

Is the future Freudian?

FREUD 2000

Edited by Anthony Elliot

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Introduction

Is the future Freudian? Or are we going to witness the dismantling of psychoanalysis in favour of discourses that will bear only an etiolated relationship to the foundational texts of Sigmund Freud? And, most importantly, has the very success of psychoanalysis been its failure? Has the percolation of psychoanalysis into the cultural unconscious made it impossible as a form of therapy? What must Freudians do to render psychoanalysis into the radical practice that it once was?

Freud 2000 brings together ten essays on the possible uses of Freudian psychoanalysis in the years to come. The Freudians assembled here are not all psychoanalysts, but thinkers in the humanities and the social sciences and are well known for their commitment to the Freudian field. These essays in applied psychoanalysis seek to revive the prestige of psychoanalysis as a form of cultural commentary and justify its relevance in a world suffused with a plethora of images and signs – a world that demands a finer understanding of associational thinking as a basic form of linguistic competence. Since *the unconscious is the site par excellence of associational thinking*, Joanne Brown and Barry Richards (two contributors to this volume) are able to “predict... that beyond 2000 there will be an increasingly wide and sophisticated use of post-Freudian psychoanalytic ideas in the social sciences and humanities, in the study of culture, social process and politics.”

The urgency of this book arises from the continual assaults that Freudian psychoanalysis has been subjected to in recent years both in academic debate and in the popular media in the United States. The vehemence with which Freud has been attacked by erstwhile Freudians like Jeffrey Masson and Frederick Crews is itself perhaps worthy of analysis. What is it about the Freudian cultural legacy that should invite such vehement criticism? Why does Freud continue to inspire so much love and so much hate?

The resistance to psychoanalysis has revolved, one suspects, around Freud's ability to revise cultural history with so much panache that a great deal of it appears but an

anticipation of his own work. Hence the violent oscillations that mark the careers of the Freud lovers, the Freud haters, and the Freud bashers. They are fascinated by the scope of Freud's ambition but repulsed by his very human limitations.

Here, the Freud lovers attempt to address three traditional philosophical problems that pertain to the subject, object and means of knowledge. In other words: Who knows? What is known? How is it known? As Anthony Elliot puts it in his introduction: “Freudian psychoanalysis is of signal importance to three major areas of concern in the social sciences and the humanities, and each of these covers a diversity of issues and problems. The first is the *question of human subjectivity*; the second is that of *social analysis*; and the third concerns *epistemology*. These concerns are at the heart of *Freud 2000*.”

The Clinical and the Cultural

In other words, psychoanalysis is not reducible to what goes on between the doctor and patient. Most schools of psychoanalysis belabour this point at every given opportunity. Lacan's influential heir, Jacques-Alain Miller, has argued in his *Extimité* seminar (1985-86) that “for analysts, referring only to the analytic experience is illusory for Freud's and Lacan's works are also part of our relation to psychoanalysis.” It appears then that it is not just the doctor who inspires the transference, but the discourse as well. Psychoanalysis, as Anthony Elliot is keen to point out early in the volume, is a discourse that can help us to frame the “psychic orientation of social practices.” This expansion of the psychoanalytic ambit (in Elliot's definition) also means that unlike the physical sciences, which seek to demarcate their concerns with rigour, psychoanalysis is making itself vulnerable to the charge that it is moving away from its ‘core competence’ in clinical work. The answer to that charge from the point of view of this book is that the focus here is not so much on the metapsychology that animates the core of clinical analysis but an attempt to

demarcate the ways in which the Freudian unconscious interferes systematically in the fabric of everyday life. This systematic interference is made possible by the fact that the symbolic meanings of our acts are overdetermined by unconscious processes of which we are not fully aware. As Jacques Lacan points out in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977), most people sympathetic to psychoanalysis rarely appreciate what exactly is at stake in the claim that the unconscious has a structure and that the notion of the unconscious is not a mere romantic font of creativity. In fact, most humanists and lay people who nod appreciatively on hearing the notion of the unconscious being mentioned are thinking of the Jungian (rather than the Freudian) unconscious.

The Freudian Unconscious

What then is this Freudian unconscious that must be rearticulated to prevent its misappropriation in cultural analysis? To prevent its absorption in residual romantic notions that preceded the Freudian articulation? Lacan says quite categorically that “to all these forms of unconscious, ever more or less linked to some obscure will regarded as primordial, to something pre-conscious, what Freud opposes is the revelation that at the level of the unconscious there is something at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject – this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege.” And, most importantly, “I am well aware of the resistances that this simple remark can still provoke, though it is evident in everything that Freud wrote.”

But how do we identify such a moment? Where else does this moment lie but in, what Lacan terms, the “sense of impediment?” It is in the moment of “impediment, failure, split,” that the unconscious reveals its logic of interference. Freud finds failure interesting because it reveals a structure that is Other to the subject. “Freud is interested in these phenomena and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realised – which appears intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is produced, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious.”

The Impossible Professions

Should not the political realm then be the privileged site for the revelations of the unconscious? Or rather in the revelation that it has a systematic structure of interference that is marked by “impediment, failure, and split?” Was not politics (along with pedagogy and psychoanalysis) one of the *three impossible professions* in the Freudian doctrine? Should it not be to these impossible professions that we must turn to for evidence of the workings of the unconscious that is marked by a *passion for ignorance*, by a resistance to change. Does not the Freudian experience bear witness to the fact that change (be it political or personal) is always marked by resistance when it encounters the desire of the Other? Therein lies surely the trauma of culture, the Freudian discontent in civilisation. The psychoanalytic notion of trauma, for example, will help us to understand not only the impasses in the lonely, alienated human subject but also the savage bouts of irrationality that break out repeatedly on the world's stage in the form of riots, rapes and genocide. By spelling out the relationship between trauma, repetition, and the death drive, psychoanalysis makes it a little more difficult to go into denial about the fact that cultures like individuals would rather *repeat than remember* (the historical trauma).

Freud & Current Affairs

Both individual humans and cultures are equally prey to the death drive that emerges in traumatic situations like the Partition, the recent referendum in East Timor, the genocide in Rwanda, etc. For, wherever there is a gap, or a split, the unconscious will speak. The classic sub-continental symptom from this perspective is Kashmir. What are *the libidinal stakes* in Kashmir that are not reducible to questions of geopolitics or military strategy? How does Kashmir function as a wound that is imbued with a perverse *jouissance* at its core? Unless we address this question and seek to traverse the real of this *jouissance*, there is no possibility of a political breakthrough. There will only be bouts of anxiety when, and if, talks are announced and there is endless posturing about pre-conditions. Again, how are we to undo the damage and bring about a measure of justice to the lives of the people affected by large-scale disruptions? As we approach the end of what is undoubtedly the most violent century in history, can psychoanalysis at least

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murdered and Kalicharan implicated in a false case only to flee into the jungles at the end of the novel. Prem Singh faults the novel only on one

count – Renu does not describe the growing peasant-movement of the day.

All in all, Prem Singh has raised more pertinent political questions related to the notions of revolution, freedom, decolonisation and develop-

ment as reflected in the Hindi novel with special reference to Ajneya, Yashpal and Renu in his valuable book. The addition of an updated bibliography will make it more researcher/reader friendly. The book

is, indeed, an important contribution to the politico-cultural criticism of the modern Hindi novel.

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Summerhill

give us a clue to the psychopathology of these aberrations, if not cure them?

This book argues that it can. If one wished to be formulaic, we can simply say that this book *marks a transition in the fortunes of psychoanalysis*. While in the twentieth century, psychoanalysis brought out the inherent *violence in sexuality*, in the twenty-first century it will seek to expose the intrinsic *sexuality in violence*. As Fred Alford, one of the contributors, points out in his essay on 'Freud and Violence': "Freud is not just a metaphysician of violence and destruction. He is an observer, operating on the quite simple, non-metaphysical premise that *if people do it so much, they must like it*. There would be nothing surprising about this argument if it were about sex. Why does it still surprise about violence?" As globalisation accelerates the movement of peoples around the globe, giving rise to ethnic and cultural conflicts, it might help to keep this in mind. As Elliot insists, "every life, every activity, every event, every social or cultural practice is constituted and reproduced through representational and affective modes of psychic processing."

What, after all, is a culture? Is it not but a specific method of regulating the placement, use, and *jouissance* of human bodies? Where else (but in Freudian psychoanalysis) will we find a specific theory of this *jouissance*? A *jouissance* that insists beyond the pleasure principle in a perverse enjoyment of suffering itself? Is it not to Freud that we must turn in order to understand that the "world is, in the most general sense, at once an imaginative and social-historical project?"

What are these Freudian Futures?

Let us try to envisage the contributions that psychoanalysis can make to the so-called 'new-world order'. Given that Freudian psychoanalysis is not inherently geared towards a particular political agenda, how can we deploy its insights in ways that do not merely legitimate the dominance of the right or console the left? After all, both the leftist program of Freudo-Marxism in Europe and the rightist reduction of psychoanalysis to ego psychology in the United States have not borne fruit. I think one way of doing so would be to note, after Jacques Lacan, that psychoanalysis is not about economic production, it is not a method of increasing productivity either through an endorsement of free market capitalism or socialist planning. Lacan makes this quite clear in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60). This is because neither the left nor the right is willing to come to terms with the *tragic constitution of the human subject*. This becomes necessary because the attempt to use psychoanalysis in political projects cannot remain untouched by the libidinal

underpinnings of emancipatory critiques. In Elliot's formulation: "a reading of the emancipatory dimensions of Freudian psychoanalysis which is more in keeping with a radical postmodern perspective is one in which desire is viewed as integral to the construction of alternative selves and possible collective futures. In this reading, it is not a matter of doing away with the distorting dross of fantasy, but rather of responding to, and engaging with, the passions of the self as a means of enlarging the critical imagination."

Psychoanalysis and Orientalism

An example of how fantasy structures the critical imagination is Orientalism. Steve Pile, one of the contributors, takes up the challenge of situating the ways in which the Freudian theory of fantasy might help us to deconstruct the imaginative geographies of the Orient. In his contribution to this volume entitled 'Freud, Dreams and Imaginative Geographies,' Pile engages with the possibility of bringing together the discipline of human geography with psychoanalysis. He does this by examining the use of Freudian dream analysis in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Pile's take on Said is that "the analogy between the production of dream-space and the production of space as dream-like holds better once a fuller understanding of Freud's spatial imagination is appreciated." This fuller understanding will help us to realise that "there can be no decolonisation as such, but only the re-working of spatial relationships – so that the point of political action is not to seize space, but to transform it."

The transformation of space implies that the dream, which Freud dubbed "the royal road to the unconscious," is not a static object. It is in its ability to impact on the space of geography, in the so-called dream work, in the *transformational grammar of the unconscious* that we must seek a better understanding on the availability of the Freudian model as a tool to deconstruct the imaginative geography of the Orient. After all, as Pile points out, Said appears to be resistant to pushing this model for what it is worth. "If Said was briefly taken with a Freudian scheme for interpreting Orientalism, then he quickly abandons this in favour of a more Foucauldian analysis of the shift from one Orientalist 'vision' to another." By hesitating at this point, Said is not merely losing out on the dynamic sense of the latent/manifest content opposition that is implied in the Freudian model of dream work. He also fails to identify the constitutional ambivalence that attends the encounter between the coloniser and colonised, necessitating a corrective that was introduced by Homi Bhabha.

Since it is this constitutional ambivalence that animates the subject when it encounters the *jouissance* of the Other and which propels it into the modalities of mimicry and mockery, it appears that there are advantages in holding on to the Freudian model for at least a while longer. For at the scene of this ambivalence "is both fear and desire: fear of the other, desire for the other." But insofar as ambivalence is a constitutive feature of subjectivity, a psychological representation of the linguistic problem of ambiguity – given that the unconscious is structured like a language – does it not compel a larger understanding of the encounter that is instantiated in this example as that of coloniser versus colonised? Would not Hegelians understand the conflict as one between Master and Slave in the fight for symbolic recognition? Or Freudians notice that this model is resonant of the oedipal encounter where Father and Son are locked in an ambivalent quest for power to define ultimately the nature of Law?

Psychoanalysis & Law

I will conclude with a brief examination of David Caudill's essay on 'The Future of Freud in Law' as it dramatises the question of whether psychoanalysis has any place in jurisprudence given its problematic status as a science. Caudill is an American law professor and is committed to asking whether Freud, who has for decades been exiled from legal scholarship, will return to mainstream jurisprudence and, if so, in what form. The Freudian exile from jurisprudence is odd given that psychoanalysis has had a major impact on critical and cultural theory – discourses that are not without an influence on the critical legal theory movement. So how is it that Freud becomes an object of repression? Another way of asking this question is this: *What is it about psychoanalysis that is being evaded in legal theory?* Rather, in the practice of law, since some of the best minds in the legal academy have turned to psycho-analysis of late?

Pierre Legendre, a French legal historian (influenced by Jacques Lacan) and Peter Goodrich, his English editor, have argued that the resistance to Freud may have to do with the fact *the law itself has an unconscious*. Like psychoanalysis, the law too has to address whether it is a science, whether it has a logical structure, whether logical coherence is synonymous with a science or whether the law is just a set of contingent practices. Again, attempts have been made in the law as in psychoanalysis to use everything from moral philosophy to hermeneutics to elide the embarrassment of the fact that it can never be a science. Like psycho-analysis, the law too has had its deconstructors and debunkers who fight shy of building

theories and are content to merely work on the plane of practice.

The influential pragmatist tradition of the common law that is best personified in the spirit of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the U.S. Supreme Court, who decisively framed the law as a matter of experience, of *trial and error* (in more ways than one) rather than one of logic and science has made a great deal of legal theory redundant in American law schools. While this irreverent, pragmatist tradition continues in the heady mixture of law and economics that is represented by the contemporary jurisprudence of Judge Richard Posner, it is difficult to believe that Freud will actually make a comeback in legal theory. Nevertheless, the difficulty in envisaging a future for Freud in law does not amount to dubbing psychoanalysis irrelevant. It may even be that it is precisely the ease with which psychoanalysis has been repressed in legal discourse that will give us a fundamental clue to the debates ahead. The task for those who wish to do legal theory influenced by the psychoanalytic notion of law is perhaps to focus on the ways in which Freudian metapsychology helps to frame *both the subjectivity of law and the law of subjectivity*.

The burden of proof is on the legal theorist to demonstrate that the unconscious (in Legendre's contention) acts like a lawyer. Given the excessive pragmatism that attends legal discourse, surely the onus is on the Freudians to demonstrate how insights into the nature of the unconscious can make us into better and more ethical lawyers. After all, did not Lacan situate the unconscious in the plane of ethics rather than in alternate ontologies? Are we to be content, like the deconstructionists, with merely bringing out the fact that the institution of law proceeds from a repression of its 'originary violence'? Should not legal theorists instead find the Real of law in the impossibility of its practice? Though Caudill doesn't push the argument in this direction, I think the future of Freud in law will depend on the ability of psycho-analytic jurisprudence to take on the law and economics movement. Surely, it would be ridiculous for Freudians to cackle over the fact that they are not susceptible to fantasies of economic determinism from the left, only to submit tamely to the same argument from the right. *The future of Freud will not be fought out in medicine, but in law*. For in the ultimate analysis, psychopathology is not a demand for a cure, but a plea for justice – in the Lacanian formulation of the 1950's: 'an appeal to the Other.'

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