



Some Reflections in Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis

by Hsiang Hsu

Abstract

This paper examines the origin of phenomenology, and delineates several of its significant developments and refractions, in order to arrive at a renewed conception of phenomenological theory and practice: a future phenomenology that can, it is argued, articulate productively with certain grounds opened up by psychoanalysis.

It is possible for the process in the Ucs [Unconscious] to come to an end, either after the fury has spent itself, or after the object has been abandoned as worthless. (Freud, 1915/1957, p. 257)

The history of psychoanalysis is not finished – although it is possible that it may finish sooner than we think. (Castoriadis, 1978/1984, p. 103)

Socrates: Does not what you have been saying, if true, amount to this: that there must be a single science which is wholly a science of itself and of other sciences, and that the same is also the science of the absence of science?

Charmides: Yes.

Socrates: But consider how monstrous this proposition is, my friend!

(Plato, 380 BC/1871 (trans.), *Charmides*, 167c)

In 1964, just thirteen years before Serge Valdinoci's "Décomposition et Recomposition Phénoménologiques" was published in *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, Octave Mannoni (1969) wrote his now renowned essay "Je Sais Bien" for *Les Temps Modernes*, which contained, at the very end, a remarkable phrase, "une phénoménologie freudienne" (p. 33). Leaving aside that subtle humour for a moment, as if to think through it in all its seriousness, what does such a project toward, say, the phenomenology "from the other side" entail or require, and how might its articulation be contingent and, perhaps even more

arbitrarily, pertinent?

Here, I hope, by way of first examining the origin of phenomenology, and delineating in some detail, and to some speculative extent, several of its significant developments and refractions, that we may arrive at a renewed conception of a theory and practice – a future phenomenology that can, I posit, articulate productively with certain grounds opened up by psychoanalysis. My thesis, as I have shown and will elaborate further below, is not novel (considering, for example, Binswanger's, Abraham's and a few others'

attempts in the past in the same vein to “synthesize” these two fields); with it, however, and in view of greater import than any commitment *per se* to reconcile or to polarize the two fields, I wish to draw a new relation between the notions of *actuality* and *freedom* that, I believe, a speculative retooling of some key *concepts* of these two Western traditions is able to open for and offer to us.

While we know that the word “phenomenology”, *Phänomenologie*, was introduced by the 18th-century German mathematician and physicist Johann Heinrich Lambert, who used it in the title of the last part of his *summa philosophiae, Neues Organon*, “Phänomenologie oder Lehre von dem Schein”, Kant (with whom Lambert corresponded for five years, concerning the publication of his inaugural dissertation), in fact, in a letter to Lambert, proposed “[a] quite special, though purely negative science, general phenomenology (*phaenomologia* [sic] *generalis*) ... presupposed by metaphysics” (1770/1999, p. 108). The phenomenology *in general* addresses “a science of appearances”, in which Lambert (1764) – almost four decades before his compatriot Herschel unintentionally discovered infrared radiation, “the invisible light”, in Berkshire – distinguished an emerging class of “*true* (or objective) appearances” within the Argian survey of a “transzendentale Optik”, as, literally, a likelihood or “probability”, a *Wahrscheinlichkeit* (pp. 184-186, 218-220). He ended his last missive, seven years before his death, to Kant with the statement that “an appearance that absolutely never deceives us could well be something more than mere appearance” (Lambert, 1770/1999, p. 119). It is this excessive *quality* of appearance, which circumscribes a transcendental irrationality in detention, that refracts, in varying rates and every which bearing of axiological spin, via the inclinations from Hegel, Husserl, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, JL Marion, et cetera, et cetera. (Kant himself, of course, would later eject this phenomenology from his corpus as an “empty waste”.)

As if “phenomenology” watches itself through a shattered mirror, in a certain mode, and presumes an eminent facet (symptom), composition (constitution) and characterization (classification), “consciousness” needs not to correspond with or be restricted to empirical reality *ipso sensu*, but to an absolute reality which nonetheless *remains* “material” (*dinglich*) under every phenomenal disposition. “Lived experience”, then, is itself but a precise stratification of the infrastructure of “real life” – or, as Lyotard (1986/1991) succinctly notes in his nice little book on phenomenology, “the economic *already* belongs to the existential”, constituting a dual arc of “regression”

extending one end of a particular ontological horizon to another (p. 129). However, it is in effect the global reduction that parses this as an ontological problem at all, redressed by Husserl (Husserl & Fink, 1988/1995) himself in the *Sixth Meditation* and Paris lecture (“a critique of phenomenological experience and cognition”, according to Eugen Fink, p. xvi): “The universality of the reduction is a total act, one that however must be constantly exercised as here and now [*actuell*] participating and *actual* [*wirklich*] in every particular act. That belongs therefore to the phenomenology of the reduction itself” (p. 97, n. 336).¹ The analytic precisely does not end in an overtaking of being’s experience by a hallucinatory subject (and the consequent reckoning for the predication to its object), but in its possibility from *not* pre-tending to an articulation of an “*actually* real life”, and the deep and delicate silence subdued at the core of the phenomenological reserve.

Following this thesis, I propose that a science of the *real* is the production of a theology. Phenomenology seems to have contended with this primacy of the real over the true (but in the name of the true, as in the “phenomenology of phenomenology”) in two main ways – ratifying the revelatory primacy of reality as reality itself (pseudo-science in the most general sense), or adducing the revelatory power of truth (theology – cf. Janicaud, 1991). More specifically, this dissolving of the object into its “setting” is what renders the (passive) synthesis of phenomenological composition a *trans-ascendental* process within all internal homologies – that is, in the actualization of the internal limit of the object-as-such with respect to a “scientific” procedure. (Inversely, as we noted, the co-dependence of the concept-as-object, “reality” *a fortiori*, and the setting-of-object, “truth”, as the philosophico-analytic imaginary, has been cut off by Kant.) “Phainein” is framed *internally* – which is what in no way negates the apposite reality of its object, but finds and founds it as the intensive catalyst of its *appearance*. In an analogous manner, Trần Đức Thảo (1973/1984) correctly identifies the linguistic function of this *formative* procedure as an economical “index-sign” that resolves, relatively, “the modelling of the sign based on the collective work procedures of the ensemble of workers” into what he calls “syncretic” versus “distinctive” languages, constituted by a series of representative regimes or

¹ The “marginal comment” is Husserl’s. See also Eugen Fink’s revisions: “We are simply sticking to the *basic problem*, the question of the *intrinsic sense of the relation* of ‘constructive’ phenomenologizing, which is given the distinction of the *privileged status in being* of actual-moment (given) transcendental existence [*Existenz*], to its object, which does *not* partake in this same privileged status in being” (1988/1995, p. 66).

thresholds which make possible the resolution of “the object and the motion in its most elementary form, namely the disappearance of the object outside of the actual field of perception”, thereby “*realizing the freedom of the mind*” (pp. 132-137).² It is precisely the freeing of this migrant nucleus or kernel of the theory of thought that I wish to pursue a bit further first.

Phenomenology is a phenomenology “of the margins” quite literally: it is a *making* and *making-out* of distinctions, a parastable encoding and exaction of laws of form – a gathering and “collection” of “figures” (which Husserl (2001, p. 291) described beautifully on introducing the “phenomenological science” in the *Investigations* as “straightforward perceptions of sensuously unified manifolds, series, flights” that are distinct from conjunction) that belie and shift our implicit sense of reality, the entire living present in its “preconscious” commutation of the given and not-given. I do not believe it was a matter of mere contingency that phenomenology received the embrace it did in Chinese (and, more precisely, Taiwanese) circles in the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s (and until even as late as the ’70s) from Xiong Wei, Cheng Chung-ying, Hsiao Shih-yi, Chang Chung-yuan, and others.³ The “xiang”, particularly, of *xian xiang xue*,

² This is a collection of Trân’s revised papers originally published in *La Pensée* from 1966-1970, with the addition of a “Third Investigation: Marxism and Psychoanalysis – The Origins of the Oedipal Crisis”, where he states: “*The unconscious is generally the sedimented residue of the language of the transcended stages of human development . . . But the unconscious in its Oedipal content, namely, the Freudian unconscious, cannot play that role, for it is only the residue of a language distorted from the beginning . . . It is alienated language*” (pp. 195-197, original emphases). On the contrary, “syncretic language” (closer to *signals*) can appear on “the objective plane of the *language of real life*, under the pressure of the exigencies of the situation”, as well as “in the unity of his own *lived experience*” from “possess[ing one’s] own image in the *still present* gesture of the other” (“The Birth of Language”, p. 77). This is a further development of Trân’s ideas (1951/1986) and is discussed in Lyotard’s *Phenomenology*.

³ Phenomenology (Husserl’s and Heidegger’s) gained considerable interest among academics and literati in East Asia, when it itself was giving way to oriental structuralism in mainland Europe. The logician Shen You-ding mentioned Husserl in relation to his own research in an English article in 1935; Yang Ren-pian (a student of Whitehead) published “A Summary of Phenomenology” (“Xian xiang xue gai lun”) in the famed *Ming duo* magazine in 1929; Chang Chun-mai, in the foreword to his 1924 translation of Driesch’s *Relativitätstheorie und Philosophie*, also wrote on Husserl and Driesch. Later, Paul Shi-yi Hsiao, of course, was known for translating parts of the *Tao Te Ching* with Heidegger in 1946 (a project which broke off that summer) in the Black Forest, right after the war. At the

phenomenology (“xue” of “xian xiang”, the study of phenomenon/na), with its fecund idiomatic and textual history (up to the *I-Ching* and *I-Chuan*), is instructive: more than *xing*, “shape” or “form”, it denotes a particular *reality*, that is, of form, as it *appears* in some manner of “direction” or “orientation” (which is its sense in the *I-Ching*) in the world. Chinese “logogenesis” is, literally, *zao xiang*, the making of *xiang*, which naturally contains that to which it refers, thus becoming like its *eternal form* (or “ben xing”, or even “ben ti”). Code and message are coextensive. (It is interesting to note, however, as sharply remarked by Jullien (1995), that psychoanalysis, on the other hand, has never really taken root, nor will possibly ever take root, in China.)

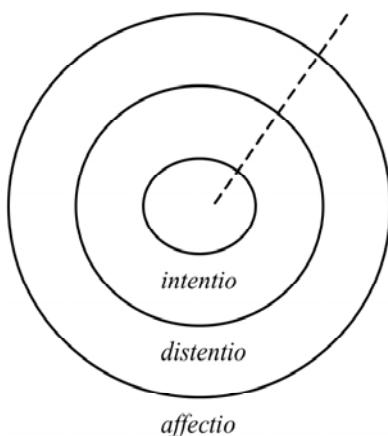
Brentano (1874/1973) asserts:

[T]here is a special connection between the object of inner presentation and the presentation itself, and ... both belong to one and the same mental act. ... [I]t is only by considering it in its relation to two different objects, one of which is a physical phenomenon and the other a mental phenomenon, that we divide it conceptually into two presentations. ... [Furthermore] if the strength of a conscious presentation increases and decreases, the strength of the accompanying presentation which refers to it increases and decreases to the same degree, and both phenomena always have the same level of intensity. (pp. 127-136)

This in fact leads him to reject “unconscious determining factors” altogether, upon locating the “missing steps” in “analogy” in the case of “other mental phenomena besides presentations” such as judgment and desire/“love”. This does not mean Brentano, the “master” to Husserl (and also to Freud), is a “Platonist” nevertheless, in the attenuated sense that he makes a distinction and then claims the “other side” does not exist; in fact the smallest gradient and shade is maintained here in the figure of a “duty”, a “name” or an “association” or “context” (pp. 134-136). Distinction *is*, in effect, being-not-being: in other words, *illusion*, or *Schein*, which is perhaps in a sense closer to what Gestalt psychologists call “metastable”. Distinction would be the momentariness of the “metastability” of appearance. Intention and *intensity* are inextricably binding in the most “peculiarly intimate way”.

end of the Cultural Revolution, interest was rekindled, and Chang Chung-yuan (in Hawaii) continued the project in 1975.

Every intention has a direction and a magnitude, to be conceived of more specifically in St Augustine's sense of the *intentio animi* – not "intent", of course, but "tending", or "attending" – as "the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable" (Weil, 1951/2001, p. 57).⁴ It implies the reticular concentration or compression of *affectio* ("impression") into *distentio* ("expression"), which can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



It is the minimal identification of a *transversal* qua an inward projection or fold, the "inroads", which serves as the cogitating factor or *transducer* in the capacity for, in this case, a *responsibility*. For instance, as I drive my car through a familiar cross-path of lanes, expressways and streets in the course of reaching the destination of my home, via a route which may be very complex for someone who has never, or rather infrequently, been to my home, I am able to take my mind off the driving itself, and devote my "attention" to some matter, of whatever content, which suits my imagination; nonetheless, should an "anomaly" (of relative intensity) register with my recognition, such as an animal running into my path or a new construction being raised, suddenly my perception shifts, and, for the most part, without anticipation, the distinction is made for my assumption of a compensatory or alternate course of action (such as veering into a different lane, or taking a different route) in order to reach my set destination. *Intention* should be taken in precisely this holistic sense of the *unity* of objective projection (from affect to effect) and, borrowing one of Freud's terms, "freely suspending attention" (*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*), and herein it redoubles and intensifies *instinct*. It is the transcription of the correspondence of a determining tensile "group" or aggregate (for example, Augustine's "secundum intentionem") in

⁴ See also St Augustine's *Confessions* (trans. 1998) and *On Christian Doctrine* (trans. 1958).

ratio to a code (from genetic to cultural) which extends that schema to an actualization (for example, as predator or fleeing prey, the subject of an economy or a sacrificial object, or a "flight-transformation" as Elias Canetti would say), even in a fraction of a pattern, in the reflexive arc of transmissive intensities. Above all, it – the spider's stratagem - is the instinct tending to, *for*, freedom.

Even psychoanalysis securely accords a *forgetting of instinct* (*Instinkt*, as, for example, noted by Laplanche, 1996). Likewise, physicians of a *Daseinanalysis* and "anti-psychiatry" orientation attribute intention to the sole sponsorship of a hermeneutic concurrence.⁵ If this is the case, then we ought to stipulate a true "anti-phenomenology", which would entail "not the reduction to consciousness, but the reduction of consciousness" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 8), and which, at the same time, *again*, furnishes the extra-material core to dialectic and psychical materialism. While "The accord of phenomenology and psychoanalysis should not be understood to consist in phenomenology's saying clearly what psychoanalysis has said poorly" (p. 8) (or vice versa), nonetheless the latter cannot be said to reject or supplant entirely "the quotation marks of the phenomenologist", even within the exigent admittance of an *actual* modality of existence (Abraham, 1968/1994, p. 83).⁶ Psychoanalysis forgets its intention as the identification of instinct: intention and instinct are coextensive, where message and code coincide. They are two irreducible aspects of the same mythology, an assonance of parallels. It is the actualization of the encoding of this absolute nature – this, for psychoanalysis, taking the form of a tensile *dispersion* – that *transverses* this distinction to which I am dedicating the last topic of this paper.

Phenomenology is the science of intention, as choice *a fortiori* between distinctions. Psychoanalysis is the science of instinct, as reasoning *a fortiori* without cognitions. They compose the bounds of the primacy of a *direct inference*. First, it seems to me that Castoriadis (1968, p. 21), of all people, came near to something like this point when he wrote:

⁵ In particular, I depart from the investigations of Boss, Binswanger, and Maldiney here (and, to an extent, N Abraham, who carries this experiment, in a sense, to its limit), for a "unity of psychology" – if it is a point indeed where all this takes us – cannot be sufficiently found in methods and assumed *horismoi* (or hermeneutic premises), but only in actual concepts and their usage. The logic of the analytic must be addressed in actuality.

⁶ Abraham and Torok also organized a series of seminars titled "Phenomenological Psychology" (later changed to "Genetic Phenomenology") at their Paris residence from 1959-1961.

To isolate signification in order to formalize it is possible only if one literally plays with words – if, that is to say, one takes the materiality of the signifier for the entirety of the signification In psychoanalysis, this impossibility is raised, if one may so put it, to a higher power, for we are dealing here with incarnate significations; that is, with representations whose bearers are intentions and which are inextricably bound up with effects.

Then, in a quite moving insight, Castoriadis says,

No intention, indeed, is isolatable; reflex movements apart, any identifiable intention rises within the intentional horizon of the subject, and has existence and meaning *within and by means of* that horizon (which is, of course, largely unconscious). And this horizon is, in an essential respect, hanging above the void of that which is to come. (p. 21) [my emphasis]

Paul Ricoeur (1961-1962/1970), for his “archeological” course on “Freudianism” – which, he reiterates, “deals with Freud and not with psychoanalysis” and “is strictly philosophical and in no way binding on the psychoanalyst as such” – also distinguishes four linchpins that hold (Freudian) analysis in place in the activity or exercise as a constituting segment of an unremitting *Diakritik* – that is to say, in discourse – expressed as the reduction, intentionality (of alterity), the language of “mastery” (in the precise act of speaking), and intersubjectivity, which, in turn, orient that “unconscious of phenomenology” toward the “preconscious of psychoanalysis” (pp. xi, 375-418).⁷ Psychoanalysis, then, completes the arc in supplying its view of the epiphenomena within an objectivist (“energetic”), entirely classical systematic – with the simultaneous metabolism of appearance into assimilable transparency. Michel Henry (1985/1993), twenty years later, concisely points out, in a footnote, the potential problem herein:

[T]he rights of intentional consciousness are saved. Affect itself has meaning only insofar as it is bound to a representation: is it not itself a representative of the drives? The concept of “representative,” whose

importance, particularly in the “Metaphysics,” has been shown by Ricoeur, appears to be the means to reintroduce Freudian energetics back into a psychology essentially defined by representation But then isn’t the originality of a thought of life lost? (p. 349, n. 62; see also p. 300)

Lust against Eros, life turning and re-turning on itself in the cascades of emergent, “Caesarian”, typological sexuality, the elective transcendence of desire Here we answer: it is with a notation of instincts (which are not simply *genes*) that is persistently beyond the account of life and death, any genealogy or archeology, and is, foremost, distinguished as the instinct to be free, to “intend” otherwise, *to will itself*. In other words, it is precisely the *pulse* between the real and the actual.

Two corollaries: I propose, thus, that psychoanalysis is patently the science of live, but non-extant things. Sex, investment, et cetera, on the other hand, are not conditional for life, but for existence – of a species, phylum, continuation, repetition. Here, *man* is as asexual as he is asocial. The singular *problem* of psychoanalysis is presented as a modulation of repetition *par excellence* – be it in the articulations of functional regression (Ferenczi), narcissism (Klein, Leclaire), symptom/*sinthome* (Lacan), even synchronicity (Jung), and so forth – and, more specifically, of how to *bind* it, within the therapeutic of the concept.⁸ (However, the most *literal* adaptation is perhaps, ironically, in Rogerian psychology, as well as in the fields of “artificial intelligence” testing⁹.) If sexuality is a “Lebensform”, then the “site and object” of the analytic experience is life-as-such – to lift the veil of nudity. In this respect, psychoanalysis proffers a unique view of language and linguisticity: within the bracketing of fantasy (“I know very well, but all the same...”), it accedes to not the materiality (which is sacrificed under the *dispositif* of the text), but the actuality, of language. (The language of psychoanalysis *itself* is very beautiful – that is, ironically, until it is said the unconscious is structured like a language; instead, psychoanalysis is “the language of the madman, codified” [Dubrovsky, 1974]). What is hence common actually to (Derridean) deconstruction and psychoanalysis is not some hermeneutic subversion, or even a “fundamental actualization” of epistemological categories (Granel, 1972), but, analogically, a work of confusion of positive, *working* distinctions (the social

⁷ This book is the culmination of a series of lectures Ricoeur gave at Yale and Louvain in 1961-1962. For axiomatic critiques of this position (as well as, essentially, Abraham and Torok’s), see Lyotard (1971) and Jean Laplanche (1995/1996).

⁸ For a take on repetition as a *theme* in the unconscious, see Gilles Deleuze (1968/1994, pp. 16-19, 96-115).

⁹ cf. Turing, A. M. (1950). Computing machinery and intelligence. *Mind*, 59(236), 433-460.

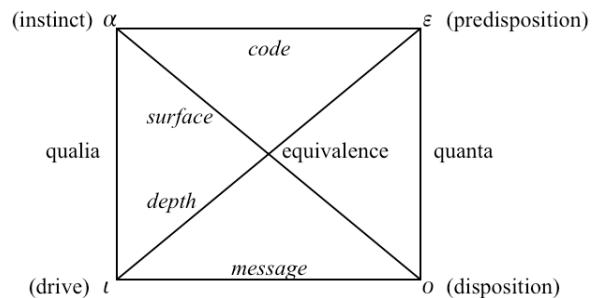
against society, for instance) within coordinates of the actual. It aligns the drifting movement which ultimately I shall term "Western" into a singular prescriptive, a pure agency which flows in eminence within a heuristic of cycles of transfer. That particular ethics can be expressed as: you can see something for what it is and not accept it; you can even reject something for what it is. You can *not* want what is good for you.

The second corollary concerns an absolute transitivity of all surface, within, and most effectively so in regard to the dialectic of repetition, what Abraham (1985/1995) called "fascinated consciousness": subject to an "inevitable, horizonless future ... [to] as far as the total abdication of freedom, to the point of the abolition of consciousness itself, to catalepsy or ecstasy ... [which] express and realize *in the essential mode* a temporal experience of passivity"; he goes on: "Although this essentializing retreat evinces, in fact, a certain freedom, the absence of a revalorization of the past as a constitutive process clearly reflects the total axiological passivity of the individual before the imperatives of the group" (p. 84) (my emphasis).¹⁰ Obviously, this "before" is taken in the spatial as well as the temporal sense. The individual stratum here is ambivalent with the collective stratum, which would consist in, on the one hand, sublimative ego-drives, and, on the other, the nirvana principle (which "expresses" the trend of the death drive) – or what Bion (1961) calls "alpha" and "beta functions". Esther Bick, in a 1968 paper in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* titled "The Experience of the Skin in Early Object-Relations", further develops this therapeutic as a procedure of "passive" assimilation of "the parts of the personality [in its most primitive form, which] are felt to have no binding force amongst themselves", to a selective identification of a "second-skin", which "manifests itself as an either partial or total type of muscular shell or a corresponding verbal muscularity".¹¹ Projection is thus a mapping of literal *emergence*. Psychoanalysis can cut across this determination (as a sort of "anti-repetition" of consciousness) to make the individual that is the "decomposition and recomposition" (Valdinoci, 1977) of the "blocs" of a system (which are informed only intersubjectively) of

¹⁰ Ricoeur (1968) remarked to Abraham in 1962: "Taking as your point of departure elements completely devoid of content ... you have tried to make us rediscover what an affect is. ... By the same token, the question of the birth of temporality is raised ... in a Kantian fashion, as when he states that we create time by drawing a line. You have shown us how we create time by drawing a rhythm ... [T]his particular time is ... the respiration of a rhythm ... its very repetition is an element of tension" (p. 68).

¹¹ See also Bick (1986) and Didier Anzieu (1985/1989).

constitutive realities, as the following diagram represents in propositional form:



Surface is then taken in the sense of something like the "after-image" of an absolute externalization of identificatory processes to isomorphically autonomous realities enacted on their infinitely voluminous "material". *Horror, per speciem*, is not the cavernous fundament beneath its veneer with the horrible thing hidden in an absolute recess behind shadows, threatening to unleash itself. Horror itself is that skin, that unfathomable, depthless, absolute threshold itself; there is nothing more familiar and terrifying than the proximity of skin. (To offer another illustration – Klein's formulation of "primary narcissism" invokes the two "sides" of the ego¹²: that, on the one hand, of the proto-image-effect resulting from the affective "ricocheting" off of the reality of another, and, on the other, of an express encoding of the "stuff" or material which constitutes the latter. It is formally distinct from autoerotism and "critical pleasure" (for example, *Schau-Lust*) in that it structures and signifies the phenomenon of the ego, which anchors itself like a skin onto a determination of a simultaneous unfolding and displacing of a "narcissism proper" to become that precise ego of the phenomenon which, on one side, controls the libidinal cycles of conduction, degradation, flux and fusion; on the other, the "not-yet" and the "always-already" traverses the presence of the law of codes – that is, aggression and transgression. It is in this manner that the equivocation of reality – *Ananke* – which denies itself anaphorically, is attested to: reality carries or effects its own element of annihilation.) Psychoanalysis subsists in the irony of the surface.

I have sketched how, I consider, in general phenomenology and psychoanalysis come to enlighten and to elaborate each other, with the fundamental equation of intention and instinct, in the form of a phenomenon of distinction (toward a core of reserve) transversing an analytic of repetition

¹² The "ambivalence" of the ego in narcissism in relation to the libido was already addressed by Lou Salomé to Freud in 1915 (Pfeiffer, 1985, pp. 23-24).

(toward the surface of language). Phenomenology represses the basis of intention in instinct, and psychoanalysis, while supplying this ground, forgets its *Arbeit* and expression. It is for the actuality of a

plenary freedom – of each's respective practice and force – as well as for their own inchoate freedom for full actualization, that such a project, in incorporating the two fields, strives.

About the Author



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