

The Drive: Pathogenic and Curative¹

Dan Collins

Desire, appetite, libido, lust, motivation, impulse, instinct, want, need, urge, hunger, love—we have a large inventory of terms for internal forces that prompt us to action and towards objects. But in a Saussurian fashion, all of these terms, taken as a system of differences, only highlight the negative space left for drive. Synchronically, *drive* appears where none of these other terms are.

But the drive also has a history. As a term, it appears only in certain historical eras. It is as if the space left for the concept of the drive opens and closes. It only appears when all the other terms fail. It only appears when all the other terms still leave human behaviour in question. The drive arises among the ancient Stoics, whose word for it is *horme*. It is obscured for centuries by the Christian God, who offers only love and makes no demands. It appears again among the German idealists, and especially Fichte, who uses Freud's word *Trieb*. And it arises with psychoanalysis, but not immediately. It is fifteen years after Freud announces the interpretation of the *Wunsch* that he takes up the vicissitudes of the *Trieb*.

Lacan too begins with the interpretation of desire, and first conceives of the drive rather unproblematically as the subject's interaction with the Other's demand. His inscription of this relation

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is (§ ◇ D).² This conception allows Lacan to situate the drive as a border concept, just as Freud did, between bodily needs and the demands that signify need. But there is a shift in Lacan’s thinking on the drive in the early sixties. In “The Subversion of the Subject,” first delivered as a lecture in 1960, Lacan argues that in neurosis, the demand of the Other replaces the object in the neurotic’s fantasy, thus reducing fantasy to drive—to an obligation, to a duty to enjoy as the Other requires.

D

↓

(§ ◇ a)

In his own words, “the Other’s demand takes on the function of the object in the neurotic’s fantasy—that is, his fantasy . . . is reduced to the drive: (§ ◇ D). This is why it was possible to catalog all the neurotic’s drives” (2006, p. 698).³ Here the drive seems to be pathogenic.

But four years later, in *Seminar 11*, Lacan tells us that the end of analysis is going through the fantasy and “living the drive” (*vivre la pulsion*) (1977, p. 273). Lacan says explicitly that “the experience of the fundamental fantasy becomes the drive” (p. 273). This seems to be the same structural shift that Lacan described in 1960, fantasy becomes drive. But the process that was pathogenic in 1960 has become curative by 1964.

So we must ask, what does it mean to “live the drive”? Almost certainly, it does not mean a return to compliance with the

² See for example Seminar 5, *Formations of the Unconscious*, where this inscription is first developed, and “The Subversion of the Subject,” where it appears in the definitive version of the Graph of Desire.

³ The translation of the *Écrits* quoted is that of Bruce Fink (2006). Page references to the French edition (1966) can be coordinated by the marginal page numbers included in the English translation.

Other's demand. Lacan says that "transference is that which separates demand from drive" (1977, p. 273), and in fact, after 1964, Lacan gradually stops using ($\$ \diamond D$), the relation of subject to demand, as an inscription for the drive.

Jacques-Alain Miller talks about the relation of fantasy and drive in terms of identification: "As long as the subject is...within the plane of identification, the drive is masked by the fantasy" (2001, p. 21). It is transference that leads the subject to identify with the Other as demand. But the analyst operates with desire, not demand, and evades the subject's identification, and this, Miller says, "opens the way to the drive" (p. 21). What, then, is the drive when it is no longer aligned with the Other's demand?

My hypothesis is that the drive, at the end of analysis, is able to be sustained as a question, not a question about the meaning of the Other's demand (as in neurosis), but a more basic questioning of existence. This is why the subject must "go through the fantasy" before "living the drive." The subject must give up his or her fantasmatic answers to the question of existence and seek answers independent of the Other.

What does it mean to question one's existence? It is perhaps not as philosophical as it sounds.

We do not ask why it is that a lion leaps up and attacks a gazelle. It is a fact of nature. We attribute the lion's attack to instinct and hunger. It is a behaviour that explains itself. But human behaviour does not explain itself, and thus it constantly poses a question for us. In fact, biological or instinctual accounts of human behaviour foreclose this questioning. In *Seminar 11*, after Lacan gives a dialectical account of developmental stages, Françoise Dolto asks how we could possibly do without biological stages of

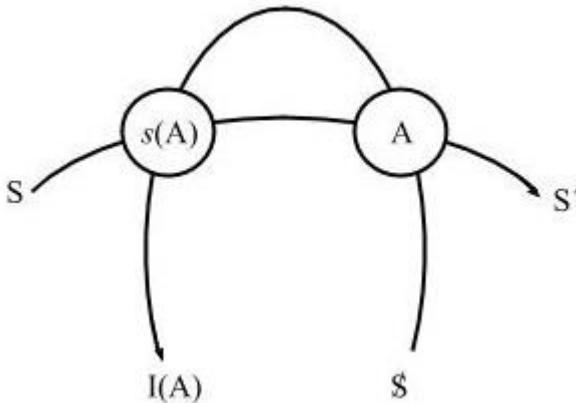
maturation. Lacan answers that if we resorted to a biological account of development, the process would remain completely opaque to us, a natural fact (1977, p. 64). No questions would be answered, or even asked.

This is how the drive makes its appearance in the clinic—in the questions we ask. Heidegger tells us that *Dasein* is the only being that has its own being as a question for it. We question our own existence. The drive is both what we question and the source of our questioning.

I would say that even the way Heidegger describes the structure of questioning sounds very much like Freud's description of the four elements of the drive. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says, "Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its lead beforehand from what is sought" (2010, p. 4). So a questioning has an aim. Does this not sound like Freud's *aim* of the drive, which is always satisfaction? Heidegger says, "Besides what is asked, what is *interrogated* [*Befragtes*] also belongs to a questioning" (p. 4). What is interrogated, then, is the object of a questioning. Isn't this Freud's *object* of the drive? Heidegger says, "As an attitude adopted by a being [*Seienden*], the questioner, questioning has its own character of being" (p. 4). So a questioning has a source in the attitude of the questioner. Doesn't this correspond to the source of Freud's drive in the being of the subject? And finally, what is peculiar to an explicitly formulated question is that it is not just an "asking around"; a formulated questioning "becomes lucid in advance with regard to the above named constitutive characteristics" (p. 4), in other words, with regard to the aim, the object, and the source that we just identified. Does not this formulating in advance, the urgency of not just "asking around," then, sound like Freud's *pressure* of the drive?

Is this questioning, then, Freud's epistemophilic drive? Or is it the more basic reason why Freud posited that there was an epistemophilic drive? If the neurotic drive is the constant attempt to take the Other's demand as an object of questioning, to interpret and to answer the demand of the Other, then isn't the drive at the end of analysis a kind of questioning of one's being beyond the demand of the Other?

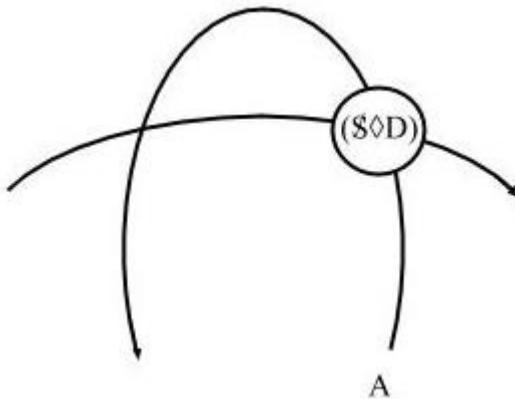
We can begin to map out answers to these questions by looking at Lacan's big graph.⁴ The lower level of the graph is about a living subject with biological needs, $\$$, encountering the language of the Other (A) (2006, p. 684), which Lacan calls the treasure trove of signifiers at this level of the graph (p. 682).



⁴ Lacan's Graph of Desire is presented in its definitive form in "The Subversion of the Subject" where it appears in four distinct "moments" (2006 [1966][1960], pp. 681-692). The stages of the graph that appear below are slightly modified versions of those that appear in the *Écrits*.

The encounter with the signifying chain forces the subject to learn the Other's language, to put his or her demands into the foreign language of the Other. This gives rise to meaning, $s(A)$, and to the subject's ultimate identification with (and alienation in) the meaning of the Other, $I(A)$.

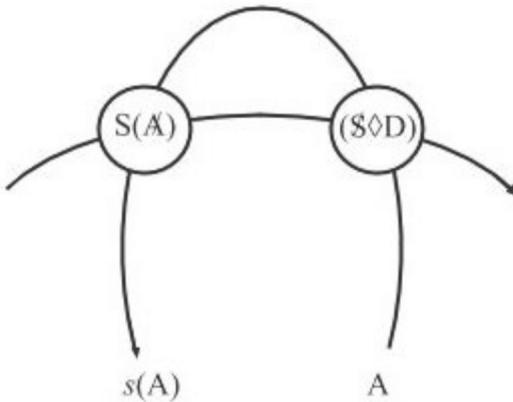
The upper level of the graph, on the other hand, is about the encounter of language (A) with a living being (2006, p. 817).



Here the drive is still figured as the subject's relation to the Other's demand, $(§ \diamond D)$, but looked at the other way. It is no longer the subject's biological needs being subjected to the structure of language. Here the system of language encounters the recalcitrant lived experience of a speaking being in the form of the subject's own unique catalogue of drives or vocabulary of enjoyment. This vocabulary forms the "treasure trove" of signifiers at the upper level of the graph. I would say that the collection of signifiers at the lower level, A, are the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* that Freud refers to, foreign signifiers imposed upon the subject's biological needs (cf.

Lacan, 1977, p. 60), while the collection of signifiers at the upper level is rather a collection not of *signifiers of the drive*, but rather of *drive-signifiers*.

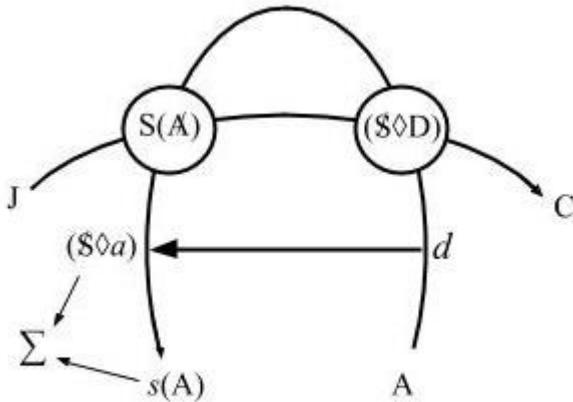
The “message” that arises from this collection of signifiers, though, is that the language of the Other cannot account for the lived experience of the speaking being, a message that is inscribed as $S(\bar{A})$, the signifier of the lack in the Other. The Other is barred (2006, p. 817).



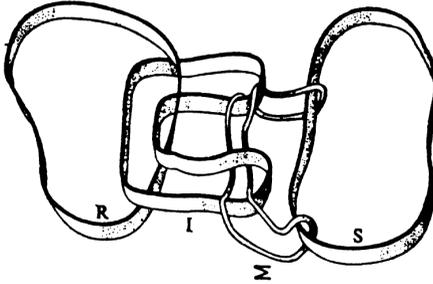
This message is reduced to an individual, subjective, idiosyncratic meaning, $s(A)$. At this level of the graph, $s(A)$ is an endpoint, a reduction of the Other to the subjective meaning of a living subject, a lived *meaningfulness*, as opposed to what $s(A)$ is as a node of intersection at the lower level, a linguistic *meaning*. Thus $s(A)$ is always intermediate between subjective lived experience and the shared significations of the Other, between *meaningfulness* and *meaning*. One way we can conceive of “living the drive,” then, is as a

freeing of our subjective meaningfulness from the Other's demand that we must always mean as others mean, as the Other means.

“Living the drive,” then, is what Lacan will later call the *sinthome* (Σ), which Jacques-Alain Miller locates between a meaningful symptom (or a symptom of meaning), $s(A)$, and fantasy, $(\S \diamond a)$ (2001, p. 26).



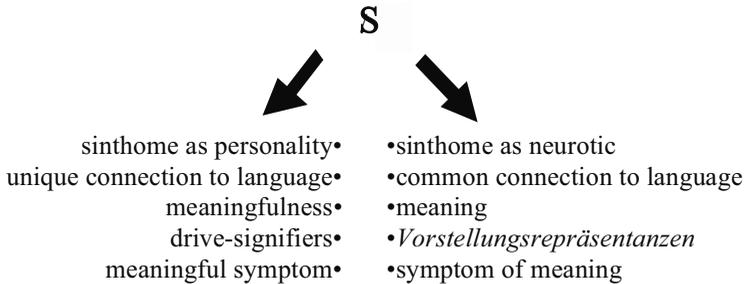
The *sinthome* is our drive, our continuing questioning of our lived experience, our negotiation between our own subjective lived meaning and shared, “objective,” signification. The *sinthome* is what allows us to connect our lived experience to language in a subjective way (Lacan, 2013, p. 6):



In his seminar on the *sinthome*, Lacan says that the privileged way to do this is through art. He's fascinated that Joyce was able to forge a *sinthome* for himself through his writing, through artifice. But we don't all have to be Joyce. For each of us, the *sinthome* is, as Miller says in the article I've been referring to "a mixture of symptom and fantasy" (2001). A symptom is our unique relation to the meaning of the Other. Lacan locates it in the graph as $s(A)$, the subjection of our subjective meaningfulness to the demand of the Other. But if Lacan gives the symptom another name, the *sinthome*, it is because that symptom can also be lived as our own meaning, free of the demand of the Other. The other half of the mixture is fantasy, our access to enjoyment. This might be confusing because we've been talking about going through the fantasy and living the drive, but the confusion only arises because Miller grafts his reading of the *sinthome* onto Lacan's big graph, reading the later Lacan back into the earlier Lacan. So with the *sinthome*, we might be able to talk about fantasy as a relation to enjoyment beyond identification with the Other, a fantasy unmasked, as Miller says.

This is a fine balancing act. And it doesn't have to imply that we give up living in the world and using the language of the Other to

communicate. In the seminar on the *sinthome*, Lacan approaches this possibility and rejects it. He says that another name for the *sinthome* is simply *personality*. Lacan's thesis was *Paranoid Psychosis in Its Relationships with Personality*. He says that if he refused to publish his dissertation for so long it was because there is no relationship between paranoid psychosis and personality, simply because they are the same thing (2005, p. 53). Does he mean to imply here that living the *sinthome*, or living the drive, is akin to psychosis? Does he mean that living within our own meaningfulness would be akin to delusion? No, he takes pains to clarify. The fourth term that for each subject knots the symbolic to the imaginary and the real is the *sinthome*, or as he calls it on this occasion, personality. The *sinthome* knots us to the signifying chain and does not constitute a psychosis because that chain is common. This is the neurotic's subjective knotting to the language of the Other. He goes so far as to say that this connection to the language of the Other is the *sinthome* "not insofar as it is personality," but insofar as it is neurotic (p. 54).



So we can say that the *sinthome* after analysis is a way of being, a way of living the drive, that tends away from the demand of the Other, away from being subjected to the Other's meanings.

I've linked the drive to questioning, and through Heidegger, I've linked questioning to being. Thus "to live the drive" is not, as Bruce Fink cautions us to remember, to become "a nonstop, pleasure-seeking machine" (1999, p. 210), nor is it to become quiescent and ascetic. To live the drive is to question, and to be, and to question being. One question we might have is how well these linkages hold up. I'd like to defend them.

In "The Subversion of the Subject," Lacan asks the simple question "What am *I*?" (2006, p. 694). His answer: "*I* am in the place [in] which 'the universe is a flaw in the purity of Non-Being'" (p. 694). Now it happens that the universe is full of matter. On the other hand, it might not have been. But either way, it wouldn't matter if we were not here to question Being. It's not simply a question of matter as material stuff. If we weren't here to question Being, then Being and Non-Being would look very much alike, since there would be no one to tell the difference. We can read the remark then, in reverse: *I* am a flaw in the purity of the Non-Being of the universe. What does Lacan call this impurity? *Jouissance*. And here, in the text, Lacan gives the word *jouissance* a capital letter, just as Heidegger's Being has a capital letter. These philosophical connections may sound like obfuscation, but I think that Lacan's point is clear: our *jouissance*, our being-in-the world poses a question for us. Being, questioning, and *jouissance* are linked. And that is why, after 1964, Lacan stops using the term drive so much and simply refers to *jouissance*: the drive is our questioning, our striving towards *jouissance*.

Finally, etymology might help us here. We all know that the English verb *to be* is very irregular and includes a number of varied forms: *am, is, was, were*. This indicates that these were originally many different verbs that collected into one conjugation. But at least one form of the verb to be, *are*, seems to share an etymology with the Greek word for drive, *horme*. Good etymological dictionaries, like the OED and the *American Heritage Dictionary*, tell us that the *ar-* of *are* is the same root as the *hor-* of *horme*, the Greek word for drive—this gives us another link between the drive and being.

But to leave philosophy and etymology behind and to state things more simply, I'll end by quoting an aphorism of Lacan's from *Seminar 14*, the session of 12 April 1967. It is, I think, a clinical aphorism:

It's when demand shuts up that the drive begins.

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