Chapter 12

Psychoanalysis, Popular and Unpopular

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In the 1956 science fiction film *Forbidden Planet*, a dashing crew of terrestrial soldiers frees a fair maiden and destroys an alien machine that can unleash the destructive power of the “id.” Leslie Nielsen, playing the captain of the United Planets Cruiser C57-D, triumphs over the hubristic mad genius Dr. Morbius by forcing him to accept that the invisible monster that killed all members of his original expeditionary force was a materialization of his own “subconscious.” Morbius, played by Walter Pidgeon, has been living with his daughter Alta in a modernist, biomorphic-style ranch house in a state of radical seclusion and incestuous self-sufficiency. Psychoanalytic terms like “id” were common currency in Hollywood of the 1950s: long before 1970s film theorists embraced sexual difference, the gaze, and fetishism as keys to understanding film form, spectatorship, and the ideological apparatus, the American film industry followed in the footsteps of Greenwich Village bohemian modernists by taking up the tools presented by Sigmund Freud’s epochal discovery.

In narrativizing, visualizing, and taking apart the psychic apparatus on screen, Hollywood filmmakers and stars displayed their embrace of modern life: *Forbidden Planet* not only cast the psychoanalytic concept of the “id” as its villain, it was also the first feature film with a completely

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electronic score, composed by experimental musicians Lois and Bebe Baron. Dr. Morbius' home on Altair bears a striking resemblance to the intimate but modern case-study homes being built in California by a generation of idealistic architects, from Charles and Ray Eames to Gregory Ain. Its furnishings follow the biomorphic designs of Isamu Noguchi, while Robbie the Robot as futuristic butler incarnates the domestic labor-saving device in one compact, queer anthropomorphic package. Finally, under Leslie Nielsen's, or Commander John Jay Adams', insistence, Morbius acknowledges, like a good psychoanalytic patient, his dark side: he accepts that the monster is a materialization of his unconscious aggression. In order to save the world from its nefarious power, he, like the Krell technology, must be destroyed. The massive power plant, suggested by special effects produced by painted sets – implying a vast underground lair – must be laid waste, lest other creatures come into contact with its mysterious ability to realize one's unconscious aggressions. His daughter Alta is released from her incestuous sequestration and the expeditionary force can return to Earth having solved the riddle of Morbius' failure and self-destruction. The unconscious, once weaponized, can have genocidal powers: its containment is the task of a rag-tag detachment of Earth soldiers, whose respect for the chain of command allows the highest-ranking officer to win the love of the innocent daughter of an alien world. Working between high culture and pulp fiction, the film is able to refer to Shakespeare and Freud while providing an MGM showcase for Disney animators, on loan to render the monster materialized out of Morbius' unconscious.

According to Ann Douglas, Freud's career and body of work shared a "mind-set and a mood" with white urban America: "Freud and America in the modern era were not just conversationalists on a common theme, but mutual mind readers at work in an age fascinated with all forms of mind reading and mental telepathy.... As powerful arrivistes, Freud and America, more specifically New York, shared in its most acute form of adrenaline rush that was modernism" (1995, 156). Douglas' analysis of American culture of the 1920s weaves narrative strands that tie together the cultural restlessness and spirit of experimentation and invention that characterized New York and its bohemian culture. William James and Gertrude Stein, two forward-thinking Americans, emerge in her history as figures that were fascinated and repelled by psychoanalysis. Douglas describes Freud as fundamentally hostile to the energies of the young nation but his ambitions for psychoanalysis as a set of world-making and

world-destroying insights inspired Greenwich Village bohemians, aspiring actresses, and men of letters. The power of his discovery of the unconscious was allegorized in *Forbidden Planet* by the Krell machine. If, according to psychoanalytic theory, resistance was the hallmark by which its proponents and adversaries measured its truth, the enthusiasm with which psychoanalytic theory was embraced in America was deeply disturbing to its founder. Popular culture as it emerged in the 1920s and 1930s had already taken up many of Freud's theories and presented them energetically in the film industry, with daring young women like movie star Colleen Moore seen reading a book by Freud in *Flaming Youth* (1923) (Douglas 1995, 123). In a letter dating from May 14, 1922, to Arthur Schnitzler, Freud writes upon the occasion of the playwright's birthday that Schnitzler had made similar discoveries in human psychology as psychoanalysis, but that he found aesthetically pleasing forms with which to communicate his insights. Apologetically, Freud closes the letter with the statement, "Forgive me for drifting into psychoanalysis; I simply can't do anything else. I know, however, that psychoanalysis is not the means of making oneself popular" (quoted in Jones 1957, 444).

In fact, MGM, the studio that produced *Forbidden Planet*, was an early adopter when it came to psychoanalysis: readers of the *New York Times* on January 24, 1925, would have found themselves scrutinizing the following headline, "Freud Rebuffs Goldwyn: Viennese Psychoanalyst Is Not Interested in Motion Picture Offer." According to the *New York Times* report, Goldwyn travelled to Vienna to ask the "master" of psychoanalysis to write a love story, but Freud refused even to meet with him. For Douglas, Freud's rejection of Goldwyn's offer was of a piece with his symptomatic dislike of American life and its popular culture: she implies that Freud's animus lay in the "hatred of small differences" that motivates narcissistic rejection of those who remind us too much of ourselves.

Freud and the American moderns like William James did diverge in their attitudes toward religion and the mind-cure therapies that emerged at the turn of the century in the United States. For Ann Douglas, James' acceptance of the practices and results of spiritualism and its exploration of the occult and the supernatural was linked to pragmatism's emphasis on practice rather than theory: in practice, mind-cure therapy was producing powerful healing effects on its patients, just as spiritualism gave succor to those who craved contact with other worlds and their lost ones. Christian Science, as pioneered by Mary Baker Eddy, was a female-oriented movement. James did not

hesitate to affirm “alternative” cures and alternative knowledge produced by ordinary, often uneducated women. James rejected Old Testament austerity and the Calvinist approach to salvation, while Freud’s patriarchal authoritarianism placed him in a starkly drawn genealogical relationship with impersonality and masculinist privileging of objectivity.

Like psychoanalysis, mind-cure and self-help were based upon the idea that unseen, non-organic forces shape our world and our bodies. Perhaps these movements faced a medical establishment bent on enforcing a monopoly on expertise in the healing arts, but psychoanalysis appeared exotic and foreign while self-help and mind-cure were allied to American traditions and folk cures. While compelling, Douglas’ parsing of the difference between William James and Gertrude Stein, on the one hand, and Sigmund Freud, on the other, overlooks a powerful dimension of Freudian theory – its intimate relationship with the deflationary and comical worldview of Yiddish folk humor. In fact, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) anthologizes the Jewish joke and its folk repository of popular wisdom. Freud allows us to interpret its humor as playful, infantile subversion of the pretensions of the powerful and the wealthy, even as he demonstrates that, as in the experiences of Jewish popular culture with its unflinching take on the vanity of the rich, the desire of the undesirable offers powerful examples of the power of censorship and the pleasure of nonsensical defiance. Freud’s explanations of the economy of repression and its relationship to laughter can be crudely summarized in this way: a good joke allows teller and listener to save energy that we spend censoring childish associations between words (puns), aggression against the superego (displacement, nonsense, criticism), and sexual associations (dirty jokes, of which there are not many examples in the joke book). He returned over and over again to the following “Jewish joke,” which he felt demonstrated the shared pleasure that jokes communicate when they present the cleverness of instinctual life defending itself from superegoic reproach:

An impoverished individual borrowed 25 florins from a prosperous acquaintance, with many assurances of his necessitous circumstances. The very same day his benefactor met him again in a restaurant with a plate of salmon mayonnaise in front of him. The benefactor reproached him, “What? You borrow money from me and then order yourself salmon mayonnaise? Is *that* what you’ve used my money for?” “I don’t understand you,” replied the object of the attack; “if I don’t have any

money I *can't* eat salmon mayonnaise, and if I have some money I *am not allowed* to eat salmon mayonnaise. Well, then, when am I to eat salmon mayonnaise?"

(Freud 1953–74, 8:49–50; translation modified)

Jewish humor embodies a subaltern people's comic vision of human vanity and social and economic inequity. In this joke, the hedonism of the poor man and his willful misunderstanding of his benefactor's reproach allow us to see philanthropy or the generosity of the rich for what it is – an exercise of power and discipline. We sympathize with the poor man's self-defense and trickery and laugh at the benefactor's hypocrisy exposed: his gift came with strings attached. A sob story and the pity evoked demonstrate that when the rich give to the poor, they do not want the poor to enjoy the good things of life. The connection between this Jewish joke and Freud's deflationary but comic view of human pretension is obscured in Douglas' otherwise magisterial account of his influence on American moderns. When she reduces Freud's interpretation of jokes to sinister vehicles for repressed violence, she is taking a cue from the melodramatic plot of popular understanding of the id as promoted by *Forbidden Planet* (Douglas 1995, 139).

Freud was without a doubt, if not an Old Testament, then an Old World patriarch, but Ann Douglas in 1995, and then David Cronenberg in his 2011 film *A Dangerous Method* represent him as particularly humorless and severe. Viggo Mortensen's Freud is an ethically upright, judgmental and brilliant man. For Douglas, Freud is a dynamic upstart. Cronenberg and Douglas perform similar acts of decontextualization by ignoring "Jewish sensibility" formed by Yiddish and its earthiness and stubborn plebeian pride (Gabler 2011, 10). Freud's book on jokes abounds with characters familiar to popular Yiddish culture: opportunistic *schädchen*, or matchmakers, desperate bachelors, Jewish beggars, Jewish millionaires, superstitious faithful and the deceitful rabbis who exploit them. As Freud describes the pleasure released when joke teller and interlocutor can share in the temporary lifting of repression, he cites the Jewish jokes and puns with which he is familiar. The comedy of unmasking "arises in the first instance as an unintended discovery derived from human social relations" (Freud 1953–74, 8:189). Neal Gabler and Harvey Pekar would agree. As Gabler concludes in his introduction to Pekar's illustrated volume on Yiddishkeit, Yiddish is capable of ripping "through formalities ... prevarications – pretensions, and ... dishonesty. In a world that fetishizes money and status,

Yiddishkeit shrugs at both” (Gabler 2011, 10). In the case of the joke about salmon mayonnaise, we laugh because we are given temporary reprieve from an oppressive and disciplining sense of gratitude enforced by the generosity of the powerful. In Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he casts a shadow of a doubt on his friend Romain Rolland’s description of a spiritually infused “oceanic feeling of connectedness” with the shrug of Yiddishkeit’s vernacular skepticism:

So it is a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole. To me, personally, I may remark, this seems something more in the nature of an intellectual judgment, not, it is true, without any accompanying feeling-tone, but with one of a kind which characterizes other equally far-reaching reflections as well. I could not in my own person convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling. But I cannot on that account deny that it in fact occurs in other people.

(Freud 1953–74, 21:78)

The humor of the Jewish sensibility provided Freud with powerful examples of the depreciation of the superego in popular culture. Low Jewish sensibility communicates a critical perspective on superstition, venality, and hypocrisy, while expressing solidarity with the cunning and pleasure-seeking project of not just the ego, but also the poor, the ordinary, and the deprived.

It is striking that Douglas emphasizes Gertrude Stein’s Rabelaisian appetites and carnivalesque attitude at the expense of Freud’s somber and allegedly stoical pessimism, while Viggo Mortensen’s Freud is essentially a humorless and resentful prig. William James and Gertrude Stein did not have to work for a living: both enjoyed family fortunes that were financially well managed. Henry James Senior was independently wealthy: William James was born at Astor House in New York City. Gertrude Stein’s father, Daniel, was a railroad executive who invested in real estate. Gertrude and her brothers, Daniel and Leo, enjoyed lives of bohemian ease because of the wealth and parsimony of the family patriarch. The interest income they derived from family capital allowed them a disinterested relationship to survival that Freud could never entirely enjoy, even though by the 1920s his practice was burgeoning and he felt for the first time in his life free from the economic anxiety of a paterfamilias with six children, a wife, and spinster sisters to support. The 1920s represented a period of global economic prosperity, with the United States leading the way in forging new forms of consumerism and popular, democratic culture. The stock

market soared and the principles of liberal capitalism and social mobility seemed ascendant as a rising tide of economic growth and easy credit lifted many Americans out of lives of rural deprivation into, if not lives of material ease, then at least relative urban cosmopolitanism. In the 1920s and 1930s, many of Freud's patients were Americans, like A.A. Brill who traveled to Vienna to be treated by him and paid him in US dollars, of which he began accumulating a substantial sum (Jones 1957, 147).

Douglas' historical linking of Freud, James, and Stein as the theoretical enablers of American modernity unites and divides the three figures into two groups: elitist and pluralist, with Freud alone in the first category, and James and Stein in the second. Freud's single-minded pursuit of unitary theories of psychological life can easily be characterized as dogmatic, in contrast to the eclectic, egalitarian ethos represented by the Americans in Douglas' constellation. As I have tried to show in greater detail in *American Idyll: Academic Anti-Elitism as Cultural Critique* (Liu 2011), Freud's thinking embodied the popular skepticism of an ordinary person who is capable of exercising reason and critical thinking as a matter of instinctual problem-finding and problem-solving. Pluralism and eclecticism may seem at first to be more democratic in ethos, but in psychoanalytic terms, they also demand a higher degree of sublimation and renunciation. While Freud may not have been a populist, he abhorred esoteric and mystical spiritual practices, simply because gurus and teachers of that sort did not lay out clear paths that could be followed by the exercise of reason in their disciples.

In *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (1993), Sander Gilman affirms the image of a strong-minded and ambitious Freud, enmeshed in arguments about biological determinism and the pseudo-science of race and racism that characterized the medical establishment of not only the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but of the western world itself. Gilman, like most progressive academics writing and publishing in the early 1990s, was obsessed with the question of identity. For Gilman, Freud was unable to escape the dilemma presented by the rampant "medicalization of race" in late nineteenth-century Europe. He could not avoid contributing to the project of biologically defining the difference between Jews and non-Jews and yet he fought for psychoanalysis as a new science based on neutrality and objectivity in a social and cultural milieu that condemned Jews for being emotional and incapable of true reason. While Gilman does not go so far as to suggest that Freud in fact embraces an antisemitic scientific establishment, he does elaborate a theory of self and bad

object that comes very close to defining Freud's ambiguous relationship to the medical establishment as a neurotic and harrowing one. Gilman seems to suggest that in choosing to be a doctor, Freud also "chose" to expose himself to more antisemitism than might have been his lot had he remained outside the field of professional medical ambition: in his words, "Freud elected to be a physician. Yet this choice heightened the meaning of his Jewish identity for he could never remove himself from the anti-Semitism that clouded his professional choice throughout his adult life. Anti-Semitism haunted the medical profession" (1993, 217). Freud's "choice," thus framed, leads Gilman to see the creation of the new science of psychoanalysis as of a piece with the Viennese doctor's "search for identity" (1993, 218). The question of identity formation in *fin-de-siècle* culture contains, according to Gilman, potential for extraordinary growth and development: "Freud's project is an example of his positive reaction to the bind of race and science he was placed in" (1993, 226). Strong-minded, assertive and positive, Freud did not just embody the traits of burgeoning modern America; he was obviously understood by Gilman as an exemplary subject, someone who made difficult choices, and who could be creative and adaptive in response to a complex set of ostensibly insurmountable obstacles. Freud was a strong individual whose search for identity allowed him to be more innovative and courageous than others around him: in choosing difference, difficulty, and complexity over homogeneity, ease, and simplicity, Freud arrived at the success of the strong-minded.

During the 1990s, many Anglo-American academics found succor in the idea of "identity" and the "search for identity": Sander Gilman's forensic analysis of Freud's relationship to his Jewish identity partakes in the intellectual climate of the time. It is not so remarkable, then, that in a book on Freud's Jewish identity written during this period of academic ferment around "identity politics," Gilman would neglect to consider the one text where Freud investigates the founding myths of Jewish identity, namely *Moses and Monotheism*.¹ This work by Freud is an extraordinary close reading of the Old Testament and an exfoliation of the greatest prophet of the Judaic tradition. Moses, Freud argues, was an Egyptian: his proof has to do with symptomatic aspects of the foundling story that betray the repressed content of Moses' foreignness to the Jews of Egypt. The foundling Moses is adopted by an Egyptian princess: he is raised as Egyptian royalty, and only later discovers his humble origins. Freud finds this reversal odd: in almost all ancient folk tales, the foundling is found by peasants or shepherds, humble people,

and it is later revealed that he has royal blood. The fantasy of secret, royal origins allows us narcissistic satisfaction. If Moses' story is a secondary revision of the wish-fulfillment of the traditional folk tale, it is because the Jewish people have had to repress Moses' actual origins. Moses famously had a speech defect, and this for Freud betrayed his discomfort with the language of the Jews. According to Freud's account, which relies on Egyptologist Ernst Sellin's work, Akhnehaton ascended the throne and preached an austere form of monotheism that was rejected by the Egyptian elites upon his death. Monotheism, however, appealed to some of the most brilliant men in Egypt: according to Freud, Moses was one of these men. Upon the death of his pharaoh, he chose to leave Egypt with the Jewish people in order to preach and institute a monotheism that his chosen people found equally unbearable. In the desert, the priesthood murdered Moses, and then the guilt of his assassination and the realization of the debt of freedom that was owed to him created the elaborate series of prohibitions and proscriptions that the rabbinical elite imposed upon the tribe as collective atonement for the murder of the great man: "The Jews, who even according to the Bible were stubborn and unruly towards their law-giver and leader, rebelled at last, killed him, and threw off the imposed Aton religion as the Egyptians had done before them" (Freud 1953–74, 23:156). Freud himself never spoke about identity as an object or problem that could be either found or solved: for Freud, identification was a process, one that Jacques Lacan would later locate in relationship to mirrors and infantile delusion. When Freud talked about apparatuses and qualities, and about himself in his correspondence with his intimates, he was never anything but humorously self-deprecating. Freud as "father" of psychoanalysis continued to fascinate American thinkers, whether as an entrepreneurial strong man, austere patriarch, or conflicted, identity-seeking Jewish doctor.

Self-deprecation and devaluation may have been the emblem of the strong man of liberal capitalism, inventor, discoverer, and adventurer. It was no accident, however, that the quest for identity and self-affirmation became one of the major popular preoccupations of postwar America, a country beset by the massive social and economic changes described by C. Wright Mills in his classic *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (2001 [1951]). Mills' analysis of the gospel of success takes off where Ann Douglas leaves off. "Self-help" and "pop therapy" would lack "the intellectual and cultural interest that James and Stein had brought to the Mind-cure tradition." By Stein's death in 1946, "It had come to be an unwritten axiom that 'theory' and 'therapy,' elite

art and professionalized good cheer, were mutually and forever exclusive. Highbrow pessimism assumed low-brow optimism, and vice versa" (Douglas 1995, 143). Neither Freud, James, nor Stein was able, however, to predict the ways in which popular representations of psychic life would be reshaped and rearranged by postwar self-help movements, and the rise of new forms of popular culture and an advice industry that married self-hypnosis, self-help, the power of positive thinking, and business motivation, for a middle class confronting confusing new forms of work and leisure.

According to Mills, just as the conditions of liberal capitalism were being reshaped to suit the massive bureaucracies and corporate structures of monopoly capitalism, motivational literature sought to reinforce the psychological qualities of an entrepreneurialism that no longer suited the professional and economic progress of the salaried masses of the American postwar period:

The way up, according to the classic style of liberalism, was to establish a small enterprise and to expand it by competition with other enterprises. ... According to the old entrepreneur's ideology, success is always linked with the sober personal virtues of will power and thrift, habits of order, neatness, and constitutional inability to say Yes to the easy road. These virtues are at once a condition and a sign of success.

(Mills 2001 [1951], 160)

Mills describes the evolution of the inspirational literature of entrepreneurial success: first, by bolstering individual resolve in the service of the entrepreneurial spirit; second, by justifying the cruelty of failure; and third, in the phase of monopoly capitalism and white-collar work, by encouraging "peace of mind and various physical and spiritual ways of relaxation ... by lowering the level of ambition by replacing the older goals with more satisfying internal goals. ... The literature of the peace of the inner man fits in with the alienating process that has shifted men from a focus upon production to a focus upon consumption" (2001 [1951], 282–83). If fewer and fewer Americans were actually able to persevere as small business owners and self-employed entrepreneurs, the literature of success "explained" macro-economic changes in terms of individual insufficiency. If your family farm or corner grocery store could not survive a period of economic consolidation, you were not thrifty enough: you chose the easy road, unlike Freud, who allegedly "selected" the medical profession in order to present himself before the hostility of institutionalized, pseudo-scientific antisemitism. On the other hand, if you were unhappy with

being passed over for promotion in your white-collar job, you made yourself miserable by focusing on the external trappings of success.

Mills' analysis of the psychology of the mid-century gospel of success and inspirational literature served one end: to understand the class identity of this new American worker. Would he or she be proletarianized, as might be expected of wage workers who had no hope of enjoying inherited wealth? Or would he or she hide behind the prestige of educational credentials and office work, even if the wages were merely comparable or even occasionally inferior to those of blue-collar workers? Will they assume political power in solidarity with those below them, or in reactionary consolidation with their economic superiors? His answer is not at all clear-cut, but Mills sees the fragmentation and decentralization of political power as key in dispersing political authority across a bureaucracy or "network" as "manipulation": in an "impersonalized and more anonymous system of control, explicit responses are not so possible: anxiety is likely to replace fear; insecurity to replace worry. The problem is who really has power, for often the tangled and hidden system seems a complex yet organized irresponsibility" (2001 [1951], 349).

Although Mills' Left critique of the growth of technocratically oriented state-sponsored solutions to inequality inspired the student movement of the 1960s, his thesis about mass media, popular passivity, and "manipulation" fell out favor as a generation of post-'68 academics emerged on the cultural studies scene.² His class-oriented brand of qualitative Left sociology had fallen into serious disuse by the 1980s and 1990s, two decades that discarded class analysis for split selves, performativity, and identity formation. His theories of mass media manipulation and popular political indifference fall in line with his analysis of monopoly capital's thinning out of the sphere of political action: while unions and corporations seem to monopolize discussions about working conditions and two political parties divided the share of voters, the white-collar worker retreats or escapes into an inviting inner space of self-fashioning. Mills finds in the psychology behind the political indifference of the new middle class "the impasse of liberalism and the collapse of socialist hopes" (2001 [1951], 326). When a class rejects politics altogether, it no longer sees political meaning in its "insecurities or desires." The women's movement became a place where personal experience and political activity would be aligned once again, but not in ways that Mills would have recognized.

Although the hipster of the late 1950s would seem to be positioned in direct opposition to the rearguardism of Mills' white-collar workers, his stylized estrangement from political meaning and organization was

articulated by Norman Mailer's 1957 essay, "The White Negro," a hipster declaration of independence from both political participation and the talking cure. Whereas, in the 1920s, to be psychoanalytically oriented was to be modern for both white and black bohemians, by the end of the 1960s analysts were "squares" and the true social and cultural rebel embraced his mental illness as a sanctified and rather problematic identification with the everyday danger faced by black Americans (Mailer 2007 [1957]). Despite or because of his bombastic tone, Mailer presaged the popular repudiation of psychoanalysis as both backward and repressive. Moreover, he attributes to the "Negro" the unique ability to live completely present to imminent destruction: hipster emulation arises not from a bohemian solidarity between white and black moderns as described by Douglas in *New York City of the 1920s*: Mailer's white Negro embraced the allegedly transcendent psychopathology of African Americans. While a repudiation of mental healing of any sort, "The White Negro" opens with an allusion to the unconscious and its unfathomability: "Probably we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years."

While psychoanalytic institutes and practices flourished in American cities in the 1970s and 1980s, Freud's science had lost its appeal to popular culture. First of all, psychoanalysis was no longer the only therapeutic instrument available to middle-class Americans hoping to find answers and cures to a spectrum of dilemmas caused by the suffering that accompanied mental illness. The counterculture that embraced the modern primitive and alternative cures, and non-traditional forms of knowledge, found Carl Jung's theories of anima and animus much more congenial to a generational quest for identity and alternatives. The search for self would animate social movements even as the intellectual arms of such movements grappled with the legacy of psychoanalysis, as both theory and therapy.

In the 1970s, psychoanalytic theory found unlikely users among a passionate cadre of feminist scholars, especially in the new field of film theory and film studies. Freud himself had puzzled over femininity and its symptoms: Jacques Lacan would later take the psychoanalytic account of castration and lack and remake it as a structural, meaning-making, but contingent mark of "difference." Sexual along with class difference were two things that feminists wanted to assert in the face of homogenizing representations of politics and political participation. Marxists like Mills had neglected the gender question: they had

neglected the question of sexual difference and in doing so excluded forms of political participation and critique made possible by the identification of the oppressive powers as “patriarchal.” If the women’s movement declared that the “personal was the political,” the objective conditions of oppression appeared apprehensible through the identification of what was unique and particular to women’s experiences and women’s lives. According to Daniel T. Rodgers’ historical account of the early women’s movement, social change was the goal of the movement’s focus on raising levels of women’s awareness about their identity as women:

Consciousness raising made the personal collective and political. It gave the idea of “experience” a powerful place in the 1970s women’s movement.... In the process it made solidarities: sisterhood where ... only fragmented, male-identified, household isolated and family-absorbed women had existed before.

(Rodgers 2011, 148)

For feminist activists and scholars, the political significance of building feminist coalitions could not have been recognized or imagined by their male counterparts on the Left. A new worldview of politics and female experience had to be constructed from the ground up. According to Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, as feminist filmmakers and scholars “began to interrogate the assumptions behind a cinematic language of representation which promoted the concept of ‘realism’ and its effects on the construction and maintenance of sexual difference along patriarchal lines,” they “began to embrace semiotic and psychoanalytic theories that seemed capable of accounting for the ways in which patriarchal ideology has elided the representation of women” (1984, 7). Although Freud had given us the tools by which to understand femininity, he was unable to completely account for the generalized cultural misogyny that had rendered femininity “the underside, the repressed of a classical or rational/conceptual discourse ... Feminism ... allied itself with the avant-garde or with any signifying practice which challenged existing discursive structures” (Doane, Mellencamp, and Williams 1984, 11).

Feminist filmmakers and activists looked for new ways of working and intervening in the art world, in the film industry, and in academia. The leading intellectuals of the movement embraced psychoanalytic theory as a powerful form of meta-criticism: the use of psychoanalytic theory provided tools by which pioneering scholars in feminist film

criticism sought to introduce or smuggle new objects and new methodologies into the sphere of scholarly study. Psychoanalytic theories presented themselves as both weapons and targets for a new generation of scholars who were bringing their cultural activism into the halls of academia. The critique of realist film as male fantasy aimed at changing the world and freeing women from the straitjacket of gender. Hollywood film spectatorship was no more and no less than a form of political violence, an Althusserian exercise in ideological assertiveness. No one made the case more dramatically than Laura Mulvey in her classic essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), in which she uses Lacanian and Freudian concepts to dissect the ways in which the cinematic objectification of women contributes to the political suppression of women: "Woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound. She can only exist in relationship to castration and cannot transcend it" (Mulvey 1975, 7). As figures in feminist film criticism like Laura Mulvey, Linda Williams, Tania Modleski, Kaja Silverman, and E. Ann Kaplan gained recognition in academia, their work became increasingly cited, recognized, and debated, but the goal of securing social change seemed to recede even as professional success and recognition seemed more achievable. Feminists were remarkably successful at organizing conferences and film festivals, and editing anthologies and journals in which new ideas about sexual difference and the politics of exclusion and exploitation were highlighted and criticized. In the passionate debates inspired by feminist film theory, fantasy, fetishism, and visual pleasure alternated between censure and celebration. The concepts themselves were as divorced from the practice of psychoanalysis as they were from the formulation of policy and political struggle in legislative bodies. In these familiar and tortured controversies over women's images, male gazes, and imaginary penises, a.k.a. phalluses, we see feminist film scholars using a selective language of psychoanalytic theory to present possibilities for reading, interpreting, and making film in order to remake the world itself. Christine Gledhill's 1976 essay, "Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," illustrates the problems that feminist film theorists confronted in their use of psychoanalytic concepts as ideology critique. At the beginning of her essay she writes, "there is a danger that, once the object of feminist criticism is defined solely in terms of the cinematic production of meaning, we lose the ability to deal with its relationship to women as defined in other social practices" (Gledhill 1984 [1976], 19). Gledhill's political and intellectual ambition encompasses no less than an "assault" on patriarchy using the critical tools of the avant-garde, anti-realism, Lacanian

psychoanalysis, the work of Roland Barthes, and the integration of a feminist-infused form of Marxism to contest the ideologies of capitalism. It is undeniable that the 1970s were a time of political optimism for the Left, with the civil upheavals of the 1960s still fresh in everyone's memory, but Gledhill realizes as she approaches the end of her overview that something has been lost in the theoretical elaboration of post-structural psycholinguistic subject positions. "Real" women's lives, as defined by social practices, seemed to recede further and further from critical and cognitive analysis. The way out? Pointing to academic study of Harlequin romances, television, and newspaper advice columns as "unofficial discourses" by which women negotiate their relationships with dominant culture. It was during this period that poststructuralist theory became more insular and more elaborate, even as its engagements with popular cultural forms became more strident.

Psychoanalytic theory was instrumentalized as a facilitating but limited critique of patriarchy that returns the intellectual, boomerang-like, back to more study and more analysis of the repressed and the marginal, all in an airless world of dominant and marginalized discourses desperately seeking social relations in the form of real people and their experiences of spectatorship. Feminist film theory's accomplishments were many, but its mobilization of psychoanalytic theory for the purposes of cultural criticism became increasingly academic. In the meantime, on November 29, 1993, *Time Magazine's* cover featured a digitally rendered portrait of Freud's head dissolving into little puzzle pieces with the headline, "Is Freud Dead?" Along with self-help and New Age cures, behavioral and psychopharmacological therapies had increasingly replaced the Freudian cure in the practice of psychiatry with allegedly more effective and economical treatments. Freud's own "strength of mind" now appeared more as a symptom of his dogmatism and rigidity.

The famous white-collar middle class described by Mills had been thoroughly traumatized by wave after wave of corporate downsizing. Freelance work was the dignified way of understanding professional unemployment as self-employment. Blue-collar workers saw their unions decimated, their jobs transferred overseas. At the same time, 1970s feminists were disturbed by the younger generation of women's traditional choices. Even as middle-class women made their way up the meritocratic ladder, the middle class in general suffered economic setback after economic setback. The 1990s was the decade of the New Economy entrepreneur and the hacker. The rise of the Internet facilitated the study of the moving image, but undermined the importance

of traditional Hollywood realist narratives; younger people had less and less experience with the realist narratives attacked by feminists and poststructuralists. The personal computer interfaced with increasingly miniaturized and mobile screens, and the on-line identities with which we accessed these spaces seemed a priori discursive, fragmented, transgressive, and unpredictable. Psychoanalysis was no longer a novelty or a scapegoat, at least in the popular imagination: almost everyone knows that sometimes “a cigar is just a cigar.” A certain kind of psychoanalytic theory continues to thrive almost exclusively as an academic discourse, the history of its reception obscured by antagonisms real or imaginary with the culture that surrounded it. It is not surprising that today an obdurate but familiar indifference greets Freud’s and feminism’s insights regarding sexual difference and the unconscious.

Notes

- 1 Jan Assman’s *Moses, the Egyptian* (1997) and Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (1991) represent two different, sustained scholarly investigations of Freud’s theory of the origins of monotheism.
- 2 See, for example, Andrew Ross’ *No Respect* (1989) and Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture* (2006).

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