



# Research Repository

## Regression, Nekyia , and Involution in the Thought of Jung and Deleuze

Accepted for publication in Paul Bishop, Terence Dawson, Leslie Gardner (eds.) 2023. The Descent of the Soul and the Archaic Katábasis and Depth Psychology. Routledge. London.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032617060>

**Research Repository link:** <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/40720/>

### Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite this paper.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003054139-15/regression-nekyia-involution-thought-jung-deleuze-christian-mcmillan>

# Regression, Nekyia, and involution in the thought of Jung and Deleuze

## Introduction

In his *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, Christian Kerslake writes that '[t]he notion of a 'second birth', rebirth or renaissance is fundamental to the work of Gilles Deleuze from the beginning'.<sup>i</sup> Kerslake adds that 'large tracts of Jung's *Symbols and Transformations of the Libido* (*Symbole und Wandlungen der Libido*) (1911–1912) (the work to which Deleuze most frequently refers) are devoted to the myth of rebirth which Jung discovers in the background to the mythologies handed down by history' (p. 81). The myth of the hero who enters on a 'night sea journey' (Nekyia – the Journey into Hades) is one that preoccupied the work of Deleuze (1925–1995) and his collaborator Félix Guattari (1930–1992).

This chapter considers the extent to which the early conceptual affinities evident in Jung's influence on Deleuze persist through later works written by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. It is argued that the early conceptual affinities are exclusively psychological in character and gravitate around a common theme concerning symbolic death and rebirth. Jung's articulation of a 'night sea journey' (Nekyia) in *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916)<sup>ii</sup> can be identified in Deleuze's 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism' (1961)<sup>iii</sup> in which Masoch is entranced and transformed by an encounter with the image of Venus in furs.<sup>iv</sup> This is Deleuze's early notion of katabasis although he does not refer to psychological transformation by this term. Deleuze openly criticises Freud in his reading of Masoch's transformation and this criticism is informed by his reading of Jung's early work.

Building on the work of others, I argue that there is a clear evidence for a Deleuzian adoption of what one might call a 'Jungian reading' of Freud's death instinct and that this reading has strong resonances with Deleuze's concept of 'involution' which he will use in later works to describe transformation, not only in a psychological register, but also in a biological-vitalistic context and even as a vital-materialist principle. Involution is a concept that Jung first refers to in *The Psychology of the Unconscious* when discussing the night-sea journey and I speculate that Deleuze might first have learned of this concept from his close reading of this work in the early part of his academic career.

## Deleuze on Jung: Early influences and conceptual affinities.

In his 1961 commentary on Sacher-Masoch (1835–1895) and the nature of masochism Deleuze writes:

As Jung demonstrated, incest signifies the second birth, that is to say a heroic birth, a parthenogenesis (entering a second time into the maternal breast in order to be born anew or to become a child again). (*SMM*, pp. 129–130)

Although Deleuze scatters references to Jung throughout most of his core works, in this chapter I want to return to some of Deleuze's earliest work; work in which he is arguably at his most 'Jungian'.<sup>v</sup> In his article 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism' Deleuze demonstrates a very strong commitment to a number of Jung's ideas. Kerslake has translated Deleuze's article into English and he writes that in the article 'we find Deleuze entranced by Jung's labyrinthine 1912 book *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*'.<sup>vi</sup> Furthermore he states that Deleuze's central thesis in the article 'is that masochism must be conceived as a *perverse realisation of the fantasy of incest* – on condition that incest is taken in its "more profound" significance as a symbol of rebirth, as Jung claims' (*SMM*, p. 135). In his article on masochism Deleuze argues that Freud was unable to understand the role of the 'image' of

the mother in masochism, preferring the interiorisation of the image of the Father following from its reexteriorisation in the image of woman:

Freudian psychoanalysis in general suffers from an inflation of the father. In the case of masochism in particular, we have to perform some astonishing gymnastics to explain how the image of the Father is first of all interiorised in the superego, and then re-exteriorised in an image of a woman. It is as if Freudian interpretations are often only able to reach the most superficial and most individualised levels of the unconscious. They do not enter into the profound dimensions where the image of the Mother reigns in its own terms, without owing anything to the influence of the father. (*SMM*, p. 128)

Deleuze claims that Jung valued the meaning and importance of the image of the mother, this in turn emerging from Jung's discovery and investigation of the role of a 'deeper unconscious':

That there are very different levels of the unconscious, of unequal origin and value, arousing regressions which differ in nature, which have relations of opposition, compensation and reorganisation going on between them: this principle dear to Jung was never recognised by Freud because the latter reduced the unconscious to the simple fact of desiring. So one ends up seeing alliances of consciousness with the superficial layers of the unconscious, while the deeper unconscious which encircles us in a tie of blood is held in check. (*SMM*, p. 128)

Hence, there is a subjective relation to the maternal imago which operates at the deepest level of the unconscious. Deleuze follows Jung by referring to the relation with the 'deeper unconscious' as 'subjective' as opposed to 'objective'. Jung's distinction can be identified from *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (1928) where, with respect to dream interpretation, he states; 'Interpretation on the subjective level is synthetic, because it detaches the underlying memory-complexes from their external causes, regards them as tendencies or components of the subject, and reunites them with that subject.'<sup>vii</sup> In his affirmation of Jung's synthetic method, Deleuze distances himself from Freud's 'reductive' approach and permits the 'original Images' (*SMM*, p. 131) of the deeper unconscious to remain beyond all possible experience whilst also being the very condition of *real* experience; transcendent and immanent.<sup>viii</sup> By 'real' experience Deleuze intends a kind of experience which does not presuppose a 'subject' in the phenomenological sense; one involving a transcendental unity of apperception.<sup>ix</sup> Indeed, it is this very search for conditions of real experience (transcendental empiricism)<sup>x</sup> which drives much of Deleuze's philosophical experimentation, an experimentation in which the conditions of real experience are investigated in different registers relating to the unconscious, matter and time.

A condition of real experience has a problematic structure and Deleuze's preoccupation in 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism' is the problematic structure of the image of the Mother; problematic because it is never fully exhausted by its expressions. This correlates with Jung's notion of the productive power of the symbol which is never reducible to or exhausted by one of its representations. In other words, the solution (representation/expression) is never adequate to the problem (symbol). With respect to the early work on masochism, Deleuze appears to view masochism as an exemplary instance of the manner in which a "paradoxical" experience can initiate a regression that terminates in a "symbol" or "original Image" bearing no apparent relationship to the actual experiences of the affected individual. Such an image remains irreducible to reality, "surreal"; and this is the

source of its potentially “revolutionary” value as manifest in Masoch’s own fantasies, and of its therapeutic value if handled correctly, but also, finally, of its extraordinary danger for the subject, him or herself. The problem-solution dynamic is one Deleuze continues to explore in *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and *The Logic of Sense* (1969).

In *Proust and Signs* (1964), written four years before *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze appears to broaden the Jungian notion of ‘original image’ to include encounters with empirical objects that occasion a paradoxical experience. A paradoxical object can now engender regression in what Deleuze refers to, following Marcel Proust (1871-1922) as an ‘involuntary encounter’. He claims: ‘The real theme of a work [of art] is therefore not the subject the words designate, but the unconscious themes, the involuntary archetypes in which the words, but also the colours and the sounds, assume their meaning and their life. Art is a veritable transmutation of substance’.<sup>xi</sup> Here the paradoxical object may be a work of art itself, one which has a destabilising influence and problematic structure which is generative of something radically new and transformative. A few years later in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze recapitulates this point suggesting:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined, or conceived. (*DR*, p. 139)

Proust’s encounter with the madeleine from his *In Search of Lost Time* (1913) would later become paradigmatic of such an experience in Deleuze’s work, along with several Platonic examples tied to recollection, notably in the *Phaedo* and Book Seven of the *Republic*. In this later theory, such paradoxical experiences can initiate a process within the psyche that terminates in something analogous to what Deleuze will call a “transcendent exercise” of the faculties, that is, their exercise in relation to objects that they themselves synthesize. The transcendent exercise of the faculties; an individuation and process of transformation, an exercise which is forced – is wholly incompatible with the ordinary coordination of the faculties according to the rules of empirical “common sense”. Kerslake suggests that ‘the path of individuation necessarily involves a series of ‘transcendent exercises’ of the mind carried out beyond conceptual representation, in which unconscious Ideas emerge to shape and reshape the consciousness of the subject (who is both a thinking and passive subject).’<sup>xii</sup> Involution, another term for the journey that begins on the basis of a paradoxical encounter, gestures to the emergence of a symbiotic field, or what Deleuze would occasionally refer to in subsequent works as the ‘transcendental field’ that allows assignable relations between disparate things to come into play

In ‘From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism’ Deleuze claims that only Jung was able to grasp the process of return or ‘regression’ as it functions in perversions and psychic disorders (p. 128). By ‘perversion’ Deleuze intends something quite different from its more common reduction to the abnormal or pathological. Kazarian has investigated Deleuze’s use of perversion as it appears in *The Logic of Sense*. He notes; ‘The issue of perversion is not an issue to be addressed at the level of the subject, but rather in terms of a conception of the unconscious and desire that is analogous to the “impersonal” transcendental field.’<sup>xiii</sup> In this instance, the transcendental field is a new register for what has appeared in *SMM* as the ‘deeper unconscious’. The perversion of the masochist in *SMM* and the type of perversion discussed throughout *The Logic of Sense* are different only by degree. Deleuze articulates that

‘perversion is not defined by the force of a certain desire in the system of drives, the pervert is not someone who desires, but someone who introduces desire into an entirely different system and makes it play, within this system, the role of an internal limit’ (*SMM*, p. 304).<sup>xiv</sup> The introduction of desire by Masoch into the problematic ‘system’ engendered by an encounter with the Image of the Mother (mediated by the image of Venus in furs)<sup>xv</sup>, will be transformative precisely because it destabilises the ego. Deleuze challenges the idea that the form of the ‘I’ is somehow innate and he condemns the Kantian notion that at the heart of subjectivity there must be some seat of synthesis such as the transcendental unity of apperception which performs the function of synthesis presupposed as necessary for possible experience.<sup>xvi</sup> Masoch’s encounter with the Image of the Mother entails that the ego/subject is brought into contact with the impersonal unconscious to encounter non-subjective forces which are transformative of the ego/subject. In very general terms these forces can be aligned with conditions of *real* experience as opposed to conditions of possible experience, the latter presupposing some unified synthesising agency responsible for the world of representation and recognition. Furthermore, Deleuze’s interpretation of perversion in ‘From Sacher-masoch to Masochism’ involves the use of desire as an internal limit with which to confront constituted systems and habits, the elements of which are arranged in a sedentary and largely unchanging manner. Kazarian (1998) comments that it is ‘[t]he pervert’s aim is to avoid fixity and completeness, stable and harmonious distributions as such’.<sup>xvii</sup>

Returning to the context of Sacher Masoch’s masochism, when Deleuze invokes the image of Venus in furs he argues that ‘regression’ to an Image refers to a transmutation, a kind of katabasis or rebirth.<sup>xviii</sup> This is a regression to the ‘problem’ of the Mother, a kind of perversion which is revolutionary because of its transformative effects. These effects concern the potential to overturn patriarchy and three characteristics of masochism are necessary for this end to be realised to some extent, as Deleuze interrogates it.<sup>xix</sup> Firstly the aesthetic origins of the masochistic fantasy; ‘It is when the senses take works of art for their objects that they become masochistic for the first time. It is through Renaissance paintings that the power and musculature of a woman wrapped in furs is revealed to Masoch.’<sup>xx</sup> Secondly the juridical forms by which the fantasy is realised and thirdly the mythological and historical contexts in which the first two characteristics find stability, involving, for example ‘allusions to an epoch of beautiful Nature, to an archaic world presided over by Venus Aphrodite, where the fleeting relationship between woman and man has pleasure between equal partners as its only law.’<sup>xxi</sup>

Of these characteristics it is the second that appears most significant for Deleuze in terms of the role it might play in challenging the patriarchal order (and psychoanalytic discourses which privilege the Father).<sup>xxii</sup> This characteristic revolves around the role of the contract in masochism; ‘the contract here expresses the material predominance of the woman and the superiority of the maternal principle.’<sup>xxiii</sup> This contract is the ‘subversive double of the [patriarchal] marriage contract’.<sup>xxiv</sup> Under ordinary circumstances, claims Deleuze, the patriarchal marriage contract is ‘made to express and even justify the notion that there is something non-material, spiritual or instituted in the relations of authority and association which are established between men, including between father and son.’<sup>xxv</sup> By contrast, the subversive contract of Masoch recapitulates the sense of dependence (‘chthonic tie’)<sup>xxvi</sup> between mother and child; it expresses the material predominance of the woman and the superiority of the maternal principle.<sup>xxvii</sup> The aim of this new contract, within the regressive fantasy of the masochist, is to restore gynocracy; ‘He who unearths the Anima enters on this regression: all the more terrible for being repressed, the Anima will know how to turn patriarchal structures to its own advantage and rediscover the power of the devouring Mother.’<sup>xxviii</sup> On the basis of this Deleuze avers that the ‘true man’ will emerge from the ‘ordeals of a restored gynocracy’.<sup>xxix</sup> Deleuze refers to Johann Jakob Bachofen’s *Mother*

*Right* (1861) and Pierre Gordon's *Sex and Religion* (1949) to offer speculative insights into a primal historical epoch regarding the existence of a gynocracy which gave way to patriarchy in the time of Rome and beyond.<sup>xxx</sup> The notion of a repressed matriarchal law, with its specific social forms and symbolic and ritual structures, is significant as a historical phenomenon, but Deleuze does not pursue this, preferring instead to read this as a 'speculative *historicisation* (a kind of transcendental illusion) extrapolated from tendencies at work within the temporal matrix of the Oedipal triangle', according to Kerslake.<sup>xxxi</sup> It is the *regressive fantasy* itself which is of most significance, the means by which 'Masoch dreams of using patriarchy itself in order to restore gynocracy in order to restore primitive communism.'<sup>xxxii</sup>

Some influences of Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* and *Symbols of Transformation*<sup>xxxiii</sup> are evident in Deleuze's references to regressive fantasy and gynocracy in *SMM*. Notably, it is the theme of rebirth (and symbolic death) which accompany a 'night journey to the sea'<sup>xxxiv</sup> (or 'night sea journey': Nekyia)<sup>xxxv</sup> that is of significance. Jung's use of the idea of the night-sea journey (*die Nachtmeerfahrt*) can be attributed to the ethnologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) where he describes the journey in his book, *Das Zeitalter Des Sonnengottes* (*The Age of the Sun God*), first published in 1904.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Whether Deleuze was familiar with this text or not is unknown. Nonetheless, the influence of symbols of an archetypal Mother which are encountered on this journey and which involve rebirth is a theme which informs Deleuze's work well beyond his early, 'Jungian' phase as detailed in the *Sacher-Masoch to Masochism* essay. In what follows I turn to a concept that Deleuze introduces in some of his later works and which continues to exemplify the themes of rebirth that have been recounted thus far.

## Nekyia and involution

At no point in the *Psychology of the Unconscious* does Jung employ the term 'Nekyia' directly. Yet, a comment from 'The Dual Mother Role' expresses what Jung will come to refer to as Nekyia in subsequent works. Jung relates that the place of 'katabasis' is symbolic of the 'descent into the lower world'.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Somewhat later, in his monograph on 'Picasso' (first published in 1932 which accompanies his critical examination of James Joyce's *Ulysses*)<sup>xxxviii</sup> Jung articulates Nekyia as a 'journey into Hades, the descent into the unconscious and the leave taking from the upper world' (p. 138).<sup>xxxix</sup> Furthermore, this Nekyia journey is 'no aimless and truly destructive fall into the abyss but a meaningful *katabasis*, a descent into the cave of initiation and secret knowledge' (ibid., p. 139). Evidently, the relationship between the night sea journey and a descent into the unconscious are closely related and involve a process of katabasis.

Having introduced these terms, I want to offer one more: involution. Appearing far less than the term Nekyia in the *Collected Works*, involution makes an appearance in the *Psychology of the Unconscious* in a crucial passage where Jung articulates the night sea journey with his customary literary flare and also in a diagrammatic form drawing from the work of Frobenius.<sup>xl</sup> The stages of this journey are as follows: 1) The devouring of the hero by a water monster in the West. 2) The hero lights a fire in the belly of the beast and cuts part of its heart to quell hunger. 3) The sea-monster becomes beached on the shore. 4) The hero cuts free of the sea-monster and slides out. 5). The hero has lost his hair given the heat inside the sea-monster. 6). The hero frees other captives devoured by the sea-monster. Jung indicates that there is a link between being devoured and the endurance of heat which, as we have seen, the hero suffers in the belly of the beast. To be devoured and endure heat in the context of psychological regression is captured by the term 'involution' to which I return momentarily.

Whilst considering the etymology of related terms in a passage from ‘Symbolism of Mother and of Rebirth’ it is worth recounting that Jung spends much of this chapter reflecting on maternal symbols as they occur in sun-myths and related religious myths. These symbols of the mother include the chest, the sea, water, the city and the tree of life. The notion of entwining or being entwined is raised as a symbolic example of rebirth by Jung:

There is an Indo-Germanic root, *vélu*, *vel-*, with the meaning of “encircling, surrounding, turning.” From this is derived Sanskrit *val*, *valati* = to cover, to surround, to encircle, to encoil (symbol of the snake); *vallî* = creeping plant; *ûluta* = boa-constrictor = Latin *vulûtus*, Lithuanian *velù*, *velti* = wickeln (to roll up); Church Slavonian *vlina* = Old High German, *wella* = *Wella* (wave or billow). To the root *vélu* also belongs the root *vlvo*, with the meaning “cover, conum, womb (The serpent on account of its casting its skin is an excellent symbol of rebirth.) Sanskrit *ulva*, *ulba* has the same meaning, Latin *volva*, *volvula*, *vulva*. To *vélu* also belongs the root *ulvorâ*, with the meaning of “fruitful field, covering or husk of plants, sheath.” Sanskrit *urvârâ* = sown field. Zend *urvara* = plant. (See the personification of the ploughed furrow.) The same root *vel* has also the meaning of “wallen” (to undulate). Sanskrit *ulmuka* = conflagration. *ῥαλέα*, *ῥέλα*, Gothic *vulan* = wallen (to undulate). Old High German and Middle High German *walm* = heat, glow. It is typical that in the state of “involution” the hair of the sun-hero always falls out from the heat. Further the root *vel* is found with the meaning “to sound, and to will, to wish” (libido!).<sup>xli</sup>

Jung continues that the ‘motif of entwining is a mother symbol.’<sup>xlii</sup> Venus wrapped in furs is an image which entrances Masoch and, as Deleuze relates, ‘furs have multiple meanings’. To reduce these meanings to a paternal image would be ‘singularly devoid of foundation’ [...] as ‘fur is first of all a directly maternal symbol, indicating the refolding of the law in the feminine principle.’<sup>xliii</sup> Wrapped, entwined, encircled; Masoch dreams of being devoured by ‘the fur of the despotic and devouring mother who establishes the gynocratic order.’<sup>xliv</sup> Masoch the hero on a night sea journey towards rebirth; Masoch, another version of the sun-hero.

Involution and libido are revisited by Jung in his *Symbols of Transformation*. He links them directly in the following passage:

It is as if the libido were not only a ceaseless forward movement, an unending will for life, evolution, creation, such as Schopenhauer envisaged in his cosmic Will, where death is a mishap or fatality coming from outside; like the sun, the libido also wills its own descent, its own involution.<sup>xlv</sup>

Deleuze will make much of the notion of involution as a form of becoming. Like Jung, Deleuze regards involution as a descent or regression (*Nekyia*), but one which is anything but a return to a less differentiated state. Recalling the experience of Masoch and his ‘regression’ Deleuze asserts:

In masochism, *regression* to the mother is “like the pathological protest of a part of ourselves that has been wrecked by the law; but regression also conceals and contains possibilities for a compensating or normative *progression* of this same part, as one can glimpse in the masochistic fantasy of rebirth” (*SMM* 131).’

The endpoint of this kind of regression is symbolic death as rebirth and Deleuze is keen to

point out that this kind of death must be distinguished from what he regards as Freud's assertion that the death instinct involves a return to a state of inanimate matter. In *SMM* he claims that Freud was right to recognise that the nature of instinct consists solely in regression and that the only difference between instincts of life and death for example lies in the terminus of the regression (p. 131). Yet, argues Deleuze, it 'was not left to him [Freud] to grasp the role of original Images'. It is these Images (symbols) which are the 'terminus of each regression' and '[i]nstances are simply internal perceptions of original images'. Within this Jungian account of Freud's death instinct, Deleuze relates that death must be understood as symbolic death, and 'the return to matter as a return to the symbolic mother'. Jung was an important catalyst for Jung's thinking on the death instinct, making certain moves in *The Psychology of the Unconscious* the effects of which would ripple through psychoanalysis. His inspiration for this thinking is arguably due to the influence of Sabina Spielrein (1885-1942). In *Symbols of Transformation* he comments that the terrible mother devours and destroys and symbolises death itself and that it was '[t]his fact led my pupil Dr. Spielrein to develop her idea of the death-instinct, which was then taken up by Freud. In my opinion it is not so much a question of a death-instinct as of that "other" instinct (Goethe) which signifies spiritual life.' (p. 328, n. 38). Jung undertook what one might call a 'holistic approach' towards the instincts that would be taken up by Freud in his paper On Narcissism (1914) and his rejection was necessary for the emergence of the split between the life and death instincts.<sup>xlvi</sup> Jung abolishes the dualistic structure of the instincts that was necessary for psychoanalytic theory and his genetic standpoint makes the multiplicity of instincts arise from a relative unity from the Ur-libido. The recognition of such displaceable libidinal contributions was incompatible with the view that in the repressed the ego and the id, as two essentially different kinds of instinct, were at work. On a related note, in 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious' Jung writes; '[s]ince the so-called destructive instinct is also a phenomenon of energy, it seems to me simpler to define libido as an inclusive term for psychic intensities, and consequently as sheer psychic energy.'<sup>xlvi</sup>

Regression as symbolic death is not isolated in Deleuze's works to *SMM*. In his seminal work, *Difference and Repetition* written seven years later, he remarks that 'Freud strangely refused any other dimension to death, any prototype or any presentation of death in the unconscious, even though he conceded the existence of such prototypes for birth and castration.'<sup>xlvi</sup> In this instance 'prototypes' are substituted for 'original images'. Nonetheless, the meaning remains largely unchanged between the two texts and Deleuze restates his critical commentary on what he considered to be lacking in Freud's conceptualisation of the death instinct: 'Death does not appear in the objective model of an indifferent inanimate matter to which the living would 'return'; it is present in the living in the form of a subjective and differentiated experience endowed with its own prototype.'<sup>xlvi</sup> The prototype that is 'death' is 'the last form of the problematic, the source of problems and questions, the sign of their persistence over and above every response'.<sup>1</sup> As he makes these remarks we can assume that that Deleuze still has Jung in mind when elsewhere in *DR* he writes; 'Was not one of the most important points of Jung's theory already to be found here: the force of "questioning in the unconscious, the conception of the unconscious as an unconscious of "problems" and "tasks"?'<sup>li</sup>

Regression is not a return to the inanimate and involution must also not be confused with a movement towards the less differentiated. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), a work Deleuze co-authored with Felix Guattari, the writer's comment on what involution entails when considered in relation to evolution:

[...] becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation [...] It concerns alliance. If evolution



includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of symbioses that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. [...] Accordingly, the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is “involution”, on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involu-tionary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line “between” terms in play and beneath assignable relations.<sup>lii</sup>

The nature of becoming as related by Deleuze and Guattari in this passage has much in common with Jung’s assertion that libido ‘wills its own descent’. The regression/involution which characterises this notion of descent is underpinned by a philosophy which Deleuze seeks to articulate in many registers (the psychological, the aesthetic, biological and the material). Involution does not presuppose a differentiable totality from which one becomes less differentiated. Nor does it presuppose an original, organised unity which is then lost and to which a return is deemed essential.<sup>liii</sup> In other words, the creative nature of involution concerns movement by alliance in a direction which cannot be determined in advance. Masoch becomes involutory when he encounters an original image which prompts his descent and spiritual re-birth. For Deleuze, the resulting katabasis is one which enables a challenge to the patriarchal order itself and this challenge could not have been determined or even envisaged in advance. In Deleuze’s Jungian reading of Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* the alliance which is formed between Masoch and the image of the Mother leads to a rebirth which is revolutionary in the sense that something genuinely new emerges, a novel alliance.

### Concluding remarks

Whether libido is considered in the narrower psychological sense, libido as a vitalistic life principle<sup>liv</sup>, or libido as a material-vitalism<sup>lv</sup>, these different registers belie the same philosophical approaches within the work of Jung and Deleuze with respect to symbolic death and spiritual rebirth. The Neykia journey of Psychological regression and involution as a material vital principle in which there is a ‘return’ to a power to forge new alliances which cut across different phyletic lineages may be processes which occur in different registers, but the process of regression-involution remains the same. There is no ‘return’ to the inanimate because there is no *a priori* assumption that death is synonymous with an entropic state of lifelessness. This insight is given its fullest philosophical expression in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* where he equates the notion of return with a form of repetition which can be defined by what it is not; a ‘material, bare and brute repetition understood as the repetition of the same’.<sup>lvi</sup> The Freudian conception of the death instinct understood as a return to the inanimate remains, says Deleuze, ‘is inseparable from the positing of an ultimate term, the model of a material and bare repetition and the conflictual dualism of between life and death’.<sup>lvii</sup> From where did Deleuze derive this idea? As we have seen, its most likely source was Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious* and it finds itself re-imagined in different registers and concepts throughout Deleuze’s work, one of the most important of which was involution. It is also noteworthy that in some of his earliest and final works, Jung approaches the idea symbolic death within the context of the quasi-vitalist notion of the ‘psychoid’.<sup>lviii</sup> Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer any insight into the relationship between the psychoid and involution, it is enough to suggest that further resonances may exist between these two concepts which can and should be subjected to further investigation.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> C. Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*. London: Continuum Press, 2007, p. 81.
- <sup>ii</sup> C.G. Jung, [1912/1916], *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, tr. B.M. Hinkle, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co. 1949.
- <sup>iii</sup> G. Deleuze, 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism', tr. C. Kerslake, *Angelaki* 9 (1), Apr. 2004, 125-133. Originally published as "De Sacher Masoch au masochisme" in *Arguments*, 5e année, no. 21, 1er trimestre (1961): pp. 40-46. Hereafter *SMM*.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Venus in Furs* is also a novella by Ritter von Leopold Sacher-Masoch, first published in 1870.
- <sup>v</sup> Cf. C. Kerslake, 'Deleuze and the Jungian Unconscious' in C. Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*. London: Continuum Press, 2007, p. 69.
- <sup>vi</sup> C. Kerslake, 'Rebirth through incest', *Angelaki*, 9 (1), Apr. 2004, 135-157 (p. 135).
- <sup>vii</sup> C.G. Jung, 'The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious' [1928], in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* [Collected Works, vol. 7, tr. R.F.C. Hull], 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 113-169 (p. 130). Cf. G. Deleuze, 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism', p. 132, n. 13. Cf. E.P. Kazarian, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', *Substance* 39 (2), 2010, 91-106, (p. 102).
- <sup>viii</sup> G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], tr. P. Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 163. Hereafter *DR*. Cf. Kazarian, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', p. 92.
- <sup>ix</sup> Kazarian summarises: 'To make "possible experience" is to subject experience to the conditions of self-identity, and to subject sensibility to the rigours of conceptual representation. Real experience, on the contrary, does not depend on the presence of a transcendental ego but upon a "virtual" transcendental field, equivalent to the unconscious.' 'Deleuze, Perversion and Politics', *International Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1), 1998, 91-106, (p. 101).
- <sup>x</sup> For example Deleuze comments: 'Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity.' (*DR*, p. 57).
- <sup>xi</sup> G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* [1964], tr. R. Howard, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 47.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, p. 96.
- <sup>xiii</sup> 'Deleuze, Perversion and Politics', p. 96.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Cf. Kazarian, 'Deleuze, Perversion and Politics', p. 95
- <sup>xv</sup> On the symbolism of fur in which Venus is wrapped and by which Masoch is entranced Deleuze states: 'fur is first of all a directly maternal symbol, indicating the refolding of the law in the feminine principle, the *mater Natura* threatened by the ambition of her sons.' *SMM*, p. 127.
- <sup>xvi</sup> See G. Deleuze, 'The Image of Thought', in G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], tr. P. Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 129-167.
- <sup>xvii</sup> 'Deleuze, Perversion and Politics', p. 98.
- <sup>xviii</sup> See *SMM*, p. 130.
- <sup>xix</sup> See *SMM*, p. 126; Cf. Kazarian, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', p. 92.
- <sup>xx</sup> *SMM*, p. 126
- <sup>xxi</sup> *SMM*, p. 127.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Deleuze writes: 'It therefore seems very doubtful that the image of the Father in masochism has the role which Freud gives it. Freudian psychoanalysis in general suffers from an inflation of the father.' *SMM*, p. 128.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *SMM*, p. 126.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Kazarian, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', p. 97.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *SMM*, p. 126.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *SMM*, p. 126.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *SMM*, p. 126.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *SMM*, p. 127.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *SMM*, p. 127. On the notion of the 'ordeal' in masochism Deleuze writes, 'the castration of Attis or Osiris, being swallowed up by a whale-dragon or a gluttonous fish, being bitten by a serpent, being suspended from a maternal tree, all these symbols of return to the Mother signify the necessity of sacrificing the genital sexuality inherited from the father, in order to obtain the rebirth or renaissance which will equip us with a new and independent virility.' *SMM*, p. 130.

---

<sup>xxx</sup> *SMM*, p. 127. Cf. Kerslake, 'Rebirth through incest', p. 146; Kazarian, 'The Revolutionary Unconscious: Deleuze and Masoch', pp. 98-99.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Kerslake, 'Rebirth through incest', p. 146.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *SMM*, p. 127.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> C.G. Jung, [1912] *Symbols of Transformation*, [Collected Works, vol. 5, tr. R.F.C. Hull], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 237; p. 240; p. 245; p. 267; p. 273; p. 277; p. 351; p. 384; p. 392.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 210; p. 212; p. 218; p. 233; p. 236; p. 243; p. 316; p. 331; p. 350; p. 358; p. 371.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Cf. P. Bishop. *Analytical Psychology and German Classical Aesthetics: Goethe, Schiller and Jung*, vol. 1, London & New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 34.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 399. Cf. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 365.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> See C.G. Jung, 'Picasso' [1932] in *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, [Collected Works, vol. 15, tr. R.F.C. Hull], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 135-141.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Jung says: 'Nekyia is therefore is an apt designation for the "journey to Hades," the descent into the land of the dead'. 'Individual Dream Symbolism in relation to Alchemy [1936] in *Psychology and Alchemy* [Collected Works, vol. 12, tr. R.F.C. Hull], 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, pp. 41-223 (p. 53, n. 2). Jung goes on to say that his use of the term is derived from the work of Albrecht Dieterich (1866-1908) and his commentary on the Codex of Akhmim. Dieterich, A. *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse*. Leipzig and Berlin, 1913.

<sup>xl</sup> See Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 238.

<sup>xli</sup> Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 278. Cf. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 245.

<sup>xlii</sup> *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 245.

<sup>xliii</sup> *SMM*, p. 127.

<sup>xliv</sup> *SMM*, p. 127.

<sup>xliv</sup> Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 438.

<sup>xlvi</sup> According to Fátima Caropreso, Sabina Spielrein was another who did not subscribe to this: 'Thus, [Spielrein] maintains the opposition between the ego drives and sexual drives and places the death instinct within these two. This latter instinct would not seek the annihilation of life, would not aim to completely eliminate stimulation, as Freud proposed in 1920, but would in fact attempt to destroy the Self; the transformation of *Self* into *Us*. The hypothesis of the inseparability between destruction and creation means that, for Spielrein, there is no purely negative drive, which is part of the Freudian theory.' 'The death drive according to Sabrina Spielrein', *Piscologia USP*, 27 (3), 2016, 414-419, (p. 418).

<sup>xlvii</sup> Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Unconscious' [1917/1926/1943] in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, [Collected Works, vol. 7, tr. R.F.C. Hull], 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 9-119 (p. 53, n. 6).

<sup>xlviii</sup> *DR*, p. 111.

<sup>xlix</sup> *DR*, p. 112

<sup>i</sup> *DR*, p. 112.

<sup>li</sup> Deleuze, *DR*, p. 161. Cf. Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>lii</sup> G. Deleuze, 'Becoming Intense, Becoming Animal' [1980], in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. B. Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 238-239.

<sup>liii</sup> A recurring theme throughout all of Deleuze's thought and when writing with Guattari concerns relations of the 'whole' (*tout*). Deleuze's persistent criticisms of a 'logical', 'organic unity'/'organic totality', internal relations and relations of interiority (that Deleuze tends to identify with organic unity/totality) are situated across many different registers throughout his works (e.g. history, literature, art, cinema, politics, biology) and the notion of the 'whole' frequently appears with them. See G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*: pp. 113-116; p. 161; p. 163; G. Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* [1983], tr. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 95-6; pp. 322-3; pp. 326-7 (cf. 'closed' and 'open' whole/s, in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy* [1991], tr. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.105); G. Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* [1985], tr. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota pp. 9-11; pp. 16-20.

<sup>liv</sup> On related themes concerning vitalism in the work of Jung and Deleuze see, C. McMillan, 'Jung and Deleuze: Enchanted Openings to the Other: A Philosophical Contribution', In *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 10 (3), Feb. 2018, 184-198. Also, C. McMillan, 'Kant's influence on Jung's vitalism in the *Zofingia Lectures*' [2019], in C. McMillan, R. Main, D. Henderson (eds) *Holism: Possibilities and Problems*: London & New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 118-129.

<sup>lv</sup> Deleuze was an anti-foundational thinker, but he also refers to himself as a 'vitalist' and a 'metaphysician', highly critical of most branches of phenomenology which had emerged before and during his life-time. Everything I've written is vitalistic, at least I hope it is." *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, tr. M. Joughin, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 143.

---

<sup>lvi</sup> *DR*, p. 103.

<sup>lvii</sup> *DR*, p. 104.

<sup>lviii</sup> See, M. Nagy, *Philosophical Issues in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 251, and A. Addison, 'Jung, vitalism and 'the psychoid': an historical reconstruction', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 54 (1), 2009, 123–142 (p. 128)