

## **“The Freudian Legacy Today”**

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This volume, and the conference that inspired it, were borne out of a chance conversation several years ago at an academic gathering in the United States that brought clinical practitioners together with academics for conversations about psychoanalysis, culture and politics. Dina Georgis, James Penney and I, all participants at that meeting, discovered a mutual curiosity about the status of psychoanalytic thinking amongst our Canadian colleagues. Was there something unique, we wondered, about how scholars and analysts training, studying and/or working at schools, institutes and universities north of the border understood the legacy of psychoanalysis for their various intellectual, social and clinical projects? And so our somewhat ambitious (and slightly wild) plans for the Canadian Network for Psychoanalysis and Culture were laid.

The driving polemic for that inaugural conference held in Toronto, September 20-22 2013, was that the concept of the unconscious first articulated by Freud offers a radical and insistent challenge to our basic notion of how it is that we come to know ourselves in relation to our social, cultural and political worlds. We were also convinced by the continued saliency of Freud’s insights for thinking through the pressing social issues of our time. How do we live ethically and socially with difference? How do the dynamics of love and hate structure our social and political ties? How are social and cultural histories written in between what can be understood and what is unavailable to knowledge? It was, and is, our view that psychoanalysis continues to be central to the study of contemporary culture and social life, offering the humanities and social sciences the radical gifts of its investigative methods, insistent questions and clinical insights.

The word ‘legacy’ has its own potency. Derived from the Old French *legacie* and referring to the function and/or office of a delegate or deputy of some higher office, such as a papacy or sovereign authority, the word connotes both the designation of authority by particular means of stewardship and the act of that bequest. If Freud is the Father in this sense, it is easy to think about psychoanalytic training in its various iterations and schools of thought (including the well-known fights) as an ongoing expression of that ‘original’ designation. But what of the act of that bequest? If we take the notion of the unconscious seriously, then we must also consider another sense of the term. *Since* the analytic process relies on psychic remnants – dreams, slips of the tongue, wild thoughts and other such parapraxes – the Freudian legacy is also an insistence towards a particular approach to thought: one that privileges these remainders, residues and excesses of our efforts to know and acknowledges how we are haunted, both by the figure of Freud and the limits of our own understanding. As such, the thirteen papers collected here represent one trajectory of this legacy, *written* by academics, cultural workers and clinical practitioners working within, or in tandem with, a predominantly Canadian context. As opposed to any kind of sovereign teleology, however, the work instead manifests a spiderweb of creative thought, social concern and political insight. If there is an inquisitiveness towards that design, it is registered in the ways that these various considerations gather together around a discernable centre, but also, and importantly, heed the gaps that remain.

Lana Lin stages the question of Freud’s legacy as an encounter with material history, namely the objects, or rather “lost objects”, that populate the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna. Bergasse 19, the site of Freud’s home and psychoanalytic practice until his exile in 1939, performs what Lin describes as a kind of hopeful melancholia. Focusing her analysis on the role of photography and architecture in framing the visitor’s encounter with the space of Bergasse 19,

Lin asks us to think about the fetishism of the lost object as compensation for the horrors of absence, both in terms of Freud's political exile and his eventual death. This defended history, Lin suggests, might be explored via the potency of Freud's couch, a lost object of psychoanalysis. No longer in situ at Bergasse 19, its presence is nevertheless activated through the museum's obsessive photographic display. What happens, Lin asks, when the visitor to the museum desires the couch and encounters a photograph instead? This frustration, lying between desire and disappointment, might activate one's reflection on the difference between an absence that is real and one that is symbolic – the basis, Lin argues, for a “melancholic working through” (29).

Whereas Lin explores Freud's legacy quite literally, Julia Huggins is concerned with the intellectual legacy of a particular Freudian concept – the narcissism of small differences – and how, via a Lacanian re-reading, it has the potential to invigorate our understanding not of hostility but rather of love. She turns to Todd Haynes' 2011 televised miniseries *Mildred Pierce* as a way to explore the idea that it is the small difference between the narcissistic object and the *objet petit a* (object cause of desire) that allows the subject to be emancipated from the repeated frustration of demand. It is the relationship between Mildred and her daughter Veda – who, under the rubric of love, represents a “worthless box” that contains the “precious object” of Mildred's desire – that enacts the “indefinite work of love as distinct from narcissistic obsession” (44). What Huggins's paper helps us to explore are the conditions of difference that would allow for love – or recognition of the other beyond narcissistic attachment – to occur.

Dina Georgis considers how traumatic legacies of war carry affective residues that open possibilities for imaginative renewal, both subjectively and politically. She centres her discussion on a group of post-war artists in Lebanon whose work confronts neoliberal attempts to suture the

ragged edges of political difference via state-sanctioned practices of forgetting. Such orientations to the past might offer a palliative or redemptive remedy. But what would it mean, she queries, to work through collective memories of war in such a way as to preserve their ethical and political complexities? To address this dilemma, Georgis offers the concept of the aesthetic archive, both a metaphor for how individuals collect themselves in psychic time and a creative space of assemblage that offers a reparative orientation to traumatic loss. Drawing on insights from Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott, Georgis analyzes Lamia Joreige's artistic project "Objects of War" – a series of videos that chronicle the testimonies of individuals who lived through the Lebanese war – as an aesthetic archive that "creates the conditions to experience the remains of war" (53) not as a story of loss, but rather one of psychic survival and even of love.

With their exploration of the reparative potential of unruly affect to forge a relationship with traumatic loss, Hannah Dyer and David K. Seitz investigate the ways in which ethical relations in the present are made possible via the symbolization of inner conflicts. Their site of exploration is *Monsieur Lazhar* (2011), a Canadian film that narrates the story of a teacher and his class of young pupils struggling to make sense of death and the painful, confusing affects that rage in its wake. Following the Kleinian theory of psychic repair, Dyer and Seitz wonder what it might mean to linger with its unpredictability – what they call the queer timing of reparation. The authors offer a reading of queerness understood not as subjectivity, but rather as an unruly process through which one might learn to symbolize and survive the traumas of loss. As part of their intellectual project, Dyer and Seitz assess the contemporary reassurance campaign directed at queer youth, "It Gets Better," for its reparative potential. In doing so they privilege the "queer time of mourning" (63) whereby the vicissitudes of psychic time provoke us to encounter "the aching reverberations of the past" (76) as a creative story as opposed to a progressive demand.

Also interested in a critique of redemptive narratives of futurity as well as their nihilistic opposite, James Penney calls on Alain Badiou and Jacques Lacan to examine philosophically the question of what it means to imagine queer-theoretical futures. Beginning with an appraisal of Lee Edelman's insistence that queerness is aligned with a radical negativity, Penney excavates the failures of this approach by offering a psychoanalytic reading of the temporal dialectic between death and immortality. Under Edelman's purview, he explains, political (and indeed human) futurity is always and only a deathly imaginary. It is a fundamental misreading of Lacan, Penney suggests, that allows Edelman to elaborate his argument. Against this polemic, he offers an alternative interpretation that theorizes psychoanalytic temporality as one of discontinuity and therefore of change. This temporal dialectic, he argues, is what allows one to assert that "death needn't be the end" (101) of politics if we see our choice as one between life and not death, but rather immortality.

The next three papers in the collection offer different interventions into contemporary clinical narratives of transsexuality with a particular focus on the psychoanalytic legacy of reading transsexuality as a psychotic identification. A key feature of Sheila Cavanaugh's work is her effort to depathologize transsexuality in Lacanian discourse by retheorizing the transsexual's sexuation, usually understood as failed by virtue of a psychotic foreclosure, as the creative work of resignification. To do this, she reexamines the psychotic thesis as it pertains to transsexuality, providing insight into Lacan's work on sexuation. Cavanaugh then theorizes transsexuality as a subset of neurosis through her reading of Bracha Ettinger's work on the matrixial borderspace. Locating sexuation before the phallic order of sexual difference as theorized by Lacan, she argues for a transsexual trajectory "understood as a metamorphical becoming and co-fading in a

transsubjective space of feminine difference that reconfigures and reinscribes the traces of a primordial m/Other” (105).

Patricia Elliot also critically engages Lacanian theorizations of transsexuality, distinguishing between distinct currents. While the first follows in the path of Catherine Millot’s articulation of transsexuality as psychosis, the second includes more recent approaches that offer a nuanced understanding of transsexual subjectivities. Thinkers associated with the second movement, she suggests, not only counter previous transphobic accounts, but also open theoretical and social spaces from which it becomes possible to transform prejudicial attitudes and delineate more appropriate therapeutic and medical interventions. For Elliot, what is valuable in Freud’s legacy is the discourse of analysis – the technique of listening to and privileging the analysand’s narrative over that of the master. While normalizing approaches such as Millot’s claim to know what transsexuality means, thinkers such as Shanna Carlson, Patricia Gherovici and Oren Gozlan listen for the discourse of transsexuality as articulated by the transsexual subject through both words and embodiment. This return to the discourse of analysis in both theory and clinical practice, Elliot suggests, allows for an understanding of transsexuality as a creative narration of neurosis as opposed to a structure of pathological phantasy.

For Oren Gozlan, the clinical narrative of transsexuality as a pathological condition is based on a repression at the heart of Freud’s theory of sexual difference itself – that castration is fantasy as opposed to fact. It is this dialectic that reveals normative psychoanalytic theories of transsexuality as limited in their ability to transcend what Gozlan calls the “fetishistic phantasy of phallic monism (non-castrated/castrated)” (139), an aporia that leads to the problem of not being able to think alongside the unknowable. Gozlan shows how transsexuality is both “a psychic position and a metaphor for the transitional experience of the transformation of the

psyche” (140). To develop this notion, he offers an aesthetic reading of the subject of transsexuality through two figures – Michel Foucault’s Herculine Barbin and Jeffrey Eugenides’s Calliope – who both ask themselves the question, Am I a boy or a girl? The transgressive answer for psychoanalysis is that “no body is ever false” (146) and that what matters is learning to live creatively with the symptom.

At stake in Allan Pero’s paper is the notion of resistance to what he names, in conversation with Lacan’s four discourses, the discourse of economics. He suggests that since the 1980s there has emerged a situation in which “economics now functions in the position of agent, and as *objet a* – or surplus *jouissance*” (158). What can this mean, Pero asks, for social life? One is asked to identify with economic injustice and its hoarding of enjoyment or risk relegation to the position of the hysteric. What is silenced in this pernicious dynamic, he argues, is the “voice in the alethosphere” – the symptom of resistance that is left over from speech and that cannot be mastered nor readily heard. The space of resistance to the discourse of economics, Pero suggests, is the voice as the object of the drives which the discourse “has yet to hoard” because it “has yet to be heard” (162).

Clint Burnham poses the question: Does the internet have an unconscious? By way of an answer, he offers a diverse range of cultural examples – from the role of email in the police procedural, to the user experience of passwords, to post-internet art – as he thinks through a psychoanalysis of the digital via the insights of Freud, Lacan and Fredric Jameson. Whereas Freud helps Burnham to contemplate the question of “whether the internet *has* an unconscious, or whether the internet *is* the unconscious” (164), it is through Lacan’s work that Burnham articulates the unconscious space of the internet as that which is left over when the subject is created. We see evidence of the unconscious, Burnham puts forward, in digital failures such as

“404 file not found” and other alerts announcing the void of the subject such as “Warning (!) No Subject. Send Anyway?” (172). Frederic Jameson’s work offers Burnham access to the question of the political unconscious, which he then explores using the example of visual artist Laura Owens’s vast tactile canvases. In the transferential sense, Burnham concludes, the internet *is* the unconscious. As for whether or not the internet *has* an unconscious, the author leaves us with an open question and a few dark corners of political economy.

Randall Terada explores the emergence of the subject as part of a Lacanian political project. To this end, he distinguishes between the individual and the subject. Whereas the first describes a fantasy frame that responds to and secures the reproduction of the social as a normative claim, the latter is a relation of ethics in which the subject might emerge as truly political, that is, beyond identity as such. The political subject “proper,” he argues, “is the result of a failed interpellation” (184) by the social world, be it the school, the state, the church, or the media. Thinking about the conditions that lead to the emergence of the subject, Terada anatomizes the concept of the death drive, suggesting that a return to the originary state of loss provides an opening for the discovery of an ethical disposition. In this form of “subjective destitution,” one moves “from the lost object to *loss itself as object*” (187). Drawing on the work of Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, the author explores this emergence of a subject as distinct from identity, using the literary character Bartelby the Scrivener as his muse. Bartelby’s famous utterance “I prefer not to,” Terada suggests, is one example of such an emergence that then presents to the world the political problem of an ethical response.

Also interested in a Lacanian interpretation of the drive, Macy Todd considers the psychoanalytic dynamics of aggression and pleasure as a way to think through contemporary discourses of global famine. He argues that these discourses must have a theory of signification –

a desiring, linguistic ground from which to articulate the subject – if they are to properly map a balanced analysis of the situation of famine. Whereas the rhetorics of mathematics and logic produce the famished body as an abstraction of necessity, what is missed from this perspective, Todd suggests, is an analysis of desire as the “readable, material product of the drive, and the only access we have to any true account of the body” (218). To make a relation between famine and the drive, the author compares two contemporary forms of famine discourse: famine eschatology and the commemoration of the Great Famine in Ireland. His warning to famine critics is that an “objective analysis of famine takes the body in an impossible fantasmatic form” (218) as opposed to the subject of the drive signified through relations of desire.

Jeanne Randolph’s contribution to the collection mirrors her presentation from the September conference. Her practice – which consists of images, text and dialogue – enacts free association as a research method. This method involves the making of theory as “praxis”: the creative activity of practicing research in public, which Randolph describes somewhat humorously as standing “around, unfettered from sense, nonsense, logic or fantasy, responding out loud to huge images projected on a screen behind me” (223). For the author, free association as research practice illuminates a particular way of thinking akin to Freud’s primary processes. Within this play lies the possibility for thinking about research as a goal in itself as opposed to a production that aims to bring into existence something distinct from the activity.

The papers collected here offer a range of interpretive engagements with the legacy of Freud’s thought. Our interest at CNPC is not to delineate a particular fidelity to that legacy along the lines of something approximating a ‘Canadian’ school. Rather, we are concerned with the ways in which clinicians, intellectuals and cultural workers have taken up the radicality of Freud’s thought for their own insistences. We have hoped to create dialogic coordinates for these

individual endeavors to touch. In doing so, our aim has been, and remains, to ensure that conversations about psychoanalytic thought and practice in the Canadian context have a place to flourish and to reach both established and new audiences.

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