve, if they'll forgive me saying so, as objects for the exchanges required by the elementary structures of kinship and which are sometimes perpetuated in the imaginary order, while what is transmitted in a parallel way in the symbolic order is the phallus.[115]

Lacan also sensed that a system of exchange, of money, may not be an entirely stable self-regulating system; it may require something outside of itself to maintain it. Money often attaches itself to other social institutions (for example, the state as guaranteed by its military power) for this stabilizing function, which can never fully escape from the paradoxes associated with good faith. As Crump remarks, "the dominant political factor relating to the manufacture of money is the need to maintain confidence, which in turn requires that what comes from certain recognized producers as money is certified as genuine."[116] Just like the Bank, Lacan may have felt that the reference to the good faith, the confidence, of the creditors suffices only up to a point. Even Lacan was not immune to the realization that faith in the phallus is not unlimited, and that another principle may be required to sustain it when questions about its right of hegemony are raised:

> The law would not apply any the less if women were placed at the centre of this system, receiving the phallus in exchange for which they would give a child. If one must however describe this exchange as androcentric, it is, Lévi-Strauss tells us, on account of effects which make themselves felt, of political power that it is incumbent on men to exercise. The phallus prevails, then, because it is also the sceptre, in other words because it belongs to the symbolic order.[117]

Yet, despite the undoubted analogy between the precious substances for so long associated with money and the relation of the penis and

the phallus, there is no means of measuring symbolic debt. This is not to say that counting and measuring are excluded from an individual subject's relations to the penis; far from it. But every attempt to turn the penis into a countable measure of value is, in the end, as eccentric as the Rat Man measuring his debt in rats. Such attempts are closely akin to those which seek the most precious word in the language, for instance in the search for magic words or, more successfully, in poetry. Perhaps we might conclude that the currency in which the symbolic debt is counted will be unique to each and every analytic subject. The rat currency of the Rat Man will have to remain our model, through which we look beyond his imaginary commerce to the symbolic debt he owed his father, which can only be recognized through the mediation of his death.

There is a lesson in psychoanalytic technique to be drawn from the question of the countability of the symbolic debt. We have seen how Freud was quite clear that he would not get drawn into the system of imaginary debts the Rat Man was caught in, and I have drawn attention to the fact that Lacan, mistakenly, implicated Freud more closely in that system than Freud's own account warrants. Freud did not respond to the demand of the Rat Man for a medical certificate to aid his payment of the debt which still haunted him. But, no matter how well the analyst steers clear of imaginary involvement, there is the by no means simple question of extricating oneself from the transference.

Lacan argued that it is money that neutralizes the effects of the transference. In the end, then, it looks as if the imaginary debts of the patient—which are all translated into imaginary debts to the analyst—can be translated into the Symbolic and counted out in notes, checks, credit card accounts, futures options, paintings, or whatever else is transacted between patient and analyst. This is, as everyone is aware, a sensitive topic. Freud recognized that, for a number of reasons, it is essential that psychoanalysis be made count-

able. "Free treatment enormously increases some of a neurotic's resistances—in young women, for instance, the temptation which is inherent in their transference-relation, and in young men, their opposition to an obligation to feel grateful . . . The absence of the regulating effect offered by the payment of a fee to the doctor makes itself very painfully felt."[118] Freud also emphasized that "civilized people" treat money matters with the same inconsistency, hypocrisy, and prudishness as they do the sexual. The sense in which this may lead to incongruous effects can be gauged from Ferenczi's story of a patient who opened a consultation by saying: "'Doctor, if you help me, I'll give you every penny I possess!' 'I shall be satisfied with thirty kronen an hour,' the physician replied. 'But isn't that rather excessive?' the patient unexpectedly remarked."[119]

The well-regulated analysis will, then, manage to match the transference with the analytic fee in an equilibrated system where obligation, reciprocation, and service are perfectly aligned. This vision is the small-scale counterpart of Lacan's grand vision of the circulating symbolic debt. This is the ideal of a perfect circulation, with no dead letters, where no letters or checks go astray. The letters arrive at their destination, as if they did indeed form part of a great *kula*. But if the vision of the circulation of debt and obligation in Melanesia took on a heroic hue for Malinowski, who cast his social actors as the Argonauts of the Western Pacific, within the analytic consulting-room this vision of finely equilibrated circulation is recognizably an obsessional world of circulation and debt, in which every death is replaced by a new life, so as to keep the stranger at the door. Lacan's theory of debt is a theory of social life as obsessional in structure. The universality of debt may well be based on a gratuitous assumption, akin to the Beatles' declamatory: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." What if social life isn't like that? What if social life is more chaotic and unregulated than that? What if there are myriad unintended consequences, myriad superfluous actions and wild movements that introduce novelty? What if the other side of the concept of gift, its surprising gratuity, its capacity to create something out of nothing, is also inescapably active, both in

the social and the psychoanalytic worlds? What if lying, which shares with the gift its gratuity and its instantaneous disruption of the circulation of honest words and things, is also an essential principle of creative innovation, wiping out debt and wreaking havoc with the Symbolic's accounting system? What if psychoanalysis, despite itself, allows the possibility of something new happening, something that is not a repetition?

As Derrida noted very pointedly in his reading of the "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*," Lacan follows Freud's lead in seeing money as the means of neutralizing transference. In Lacan's allegorical reading of Poe's story, the large check Dupin receives is the equivalent to the analytic fee. "Is this the way that the debt finally gets paid off? If symbolic efficacity stops there [with the finding and the return of the purloined letter to the Prefect], is that because the symbolic debt is also extinguished there?"[120] Here, at last, when the speaking stops, at the end of analysis, appears the signifier of signifiers. And, you might reflect, it is better for analysts to be paid in money than in phalluses—though one might be somewhat surprised by the extent to which analytic efficacy is measured in babies. What indeed would happen if analysts were paid in kind, if Freud really had been paid in rats?

Lacan shows that it is not so easy for Dupin to extract himself from the letter's symbolic circuit; such a thought might have been one reason why he implicated Freud further in the Rat Man's system of debt than he had himself recognized. Two incidents in Poe's story demonstrate this: first, the infernal trap Dupin leaves for the Minister, with the deadly lines from Crébillon. This, as Lacan indicates, and as Derrida underlines in his commentary "Le facteur de la vérité," shows how Dupin does not extract himself successfully. Does the other incident—Dupin's demand for an extremely large fee—make the termination of the system of obligations and debts of analysis any more likely?

> Does this mean that this Dupin, who up until then was an admirable, almost excessively lucid character, has all of a sudden become a small

> time wheeler and dealer? I don't hesitate to see in this action the re-purchasing of what one could call the bad *mana* attached to the letter. And indeed, from the moment he receives his fee, he has pulled out of the game. It isn't only because he has handed the letter over to another, but because his motives are clear to everyone—he got his money, it's no longer of any concern to him.
>
> I don't mean to insist on it, but you might gently point out to me that we, who spend our time being the bearers of all the purloined letters of the patient, also get paid somewhat dearly. Think about this with some care—were we not to be paid, we would get involved in the drama of Atreus and Thyestes, the drama in which all the subjects who come to confide their truth in us are involved. They tell us all their damned [*sacré*] stories, and because of that we are not at all within the domain of the sacred and of sacrifice. Everyone knows that money doesn't just buy things, but that the prices which, in our culture, are calculated at rock-bottom, have the function of neutralising something infinitely more dangerous than paying in money, namely owing somebody something.[121]

In truth, this does not seem a very reliable method for extracting oneself from the system of symbolic debt. It may take more than money for the analyst to step outside of the system of imaginary circulation of debt. Dupin's actions are a model here, with their gratuitous spite and venom. Nor is it superfluous to recall how gratuitous and unpredictable were Lacan's own practices when it came to analytic fees.

And this dangerous situation of owing something to somebody reminds us that, in the end, it is not clear if Lacan as a reader of Freud owes more to Freud than Freud owes to Lacan, to posterity, and any given reader whatsoever. After all, if symbolic debt is countable and commutative, then the dead are in credit to posterity.

There is one phrase from Freud's letters to Fliess concerning money which has been repeatedly quoted by commentators, as if it supplies its own interpretation. While writing his Dreckology, his Shitology,

to his Berlin friend, Freud opined: "Happiness is the belated fulfilment of a prehistoric wish. For this reason wealth brings so little happiness. Money was not a childhood wish."[122] When he made this discovery, Freud was up to his arms in the fantasy material that would later become his theory of the anal phase, on which the famous equation of money and excrement was built. But more to my point here is the fact that he was engaged in finally detaching himself from his friendship with Breuer, attempting to pay off his debts to him—2,300 florins, to be precise. The story had, by 1898, become very complicated for Freud, since Breuer refused to accept Freud's payment of his old debt, incurred in the early 1880s when Freud was an impoverished student. However, by 1898, Breuer thought he was indebted to Freud, who had analyzed a relative of his over a period of some years. Freud was furious at not being allowed to pay off his debt; but Breuer's actions also provoked another reaction in Freud. Breuer was in the habit of criticizing Freud for not saving enough: he went on too many holidays, and his new hobby of collecting antiquities was an expensive one. Freud's dream of the Botanical Monograph, which occurred a few weeks later, was a direct response to Breuer's refusal to accept the repayment of the debt. Freud discovered that the wish informing the dream was for permission to indulge his hobbies, his whims, his desires.[123]

There is no doubt that Freud wished to clear his account, to pay off that debt to Breuer, just as Lacan tried to clear his account with Freud. But it may be no accident that this was the very moment in his life when Freud found a place in his theoretical system for the "discovery" that money can never make you happy. When I was younger, I was very struck by a comment in a conversation where my interlocutor described a mutual close friend as having a gift for being happy. Perhaps that is what Freud's discovery that infantile wishes are foreign to the logic of money—and the entire logic of debt, exchange, and reciprocity—amounted to: that our deepest wishes are for something that is as gratuitous, as full of grace, as happiness. The gift of something for nothing.