

TWO PATHWAYS: THINKING SUBLIMATION WITH DAVID JONES

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If psychoanalysis remains, as Jean Laplanche thought, an ‘unfinished’ revolution – its barrage of concepts constantly outflanked by the relentless ‘Copernican’ otherness flowing from the trauma of its discovery – one of the most prominent signs of that unfinishedness is the inadequate Freudian account of the relation between sexuality and aesthetic experience. As Donald Winnicott had to admit, ‘Freud did not have a place in his topography of the mind for the experience of things cultural’. Thus, ‘sublimation’ in Freud may seem at first little more than an empty abstraction, an unfinished notion without the epistemological consistency and applicability of a genuine concept.

The unfinishedness of the concept is not, in my view, a reason to abandon it, but rather – especially given Freud’s own obsessive return to it – to investigate it further as the site of an insistent, revealing uncertainty with wider implications for the field of psychoanalytic thinking. Sublimation always remains an open question in Freud, the mark of something crucial but unresolved; and this non-closure is not, I think, accidental but essential, since it points to a fundamental irresolution in Freud that will shed light, when read via the attempts by Lacan and Winnicott to resolve it, on David Jones’s artistic responses to his experiences in wartime and afterwards.

David Jones (1895-1974), largely disregarded by critics until quite recently, can now be seen as a key figure in British modernism, one whose work across both visual and textual media inscribes a singular and heroic struggle to sustain itself – and sustain selfhood as such perhaps – as a location of cultural experience, in a life wracked by pathological trauma. Let us start with a letter Jones wrote to his friend Jim Ede in October 1927, when his main worry, a decade after serving as a soldier at the Somme, was what to do about the woman he was supposed to be marrying, Petra Gill, daughter of Eric. How, Jones fretted, could the circle of his artistic vocation be squared with the ‘normal’ life of a married man? In his anxious, half-informed way

(he's obviously been reading some psychoanalysis), Jones accidentally touches on the central problem of Freudian sublimation:

I agree I think with what you say in your letter to a large extent—It may be I personally am too concerned with ‘inhibitions’—the whole question of sublimation—suppression—‘canalization’ and the rest is a very vexed one—and hideously complicated for me—Complicated largely by there being no general standard of practice, or accepted ethics in the world at the moment—everyone means different things by the same words and everyone interprets ideas and actions so diversely that one is more scrupulous I suppose than one might normally be if there were a real civilization builded upon some understood philosophy—were it Catholic, Buddhist, Protestant, pagan or what you will—but we of the modern world all are a mixture of these ‘isms’ and consequently are shy and alarmed at each other’s notions. *This is probably all nonsense*—at any rate it is ill put. I *told* you it is no use my writing letters—but I will post it

Jones 1980: 44

The telegraphic syntax and closing disavowal point to a high level of anxiety: the vexed question of sublimation clearly vexes Jones. But it is not a question he can suppress or ignore: it has an urgency, a sense of crucial significance, that demands to be written out, even in nonsensical letters. For Freud too, in the *Three Essays* of 1905, sublimation had to be written — even if at first it had to be enclosed in scare-quotes due to its irritating conceptual unfinishedness. Since sex can clearly interfere with non-sexual functions, it is obvious to Freud that the reverse must also be true, that there must be pathways

for the attraction of sexual instinctual forces to aims that are other than sexual, that is to say, for the sublimation of sexuality. But we must end with a confession that very little is as yet known with certainty of these pathways, though they certainly exist and can probably be traversed in both directions.

Freud 1953: 206

Pathways — *Bahnungen* — from the sexual to the non-sexual are thus certainly known to exist, though very little is known *of* them. Freud is anxiously aware of a gap between conviction and conceptualization, a sense that though one day these indubitable pathways will surely come to be fully tracked, they currently lie disconcertingly beyond psychoanalytic knowledge.

Now, the notion of a pathway from the sexual to the non-sexual may seem, we might think, something of an anti-Freudian notion. The idea of sublimation is of course caught up in a dense history of theoretical conflict — Jean-Robert Rabanel thus talks of *la pousse à la sublimation* (the ‘push to sublimation’) in Jungian technique and theory, its drive to ‘neuter’ Freudian libido by negating its sexual essence. (Rabanel 1990: 10). But before being used to name this allegedly reductive assault on psychoanalysis, sublimation was a paramount concern of Freud’s — he was convinced, in brief, that sexuality and the cultural realm formed part of the same lifeworld, should be interpretable within a single theory. Here we encounter one of the great blind-spots of Freud’s thinking, for the fundamental scandal of sexuality — repeatedly discovered, lost and then re-affirmed by psychoanalysis — is its essential otherness to the cultural matrix it inhabits, and thus its inconsistency with the discursive register of critical interpretation. The theory of sexuality is bound up with interpretation, of course — in a special sense, developed via the psychoanalytic setting and the position of the analyst; but such interpretation could never be simply applied to an artwork or literary text. After Freud, this truth has been tirelessly repeated — sometimes against Freud himself, it seems.

What makes Freudian interpretation matter so much, what distinguishes it from all previous methods, is what Paul-Laurent Assoun describes as its status as *diagnostic pulsionelle* (which English struggles to render: let’s say a drive-oriented practice of interpretation) (Assoun 1976: 109). It is this practice, as Jean Laplanche has argued, that makes psychoanalysis fundamentally ‘anti-hermeneutic’ (Laplanche 1996: 7-12). In the original 1900 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, writes Laplanche, ‘the analytical method is already complete; and...it is not in any sense a translation, a comprehension or a reading’ (Laplanche 1996: 8). The method amounts in effect to a refusal of the manifest surface of discourse, not by substituting it for another discourse or code but by breaking through discourse as such: dismantling its syntactic patterns, unreading or ana-lysing it.

Now, whatever we make of the tireless efforts by critics to articulate this method with the cultural field, the first problem with sublimation — which is why critics seldom deal with it — is that the terms in which Freud tries to define it do not seem at all ‘drive-oriented’: ‘A certain kind of modification of the [drive’s] aim and change of [its] object in which our social valuation is taken into account,’ he writes in 1933, ‘is described by us as “sublimation”’ (Freud 1964: 97). How can social values be ‘taken into account’, though, modifying the aim and object of

the drive, if the latter is at odds with discourse itself, does not abide by a consistent signifying logic? After all, psychical defence operates, as especially Freud's early work emphasizes, at the level of signification, with the unconscious disguising, distorting and otherwise juggling meanings precisely to allow the sexual drive its modicum of satisfaction. If social values — in other words repression — can modify *the drive itself*, not merely its 'signifying representative', we have drifted back to a pre-Freudian model of an integral instinct, hard-wired with a natural aim and object, operating in other words *without the involvement of the unconscious*. In terms of Freud's *diagnostique pulsionelle*, to reconnect the social and the sexual directly in this way is precisely to misinterpret the sexual by offering 'a translation, a comprehension or a reading' of it, when it can only be properly addressed anti-hermeneutically, working with the individual unconscious and *against* the repressive domination of 'social values'.

The whole question of sublimation, then, if not as Jones thinks 'probably all nonsense,' is thus indeed a very vexed one — but not simply due to the modern collapse of some 'real civilization' supposed to have once furnished a full metalanguage (a fantasy Jones shared with his reactionary Catholic friends). What is 'hideously complicated,' rather, as Jones seems to intuit, is the question of how to relate sublimation to other metapsychological terms like those he scare-quotes ('inhibitions', 'canalization'). 'Because Freud left the theory of sublimation in such a primitive state,' comment Laplanche and Pontalis, 'we have only the vaguest hints as to the dividing-lines between sublimation and processes akin to it (reaction-formation, aim-inhibition, idealization, repression)' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 433). In fact, the unfinishedness of the theory may have served a distinctly useful purpose for Freud, since it mystically squares a circle by seeming to combine satisfaction and inhibition, the unconscious otherness of the drive and the controlling agency of the ego. In sublimation, that is, although the drive is *zielgehemmt*, 'aim-inhibited,' it can still achieve *Befriedigungserlebnis*, 'the experience of satisfaction,' as if the constitutive antinomy between id and ego, the otherness of the sexual versus the fragile coherence of the 'I', has been conjured away.

If sublimation thus marked a flaw in the conceptual structure of Freud's work, how did later psychoanalytic thinkers respond to it? If we recall Freud's 1905 speculation on the existence of 'pathways' between the sexual and the non-sexual, '[which] can probably be traversed in both directions,' we can point to two subsequent approaches that move along those pathways in antithetical directions, as it were. Each of these contrasting understandings of sublimation can be seen, we will argue, to shed light on a different aspect of David Jones' work.

It is here we therefore need to turn to some post-Freudian developments in thinking about aesthetic questions. The reprise of those questions in the object-relations milieu of British post-war psychoanalysis, which centered on the concepts of play, fantasy and reparation, can help us understand some important features of Jones's work as artist and poet. However, simply to apply this theoretical perspective to Jones would be to share the tendency of many commentators on his work by producing an interpretation resolutely aligned with what we might call the Jonesian ego, an agency whose project was, precisely, one of regeneration – or sublimation, we might be tempted to say – both in terms of personal recovery and of the restoration of an imaginary site of nonalienated, redemptive culture (sometimes known as 'Wales'). The trouble with such an account is that, although it is consistent with much of Jonesian criticism and biography, it only tells half the story, and in my view risks radically falsifying the true status of Jones, turning him into a far less important artist. For the regenerative dimension of Jones's work – much of it beautiful and moving – is far from all it has to offer. Jones's work also insistently inscribes, in full modernist defiance of our aesthetic comfort, a troubling encounter with the limits of meaningful representation, a re-opening or renewal of something fundamentally at odds with 'reading.' It is this that I will try to show in what follows; and to start with we need to look in more detail at some psychoanalytic responses to the aporia of sublimation, notably those of Donald Winnicott and Jacques Lacan.

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The key to Winnicott's account of human life and of cultural experience is its intersubjective dimension, a dimension essentially defined by play. Just as, in his view, the analytic relation had to be rethought as no longer one of doctor and patient but of 'two people playing together,' so the practice of – indeed the very *capacity for* – artistic expression and understanding, he wrote, 'begins with creative living first manifested in play' (Winnicott 1971: 51, 135). Thus play, in all its senses, offered Winnicott a new pathway to thinking psychoanalytically about cultural life, one no longer focused primarily on art *works* (as Freud had), but on art as a *process*, one involved in a wider psychical field comprising other processes that were creative, but also interpretative and empathic: creative living, wrote Winnicott, entails the ability to understand and 'enter imaginatively' into another's world (Winnicott 1987: 117). Creative subjectivity was therefore essentially *transitional*, a space – 'which,' comments Winnicott, 'in

adult life is inherent in art and religion' (Winnicott 1951: 230) – for negotiating and playfully testing the intersubjective limits of inner and outer realities.

This was certainly, Adam Phillips reminds us, a long way from the Freudian view of culture, with its emphasis on libidinal *Zielgehemmung*, 'aim-inhibition': for Winnicott, writes Phillips, culture 'was only the medium for self-realization' (Phillips 1988: 119). In terms of thinking about Jones, this seems to free us from the impasse of non-repressive aim-inhibition, and Winnicott's emphasis on intersubjective play fits well with how Jones represents *one* kind of relation between individual and framing context. We need to be very careful here, however, not to throw the libidinal baby out with the metapsychological bathwater: for Winnicott's account of creativity crucially shifts away from Freud's focus on how to link artistic expression and sexuality in an *adult* subject, moving to the very different domain of pre-Oedipal infancy. Heavily influenced by Melanie Klein's post-war re-orientation of psychoanalysis, Winnicott wrote that, when treating children, '[although] I was able to confirm the origin of psycho-neurosis in the Oedipus complex ... I knew that troubles started earlier' (Winnicott 1965: 172). In engaging with subjectivity and libido *before* the definitive organization of drives and fantasy at the Oedipal crisis (which usually occurs between the ages of 3 and 5), Winnicott addresses a different set of questions than those Freud had asked about sexuality and art. In 'The Location of Cultural Experience,' Winnicott is very clear about this shift:

It is to be noted that the phenomena that I am describing have no climax. This distinguishes them from phenomena that have instinctual backing, where the orgiastic element plays an essential part, and where satisfactions are closely linked with climax. [...] Psychoanalysts who have rightly emphasized the significance of instinctual experience and of reactions to frustration have failed to state with comparable clearness or conviction the tremendous intensity of these non-climactic experiences that are called playing

Winnicott 1971: 132-3

(Winnicott suffers from the confusion caused by Strachey's mistranslation of *Trieb* as 'instinct,' which is especially unfortunate here as the question of *Instinkt*, the biological term Freud sometimes uses, may ultimately be relevant to this topic). Now, it is all very well, if we are talking about babies, to refer to the intensity of pre-Oedipal existence with all its non-climactic pleasures and pains, but when it comes to considering the adult subject, whose

sexuality is defined, from a Freudian perspective, by the unconscious – an unconscious *constituted by repression* – the terms of the question should be quite different. This is why Laplanche, for instance, talks about the ‘always more or less desexualized notion of “object-relations”’ (Laplanche 2015: 258): not because pre-genital ‘non-climactic’ sexuality does not exist, but because to make it the exclusive basis of the account is *to evade the Freudian subject*, the subject precisely of a post-Oedipal and thus *repressed* sexuality, a sexuality no longer blissfully and creatively at play in an imaginary space, but haunted by the other, impregnated by an enigmatic, seductive alien presence. We’ll see how significant this distinction is for thinking about Jones’ work.

To desexualize, to sublimate, is in this sense to make libido ego-friendly, playful, mutually pleasurable and benevolent. This may well be, as Laplanche suggests, a version of Freud’s motto *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, and may also be at stake in the transition from the first to the second Freudian topography, whereby in his late work Freud seems at times to privilege the supposedly rational agency of the ego, the very thing that in his earlier work had seemed the main *obstacle* to the treatment (Laplanche 2015: 262). But let us take this model of what Winnicott calls the ‘true self,’ a subject sustained, and ultimately freed from self-division, by a benevolent environment created by a caring, and in turn undivided, other subject. Look how Jones, writing in the 1930s about his wartime experiences, completely upends our expectations by representing that experience in a way remarkably consistent with such a model. To set the scene, it is early December 1915, and No. 6 Platoon, B Company, of the 15th Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers is just arriving in Normandy, with Private John Ball (Jones’s persona) doing his best to keep up. After a hard night trooping ‘rather as grave workmen than as soldiers,’ Jones’s persona reflects:

...there was in this night’s parading, for all the fear in it, a kind of blessedness, here was borne away with yesterday’s remoteness, an accumulated tedium, all they’d piled on since enlistment day: a whole unlovely order this night would transubstantiate, lend some grace to.

Jones 1978: 27

The minute particulars of lived reality, its suffering and boredom, are absorbed into a collective order, which as it were blesses the individual by absolving him of the burden of selfhood,

transubstantiating – or ‘sublimating’ – the real of his experience. Whereas for a writer like Wilfred Owen any hint of praising what the military order had done to individual men could be nothing but flagrant hypocrisy, Jones deliberately presents the absorption of the self into a collective, disciplinary cultural space as both an aesthetic and an implicitly religious union:

Informal directness buttressed the static forms—ritual words made newly real.

The immediate, the newness, the pressure of sudden, modifying circumstance ... brought intelligibility and effectiveness to the used formulae of command; the liturgy of their going-up assumed a primitive creativeness, an apostolic actuality...

Jones 1978: 28

It is this sense of ‘apostolic actuality’, of the self becoming a vessel for some divine message (*apostolos* is God’s postman) that makes Jones’s work strikingly unlike that of most other war poets. The Jonesian vision of the reality of war – and bear in mind that he served as a soldier for more than three years, and must have witnessed an appalling number of deaths and injuries, and indeed caused some himself – is almost surreally at odds with what we expect. What Jones is struggling to do, in fact, despite everything he had seen and suffered since 1915, is to revive as accurately as possible the lived experience of the young soldier as he first arrived at the front, a subject still hypnotically bound into the ‘corporate will’ (Jones 1978: 7) or group psychology of the military order. Perhaps, at first sight, the ‘primitive creativeness’ felt by the soldier as the empty routine of training is filled-out by the real of lived experience would seem to have little to do with sexuality at all (as Jones himself would undoubtedly have protested). But as I will show, the relation to the other, the possibility of either sacred union or nightmarish entanglement with the other – a relation at the fantasmatic heart of human sexuality – is fundamentally involved in what opens at the primal creative source driving Jones’s art.

Let us go further into Jones’s parenthesis, his episode bracketed off from ordinary life as a ritual or sacramental space. One of the strangest things we find there is a disclosure of the *erotic* dimension of the wartime catastrophe. Left without a leg to stand on by an enemy bomb, the protagonist realises that his chances of crawling out of the trench alive will be greatly enhanced if he abandons his heavy rifle. His delirious thoughts spiral back to the voice of his training sergeant when the gun was first issued to him:

...and you men must really cultivate the habit of treating this weapon with the very greatest care and there should be a healthy rivalry among you—it should be a matter of very proper pride and

Marry it man! Marry it!

Cherish her, she's your very own.

Jones 1978: 183

This libidinal investment, as Freud would say, in the modern equipment of destruction is obviously a striking example of the wartime distortion of human values. But that distortion is precisely what structures the soldier's quasi-psychotic world, as is shown by the jagged, ruptured text, switching between doctrinaire ideological discourse and sudden fantasmatic commands (recall the superego, as redefined by Lacan: a sadistic voice commanding 'Enjoy!'). It is a world 'moulded [sic] by, made proper to, the special environment' (Jones 1978: 91) of the war, and getting married to your rifle is a good example of what happens inside that world, inside the 'parenthesis' where the repressive syntax of ordinary existence does not apply. As we will see, this special, parenthetical space of fantasmatic enjoyment, was also the topic of one of Freud's writerly responses to the Great War: his *Massenpsychologie*, or 'group psychology'.

The creation of a 'special environment' in the catastrophic wasteland of the war is thus Jones' way of conveying the psychical reality of the soldiers and at the same time serves as a description of his own literary task in *In Parenthesis*. This world cannot be represented realistically or even rationally, but has to be brought back to life through a 'primitive creativeness' that corresponds to the eclipse of ordinary, rational existence. And that creativeness, counterintuitively and against all the decent pieties of war poetry, is a matter of *play*. An encounter with a 'warden of stores' in an unfamiliar trench gives a vivid sense of this bizarre playfulness:

A man seemingly native to the place, a little thick man, swathed with sacking... gorgeted in woollen Balaclava, groped out from between two tottering corrugated uprights, his great moustaches beaded with condensation under his nose.

Jones 1978: 89

This strange anthropoid trench-dweller gives the officer details of where to find the equipment needed; then

He slipped back quickly, with a certain animal caution, into his hole; to almost immediately poke out his wool-work head, to ask if anyone had the time of day or could spare him some dark shag or a picture-paper. Further, should they meet a white dog in the trench her name was Belle, and he would like to catch any bastard giving this Belle the boot.

Jones 1978: 90

The man has made himself at home in the trench, which has therefore become a special ontological parenthesis, an environment defined by its own set of rituals and forms of enjoyment. His requests and instructions indicate an acknowledgement of a shared playful community with other men in such things as telling the time, sharing social rituals like smoking or reading the paper, and the protection of love objects (Belle the dog is a mock chivalric beloved). But the man's withdrawal into his 'hole' symbolizes an ontological gap between his particular, 'animal' enjoyment and the external symbolic register of the community outside the war, as if his self-excavated world no longer forms part of human reality:

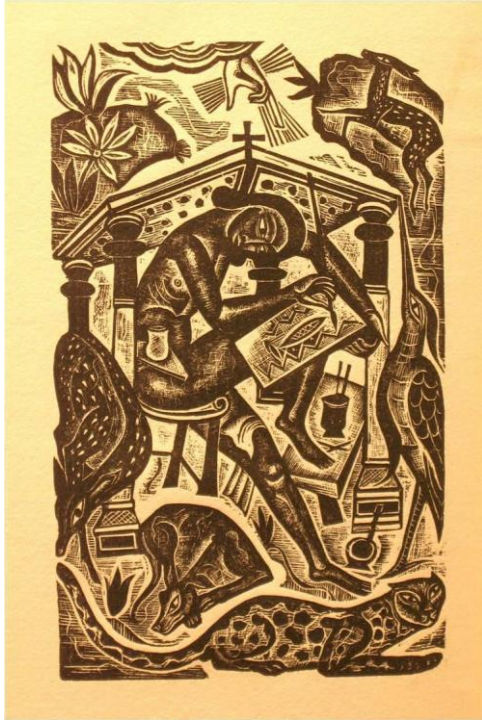
They watched him vanish, mandrill fashion, into his enclosure. They wondered how long a time it took to become so knit with the texture of this country-side, so germane to the stuff about, so moulded by, made proper to, the special environment dictated by a stationary war.

Jones 1978: 91

In Parenthesis itself, as the title indicates, is also an enclosure, a space of withdrawal from the ontologically-consistent external world of realistic 'reality'. Its special textual environment is carved out by Jones 'mandrill fashion', through a creative excavation of human subjectivity to expose the essential 'aboriginal mask' (Jones 1978: 91): the self as shaped by a space of vital but unspeakable enjoyment.

For Winnicott, the true self, away from the compliant conventionality of the everyday ego, assembles 'the details of the experience of aliveness' (Winnicott 1965: 148). But a special 'holding environment' – maternal care, the analytic setting, perhaps art or religion with their

framed spaces and consensual rituals – was required for such a self to emerge, to be able to discover itself through playful transitional experiment. Let us look at a self-portrait produced by Jones in 1927:



Jones produced this engraving in 1927 while staying as a guest at the monastery on Caldey Island, just before he began work on *In Parenthesis*. The ‘holding environment’ that offered Jones respite from the sexual problem of Petra and perhaps allowed him to ‘sublimate’ can be read as a tightly-packed series of frames within frames: first the artwork-within-the artwork, apparently centering on some symbolic shape (a fish, perhaps...), then its frame, then the holding figure of the ego-artist-monk, then the enclosing structure of the temple merging with the enclosing ring of animals, then the exterior frame of the image (and then, outside the image, the room in the monastery where Jones is working, then Caldey Island itself ringed by the sea...) It is clearly the image of an ego blissfully cushioned from external threats, withdrawn from external reality like the mandrill in the trench and, like him, ‘knit with the texture’ of the environment (the calm proximity of animals is always a sign of happiness in Jones).

One way to understand the fate of sublimation in Freud’s thinking, according to Laplanche, is to see it as a precursor of what the second topography will generalize (and perhaps mystify) as the unifying and binding power of Eros, the life drive. The main agent of Eros is of course that

pre-eminently unifying psychical agency, the ego. In one mode of sublimation, Laplanche writes, ‘the ego imposes unity on what is diverse and anarchic in the drive by way of the ego’s unitary and specular form’ (Laplanche 2015: 264). This binding of sexuality by the ego, as what Laplanche will call a ‘Ptolemaic’ agency seeking to defend against the ‘Copernican’, decentring force of the sexual drive, turns the artistic representation into a series of protective enclosures to ward off the psychical incursion of the Other (Laplanche 2020). But let us look more closely at the image, honing in on its central metafictional trope, the artwork within the artwork:



What is the artist depicting at the centre of his artwork? Perhaps a fish, a central mystical symbol in Christianity; or perhaps an opening, an orifice breaching the geometrical surface that emblemizes and enacts containment and control. This Jonesian and Winnicottian image of narcissistic binding thus has at its heart something strange, something that unsettles the frame and resists containment. To open another way of looking at Jones’s work that might help us discern this enigma, we need to trace a very different understanding of Freudian sublimation in the work of Jacques Lacan.

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In his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), Lacan grapples with what he calls ‘the problem of sublimation’ (Lacan 1992: 85) in a way starkly different from the Winnicottian approach. Given that Lacan’s central aim in the 1950s had been to rescue Freud’s work from what he saw as the conservative reductionism of his psychoanalytic contemporaries, it is no surprise that sublimation – in one interpretation, as we have seen, the very name of a ‘Ptolemaic’ reductionism – should have been an important topic for him. To define sublimation as the satisfaction of the drive in ‘socially valorized objects’, comments Lacan, is to open ‘a field of infinite complexity’, soft-peddalling his criticism of Freud but pointing to the central

problem (Lacan 1992: 94). Lacan's response is in effect to reinvent the Freudian concept by extracting *sublime* from 'sublimation'. Turning to one of Freud's earliest pre-psychoanalytic texts, the 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Lacan discovers there a new key to the question of sublimation: what Freud wrote as *das Ding*, a psychical Thing outside the signifying structure of the unconscious, thus 'the absolute Other of the subject' (1992: 52). The secret of sublimation is therefore not to be sought where Winnicott had found it, in the ordinary field of neurotic subjectivity, a field of defence mechanisms that stave off and pacify the unbridled *jouissance* of the Thing, but precisely beyond them: in other words, beyond the pleasure principle.

The Freudian Thing unearthed or reinvented by Lacan is therefore sublime in a properly Kantian sense: transcendentally irreducible to the everyday register of the signifier. Like the divine presence, the Thing reveals itself beyond mere objects; and sublimation, as Lacan puts it, serves to 'elevate the object to the dignity of the Thing' (Lacan 1992: 112). Sublimation in this sense would therefore no longer involve the mysterious evaporation of sexuality but rather would mark an intractable *jouissance* invading, disfiguring, the field of social and cultural value. Just as in Kant the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is no mere quantitative difference but a transcendental heterogeneity — a categorical difference, that is, not between different things but between different *orders* of things — so, by introducing the idea of the Thing, Lacan could open up a categorical difference between on one side the domain of social value and on the other the sublime, aseptic essence of Freudian sexuality. The field of sublimation, of artistic or cultural practices, as Lacan saw it, far from being governed by the overarching binding power of Eros, was racked by the inscrutable singularity of *jouissance*.

At the end of the 1950s, then, Lacan was aiming in effect to reverse the trajectory or *Bahnung* of Freudian sublimation, picturing it not as the cultural appropriation or colonization of sexuality but as the invasion of the cultural field by a traumatic kernel of sexuality, an anamorphic stain on cultural representation. The sublime Thing remains always irreducible to the geometrical logic of signification, with its sublime, singular manifestation spellbinding and dumbfounding the ordinary protocols of interpretation. This Lacanian approach to sublimation is clearly in marked opposition to Winnicott's view of aesthetic experience as an 'experience of aliveness' (Winnicott 1960: 148) that is fundamentally regenerative or redemptive, that opens up new therapeutic possibilities through creative work. Indeed, in his seminar of 1956-7, *La relation d'objet*, Lacan had explicitly linked sublimation to the death drive, seeing in

Leonardo's work an encounter with an 'absolute Other' (Lacan, 1994: 431), an opening of the field of representation to what lies beyond that field, the singular, illegible *jouissance* of artistic discovery.

How then can we use this Lacanian framework to inflect or transform our psychoanalytic perspective on Jones's artistic responses to war experience? Given what we have already seen of the Jonesian emphasis on 'intelligibility and effectiveness' in *In Parenthesis* (Jones 1978: 28) or the concentric rings of protection he crafts around the artist-monk on Caldey Island, surely the relevance of a Winnicottian model of transitional space and redemptive play is unquestionable?

To address this question, we need to look more carefully at Jones' work, look through and beyond its pleasurable foregrounding of an ostensible 'holding environment', and thus attempt, by using the dangerous supplement of Lacanian sublimation, to amplify our account of that work and begin to gauge its full significance. To help us do so, however, we first need to turn back to Freud, since as we noted above, a key to understanding the 'special environment' (Jones 1978: 91) of *In Parenthesis* is given by Freud's *Massenpsychologie*, his 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' (1921). How does Freud's post-war theory of the crowd shed light on Jones' post-war artistic creations?

The most striking feature of that theory is how closely it interlinks the problematic of the modern urban crowd with that of the primal horde, which Freud had first discussed in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). The atrocity of the first modern war takes Freud back to thinking about how humans behaved before civilization itself, before the very possibility of morality or cultural value. How does Freud picture the primal scene of social relations, the *fons et origo* of our catastrophic modernity? The crowd-horde is above all marked by an essentially asymmetrical topography: Freud posits a radical, insurmountable difference between the individual crowd-horde members, each deprived of autonomous agency and personal enjoyment, and the single *Fuhrer* or leader, over-endowed with both, a kind of Nietzschean *Urbarmensch* that both controls the crowd-horde and embodies an unbridled enjoyment. This essential difference, Freud emphasizes, is primal, pre-ontological: '[F]rom the first,' he writes, 'there were two kinds of psychologies, that of the individual members of the group and that of the father, chief or leader. The members of the group were subject to ties...but the father of the primal horde was free' (Freud 1955: 123). What is crucial here is that the crowd-horde members are 'subject

to ties', socially bound, whilst the leader remains unbound, essentially asocial. Just as in sublimation the drive had been *zielgehemt*, its aim tied down and tied into the texture of sociocultural values, so the crowd-horde members are socially bound, their free play or agency restricted. And this social restrictedness is a direct result of the Fuhrer's presence, which can clearly be linked to the Kantian sublime in that it entails a force beyond mere aesthetic judgement, essentially inscrutable. This sublime power is what Le Bon (arguably the source of Freud's *Massenpsychologie*) calls 'prestige' — 'a sort of domination,' as Freud puts it, that 'entirely paralyses our critical faculty, and fills us with wonderment and respect' (Freud 1955: 81).

The members of crowd or horde are thus subject to the domination of the Fuhrer, bound into restrictive social ties by his unbound, asocial presence. This, as Freud again continues in the wake of Le Bon, is the very mechanism of hypnotic suggestion, which cannot be explained by 'rational factors' (Freud 1955: 88) but which for Freud is to be linked to the everyday magic of *Verleibtheit*, 'falling in love' (Freud 1955: 111). It is no accident, of course, that one of the group formations examined by Freud in his 1921 text is the army. Indeed, this link between suggestion and sublimation, whereby the group leader is 'elevated to the dignity of the Thing', allows us a new way to read Jones' representation of wartime experience. Just as the critical faculties of the crowd-horde members are paralysed by the leader's prestige, so the Jonesian soldiers are pleasurably bound into a kind of ritual celebration or sublimation of military culture: 'the liturgy of their going-up assumed a primitive creativeness, an apostolic actuality' (Jones 1978: 28).

The title of *In Parenthesis*, we can now see, is thus entirely appropriate: the poem speaks of a 'special environment' set apart from the space-time of ordinary reality, part ceremony and part hypnotic trance. Freud's theory of the hypnotic subjection of the crowd-horde to its leader, a figure 'elevated to the dignity of the Thing', allows us to see Jones' work in a different light, and also allows us another way to understand Lacan's version of sublimation. The 'primitive creativeness' of the soldiers which the poem both recalls and celebrates — as a priest celebrates a mass — is a precise equivalent to the social valorisation of and subjection to the magical presence, the sublime prestige, of an unfathomable *jouissance* set apart from the constraints of everyday existence. Jones's language deliberately blurs the difference between the divine and

the military, with the latter seen as a symbolic framework able to combine the grubby materiality of the actual with the sublime transcendence of the apostolic.

We need to turn back to the ‘warden of stores’ we encountered earlier in our reading of *In Parenthesis*, that strange mandrill-like anthropoid of the trenches. The Jonesian narrator was amazed that this man was ‘so knit with the texture of this country-side, so germane to the stuff about, so moulded by, made proper to, the special environment dictated by a stationary war’ (Jones 1978: 91). The quadruple effort to inscribe the relation between human subject and special environment here – ‘knit with’, ‘germane to’, ‘moulded by’, ‘made proper to’ – is the key: there is something in this coalescence of *jouissance* and actuality that defies representation, that is beyond words. The pathway between the sexual and the non-sexual here, between sublime intensity and social bondedness, may seem interpretable, as we indicated above, in Winnicottian terms as an instance of creative play within a ‘holding environment.’ That Jones’s work both supports and subverts such a reading is made clear if we turn to some other images he produced shortly before he began work on *In Parenthesis*. These images tell a different story about being ‘knit with the texture’ of trench warfare:



Illustrations for *Gulliver’s Travels*,

1925¹

¹ Jones was commissioned by the editors of an independent publisher, the Golden Cockerel Press, but the engravings were in fact never published as Jones abandoned the project. They belong to the Douglas Cleverdon Estate, and are reproduced in Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), p.89.

These engravings, produced as illustrations for *Gulliver's Travels*, show the nightmarish obverse of the 'holding environment' that was supposedly the framework of the beautiful harmonic creativity of the Jonesian monk-artist: now the self is trapped, surreally constrained, in the grip of the Other. And what is most powerful about these images is how they unmask the radical passivity of this trapped self: far from being blissfully merged with sublime creativity, the subject here is drilled through, horrifically exposed to the incursion of the Other's *jouissance*. As Adorno will put it, the price of being 'made proper to' the enjoyment of the Other is the 'expropriation' of the human subject (Adorno 1974: 64).

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