

Gag Me With A Tune

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Nostalgia comes in waves, like nausea: the etymological sense of their wave-lengths, on both sides of the simile (nostalgia meaning homesickness and nausea seasickness) contains and announces a certain surf's up confrontation between psychology and psychoanalysis. Freud addresses the retro-fashion of blow-up dollies as beside the point: the point of the Sandman's repeated return. The nostalgia Olympia thus embodies doubles as watchword for that aesthetic or psychological reception of the ego which, homeward bound, encounters the all-points penetration of an enigmatic force at once superegoical and media-technological in provenance. According to Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction," the radio reception installed inside the ego ideal broadcasts within the home the uncanny or unhome. What tunes in – on station identification – ranges from ancient parental criticisms to public opinion to the background music Géza Róheim's schizophrenic patient identified as the sound in the back of one's head as one eats and chews.

Owing to its techno-mediatic rapport with mourning-sickness, uncanny doubling advances, Freud stresses down in "The Uncanny"'s footnote underworld, not from the combat zone between conscious thought and the unconscious but from the front inside the second system thrown up between ego and superego. The superego takes over the controls of consciousness whenever the time release of mournful attachment malfunctions: the mournable death of the father is thus introjected into the grieving body

to eject the unmournable deaths of mother, child, or sibling. *Blue Velvet* transmits the “Sandman” tune via a father’s severed ear which gags the one who picks it up: the mother’s child is missing.

On the outside uncanny doubling travels the route of return – as vomiting and haunting. Thus Hollywood horror films – from *The Exorcist*, for example, to *The Fly* – feature throwing up among the props of monstrous invasion and metamorphosis. Freud already analyzed this aberration in a dream that returned from the underworld it opened onto: Freud found himself naked on the stairs, which his old nurse had also ascended by returning from the forgotten past to reprimand him for spitting. *Spucken* (spitting), Freud notes, calls up *Spuken* – haunting. This nurse, recent cultural rereadings have argued, covers for that which gets repressed by Freud: mother and, interchangeably, feminine sexuality. But to fast-forward to reservations I can only confirm: the complex of screen memories for which the nurse serves as mascot also covers over the maternal legacy of unmournable death: Freud’s brother Julius who died nine-months-old during the nurse’s tenure.

Following Lacan’s return to Freud, Mary Jacobus resituated the follow-up return of the feminine within psychoanalytic conceptions of remembering and nostalgia. On the feminine side of difference – on the active side of commemoration – nostalgia can be recast as a daughter’s yearning to return to and re-member that which was never in fact dismembered or lost. In contrast to this generic rapport with loss, the little boy’s personalized brand yields only fear of castration. The asymmetry or out-of-phasedness (or *Nachträglichkeit*) of the girl’s consumer relations with castration advertises a mode of

creativity that Jacobus ascribes to feminist ideology: “Feminist nostalgia looks back not only to what feminism desires but to what it desires different, now.”¹

One example of such retro-tampering is delivered at the other end of her essay where she charges Freud, according to her “translation” of words he sent to Fliess, with equating femininity with what always gets repressed. But in the letter to Fliess dated May 25, 1897, Freud unambiguously assigns repression the other one-way direction: “the feminine is always the repressing element.” By this Freud means, up close, that recollections involving women are easier to call up in analysis than those in which men were faced. Because the father always gets repressed, the feminine is the motor of repression. What psychoanalysis is thus left to “construct” – as in “A Child is Being Beaten” – is the father’s penetration or incorporation. What gets in the way of construction of father: identification with siblings dead or alive.

Thus a return of Freud (that would be truly peristaltic in its reversal of the nostalgic return to – into – his corpus) would reshift the Lacanian/feminist/film-theoretical emphasis on desire or repression, narrative or point of view towards the reach (and retch) of more primal lines of defense. Melancholic identification is embodied or conveyed by mother who, dead, leaves it up to little one to produce the narcissistic object or objection; live, she transmits a dead child (or, put differently, the work of mourning she had been unable to perform) to the surviving child who carries the deposit or crypt and obeys its phantom’s telecommand.

Freud’s asides regarding “the rule of women” (or woman’s proclivity to psychotic aberration owing to her pre-Oedipal bonds with mother) must be permitted to slide to the

¹ Mary Jacobus, “Freud’s Mnemonic: Women, Screen Memories, and Feminist Nostalgia,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* (1988): 117:139.

inside of his critique of American (or Christian) mass culture and group psychology. Thus a cryptological summons is issued at the other end of Freudian anti-feminisms, which are always conducted deep within what Freud called “the underworld of psychoanalysis.” On the group-psychological outside of this underworld one always faces the happy-faces and mirror images of nostalgia; but on the underside we encounter – how could we have overlooked it! – the encrypting identification Derrida recast (in “Fors”) as “internal vomiting.”