
On Chronolibido: A Response to Rabaté and Johnston¹

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Abstract

This paper is a response to Jean-Michel Rabaté's and Adrian Johnston's essays on my book *Dying for Time*. In responding, I further develop my notions of mortality and immortality, pleasure and pain, the flow of libido and the anticipation of loss. I also elaborate the stakes of my critique of Freud and Lacan, underlining why desire does not derive from a lack of timeless fullness. Rather, desire is both animated and agonized by temporal finitude.

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He never knew it would feel like this. She had entered his life, transformed his world, opened his body and mind. Yet, throughout it all, he had told himself that his devotion to her did not compromise his devotion to God. 'I had warned myself', he recalls, 'not to reckon on worldly happiness' (36). But it turns out that this is precisely what he did. He loved her, and because he loved her he is shattered by her death. For days and nights, he records 'the mad words, the bitter resentment, the fluttering in the stomach, the nightmare unreality, the wallowed-in-tears' (56).

His pious friends tell him to take solace in God and in the words of St. Paul: 'Do not mourn like those who have no hope'. He comes to understand, however, that 'what St. Paul says can comfort only those who love God better than the dead' (26). His faith in God would direct

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him toward an eternal state of being. But in loving her and in mourning her death, he is not directed toward such a state of being. He does not want to repose in eternal peace; he wants her to come back and their life together to go on, in the time and space of their existence. 'The earthy beloved', he writes, 'incessantly triumphs over your mere idea of her. And you want her to; you want her with all her resistances, all her faults, all her unexpectedness. That is, in her foursquare and independent reality. And this, not any image or memory, is what we are to love still, after she is dead' (66).

The words belong to C.S. Lewis in his book *A Grief Observed* (1961), written after the death of his wife, Joy Davidman. While Lewis was one of the most influential Christian writers of his time, *A Grief Observed* strikes a different tone. Rather than preaching or instructing, Lewis seeks to describe what is happening to him in the experience of mourning, exploring the pain and desperation of losing his beloved. What emerges through this account is not simply a crisis of faith, in the sense that the death of his wife makes him doubt the existence of God. Rather, what emerges is something deeper: an insight that his faith in God cannot offer any consolation for the loss of a mortal beloved. If a mother is mourning the death of her child, Lewis writes, 'she may still hope to "glorify God and enjoy him forever"', which may be 'a comfort to the God-aimed, eternal spirit within her. But not to her motherhood. The specifically maternal happiness must be written off. Never, in any place or time, will she have her son on her knees, or bathe him, or tell him a story, or plan for his future, or see her grandchild' (Lewis 2001, 26–27).

Lewis thus describes an investment in temporal life, which I analyze in terms of *chronolibido*. The mother who is mourning her child, or the lover who is mourning his beloved, are committed to relations that require time to be what they are. The love in question is not something that could take place in an instant. Rather, it expresses a commitment to caring for the other across the passage of time. Furthermore, the temporal extension of such love is not merely an unavoidable condition; it is internal to the positive qualities of being with the beloved. In loving the other, one cherishes not only a projected future but also the extended time of living with one another: the repetition of acts, the transformation and development of an evolving relationship. It is precisely the termination of such a temporally extended life that one mourns in mourning the beloved. And as Lewis makes clear, from the perspective of such mourning, the hope for eternity is not a consolation. Even if the hope for eternity were fulfilled, it would not give him back the life of the beloved:

Suppose that the earthly lives she and I shared for a few years are in reality only the basis for, or prelude to, or earthly appearance of, two unimaginable, supercosmic, eternal somethings. Those somethings could be pictured as spheres or globes. Where the plane of Nature cuts through them—that is, in earthly life—they appear as two circles (circles are slices of spheres). Two circles that touched. But those two circles, above all the point at which they touched, are the very thing I am mourning for, homesick for, famished for. You tell me, ‘she goes on.’ But my heart and body are crying out, come back, come back. Be a circle, touching my circle on the plane of Nature. But I know this is impossible. I know that the thing I want is exactly the thing I can never get. The old life, the jokes, the drinks, the arguments, the lovemaking, the tiny, heartbreaking commonplace. On any view whatever, to say, ‘H. is dead’, is to say ‘All that is gone.’ It is a part of the past. And the past is the past and that is what time means, and time itself is one more name for death, and Heaven itself is a state where ‘the former things have passed away. . . .’

Unless, of course, you can literally believe all that stuff about family reunions ‘on the further shore’, pictured in entirely earthly terms. But that is all unscriptural, all out of bad hymns and lithographs. There’s not a word of it in the Bible. (Lewis 1961, 24–25)

Lewis here vividly articulates how the attachment to temporal life is expressed through the commitment to *living on*. He cannot come to terms with the death of his wife because he wants their life together to continue, in the temporal rhythm and physical concretion that gave their relationship its unique quality. Accordingly, he does not want them to be self-sufficient, timeless beings (what he describes as ‘two unimaginable, supercosmic, eternal somethings’). Rather, he wants them to be in need of each other, vulnerable and open to being transformed by the touch of the other. For the same reason, the promise of an immortal state of being cannot answer to what he desires. In the consummation of immortality—here described as a state of Heaven where all “‘former things’” have passed away in favour of eternity—there would be no time for their relationship to live on. The state of immortality would put an end to their temporal lives and in such a state of eternity their love could not survive.

I begin with this example from Lewis, since it elucidates a central distinction in *Dying for Time*, namely, the distinction *survival* (a temporal process of living on) and *immortality* (an eternal state of being). As Lewis makes agonizingly clear, the former cannot be reconciled to with the latter. In loving his wife and mourning her death, Lewis wants their relationship to live on. This desire for the continuation of temporal life is incompatible with the desire for an eternal state of

being. Far from fulfilling his desire to live on with the beloved, a timeless state of immortality would eliminate the life he wants to maintain.

One may here ask—as Jean-Michel Rabaté does in his response to *Dying for Time*—why the choice between survival and immortality has to be an either/or. An apparent solution to the dilemma would be to claim that the afterlife can retain all the positive qualities one wants to keep while removing the negative threat of losing them. Thus, many popular conceptions of the afterlife assume that survival and immortality can be combined, allowing one to live on with the beloved in a state of being that is exempt from suffering and loss. I will seek to show, however, why Lewis is right in maintaining that such a vision cannot be sustained, even on the level of the imagination. If you remove the exposure to loss, you also remove the meaning and significance of living on. That is why it is consistent to emphasize (as many religious sages do) that detachment from temporal life is the condition for attaining the state of eternity. Only by ultimately renouncing the value of living on in time can one embrace the timelessness of immortality.

The first thing to note here is that the problem of mortality is not limited to organic death. Even if you were physically immortal—in the sense that your body could not age or cease to be alive—you would still be susceptible to suffering, as long as you were attached to something that could be lost. Physical immortality does not protect you against the regret of having done something irreversible, the pain of not being able to fulfill a given ambition, or the heartbreak of being left by your beloved. Furthermore, living forever may eventually make it impossible to sustain the sense of meaning in your activities and either you or your beloved may withdraw due to boredom or lethargy. Even without organic death, then, you can still lose everything that makes your world meaningful. This ‘death’ can be much more painful and fearful than the prospect of your own physical death, not the least because it is a death that you have to survive.

Thus, to be mortal—in the sense that I develop in *Dying for Time*—is not necessarily to be subject to organic decline or disintegration. Rather, anyone who is committed to something that can be lost is mortal. Even someone exempt from physical death is ‘mortal’ insofar as he or she can suffer from loss. Inversely, to become *immortal* it is not enough to remove physical death. Rather, to be immortal you must be detached from everything that can be lost.

By the same token, however, nothing can matter to you in a state of immortality. There can be no urgency to do anything, to cultivate anything, or to strive for anything, since nothing of value can be lost

or fail to take place. You cannot even be motivated to pursue a single activity, since it would not count as a loss for you if you did not engage in the activity or if it ceased to be.

My argument can thus be seen as an invitation to ask yourself if you actually desire immortality and if your love could survive in such a state of being. If you were to live on wholly intact—unaffected by the passage of time—nothing could happen to you and you would never be moved or touched by the beloved. Moreover, if your life and your beloved were not haunted by the possibility of loss, you would never be motivated to care about them. The sense of something being valuable or significant is inseparable from the sense that it *can* be lost. Even a being free from organic death would have to be susceptible to loss—the affective ‘death’ of what he or she wants to keep alive—in order to care. A being exempt from such death could not sense the need or the value of caring for anything at all.

As Rabaté recalls in his response, I first develop the distinction between immortality and survival through a reading of the most canonical source for the conception of desire as a desire for immortality, namely, Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. As Diotima makes clear, immortality would require a state of eternity that ‘neither comes into being nor passes away, neither flowers nor fades’ (Plato 1961, 211a). Nevertheless, when Diotima sets out to prove that we are driven by the ‘passion for immortality’ (Ibid. 208b), all her examples concern the survival of temporal life. On Diotima’s account, the desire to have children, to be famous, or to be commemorated, is an expression of the desire for immortality. Yet, following her own description, we find that these desires are *not even oriented toward immortality*. Rather than aiming for a timeless state of eternity, they seek to extend the legacy of a finite life and in so doing they remain exposed to death. To live on thanks to one’s children or one’s reputation is not to become immortal; it is to live on through others who themselves are mortal. Furthermore, the exposure to death is not only a negative threat but also a positive inspiration for all the forms of care that Diotima analyzes. Without the sense of one’s life or the beloved passing away there would be no desire to reproduce it or to care for its sustenance.

Thus, Diotima demonstrates that the temporality of survival is operative not only in the passage from one generation to another but also in the ongoing life of the same being. As Diotima puts it, a living being can only sustain itself through reproduction (*génésis*) and this condition ‘applies even in the period in which each living creature is described

as alive and the same' (Ibid. 207d). Indeed, 'for all we call [someone] the same', Diotima points out, 'every bit of him is different, and every day he is becoming a new man, while the old man is ceasing to exist' (Ibid. 207d), in a process of temporal change that Diotima extends to the soul as well as the body. 'This is how every mortal creature perpetuates itself', she emphasizes, '[i]t cannot, like the divine, always be the same in every respect; it can only leave new life to fill the vacancy that is left behind' (Ibid. 208a). This temporal process is the movement of survival that transcends a particular moment of mortal life and yet is bound to mortality as a general condition. To survive is never to repose in a timeless moment or an absolute presence. Rather, to survive is to remain after a past that has ceased to be and before a future that may not come to be. For the same reason, the experience of survival is always marked by loss, both in relation to what *has* ceased to be in the past and what *will* cease to be in the future.

Diotima's own discourse thus allows us to articulate the distinction between survival and immortality. To survive is to live on in a temporal process that is subject to loss. In contrast, to be immortal is to repose in a state of being that is exempt from loss. Rabaté here raises the question of why the temporality of survival cannot—at least on the level of the imaginary—be reconciled with immortality. The Greek gods, to follow the example given by Rabaté, are said to be immortal but nevertheless live on in time. As I argue in the book, however, Diotima has good reasons not to align the life of the gods with a proper state of immortality. With remarkable precision Diotima defines a 'mortal creature' in terms of the temporality of survival, which entails an experience of loss even in the persistence of the 'same' being. Insofar as the gods live on and suffer from loss they are therefore mortal, even if they do not organically cease to be. Indeed, what Rabaté describes as the 'relative' or 'improper' immortality of the Greek gods is better understood as a form of mortal survival. The gods can be wounded metaphorically by the loss of a loved one, and are wounded quite literally through bleeding or physical pain. Moreover, they remain altered by what has happened to them. They live on, but are no longer the same, and in this sense they are marked by an experience of mortal loss.

The above notion of mortality is crucial for the arguments in *Dying for Time*. As I emphasize throughout the book, the problem of death is not primarily or exclusively the problem of physical death. That is, the scary thing about being mortal is not that your body will one day cease to be alive. As already Epicurus pointed out in a famous argument, the state of being dead is not something we can experience because our

death excludes our existence, so – on his account – there is no reason to be afraid of death. As I argue, however, Epicurus misconstrues what is at stake in the fear of death. To fear death is not to fear the state of being dead, but *to fear the loss of what one wants to keep*. The fear of death is thus not limited to the care for one’s own life or to the fear of actual physical death. Rather, the fear of death is operative in relation to everything one cares about and can lose against one’s will.

The same notion of mortality informs my critique of Freud’s claim that ‘in the unconscious each of us is convinced of his immortality’ (Freud 1915a, 183). Both Rabaté and Adrian Johnston seek to defend Freud’s claim, but they do not take into account my main argument. Far from dismissing Freud’s claim on the basis of a terminological definition, I provide a detailed reading of the essay in which it is articulated, showing how Freud’s own account reveals that the unconscious is marked by an experience of survival and mourning that would be impossible without a sense of mortality.² Contrary to Freud’s tacit assumption, the sense of being mortal does *not* depend on the ability to experience or imagine the state of being dead. Rather, the sense of being mortal depends on the ability to experience or imagine the loss of what one loves. As Freud himself emphasizes, *we die too when those whom we love die* (Ibid. 184). It is precisely in this experience of death that Freud locates the fundamental conflict of the unconscious with regard to mortality. While we cannot experience our own physical death, we are nevertheless confronted with mortality through ‘the death or the threatened death of our loved ones’ (Ibid. 192). This experience of mourning – or the mere anticipation of mourning – reveals an inherent tension in the unconscious between ‘two opposing attitudes to death, the one that acknowledges it as the annihilation of life, and the other that denies it as unreal’, which ‘collide and come into conflict’ upon the death of the beloved (Ibid. 192). On Freud’s own account, then, the unconscious is reckoning with the experience of mortality. If Freud nevertheless claims that there is no experience of death in the unconscious, it is only insofar as he – contradicting his own insights – equates the experience of death with the impossible experience of *being* dead. When one removes that premise one can unearth a wealth of insights in Freud’s text, which is what I do in *Dying for Time*.

The same holds for the question of temporality. When Freud claims that the unconscious is ‘timeless’ he means that it does not adhere to the chronology of *linear* time. Throughout his response, Johnston assumes that I promote such a linear conception of time. This is not the case. Far from relying on linear chronology, the notion of time that I develop is

a minimal condition for the retroactive temporality of the unconscious. The deferral and delay that Freud calls *nachträglichkeit* is on my account characteristic of temporal experience in general. A temporal event can never be present as such, since it comes into being only by becoming past and becoming related to the future. The experience of the event is always given *too late* (in relation to what is no longer) and *too soon* (in relation to what is not yet). Every experience is thus characterized by a retroactive temporality, since what happens exceeds any given anticipation and can be apprehended only in retrospect, when it has already passed.

For the same reason, my emphasis on the problem of succession does not entail that I regard the experience of time as linear or disregard ‘the multiple heterogeneous dimensions of psychical subjectivity’ (Johnston 2013, 165). On the contrary, the chapters in *Dying for Time* explore differential rhythms of temporality: the sedimentation and resuscitation of events in an individual body, the crystallization of a moment through memory and anticipation, the texture of time in a life-long love affair, intervals of pleasure and pain, the dead time of trauma and the elation of bliss. All these rhythms are different forms of time, which cannot be reduced to a homogeneous succession. Yet they are forms of *time* because they are marked by a negativity that opens onto the past (what is *no* longer) and the future (what is *not* yet). Without such negativity nothing would come into being or pass away. It is in this precise sense that succession is a necessary but not sufficient condition for any form of time. The negativity of time does not overtake a presence that is *first* given in itself and *then* ceases to be. For time to pass, the present moment must negate itself and give way to another moment. This experience of time (of ceasing to be) is not only the negative condition of loss but also the *positive* condition of coming into being and living on.

Johnston here objects that if everything is subject to temporal finitude, then all objects are ‘blackened’ and one cannot explain why we desire anything at all. This is indeed what it looks like if one assumes that we desire a state of fullness beyond time. From such a perspective, all temporal objects are doomed to disappoint us—to be ‘blackened’ by the fact that they will cease to be—since they can never provide an absolute and permanent fulfillment. In contrast, I seek to show that temporal finitude is not a lack of being that it would be desirable to overcome. Rather, temporality is intrinsic to the very fulfillment of desire. An integral part of being fulfilled is the desire to *continue being fulfilled*, which is both animated and agonized by the sense that the state of fulfillment will not last. In his essay ‘On Transience’, Freud

himself provides a vivid formulation of this notion of chronolibido. ‘Transience value’, Freud writes, ‘is scarcity value in time. Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment’ (Freud 1915b, 197). It is for this reason that something can appear all the more precious when one is on the verge of losing it. More generally, I argue that the animation of desire is inseparable from the sense of temporal finitude, even in the experience of fulfillment. Fulfillment is not a static completion but a state in which one wants to linger, and this desire to linger is necessarily intertwined with the apprehension that the state of fulfillment is passing away.³ Without such exposure to time, there would be no desire to sustain the experience of fulfillment—and no impetus to linger in its quality—since there would be no risk of loss that could make one care to linger.

Contrary to what Johnston holds in his response, the above argument does not equivocate between ubiquity and causality. I certainly do not claim, as Johnston alleges, that temporal finitude is the effective and exclusive ‘cause’ of care, in the sense that it would explain why one prefers one thing over another. Rather, I argue that temporal finitude is an indispensable part of caring about anything at all. The task, then, is *not* to show ‘why a particular psyche’s libidinal economy binds itself to the particular objects it selects and not others’, as Johnston has it (Johnston 2013, 149). The task is rather to show why temporal finitude is intrinsic to the care for anything to which one is bound. Again, this means neither that one is ‘entirely overshadowed and exclusively dominated by oppressive worries about the ticking clock’—as Johnston glosses my position with a misleading phrase (Ibid. 160)—nor that I focus on questions of time and death at the expense of love, pleasure, control, and dependency. Rather, in *Dying for Time* I rethink and rearticulate questions of love, pleasure, control, and dependency in light of the temporal logic of binding.

Freud’s own work here provides the most important resource for my argument. As Freud makes clear, there is no libidinal life without the excitation (*Erregung*) that is generated by internal and external stimuli, which have to be ‘bound’ for experience to be possible. All forms of experience thus answer to different forms of libidinal bonds, since they qualitatively synthesize and ‘bind’ excitation. Even in relation to myself, I cannot have any experience without binding excitation, and thereby being bound to myself. This binding is not an external restriction but indispensable for the being of libido as such: without binding there would be no pathways and no possible flow of libido. It follows that binding precedes the constitution of any drive, desire, or will, since

it precedes the constitution of any possible purpose for psychic life. Binding itself does not have a purpose, since being bound is the condition for having a purpose. For the affective self who comes into being through the bond, the binding of excitation is therefore undecidable: it is the source of pleasure *and* pain, chance *and* threat, love *and* hate. Indeed, the structural necessity of binding entails that the experience of pleasure is bound internally to pain. Without the binding of excitation, there could be no pleasure in the first place. But the binding that makes pleasure possible at the same time limits it and charges it with tension. Accordingly, there is *an interrelation between the pain of limitation and the intensity of pleasure*. Freud thinks this interrelation within a teleological horizon, where pleasure would consist in the complete discharge of tension and the release from pain. But since there is no libidinal life without a more or less pressing charge, a more or less tense excitation, the teleological schema is untenable. There cannot be any pleasure that is not bound to its other: no pleasure without pain. Even the very pleasure of fulfillment is a matter of temporal *rhythm*, in which pleasure is bound to pain to be what it is.

Nevertheless, according to Freud's notion of the pleasure principle, we seek to transcend the double bind of pleasure/pain. The fact that an absolute release of tension would be absolute death does not lead Freud to call into question that we are oriented toward such an absolute. On the contrary, he maintains that death itself is the proper destination of pleasure. To be bound to life is then by definition an experience of 'unpleasure' or 'pain', since the bond prevents the organism from coming to rest and compels it to survive in a state of tension. In contrast, the aim of the pleasure principle is to discharge the excitation of life in favour of a complete release. The aim of the pleasure principle is thus inseparable from the aim of what Freud calls the death drive. The death drive seeks to restore the living organism to a supposed primordial state of total equilibrium, which is exactly the aim of the pleasure principle. As Freud himself points out, both the pleasure principle and the death drive operate in accordance with 'the most universal striving of all living substance—namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world' (Freud 1920, 76).

Now, in my critical engagement with Freud's notion of the death drive I do not dismiss it as a 'pure contradiction', as Rabaté claims in his response (Rabaté 2013, 171). Rather, I argue that the death drive follows a traditional logic of lack, according to which the aim of our striving is to rest in peace: to achieve what Freud describes as *Ruhe* and the English translation renders as a state of 'quiescence'. This

is, for example, exactly the logic that informs Augustine's theological conception of desire, where the aim is to repose in the *Quies*, the peace, of God's eternal state of being. To recall the famous line from *Confessions* I.I: 'our heart is restless till it finds rest in Thee [*inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*]'. While Freud (unlike Augustine) does not believe that this desire can be fulfilled, he nevertheless holds that the lack of fulfillment accounts for the relentless movement of desire. The reason we keep going is not because we want to live on, but because we never arrive at the desired repose.

The same line of thought is developed in a more sophisticated way by Lacan. As Rabaté recalls in his response—and as I underline in the book—for Lacan the death drive is *not* a biological tendency that pertains to living organisms in general. The death drive is proper only to human beings, who articulate their desire along a signifying chain and seek to understand the cause of their suffering. Human desire is then, according to Lacan, not primarily oriented in relation to the natural world but in relation to a transcendent Thing (*das Ding, la Chose*) that is supposed to have been lost and whose return would relieve suffering in satisfying desire completely. In his response, Johnston claims that I misread the notion of the Thing, but in fact my reading follows Johnston's own account.⁴ In *Time Driven*—in my view the best book on Lacanian metapsychology—Johnston persuasively shows how Lacan's notion of the Thing amounts to a rethinking of the death drive (Johnston 2005). Drawing on Lacan's reading of the death drive in *Seminar XVII*, Johnston argues that the death drive does not aim at a return to the inorganic but rather articulates the insistent demand for the Thing, understood as an absolute and unattainable satisfaction. Lacan does *not* believe that there ever can be such an absolute satisfaction. Rather, he analyzes it as the fundamental fantasy of the subject. As Johnston makes clear in *Time Driven*, the trauma of libidinal being is thus located in the conflict between the temporal being that we are and the timeless being that we desire to be.

By taking issue with this notion of desire, it may seem as though I rationalize or explain away the *dream* of timeless being and the deep attraction it holds. Psychoanalytic reading—particularly in its most sophisticated Lacanian version—seeks to do justice to the deep and irrational attraction of this dream, while recognizing that it is a *fantasy* to be traversed, an *illusion* to be overcome. Contrary to what Johnston claims in his response, I am not 'writing off such talk as inconsequentially epiphenomenal in relation to desires themselves' (Johnston 2013, 165). I openly acknowledge the merits of a Lacanian

reading and the therapeutic effects it may have. The Lacanian reading stops short, however, of questioning the *structure* of a traditional understanding of desire. The fullness of timeless being is deemed to be an illusion, but the *desire* for such fullness is itself taken to be self-evident. Even while debunking the promise of fulfillment, the Lacanian account thus conforms to the logic of lack that has been handed down to us from a metaphysical and religious tradition: we are temporal, mortal beings who desire to repose in the timeless state of immortality.

In contrast, the notion of chronolibido locates the drama of libidinal being in the attachment to temporal life. The fear of time and death (chronophobia) does not stem from the desire for a timeless state of being. Rather, the source of chronophobia is the desire for temporal life to continue (chronophilia). The most important difference with regard to Lacanian psychoanalysis can thus be located in the diagnosis of chronophobia. The cause of chronophobia—with its fear of death, fantasies of survival, and denials of loss—is not a metaphysical desire for immortality. While an ideal of immortality may aggravate the symptoms, chronophobia is at work before and beyond any desire for timeless fullness, since it is an effect of the attachment to temporal life. Thus, the emphatic chronophilia that I trace in the works of Proust, Woolf, and Nabokov does not reconcile their protagonists with the mortality of their lives. On the contrary, they are all the more assaulted by the threat of time because they are so invested in preserving and prolonging temporal life.

For the same reason, chronophobia cannot be cured by a therapeutic chronophilia, which would teach one to affirm the value of mortal, temporal life. Such a therapy may certainly be beneficial, but the fear of time and death will remain after it has been accomplished, since fear is generated by the very affirmation of mortal life. To affirm mortal life does *not* entail accepting death. On the contrary, to affirm mortal life is to oppose death, to resist and defer it for as long as possible. But since mortal life is essentially linked to death, it is internally bound to what it opposes. The same bond that binds one to life binds one to death and the same bond that binds one to pleasure binds one to pain. Moreover, without the bond to death life would not be what it is and without the bond to pain pleasure would not be what it is. It is this interrelation between pleasure and pain—rather than the death drive—that calls into question the pleasure principle. The fundamental trauma of libidinal being is not that we seek a pure bliss that is frustrated by pain or a pure repose that is compromised by loss. Rather, the fundamental trauma of

libidinal being is that *pain and loss are part of what we desire*, pain and loss being integral to what makes anything desirable in the first place.

Thus, contrary to what Lacan holds, the lack of immortality is not the repressed ‘truth’ of desire. The supposed lack of immortality *is itself a repression* of how the bond to mortal life is the condition for both what one desires and what one fears. As I argue in *Dying for Time*, this double bind can be traced even in the ascetic strategies that repress and seek to transcend it. Because every bond to pleasure binds one to pain—and every attachment to life binds one to death—ascetic sages preach detachment. Chronolibidinal reading does not deny that one can come to embrace such a strategy of detachment, but it seeks to show that it is an *effect of* and a *response to* the investment in living on, thereby enabling one to read how the ideal of detachment dissimulates a preceding attachment to mortal life.

The notion of chronolibido thus elucidates a double bind that precedes any attempt to rationalize desire as a search for eternal repose. The desire for immortality is not the irrational truth of desire; it is a rationalized repression of the double bind of mortal life. To make this argument concrete, we can return to the scene with which I began, where C.S. Lewis’s declared desire for immortality is put to the test. As a faithful reader of Augustine, Lewis is well aware that he is not supposed to love mortal beings as an end in themselves but only as a means toward the love of God. As he explains, ‘if you’re approaching Him not as the goal but as a road, not as the end but as a means, you’re not really approaching Him at all’ (Lewis 1961, 68). This is why he emphasizes that the Bible does not support visions of the afterlife that project a reunion with the beloved. Such visions are not directed toward God as the End but at most treat God as a means for retrieving the mortal beloved. They are thus attached to the living on of temporal life rather than to the eternity of God. Accordingly, Lewis’s religious conversion is supposed to turn him away from his faith in the value of living on. Rather than investing his desire in the fate of temporal life, he should direct it toward the timeless presence of God.

What emerges in *A Grief Observed*, however, is a desire to live on that precedes and is at odds with the declared desire for immortality. In mourning his wife, Lewis loves her as an end in herself. He does not want anything beyond her; he wants her to come back and their life as lovers to go on. This desire is not oriented toward a timeless state of being, but rather toward the continuation of temporal life. Indeed, insofar as he wants to live on with her, the eternal state of immortality is not only unattainable but also *undesirable*, since it would terminate

their time together. The ‘truth’ of Lewis’s grief, then, is not a lack of immortality. Rather, his mourning of the beloved and his resistance to death is animated by a faith in the value of mortal life. Nothing can *prove* the unique and irreplaceable value of the beloved, but he *believes* in it. And nothing can *prove* that she is gone, irrevocably dead, but he *believes* it.

It is such faith in mortal, temporal life that makes us vulnerable to loss and hence exposed to death. As temporal beings, we must have faith in the future and in those on whom we depend, since we cannot *know* what will happen or what others will do to us. We place our faith in a future that may shatter our hopes and lay to waste what we desire. Yet, the notion of chronolibido seeks to show that this risk of being shattered is part of what binds us to what we love. The faith that sustains us is not only open to being shattered but also animated from within by the sense of such a threat. In order to care and to commit ourselves, we have to believe in the future not only as a chance but also as a risk. Even if we were immortal, we would have to *believe* that we are mortal—and that whatever we value can be lost—in order to care. The notion of chronolibido thus seeks to capture both the terror and the beauty of being a *temporal* being, namely, a being who can suffer, can lose things, and can die, but who for that very reason has a sense of what it means for something to be precious, to be valuable, to be worth caring for.

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Notes

1. A first version of this response was presented at a symposium on *Dying for Time* at the New School for Social Research in New York, October 20, 2012. I want to thank Jean-Michel Rabaté and Adrian Johnston for their responses to my work, and Todd Kesselman for organizing the event. I am also grateful to Simon Critchley for moderating the event and participating in the roundtable discussion. Finally, I want to thank Horace Engdahl, whose response to *Dying for Time* in personal correspondence led me to develop the notion of chronolibidinal 'rhythms' of time that I present in this essay.
2. Even on their own terms, it is hard to see why Rabaté and Johnston defend the claim that there is no sense of mortality in the unconscious. In his response, Rabaté explicitly concedes that a notion of death 'is conveyed to us unconsciously' (Rabaté 2013, 174) and that the unconscious itself should be understood as 'a differential layering of traces and signs', 'a layering of traces, *all of which somehow point to death in one form or the other*' (Ibid. 175, emphasis added). As for Johnston, I have elsewhere shown how his account of various unconscious resistances to death presupposes that a sense of mortality is operative in the unconscious. See Hägglund 2009, 231, 233.
3. In a review essay on *Dying for Time*, Robert S. Lehman provides an insightful analysis of this notion of lingering in relation to the aesthetic experience of the beautiful in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. See Lehman (2013). See also Hägglund (2012), 173–74n.14.
4. Specifically, in his response Johnston claims that I misread Freud's and Lacan's theories of the drive by accusing them of 'indefensibly proposing the possibility of an unbound drive' (Johnston 2013, 162). My critique of Freud and Lacan, however, does not allege that they posit an unbound drive. I am well aware that for both Freud and Lacan 'there is no drive without a drive-object' (Ibid.). The target of my critique is rather the assumption that the *aim* of the drive is an absolute release, which would require an unbinding of all bonds and a termination of the drive itself. The fact that neither Freud nor Lacan thinks that such an unbinding can be achieved does not prevent them from postulating that it is the (unattainable) aim of the drive. Indeed, the reconstruction of Lacan's notion of the Thing that Johnston provides in his response confirms my reading. According to Johnston, the Thing should be understood as the 'Ur/non-object of all drive objects, namely, the vanishing attractor point' (Johnston 2013, 161), thus characterizing the Thing 'as a sort of black hole around which the drives rotate' (Ibid.). It is precisely this notion of the Thing that I address in *Dying for Time*, articulating my argument via a critique of Johnston's Lacanian notion of the drive (Hägglund 2012, 139–141; 143–145). In his response, Johnston neither reconstructs nor responds to this critique.