Death drive, destructive drive and the desobjectalizing function in the analytic process

Luciane Falcão

Rua João Caetano, 497/202, 0470-260, Porto Alegre
– lufalcao@terra.com.br

‘Without metapsychological speculation and theorizing
– I had almost said phantasying—we shall not get another step forward.’ Freud

(1937, p. 225)

In 1920 Freud hypothesized that there is a death drive whose goal is to return to the previous state, whereas the repetition compulsion is a search for something beyond the pleasure principle. The death drive’s purpose is to combat whatever increases a person’s tension. In its destructive tendency it operates silently. This is a hypothesis, a speculation, which would eventually impinge upon and modify the fundamentals of Freudian metapsychology and create innumerable controversies.

Freud had found a destructive force in mankind. This destructive force, infiltrating through transference and countertransference, will be capable of hiding the libido’s manifestations, it will impede psychic harmony as well as links between the patient and analyst so as to block the development of the analytic process. These are the manifestations of the return to the previous state, a non-process. They are sometimes experienced silently within the setting, other times they are violently discharged in executing acts.

Based on Freud’s notion of drive dialectic, Green (1967) proposes studying the operations of the psychic apparatus, beginning with the work, movement, force and the drive’s interrelationship with the object. In addition to primary decussion [decussation primaire]², Green introduces the double

1 Translated by Arthur Brakel
2 Decussion: Green uses the term metaphorically. It comes originally from neurology, meaning a crossed tract of nerve fibers passing between centers on opposite sides of the nervous system. Green presents a definition which is as follows: “In 1967, in my study on primary narcissism, I postulated the existence of primary decussion, where the innermost and the outermost psyche of the subject crossed when exchanging places. The description of such a movement is necessary for understanding projection.” (André Green, Key Ideas for a Contemporary Psychoanalysis. Translated by Andrew Weller. London & New York: Routledge 2005, p. 221)
drive reversal [double retournement pulsionel]\(^3\), which he considers to be the basic model of psychoanalysis. It is during this period that Green proposes the notion of narcissism as a structure: narcissism as the scaffolding [un échafaudage] on which the psyche will structure itself and develop. As I see it, here we come face-to-face with a fundamental change to the theoretical framework of the death drive. In the dynamism and heterogeneity of the psychic apparatus in Green’s conceptions, the death drive becomes a force that acts to desobjectalize and prevents the psychical constitution of representational paths. Attack and aggression, which Klein considers as original elements, are secondary elements in Green’s account of the psychic apparatus. Green extends and reformulates the Freudian theory and includes a new dialectic: life narcissism/death narcissism. This death narcissism is related to the actions of the death drive.

The drive movements are present in the dynamics of transference (Green, 1983b) that traverse different ways of using the analytical word (Green, 1983b) to make links.

Many analytic thinkers propose similar links: Bion (1959a, 1959b, 1962) proposes reverie and the transformation of beta elements into alpha elements; Winnicott (1969, 1971, 1979, 1988) addresses potential space; the Barangers (M and W, 1966) propose the field [campo]; Widlocher (1996) proposes co-thinking activity—the partial fusion that comes along with primitive identification processes; De M’uzan (1977) proposes chimera; Donnet (2005) describes shared playfulness. Many others will spend endless time on this fundamental aspect of the analytic process.

The death drive concept within the Freudian metapsychological edifice

In the earliest psychoanalytic references, Adler (1908) presents the idea that there is an autonomous aggressive instinct, which Freud opposes at this time. Freud could not accept the existence of a special drive alongside survival and sexual drive. Some fifteen years later (1923) in a footnote (Freud, 1909, p. 140), Freud finally accepts Adler’s position.

In 1911 Spielrein (1981 [1911]), a Russian psychoanalyst, presented a paper to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, entitled ‘Destruction as the cause of coming into being’. In this paper Spielrein maintains that the individual has a tendency toward self-destruction that is linked to the survival drive itself. This article anticipates the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive. Freud refers to this only once, in a footnote to ‘Beyond the pleasure principle’ (1920, p. 55), when he reflects on sadism.

Many psychoanalysts consider there to be three theories concerning drives in Freud:

\(^3\)Green introduces this notion of double drive reversal as an expansion on Freud’s hypotheses defence, which consists of the drive’s being turned around upon the subject’s own ego and undergoing reversal from activity to passivity. The double drive reversal is dependent on the narcissistic organization of the ego. The notion of the double reversal was introduced and developed for the first time by Green in 1967, in his article Primary narcissism: Structure or state (in Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism, 2001a). This notion constitutes “a basic model of psychoanalysis” (Green, 1984, p. 162) and underlies implicitly or explicitly his developments on narcissism, play, the subject of the unconscious, representation and language.
1. The self-preservation drive (Die Psychogene Sehstörung in Psychoanalytis-cher Auffassung, 1910): the so-called ego and sexual drives.

2. The ego libido (connected to the ego, the ego drives and the self-preser-
vation drives—narcissism) and object libido (Freud, 1914b).

3. The life and death drive (Freud 1920).

Other authors, such as Denis (1997, 2007), consider four theories in
Freud’s work: where the first theory — introduced in Three Essays on the
Theory of Sexuality (1905) - is the one in which the opposition constitutive
of psychic movement is made between the sexual drives and the drive for
domination, defined as non-sexual.

Beyond the pleasure principle (1920): a change in
psychoanalytic foundations

It would not have been hard for Freud, who had already revised his own
theory of drives, to admit the limitations of the pleasure principle, revealed
by his clinical material: the presence of the repetition compulsion in many
situations and that it was not accounted for by the pleasure principle. This
was revealed in:

1. Transference neuroses, where patients repeat painful experiences from
their past.

2. Post-traumatic dreams (traumatic neurosis and psychotic states).

3. Children’s games—in fort-da—a ceaseless repetition in an attempt to con-
trol the object, transforming passivity to activity. Freud admitted that in
the attempt to dominate the object one seeks pleasure in domination; it
was not a mere tendency to return.

Freud understood that unconscious guilt feelings (even if they can be
helped as patients began to get better), masochism and negative therapeutic
reactions, could be signs of the presence of aggression in analytic processes:
and their presence would impede the positive evolution of these processes.
For Freud, these three factors were fundamental in dealing clinically with
the death drive.

Freud (1914a) had shown that up until then analytic technique had been
based on recollection—‘the impulsion to remember’ (p. 151). He tied trans-
ference to the repetition compulsion and cleared the way for presenting the
death drive six years later, and the second structural theory in 1923. He
then believed that analytic work and the repressed event are no longer only
due to memories: ‘the patient does not remember anything of what he has
forgotten and repressed, but acts it out’ (p. 150, italics in the original). The
repetition compulsion marks the failure of recollection – the impulse to
remember.

This transferential shift from narration to acting is for Freud the opening
that allows one to understand many phenomena that occur during a session—
from the acting out associated with representational content to phenomena we
understand today as ‘figurability’ (Botella and Botella, 2007 [2001]), or
presentation (Kahn, 2012).
Freud’s 1920 text is complex, at times ambiguous, and is forever subject to different interpretations. It is rich, constituting a point of departure for a fundamental change in Freudian metapsychology: it is a foundation for the second structural theory and has been used to modify understandings of the concepts of masochism, anxiety theory, reflections on destructiveness and civilization—to cite a few. From the first topic, in which pleasure and unpleasure were related to (economic) increases or decreases in energy, stimulation or tension, the pleasure principle was accompanied by reflection on life’s origins, so as to account for the diverse organisations of the psyche—all this can be found in Freud’s Project (1895). Freud introduces the hypothesis that sadism is akin to the death drive: ‘suppose that this sadism is in fact a death drive which [...] now enters the service of the sexual function’ (1920, p. 54). He supports this by invoking the sexual drive’s fusion and diffusion: i.e. the sadistic component of the libido. However, the new goal of this sadistic component led to destruction (Green, 2007a).

Aggression did not come from mere frustration of the pleasure principle. There was something demoniacal in its manifestations, and its goal would be destruction—destructive rage. The aggressive drive is present in sadism and masochism. For Freud (1930), however, there could be no death drive without fusion with the life drive. He writes:

> Even where it emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinary high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfillment of the latter’s old wishes for omnipotence (1930, p. 144).

When there is diffusion, there is death. In suicide, the death drive’s force will defeat Eros.

In 1920, sadism’s original manifestation is an effect of the destructive drive, the first drive that seeks to destroy Eros’s narcissistic relationship with its own self. Freud said that even a person’s self-destruction will not be bereft of libidinal satisfaction. And in 1924, Freud considered masochism to be death drive’s central expression; aggression is what is projected outward (according to the narcissistic libido model). Elaborating on Freud’s idea, Green (2007a, p. 62-64) believes that whatever has survived the death drive’s internal attacks and is not deflected outward as aggressiveness remains in the ego and becomes a mortal residue which, during the individual’s life, will support that person’s self-destructive tendencies.

Thus, Green hypothesizes an original destructiveness with two orientations—one inward, one outward. In summation: sadism attacks the other, and masochism kills the subject (Green, 2007a).

**Freud and Biology**

Many metapsychological facets of the 1920 text are speculative. And some of Freud’s own concerns can be seen as questionable, even today. Freud’s conception of the death drive as the first drive as a return to an inorganic
If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones’ (1920, p. 38 [italics in the original])

What could Freud have been referring to when he said: *the aim of all life is death*? It was probably Freud’s *mystical biologism* which elicited a myriad of difficulties in understanding his account of the death drive. I understand that Freud tried to fit biological presuppositions into psychoanalysis (and philosophical presuppositions about life’s origins). He believed that inserting phylogenetic functions into psychoanalysis would make psychoanalysis (and the formation of the psychic apparatus) part of the evolution of our species.

So as to consider this elemental level and to compare the human organism to an undifferentiated cell organism made of a substance susceptible to stimulation, Freud took an interest in Weisman’s studies of germinative cells. Freud considered single cell organisms to be immortal. However, he made clear that this philosophical and metaphysical speculation was on the level of a hypothesis. He used the *biological model* to address the *psychic model*. To make this perfectly clear: if I use a *model* I am not saying that it is exactly the same as what I am studying. It is a *model*, a metaphor. Or, in Freud’s own words at the beginning of Chapter 4, ‘What follows is mere speculation …’ (1920, p. 24).

The old debate on Freud’s *biologism* has elicited divergent opinions and interpretations, some of which can be widened (Machado, 2013). As an example, we have followed the divergent opinions on these matters expressed by Laplanche and Green.

On the one hand, Lapanche rejects any biological connotations concerning drive. His notion of drive is anchored in his *theory of general seduction* (1987). In this theory, the adult’s sexual unconscious, which is in an asymmetrical relation with the infant (the speechless *in-fans*), emits enigmatic messages. These messages give rise to the infant’s unconscious and to the sexual drive. However, Laplanche suggests that the other as object forms the *object source* of the drive (Laplanche, 1987, p. 144). If this is the case, we have a unified conception of drive energy. The drive, the only true drive, has two meanings: the sexual life drive and the sexual death drive. Laplanche (1984) rejects the notion of a death drive that predates the object. His drive theory leads him to disagree with Freud concerning aggression. For Laplanche, aggression toward the outside does not come from the death drive. The sexual death drive consists of free and unconnected energy (zero beginning), and its objective is total discharge and annihilation of, the object (Laplanche 1984). The sexual death drive represents the demoniacal part of drive, which only obeys primary process and the needs of fantasy.

However, if the death drive has no energy of its own, there will be no need for a drive that opposes the sexual drive. It is worth remembering that
the sexual life drive is related to bound energy (the constancy principle), and attempts to construct unities and connections (Laplanche, 1984, p. 30).

Green does not agree with Freud’s radical biologism concerning the death drive, nor does he agree with Laplanche’s total rejection of it. Up to the end of his life, Green broadened and reworked the Freudian concept; he maintained the conviction that there is a death drive and proposed a version somewhat different from Freud’s. He presented his outlook in one of his last publications (2007a).

For Green, the roots of the motions of drive lie within the body; through the work of the drive/object pair and its movements (double retournement pulsionel and primary decussation), the psyche comes into existence and creates the representational net. In this process, narcissism is the scaffolding [échafaudage] on which the psyche structures itself and develops. The subject is constituted by the objectalizing function, i.e. investments in linking and transforming functions into objects. This is the work of Eros—it clears the way towards psychic representations. Without this investment, the desobjectalizing function will emerge. It will be the negative work of the death drive in action.

Examples of these phenomena can be found in clinical work with patients with suicidal tendencies, or patients who are sadomasochistic, borderline or anorexic, as well as those with severe narcissistic pathologies. Their ‘triumph’ in destroying their own analyses exemplifies the results of the desobjectalizing function. And negative narcissism as an aspiration to reach level zero is another expression of this desobjectalizing function. This function enters into action each time the objects of the psyche lose their status – when their originality disappears, or when they are no longer valued. Once this happens the objects are eliminated. Desinvestment is crucial (Green, 1983a, 1988a, 1993, 1995b, 2007a). Green (2007b, p. 62) maintains that to desobjectalize is to begin an action that makes drive evolution lose its ability to deal with the object’s most distinguishing traits. Distinct from Freud, as well as from Klein, Green does not see the death drive as a self-destructive function that expresses itself primitively and automatically. For Green (2002, p. 319), the death drive does not always exist in an active state - the death drive can be silent. However, in particular circumstances the death drive can be activated and expressed as a destructive force which doesn’t necessarily find an outlet.

Marty, the founder of the Paris Psychosomatic School, does not reject trieb (pulsion) as a notion. However, he refers to a life instinct connected to psychic representations, and the death instinct (mouvements de mort) has no independence as an instinctive force. Death instincts (mouvements de mort) are inextricably but inversely linked to life instincts. Marty’s divergence from Freud is that there is only one drive - the instinct de vie - and ‘death movements’ which contradict the life drive. For Marty, the strength of the death instinct (mouvements de mort) is related to a lack or failure of the life instinct, whereas Freud believed that the function of the death instinct is present in psychic life, and organizes psychic phenomena through its fusion with the libido and defusion. For Marty, death instincts (mouvements de mort) are not autonomous, but operate whenever life instinct fails. Marty
does not see any strength in death movements. An important concept for Marty is essential depression, i.e. ‘objectless depression’, which is related to a lowering of libidinal drive without any depressive symptoms; this is why we say that essential depression is a negative symptomatology.

Marty believes that progressive disorganization is present in severely ill patients, such as patients with autoimmune diseases, and it is here that the death instinct is visible. This psychosomatic disorganization is a movement brought on by the death movements, whose ultimate goal is the progressive undoing of the psyche and a generalized mental disorganization (Marty, 1966).

What Marty’s theory understands as deprivation, as in the deficit of a mental function, Freudian theory understands as the death drive destroying the thought processes by annihilating links. For Marty, ‘operative states’ or ‘mechanical thinking’ corresponds to states in which the psyche is overloaded by traumatic excitations and psychical working through is no longer possible. The only results are behavioral or somatic pathologies, which can be seen as true signs of anti-thought (Aisenstein and Smadja, 2003, p. 412).

Smadja (2007) reminds us that when we consider the death instinct from the theoretical and clinical viewpoint, we see a convergence in Freud’s self-destructiveness, Marty’s disorganization, and Green’s desobjectalizing. They converge in the fragmented Ego that in its disorganization is an exemplary response to what Green considered to be the desobjectalizing function. In Marty’s disorganizing processes, the disappearance of psychic representations is central, and this coincides with Green’s desobjectalizing function.

But Green (2007b) considered Marty’s concepts ambiguous in so far as the death drive is concerned. He challenged Marty’s notion that death movement would stem from the lowering of the potential of the life drive. As Green (2007b) saw it, in psychosomatic structures there is a premature dissociation between the drive and the object.

As we have seen, Green kept to the hypothesis of an original destruction with a dual orientation. This destructivity stays unconscious most of the time. When painful experiences invade the psyche and cause the pleasure principle to fail, they give rise to painful, non-representable experiences, and to fear of original agony; thus destruction takes over the psyche; Green understood that in these cases we are closer to what Marty called disorganizations than to actual regressions (Green 2007a, p. 204-205).

Back in the 1960s Marty (1962, 1967) proposed substituting the term ‘death instinct’ with the phrase ‘counter-evolutionary disorganization’ because he maintained that the death instinct is engaged when stimuli become overwhelming.

Concerning nomenclature, Green (2002) also proposes a substitution: instead of the death drive he suggests the ‘destructive drive’, where aggression is directed inwards and outwards. Outward aggression is merely a fraction of those destructive energies, because destructivity is also internal. For Green, violence is a reaction to hopelessness and rage at impotence. Questioning this, Bernard Chervet (2012) asks if the notions of negativity and destructiveness aren’t equivalent. He also questions if the death impulse and the destructive impulse might be interchangeable - couldn’t we substitute one for the other?
A return to the previous state

Understanding what this psychic activity might be which suppresses internal tension, returning to a previous state, was not an easy task for Freud’s readers. Freud showed that this return to an earlier state would correspond to a person’s initial immobility, to the Nirvana Principle, coined by Barbara Low, an English psychoanalyst. This state would be inertial, that is, level zero tension. Thus it would be the restitution of a previous state and, finally, a return to the absolute repose of inorganic matter.

In view of this new theory, Freud (1920) argued that self-preservation drives and empowerment drives no longer have theoretical primacy and become partial drives:

> whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence […] What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion. Thus the guardians of life, too, were originally the myrmidons of death (1920, p. 39 [my italics]).

Freud believed he was dealing with a disturbing external force. But to what particular force was he referring? I believe he was proposing a force that generates an antithesis which it inflames but does not destroy. This force breaks down the equilibrium of inorganic matter (see Maturana 1991). I believe that this is related to Freud’s assertion that ‘the aim of all life is death’ (1920, p. 38) and, as we have just seen, organisms do not wish to die for reasons other than their own internal laws. They want to die in their own way and, thus, the life-preserving drives were originally in the service of death.

Based on this conception, Freud went on to say that life drives disturb the peace and are capable of producing tension felt to be pleasure when the tension is relieved. Likewise, he showed that the death drive almost always acts silently within the body. It cannot become manifest in its pure form; it is, rather, associated with libidinal forces.

Concerning these matters, Segal, in contrast to Freud, believes it is often possible to detect the death drive’s operations in an almost pure state by examining its conflicts with the life drive—more so than when it is in a fused state (1986, p. 37).

Green does not accept the idea that the death drive is a tendency toward completely reducing tension so as to attain the inorganic state (2002, p. 318). However, he does use Freud’s central idea that the death drive is an attempt to return to a previous state and that this drive is conservative or regressive: it always tends toward a return to the most primitive, the most elementary, which beckons the psyche backwards towards what is undoubtedly the most fragile form of psychic life (2011, p. 380).

Roussillon (2000, 2008, 2009, 2012) asserts that the return to the previous state is a defense against the previous state’s returning—as in the return is passively experienced, an automatic return. This idea of the previous state returning can happen with the child’s insufficient adaptation to the first environment and to the mother’s care, which causes the baby to experience
states of psychic death. According to Roussillon, the memory traces from this primitive agony are subjected to a repetition compulsion that functions in such a way that the agony cannot be integrated and symbolized. Roussillon proposes reformulating the hypothesis that led Freud to believe in the death drive. What he maintains is that the memory traces which come from the encounter with the object, whether this encounter was satisfactory or not, are reinvested in a hallucinatory way. Smadja (2007) suggests that Freud’s hypothesis of the return to the previous state corresponds to a return to a state of calm by eliminating the over-stimulating effects of trauma. He provides an outline that is easy to understand:

1. Psychic state A
2. Trauma T disturbs A
3. A becomes B – a new psychic state

Smadja argues that for Freud in psychic state B a drive would be created whose goal [but] is to return to A. Therefore, Smadja (p. 74) maintains, the self-destruction of the death drive seeks to free the new psychic state from the disturbing effect of the trauma. And this is how Smadja understands the return to the previous state: it is, in fact, a return to calm through the elimination of the over-stimulating trauma.

**Death or destructive drive’s action in the transference/counter-transference dynamic**

Rosenfeld (1964) describes narcissistic object relations in which the object is omnipotently incorporated into the self of the subject. Such relations are defenses against acknowledgement that there is a separation between self and object. Being aware of this separation will lead one to feel dependent on the object. However, dependency also stimulates envy when the goodness of the object is recognized. And Rosenfeld feels that narcissism is a defense against envy.

Rosenfeld (1964, 1971) differentiates between libidinal narcissism and destructive narcissism. Libidinal narcissism characteristically over-evaluates and idealizes the self. In narcissistic states in which libidinal aspects predominate, everything related to external objects and the outer world is part of the subject or is controlled by the subject.

When the destructive aspects of narcissism prevail, the destructive and omnipotent desires of the self will be idealized. Destructiveness will be more evident, envy more violent, and the self-destructive impulses will be far more obvious. Rosenfeld (1971) has shown that these destructive and omnipotent desires are hard to detect:

> The destructive omnipotent parts of the self often remain disguised or they may be silent and split off, which obscures their existences and gives the impressions that they have no relationship to the external world (p. 173).

Destructive narcissism is the expression of a destructive force. It is similar to the action of the Freudian death drive in patients whose psychopathology
is dominated by omnipotent and narcissistic object relations, as well as by negative therapeutic relationships. Destructive narcissism is considered to be one cause of impasse. Rosenfeld has thus established the need to recognize and analyze aggression and destructiveness as incorporated within the lives of narcissists. The veiled and silent ways in which aggression and destructiveness infiltrates transferences (and, I should add, counter-transferences) blocks analytic progress.

Years later Rosenfeld (1987, p. 303) says that Freud was right concerning the destructiveness of the death drive in patients and which it is impossible to struggle against.

Rosenfeld confirms that when destructive narcissism becomes a character trait, libidinal object relations and the desire to feel the need for an object are devalued and destroyed with pleasure. He suggests that Green’s negative narcissism is very similar to his observation of how destructive narcissism operates: i.e. it is directed against the libidinal links or the dependency links of the self and object, including primary objects (Rosenfeld, 1987, n. 6, p. 59).

The desobjectalizing movement (negative narcissism as the manifestation of the desobjectalizing function) occurs both in transference and counter-transference. Green has demonstrated these processes in detail in borderline cases in *Le travail du négatif* (1993).

Denis (2010) addresses negative transference, which he presents as characteristically monovalent. For Denis, the monovalent character of the overly hostile or overly erotic negative transference emerges when ambivalence disappears. In such conditions, if patients appear as overly hostile or overly erotic, they reveal themselves to be in potentially negative involution, and they put the analytic process at risk. The risk is that the analyst will also become monovalent in this process. For Denis, negative transference appears immediately as the only way the patient can ward off the overflowing of his ego and maintain a precarious minimal arrangement between force and meaning (p. 104).

Even though he addresses negative transference, Denis (2010) rejects the notion that the death drive is destructive energy. Denis agrees with Laplanche concerning the notion of the sexual death drive and that the Eros/Thanatos opposition introduces a functioning principle (1986)—or perhaps an organization/disorganization principle, rather than a drive opposition.

As far as I am concerned, I tend to think that the movements attributed to negative transference contain a destructive drive force in action.

**Subject and object**

We can consider the desobjectalizing function (Green, 1995a) as belonging to the transference-countertransference relationship if we remember that when the subject/object separation did not take place adequately, and at the proper time, the experience of destructiveness is immeasurable. Green reminds us that this happens when the threat of withdrawing love is greater than what the baby can tolerate. And this threat to the baby occasions intense destructive experiences related to this threat of lost love. The
reactions to this threat are desperate attempts at bringing the intolerable situation to a close, i.e. a bi-directional channeling of destructive energy coming from the failure to distinguish between subject and object (Green, 2002, p. 314). Internal anxiety and tension will be posited outward but within the setting. The darstellbarkeit (‘presentification’ [Kahn, 2012]) or the work of psychic ‘figurability’ (Botella and Botella, 2007 [2001]) will arise in analytic sessions and make an initial inscription possible (Chervet, 2013).

Of course, there are oscillations between fusion/non-distinction moments, and moments of separation-distinction. These situations allow us to understand that much fusion and separation is linked to the responses of the object and the consequences. As Green (2002, p. 321) maintains, the destruction of the drive is widely dependent on the answer of the object.

For Roussillon (2009, 2012), certain destructive features characterizing narcissistic and identity problems can be interpreted once one considers that part of a psychic process depends on what the subject other (the one who is being addressed) brings to the process, i.e. how the subject other responds.

The need for binding

Or . . . non-existence: the subject as a psychic being and the need for the psychoanalytic process

Inspired by the authors cited above, and having outlined an itinerary containing these authors’ pieces/proposals, I maintain that the psychic process, and the analytic process, emerges in a sequential movement beginning with what I shall call the driving kickoff: the beginning of the game, in a figurative sense. ‘There’s the kickoff!’ In this movement there is one body—the species’ instinkt. The body has its tensions, which, according to Freud, have their origin in homeostatic imbalance. The conjunction between body and sensations can be considered the kickoff. The sensations include two registers: an emotional/affective (pleasure-unpleasure) register, and the object in its temporal quality. In this process there is a functioning mode, with oscillations and motions that get connected and disconnected. The body itself demands representational work, and essentially the need for an object. The route initiated with this kickoff would be:

\[
\text{BODY } \rightarrow \text{ SENSATIONS } \rightarrow \text{ EMOTION/AFFECT } + \\
\text{OBJECT } \rightarrow \text{ REPRESENTATION } \rightarrow \text{ SYMBOLIZATION}
\]

Based on the affects that come on stage (in analysis) we establish representational networks. The demand for representation requires reality, i.e. there is a need that the object can provide real satisfaction, that it satisfies the desire sought from the other. For Freud (1900, Ch. 7), this desire is already present in the representation. True satisfaction should be thought of as the conjunction of specific actions and experiences, be they pleasing or painful, that Freud proposes in The Project (1895). Reality is anchored in specific action: i.e. it is the objective marker of the presence of the object, as Freud (1915) proposed.
There are, however, events not unlike bodily explosions that are bereft of psychic significance. They are similar to the non-sens Green mentions, as well as to the thing. The ingredients of these explosions can become psychically meaningful, but they need not. They can go on being meaningless, without representation. Our problem will be to distinguish between pleasure and unpleasure in a connected system, and pleasure and unpleasure in a system without representations. The affects that are not integrated with the representational network are unrepresentable. In the systems of representations we could have an indicator that is not qualitative (L. Kahn, 2012)? We could have another indicator that was not the qualitative (L. Kahn, 2012) in the systems of representations? The issue of affect’s quality is fundamental in the psychic process?

The body begins to exist based on the psychic

John, age 5, presents unconnected symptoms, with important developmental delays and encopresis (soiling). When his four times a week analytic treatment began, he could only say ‘Mama’ and some other incomprehensible words. One of his first actual words was his analyst’s name. His relationship with his mother was symbiotic. For months John would use the bathroom without shutting the door. He would move his bowels in every session, which made a stench in my consulting room that for me was almost unbearable. The stench invaded the consulting room, it invaded me ... John invaded me. But John had no idea of it. It was as if there was no difference between the odor coming from his body and that in the consulting room. There were no differences between him and me, between my nose and his.

One day John asked to be excused, went to the bathroom and shut the door. When he came out, he asked for the deodorizer so that I would not have to suffer the horrible smell. We were both somewhat surprised with this turn of events, and he smiled when I said to him that, by spraying the deodorizer in the consulting room he was now making it possible for me to smell something other than what he had let loose in the bathroom along with his feces. During the following month, smiling and proud of himself, he would spray the consulting room after a bowel movement.

Two months later he began to spray the deodorant inside the bathroom. At that point everything in the bathroom belonged to him. And he integrated even more: his feces was related to the smell, it was actually part of him.

The first step: body, evacuation, undifferentiated subject/other, John’s non-existence/undifferentiated and symbiotic

Without differentiation there can be no ego investment, just the silent workings and disinvestments of the death drive. As Green (1967) maintains, part of becoming a psychic process depends on the interpretation of the addressee or other subject. With a symbiotic mother there could be no interpretation of the other’s relation to the subject, nor of the subject’s relation to the other.

The second step: instituting differences and establishing causality
In John’s analysis, which lasted more than twelve years, the ego/non-ego differentiation process began to develop between John and his analyst by his recognition of the difference between two noses: ‘The body of the analyst is also called in this process’ (Falcão, 2013, p. 153).

At this point, when John had a bowel movement and closed the door to the bathroom, I could bear the unpleasant odor or not even notice. John started to exist both for himself and for me. The Mobius Strip is established (a double drive return and a primary decussation).

Harking back to Green, we find psychic work when a detour that favours an other is made: Green’s (1967) concept of the framing structure of the mother evokes the negative work of the mother in structuring the subject.

When John started spraying the deodorizer in my consulting room, beginning a movement to retain, he displayed a psychic expression that created an amalgamation and arose from a particular effort formed of an imperative to inscribe, where this is active in the core of psychic life and contrary to a return to a previous state (Chervet, 2013). All psychic advancement, Chervet reminds us, comes about through a detour, through time spent amalgamating and retaining value from the death and life drive. What is easiest is the closest perceptive features that are differentiated in their representation, in a double inscription.

The desobjectalizing function in the analytic treatment

To paraphrase Green on the objectalizing and desobjectalizing functions, I propose the term the psychic functions of the setting for the possibilities of transformations arising from the objectalizing function in the analytic process. The psychic functions of the setting are necessary for the analytic process to develop mediations of libidinal functions: i.e. to create connections, Eros, as well as the analyst’s drive activity.

In contrast, when the death drive brings about drive diffusion within the treatment, we end up with the desobjectalizing function of the analytic process, where disconnecting forces attack the analytic process creating resistance or death itself.

Which forces of the drive will win out in each analytic process? Given the drive antagonism of the psychic apparatus, how can we think about the crisscrossing and strengthening of the drive forces as a double drive return and a primary decussation (Green, 1967) within the setting? In the analytic process, should one consider clinical practice and transference and counter-transference to mean the return to one’s self through a detour brought on by confronting the familiar other? (See Green, 1988b)

Influenced by Winnicott (1969, 1971), Green (1972) proposed tertiary processes in which one finds three objects: two separate objects and another object corresponding to two objects’ union: the analytic object, which is a third object. This is the analytic third, an important concept used by diverse authors in contemporary psychoanalysis.

In clinical practice we use various techniques in dealing with transference and countertransference. The mental functioning experienced in the setting guides the analytic process: the mental functioning of the primary and
secondary processes, based on the drives of the analyst and patient. However, analytic work must also be based on movement, on the need for work, on fortitude, not just on the unconscious.

The death drive in the transference also appears when we face our desire to heal our patients and we cannot do it. We must recognize that our mental functioning is a source of pleasure, and that it is worth the expenditure of energy and libidinal investment needed in this solitary game (Parat, 1976). Why is it, then, that if we want to cure our patients we do not succeed? What gets in our way? Could we blame the violent action of the death drives in our psyche, which brings about our own blindness, our non-perceptions, our own disconnections? As Guillaumin (1998) suggests, could we consider this as a return to our primary identifications (made from non-mental incorporations)?

Could it be a case of representations exchanged between two different psychic apparatuses, outside their reciprocal connections? We must remember the Freudian paradoxes and permanent dialectics: the simultaneous presence of the death and life drive. And we must not forget the way Eros works to supplant the repetition compulsion that is activated towards destruction by Thanatos.

The desobjectalizing function is at work in interrupting the associative chain of discourse. The ego fragments, and this paralyzes the capacity to think thoughts (Bion, 1962). One avoids contact with the primary objects, which in the past attacked or abandoned the patient. The negative therapeutic reaction is an example of desobjectalizing whatever once was a link. Green’s dead mother syndrome (1980) is one clinical example.

Transference today is understood to be transference based on the past, transference coming from the present, hic et nunc (here and now), transference that transports (Green, 2011, p. 23). But on the same page Green describes transference as a double act: it addresses the word and it addresses the object: Green proposes that through the act of verbalization all psychic movements get translated. These movements bring with them something beyond the word that nonetheless infiltrates the path of the word.

Contemporary psychoanalytic technique rests on interpreting the repressed content of neurotic patients, as well as interpreting a patient who at times presents in a neurotic way. Psychoanalysis seeks to rescue the child the patient once was, to bring out what was repressed and whatever psychic apparatus did not undergo damage from the destructive drive. But for those patients who did not build tissues, they will need an object present, one who turns the analyst’s act (Green, 1974) into a drive movement that mobilizes something inside the patient. This something to be mobilized may be formless (Kahn, 2012), the unrepresentable state (Botella and Botella, 2007 [2001]), something under construction (Falcão, 2008), or something adjacent to that thing that one day in the past was apprehended by a sensorial apparatus that was not yet able to make connections.

At a 2012 conference in Porto Alegre, Jacques André wondered whether the practical matter could be formulated as follows: could psychoanalysis and transferential dynamics teach someone who could not play with a bobbin, who could not deal with separation/disappearance?
To this I would add: can whatever was desobjectalized once more become objectalized? We cannot say yes or no with any conviction. In some analytic processes, in transferential and countertransferential situations, we attain movements that may eventually lead to objectalization, e.g. defecating after shutting the bathroom door.

How does this happen? Through the *psychic functions of the setting* in which the objectalizing function takes place. If patients do not know how to play, they need an analyst who knows how to play and, even more, is *available* and wants to play. Child and adolescent analyses let me play and allow me to expand the potential space of the setting, so as to include the objectalizing function. Without this function, there can be no creation.

The technical approach to the death drive within the analytic setting will, necessarily, require narcissistic investment—libido in the *ego* and libido in the *object*. This entails drive investment in the setting. By libido in the *ego* I mean investment in the analyst’s ego, which suffered an attack from the destructive drives of the patient, as well as those of the analyst. To oppose the force of the death drive that searches for a return to a previous state by disconnecting, the psyche will need the life drive to mobilize its narcissism (Green, 2011, p. 381).

In order for the analytic relationship to begin through investiture, the analyst often needs to make the *kickoff*: to inaugurate, to invent a way of speaking about the matter at hand when the patient has no means in this area.

Analytic technique requires a *work by double* (Botella and Botella, 2007 [2001]), a capacity for reverie (Bion, 1959a, 1962), and these movements will only come about if the analyst is ready to *play*. Without that summoning, without a *live discourse* (Green, 1973, 1979), no technique will neutralize any action of the death drive. Live discourse summons/ connects/activates affect. It wards off death-producing silence and turns the analyst into a creative person who is able to work in a potential space. It is within this space, Green claims, that the analytic word takes the speech out of mourning (Green, 1983b): by which he uses ‘speech’ to refer to the silent, dead aspects that had not been woven into words. Owing to the *metaphorizing function* of the word within the setting, there is a possibility that we may access the word’s *polysemic metaphorization*.

With the death and destructive drives prevailing in the setting, disconnection will tend toward zero tension, toward the psychic de-existence of the analytic process (Farias, 2012) and to non-relation and the failure of the transference-countertransference relationship, i.e. the *desobjectalizing function* of the analytic process. Keeping in mind Green’s notion of negative narcissism, I (Falcão, 2014) propose that *death in life comes about and takes over*—silencing and paralyzing the libido, which stops its movements in the *psychic apparatus* since it cannot engage in a give and take with the other. Death narcissism is death in a non-life. It is psychic non-constitution, the analytic non-processes.

As many psychoanalysts even today believe, death and life drives may be Freudian myths, but myths are also our frames of reference. These were Freud’s speculations from 1920. They accompanied him, evolved and
formed into a concept that he worked on up until his final days. Clinical data and social and cultural phenomena confirmed these speculations for Freud. Shortly before his death, he wrote:

Thus it may in general be suspected that the individual dies of his internal conflicts but that the species dies of its unsuccessful struggle against the external world if the latter changes in a fashion which cannot be adequately dealt with by the adaptations which the species has acquired (1938, p. 150, italics in the original).

References


Freud S (1914a). Remembering, repeating and working-through. SE 12, 145–156.
Freud S (1920). Beyond the pleasure principle. SE 18:3–64.


