

Death Drive and Critical Theory

Inara Luisa Marin

UNICAMP - BR

Abstract

Much has been said about death drive in Critical Theory. This concept was mainly read as an aggressive and/or destructive drive. As a consequence, there are two ways of finding death drive in critical theories: the classic mode represented by Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and, more recently, Whitebook, in which death drive is seen as a factor that gives psychoanalysis its negativity face; or a way that leads to the despise of the nuclear function of death drive in psychoanalytic theory in name of normativity, as it happens in Fromm and Honneth. What I propose here is, from a comparison of both Freud's texts, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through' (1914) and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), to present a new way of appropriating the concept of death drive to produce a current critical theory. This means not considering the Wiederholungszwang as simply an imperative for coercion, but also a repetition compulsion. By proposing this reading of death drive (as suggested by Freud in 1920), I believe it is possible to amplify the range of possible connections between psychoanalysis and Critical Theory, keeping the negativity side, but without losing its normativity.

Keywords: death drive, psychoanalysis, unconscious, aggressiveness, repetition compulsion

1. Introduction

Critical Theory has two basic principles (Nobre 2004): 1) a diagnosis of the present time and 2) an orientation to practice. This second is what differentiates it from the Traditional Theory, as stated by Horkheimer (1980). This text seeks to indicate how, in the tradition of Critical Theory, the concept of 'death drive', as elaborated by Freud, has the potential to be an instrument for both principles and, thus, for a Critical Theory of society. Psychoanalysis has always been close to Critical Theory, but we understand that the death drive can be a marker to differentiate the appropriation of psychoanalysis by this current. Firstly, this concept is important for a good diagnosis of time, as it offers a concrete critical apparatus that is more appropriate for social reality. Secondly, we understand that, to think about a concept of emancipation without utopia, the apparatus of death drive is appropriate because the death drive, in Freudian vocabulary, is not innate aggressiveness, but rather compulsion or coercion to repetition [*Wiederholungszwang*]. This means that the aggressiveness of the beginning is not always found at the end. It is a contingency; not a necessity. However, in this tradition, from Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) to the present day, especially in Allen (2020) and McAfee (2019), the concept of death drive is not seen in this way.

In this tradition, there is a reading of the concept of 'death drive' as something that produces nothing. This reading originates in Freudo-Marxist literature, with Fromm (1971), but is present in other authors such as Reich, who understand that there is an incompatibility between this concept and the Marxian vocabulary, mainly the notions of work and ideology. According to this literature, the principle of the unconscious and the principle of repetition go against developmental Marxism, which should lead to emancipation. Although Freudo-Marxists have a good diagnosis of time, the understanding that Critical Theory should escape the notion of death drive separated the orientation

towards practice from the practice itself, converting this orientation into something utopian.

This reading results in a dissimilarity between Critical Theory and psychoanalysis, as can be seen, mainly, in Habermas (2011) and, in another way, in Honneth (2009). We oppose this reading because we understand that the concept of 'death drive' has potential for Critical Theory and that the proximity of this line of thought to psychoanalysis is important. In this sense, we agree with Allen's reading of this issue presented in *Critique on the Couch*. I would like to start here with an examination of the current state of the works of authors who use psychoanalysis to make a diagnosis of the present time in Critical Theory. On this topic, there is little disagreement that the return to psychoanalysis in recent years has been based on some idea of the 'death drive', a movement that disagrees with the intersubjective turn. This is because intersubjectivity means constructing a subject based on their relationship with the other, while the death drive is understood as an intrapsychic notion. The intrapsychic and the intersubjective are always placed in opposition. In this context, the death drive is an intrapsychic notion that leaves the other out of their definition or relationship.

However, this return to psychoanalysis is based on the interpretation that it would be necessary to reformulate the concept of the death drive to overcome the *deficits* that the concept had in Freud. I identify as a sign of this the direct association between the death drive and aggressiveness or destruction, but, at the same time, a certain accusation of biologism of the concept in Freud. The origin of these interpretations has a common denominator, in this case, Melanie Klein¹'s critique of Freud, substantiating a tension between the death

¹ For Klein's interpretation of the Freudian concept of the death drive, see Hinshelwood (1992).

drive (understood as aggressiveness/destruction) and the life drive (understood as love/creation of social bonds). The appeal to Klein would resolve the problem of the aggressiveness of the death drive in dialectic with the life drive, at the same time that the life drive is the aspect of social bond and life.

Allen argues that there was an instrumentalization of psychoanalysis in Critical Theory because Habermas, Honneth, and Fromm were not able to take psychoanalysis to its ultimate consequences. This is a result of the fact that they had the following characteristics in common: 1) they reject the Freudian libido theory and the death drive theory, as they understand that the concept would not be useful for emancipatory auspices; 2) they understand the theory of libido only as the death drive and the death drive only as aggressiveness; 3) their instrumentalizations do not consider an important aspect that results from psychoanalysis, in this case a certain 'psychoanalytic realism' about the structures of domination that psychoanalysis can capture. The term 'instrumentalization' therefore refers to a process of clarification of the 'Me' through a reflection on Mead²'s social psychology, as proposed by Habermas' Critical Theory; to the use of psychoanalysis as the fusion of mother and baby in Honneth; and the exacerbated socialization in Fromm's psychoanalysis. Faced with the problem of the weak ego in Adorno and the non-solution of the ego in Habermas' intersubjective and communicative notion, Allen tries to return to psychoanalysis especially through the concept of 'death drive'.

In addition to providing a 'more realistic' concept of the individual, psychoanalysis offers a method of critique: transference. Allen wants

² See Habermas (1988). In this text, the author deals with Mead and the role he has to play in his theory of communicative action. Mead is important because he allows Habermas to prove the thesis that individuals are constructed by socialization [*Vergesellschaftung*].

to give birth to a psychoanalysis capable of understanding a stratum of social life that is not conscious (as in Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse), but that also understands the ambivalences that feed this unconscious. The solution lies in an analogy with individual transference, which would be the method of critique that resists any developmental notion. The practice of transference aims to facilitate and increase autonomy capabilities through a reflective process of psychoanalytic reconstruction, or Critical Theory.

However, Allen makes this reformulation between Critical Theory and psychoanalysis through an appropriation of Klein's work. The author believes that Klein's concept of 'ego' is promising for overcoming the ego problem because it is understood as a continuous and expanding process of domination of inner nature that will never be complete. Allen admits that this issue was present in the work of Jessica Benjamin (1988) and in the distinction between intrapsychic and intersubjective. The intrapsychic domain is unconscious fantasy and impulses, while the intersubjective is the relationship between people and what provides the relationships between objects. Klein would be able to unite these two constituent elements of human life. While Allen believes that post-Habermas Critical Theory focused on the dimension of the relationship between objects, leaving aside the dimension of the drive, Klein takes forward the idea of the drive together with the intersubjective.

In opposition to this, I propose that, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud goes a long way to establish his concept of the death drive that cannot be ignored. This path is enlightening for a psychoanalytic theoretical basis that supports the instinctual conflict without dualism between the life drive and the death drive. Thus, I emphasize the concept of compulsion or coercion to repeat [*Wiederholungszwang*], announced in the second section of the text, when Freud analyzes children's games. Armed with this element of the

instinctual conflict linked to the death drive, I propose here an alternative hypothesis to the current understanding of the death drive in Critical Theory. According to this hypothesis, the death drive has potential if it is understood as immanent in Freud as the process of symbolizing the absence. In the context of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', it is this process that allows the emergence of the 'new', as occurs in children's games.

2. Death drive and the return of psychoanalysis in Critical Theory

Since the beginning of the relationship between Critical Theory and psychoanalysis, the issue of the death drive appeared as a watershed. Adhering to the second Freudian instinctual formulation was sometimes seen as an almost biologizing pessimism or, if not in this way, it was perceived as 'no way out'. This movement occurred because everyone denied the death drive in the array of tools that psychoanalysis could propose for a more complex diagnosis or critique of society, relating this drive to aggressiveness, or pure and natural destruction.

If in the first generation of critical theory, it is possible to trace this debate through the theoretical works of Reich, Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse and Fromm, the second generation of critical theory, with its intersubjective turn, will focus on what became known as object relations, not taking the problem further. It is contemporary authors such as Amy Allen who, through critique of the previous generation, raise this issue for psychoanalysis. Unlike Allen, however, who will appropriate Klein to return to the theme, in this article we intend to take the notion of repetition and from there present how the concept of death drive can carry with it a potential, along the lines of what psychoanalysis can offer, of thinking resistance, resignification or transformation of a cycle of suffering, that is, from the notion of repetition it would be possible to think of a non-utopian way of

reflecting and theorizing about a possible way out of a situation that is apparently blocked.

Currently, in Critical Theory, how can we organize the appropriation of the death drive? For Amy Allen, Melanie Klein is the one who shares this concept, going against the author's biologizing attempts.

[...] Melanie Klein's conception of the drives emphasizes the fundamental antagonism between life and death drives while understanding the death drive in psychological (rather than reductively biologicistic) and social (rather than a- or antisocial) terms. Unlike Freud, Klein equates the death drive with primary aggression; as a result, her account does not depend on the appeal to speculative biology that underpins the Freudian version. Given her distinctive understanding of the relationship between drive and object, the Kleinian death drive is a distinctive mode of social relatedness, one that entails relating to others aggressively and destructively. Klein's work thus offers critical theory the possibility of a realistic psychoanalytic account of the person that is at the same time thoroughly psychological and social (Allen 2020: 8).

For Klein, the notion of unconscious fantasy brings together both dimensions: the intersubjective and the 'other', where the 'ego' is not so coherent, but fragmented, filtered, and mediated by unconscious fantasies. Allen believes that Freud has a model of development with oral, anal, phallic, and genital stages. To oppose this, she argues that Klein would have a pre-Oedipal model and that this occurs in the first year of life. Furthermore, Freud's idea of the death drive would be very speculative and biological. Klein would leave these aspects aside, understanding that the death drive would be a desire for connection with others, the construction of increasingly larger units (Ego), interpreting this as primary aggression, or destruction: it would not be a concept of drive that would like to return to inertia or to the inorganic,

as Freud proposed.

Butler also deals with the concept of the death drive. The author, strongly influenced by French philosophy, seeks to incorporate into her reading not Lacanian notions, but rather what Lacan is trying to describe, thus avoiding the definitions of the author's baroque style. Even so, the reading she proposes of the death drive is still Kleinian³. For Butler, the concept of the death drive is seen as something strictly violent and destructive in Freud.

By the time he developed the 'death drive,' first in 1920 and then more fully in the following decade, he had become increasingly concerned with the destructive capacities of human beings. What he calls 'sadism,' 'aggression,' and 'destructiveness' came to be primary representatives of the death drive, which received its most mature formulation in *Civilization and Its Discontents* in 1930. What he had called an 'unconquerable part of human nature' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ten years earlier here takes on a new form as Freud develops a dualistic metaphysics, counterposing Eros, the force that creates ever more complex human bonds, to Thanatos, the force that breaks them down. A durable political form presumes that social bonds can remain relatively in place; but how, then, do politics deal with the destructive force that Freud describes? (Butler 2020: 106–107).

As she claims:

No position against violence can afford to be naive: it has to take seriously the destructive potential that is a constitutive part of social relations, or what some call 'the social bond.' But, if we take seriously the death drive, or that late version of the death drive defined as both aggression and

³ I will not explore this issue because I believe it is beyond the scope of this article. But I believe it is important to understand why feminists, in general, refer to Melanie Klein. We have a means of retrieving Klein that is observable in Kristeva (2004).

destructiveness, then we have to consider more generally the kind of dilemma a moral precept against destruction poses for psychic life (64).

Benjamin Fong helps us understand that:

The fact that it was the controversial figure of Melanie Klein who most powerfully made the equation 'death drive = aggression' led the psychoanalytic community to feel that it had made great progress in mending an internal conflict when it finally accepted aggressive drives alongside libidinal ones. The self-congratulation that followed virtually buried the concepts of the death drive and the drive to mastery under the weight of good will amidst the English-speaking psychoanalytic world (Fong 2016: 28).

However, we understand that the reading of the concept of the death drive in the light of Klein's thought is partial, despite being present in the tradition of Critical Theory since the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* until recently with the works of Whitebook (1996) and Allen. This is because, in Freud, there is another dimension of the death drive that goes beyond the tendency to aggressiveness or destructiveness, in this case, the compulsion or coercion to repeat [*Wiederholungszwang*]. We would like to point out a new reading of the 'death drive' as a neurotic compulsion to repeat.

3. A reading of *Wiederholungszwang*

According to Freud, humanity comes from conflict. Therefore, if we want to speak of a Freudian anthropology⁴, this cannot be said in a

⁴ It is important to highlight that Freudian anthropology does not differ strongly from

strong sense, but rather as an anthropology of conflict, since there was an opposition between sexual drives and self-preservation drives. This remained in Freud until 1910-1911, when Jung challenged this duality. This was the theme of discussions with Freud from 1911 until 1914, when, in his text 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', Freud tried to respond to Jung. The answer was the egoic drives, but Freud noted that this was not enough, because if the first opposition was between self-preservation and sexual drives, the second would be, as a direct consequence of the first, between the egoic and sexual drives. In letters, Freud stated that he was unhappy with the solution of the egoic drive because the egoic drive is a libidinated self-preservation drive⁵. And, in this case, there would be no opposition or conflict between sexual and non-sexual drives, since they would all be sexual after all. Freud spent six years without giving an appropriate answer and, in 1920, postulated a new instinctual conflict – this time, between the life drive, which would involve the sexual and egoic drives, and the death drive, which would be another name given to the compulsion or coercion to repeat [*Wiederholungszwang*]. The term repetition in 'compulsion/coercion to repeat' is one that accompanied Freud for a long time, and repetition is not the same as leading nowhere, with no exits, as the English tradition defends, as Winnicott and Klein do, for example, who understand the death drive as violence and aggressiveness. By understanding the 'death drive' as 'compulsion to repeat' or 'coercion to repeat', it is possible to capture the different

Klein's concept of ambivalence. The difference between them is based on the fact that the anthropology of conflict has two principles since the beginning, in such a way that we cannot know where things are developing, while Klein places ambivalence as a single moment. For the author, the human being is fundamentally evil, not in a moral sense, but in a factual evil, since we have auto-erotic drives that remain in the subject. It will not be possible to discuss this here, but we have the impression that Klein was never used by Critical Theory because of this issue, almost a Hobbesian character. Allen tries to answer this with Klein's phases, in this case, the depressive and the schizoid.

⁵ On this topic, see Marin (2022).

ways in which the 'death drive' occurs, not just as aggression. It can be understood as 'coercion to repetition', in the sense that it is stronger, in such a way that the subject cannot escape the repetition, that is, it is a blind repetition. But this is not the only intensity in which the 'compulsion/coercion to repeat' [*Wiederholungszwang*] can occur in Freud's work.

In the years 1914 to 1920, there was a relevant development in Freud's work, when the author realized that the principle that he believed governed the human being, namely, the pleasure principle, not only found a limit in the reality principle but also had one beyond itself. In the first paragraph of 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through' (1914), Freud briefly reconstructs the different treatment methods of psychoanalysis up to that time. With this, the author realizes that, when a subject reported a dramatic fact, unconsciously, he was unable to remember the traumatic fact that was behind what was a symptom in him. This is because, when trying to report it, he ended up repeating in his speech what, as a defense mechanism, he had 'forgotten'. Such a hypothesis became possible for Freud because in his clinical practice he noticed that, when led to the hypothesis, the subject who was in a situation of analysis remembered the act and described it without resistance. It was up to the analyst to retell to the awake patient what had been said and, as a result, there was the impression that a cure had been achieved: 'In these hypnotic treatments, the process of remembering took on a very simple form. The patient put himself back into an earlier situation, which he never seemed to confuse with the present one, and provided an account of the mental processes belonging to it' (Freud, 1999a: 127, our translation). However, a little while later, the subject returned with another symptom, demonstrating that returning to the past in the exact way it occurred does not bring benefits and prospects of change.

Under the new technique very little and often nothing remains of this delightfully smooth course of events. Certain cases behave like those under the hypnotic technique up to a certain point and only later stop doing so, but others behave differently from the beginning. If we limit ourselves to this second type in order to bring out the difference, we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed but expresses it through acting or acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action; he *repeats* it without, naturally, knowing that he is repeating it (129; our translation).

Thus, the analyst must be able to make the unconscious conscious – both in the therapeutic form of hypnosis and in the beginnings of what would later be developed as a therapy based on free association – making the patient perceive the repetition, leaving the chaotic state symptomatic for transference neurosis.

From the conceptualization of transference, it becomes easier to observe how repetition has a nuclear function in the process of ensuring that certain issues can be updated and elaborated, leading to less suffering through transference as a mode of orderly repetition, not chaotic and blind.

Transference thus creates an intermediate region between illness and real life, through which the transition from one to the other is made. The new condition has taken over all the features of the illness, but it represents an artificial illness, which is, at every point, accessible to our intervention (135; our translation).

In this place where repetition and transference seem inseparable, it is possible to begin to perceive repetition as a compulsion, not yet associated with the death drive – which only appears in its concrete form after 1920 – but rather with transference.

Just think, as a counterpoint to this, about 'The interpretation of dreams' and the role that the therapeutic process of secondary elaboration played in the elaboration of the trauma. This type of fixation and repetition of trauma imposes an impasse on psychoanalysis and the pleasure principle. In general, by incessantly repeating the trauma, the dreams of war neurotics coerce them [*Zwang*] into repeating the trauma. Coercion is, therefore, repetition that generates nothing. War neurotics do not have the necessary tools to deal with the trauma of the loss of a friendly combatant, yet they repeat the traumatic representation. Freud states: 'We may, I think, tentatively dare to regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli' (Freud 1999b: 31; our translation) – which is the origin of terror. It is important to highlight that there is a distinction in *Zwang's* notion: it can be understood as 'coercion' or as 'compulsion'.

We want to show how in other texts, especially the first three sections of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud gives light to the idea that something new can emerge from repetition. Faced with the traumatic clinical effects of the First World War, traumatic war neurosis, and repeated unpleasant dreams, Freud uses the dream work and the instruments at his disposal. The author struggles with the accomplishment of the pleasure principle in dreams, but this seems insufficient:

In the case of war neuroses, the fact that the same symptoms sometimes occurred without the intervention of any gross mechanical force seemed both enlightening and bewildering.

In the case of the ordinary traumatic neuroses, two characteristics emerge prominently: first, that the main weight in their causation seems to rest on the factor of surprise, of fright; and second, that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule against the development of a neurosis (9; our translation).

For Freud, these dreams were not the fulfillment of pleasure, but the repetition of traumatic scenes. Freud is forced, then, to think or theorize something that goes beyond the pleasure principle, which was, until that moment, the only engine of psychic causality.

It is clear that most of what is revived by the repetition compulsion brings discomfort to the Self, as it brings to light the activities of repressed instinctual movements, but it is a discomfort that we have already taken into account, and it does not contradict the pleasure principle, it is displeasure for a system and, at the same time, satisfaction for the other. But the new and remarkable fact, that we now have to describe, is that the compulsion to repeat also brings back experiences of the past that do not allow for pleasure, and which could at no time have been satisfaction (18; our translation).

Repetition is portrayed in this text as directly linked to the death drive: the idea is organized based on the rule that the drive always wants to return to the earlier state and, in this sense, there would be a type of impulse that would lead us to seek the earlier state – more primitive than the organic state of the matter –, existing a compulsive movement of repetition in the very instinctual process that aims to take everything to the inorganic. The dreams of war would be the clinical

events that led Freud to such a formulation. But Freud gives another example of the relationship between repetition and the death drive: the *fort-da* game. In this case, Freud observes his grandson. The child repeats the reel game several times, in which he throws it forward, saying '*fort*', which means 'gone away'. Then, he brings the reel back to him, saying '*da*,' which means 'there it is'.

One day, I made an observation that confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with string around it. It never occurred to him, for example, to drag this after him on the floor, that is, to play cars with it, but he threw it with a canopy so that it disappeared inside it. Meanwhile, he uttered his meaningful 'o-o-o-oh' and then pulled the reel by the string out of the bed, now greeting its appearance with a joyful '*da*' [there it is]. This was, therefore, the complete game, disappearance, and return, of which most of the time we only saw the first act, and this was repeated tirelessly as an isolated game, although the greater pleasure was undoubtedly attached to the second act (12; our translation).

The children's game reflects the emergence of something new: Freud interprets that the child is trying to elaborate, in a repetitive way, the separation from the mother or the beloved object. It is about the departure of the other that this child desires and ends up abandoning him and then, still under his control, their return. The mother's departure certainly did not seem pleasant and, for this reason, it made no sense for the child to repeat the event in the form of a game, as there is no pleasure in that. However, it then appears to Freud that this more primitive impulse could show itself there: the unconscious repetition of something that causes him pain and suffering.

I interpret that the situation is different in the case of children's

play compared to traumatic dreams since what is important in it is the mode of operation of the psychic apparatus that reflects the oldest activities of a 'normal' subject. In the example given by Freud, an unusual elaboration for psychoanalysis appears, since it would not be necessary for the economic point of view or just the gain of pleasure to be brought directly to the foreground. This is because, unlike the fulfillment of desire, the child's action is enigmatic and at the same time repetitive. It is a repetition that elaborates on the absence. In this sense, when throwing the reel, the child pulls it back, elaborating on the absence of the caregiver who is no longer present. A renunciation of impulse and consent to the absence. This is a repetition that generates something new. This leads Freud, in section III, to deal with a kind of reconsideration of psychoanalysis as an interpretative art, the art of interpreting dreams⁶. But what leads Freud to this change? An idea of repetition, and no longer of memory. I interpret, in this case, that the compulsion to repeat – understood as the death drive – occupies the place of mere memory in psychoanalytic work. With this differentiation in the concept of '*Zwang*', some elaborate drives may be inserted into the logic of the pleasure principle, potentially breaking a cycle of repetition. This gives space for a new behavior, a resignification of a cycle of suffering to resist it, and a new instinctual circuit.

Now, what appears as a contradiction for psychoanalysis is that: '[...] the compulsion to repeat and the instinctual satisfaction that is immediately pleasurable seem to converge here into an intimate partnership' (22; our translation). Or, 'Enough remains unexplained to justify the assumption of a compulsion to repeat – something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctive than the pleasure principle which is displaced by it' (*Ib.*; our translation). Thus,

⁶ It appears in 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', when Freud deals with memory and repetition. At this point, repetition is one of the forms of remembrance.

in 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through' (1914) and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), *repetition* takes on two forms: the first is directly related to the act of returning to what was repressed, and the second is the repetition compulsion. These forms will also be, for Freud, shaped based on the author's conceptions of the polarities of instinctual conflicts and their relationship with the pleasure principle.

4. Why is the death drive not biological?

It is interesting to note that in these excerpts Freud does not establish the concept of death drive at the beginning of the text. On the contrary: the attempt to maintain the primacy of the pleasure principle is put to the test by several hypotheses; however, in the end, it is not maintained. Biological arguments also appear as hypotheses for Freud, in an attempt to follow the development of science of his time, as we see in section VI of the critical edition of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. The very idea of the death drive is extracted from two sources: the conflict between the 'I' (ego), which would lead to the constitution of a primordial inorganic state, in opposition to the external elements that constituted life impulses, for adequacy, in a kind of internal crisis in the science of psychoanalysis, that is, in the explosion of this tension between egoic drives and sexual drives; and the discussion of biological and chemical science of his time, as in Weisman, Hartmann and Lipschutz. What is interesting is that even these 'origins' of the concept face an impasse. Freud says:

Multicellular organisms may die from internal causes, due to defective differentiation or imperfections of their metabolism, but the matter is irrelevant from the point of view of our problem. Such an explanation of the origin of death, in fact, is much less at odds with our usual ways of thinking than the strange assumption of 'death drives' (50; our translation).

It is worth noting that Freud, in session VI, does not accept the concept of the death drive as his own. The author resorts to the trivial common-sense concept of the death drive instead of a more primordial metapsychological concept that would be of great value in resolving the impasses of the psychoanalytic theory, in line with scientific discussions.

Still in session VI, resuming a kind of summary of the psychoanalytic theory, Freud refers to the role of the 'libidinization' of the 'I' (ego):

Advancing more cautiously, psychoanalysis observed the regularity with which the libido is withdrawn from the object and directed towards the ego (the process of introversion); and, when studying the libido development of children in their earliest phases, he concluded that the ego is the true and original reservoir of libido which is extended to the objects only from this. The ego now found its position among sexual objects and was immediately placed first among them. The libido that has remained attached to the ego has been described as 'narcissistic'. This narcissistic libido was, of course, also the expression of the strength of the sexual drive in the analytical sense of these words, and it necessarily had to be identified with the 'self-preservation drives' whose existence had been recognized from the beginning. Thus, the original opposition between ego drives and sexual drives proved to be inadequate (56; our translation).

The impasse, now admitted by Freud, is that: 'If self-preservation drives are also libidinal in nature, perhaps there are no other drives besides libidinal ones?' (*Ib.*; our translation). In this way, Freud tries

to investigate something like 'another drive', which would have the role of avenging a conflict of drives lost by the libidinization of the 'I' (ego). However, he admits that he cannot find it in the dualistic framework between sexual drives and drives of the 'I' (ego). It is, therefore, from this imbroglio that a new duality emerges, that is, between the life drive and the death drive. In this sense, we understand that what emerges from the hypothesis of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' does not mean, if we read the book as a theoretical response to the idea of narcissism, a dualism based on the equality established by Freud between the ego drive and death drive; and self-preservation drive and life drive. According to our interpretation, this overlap that simply adds the death drive refers to the attempt to add a new drive that originates in biology and chemistry studies. This is not what the death drive represents. Therefore, Freud's withholding in accepting such biological claims is evidenced by the recent critical edition of the book, by the number of hypotheses and arguments discussed until the author reaches the heart of the matter: the challenges to psychoanalysis that the 'Introduction to Narcissism' offers.

It is from the emergence of the problem of narcissism that Freud needed to reformulate what he conceived as his drive theory, since this term dissolved the conflict, and finds this conflict in the divergence between destruction and connection. Destruction appears directly related to the idea of repetition of trauma or something that increases tension and averts pleasure, while, on the other hand, the connection will allocate to the two other drives that made up the old Freudian drive system and were united due to the problem of narcissism: self-preservation and libido. Freud will call the first the death drive because this movement of rupture and destruction exists to take everything organic to the inorganic. The second, life drive, is responsible for maintaining life. Although the second instinctual conflict had been formulated in 1914, it was only in 1920 that Freud crystallized the

notion of the death drive, unfolding the consequences of this discovery *a posteriori* in the texts 'The Ego and the Id' and 'The Economic Problem of masochism' (1924).

After that, Freud addresses the idea of the death drive with the example of sadism and masochism, which should have our attention. British literature, especially Melanie Klein, is based on this argumentative sequence to extract that there would be a direct connection between this new conceptual framework of psychoanalysis – life drive and death drive – with love and hate. It is based on the following excerpt: 'The object relationship presents a second example of a similar polarity – that between love (tenderness) and hate (aggression)' (57; our translation). However, coherently following the back and forth of a hypothetical text such as 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud states: 'If only we could succeed in bringing these two polarities into relation with each other, and in deriving one from the other!' (*Ib.*; our translation). Therefore, although Freud argued for a new ambivalence – life drive and death drive – these two concepts do not consist in their full realization as polarities that must be totally mixed up with the specificities of the concepts of love and aggression. In fact, it is just a new hypothesis, despite its relevance – an effort by Freud to explain the phenomenon of sadism in this new framework, for which the drives of the 'I' (ego) are no longer a central element of ambivalence. The love-hate fusion is, in the author's conception, the specific concreteness of the ambivalence of the drive carried out in the case of masochism. Even so, this attempt ends in an embarrassment.

We shall see why: if our previous reasoning proves to be correct, the direct relationship between the more general idea of drive and destruction was not made by Freud. In fact, it was formulated by Sabina Spielrein, in her text 'Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being'. Precisely because he was not the author of this association, Freud had already warned that if masochism, and consequently

destruction, is used in the text as an example of the new concept of death drive, we would be incurring the attempt to find at any cost a way out of great difficulty or even '[...] this conception is far from easy to understand, and creates a frankly mystical impression. It seems suspiciously like we are trying to find a way out of a highly embarrassing situation at any cost' (58; our translation). Once again, we see that Freud is reluctant to accept a concept of the death drive at any cost. He had already rejected it on biological grounds; now he also does it through masochism and, in this way, through the idea of destroying a drive of the 'I' (ego) that turns against the 'I' (ego).

Thus, what does this new concept of the death drive consist of? Freud lets slip its non-definitive character: 'But we still feel our thinking appreciably disturbed by the fact that we cannot attribute to the sexual drive the characteristic of a compulsion to repetition that first put us on the track of the death drives' (Freud 1999b: 60; our translation). The 1920 text suggests the reconfiguration of the dualism of psychoanalysis as ambivalence, which is established in a new framework, for which the dynamic and conflicting factor of psychic life can now be established between life and death drives. Only then can Freud ask: 'Can we dare to recognize in these two directions of the vital processes the activity of our two instinctive movements, the life drive and the death drive?' (Freud 1999b: 53; our translation).

5. Conclusion

The repetition compulsion movement described by Freud can be interpreted both from a blocking and naturalizing perspective and can enable us to think about the more creative side and producer of new meanings that the death drive brings immanently to our complex way of being naturally and socially. If we take the two examples mentioned, we can observe that both the soldiers and the child repeat something that was unpleasant from the beginning. However, it is possible to focus

on the fact that they continue to repeat this trauma and increase their displeasure – abandoning the Freudian theoretical and interpretative hegemony of the pleasure principle – and, in this sense, finding themselves in a cycle of destruction that distances them from finding a possible cure for this trauma. Or, from another perspective, it is possible to take forward the idea that the pleasure principle does not cease to exist in the background of all unpleasant activity in these cases, and the repetition of traumatic scenes that occur compulsively by both soldiers and children, since the first time they are repeated, no longer appears in the same way as the original scene once occurred. This is because, in the second, third, or however many there are, the repetitions will carry with them the transformation of something that will appear different in each one of them, whether due to how the encryption of the dream takes place and which will shed light on some other new element at the time of the narration of the dream so that it is then possible for an attentive ear to catch an escape, whether by the simple fact that they no longer find themselves passive in the face of the trauma. It is the ability to invert the symbolic position in the face of the trauma that already opens up a space, for example, in the case of the child who throws the reel and pulls it back, to think that it is possible to break this cycle of repetition in order to give a new meaning to it.

In this sense, thinking about emancipation (without utopia) from a traumatic scene, or opening up to a blocked scenario, means not completely breaking the existence of a chain of events, causing them to never appear again as invitations to repeat. The cure – or the emancipatory, creative, creator – in the psychoanalytic sense, appears if we want to take forward the idea that we are complex and ambivalent beings, that we are formed by drives of connection, but also of destruction, as the ability to face the same situation that invites you to possibly repeat a trauma or displeasure that marked you and

constituted you as a subject, being able to assume your power as an actor and not repeat the cycle of suffering in which you found yourself – even if this means, sometimes, to act in an unnatural way or with an almost supernatural effort to take control (together or not with the other, in a situation of transference) of that which is indomitable, namely, the unconscious.

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