From Freud to Jacques Lacan and the Textual Unconscious

[T]he unconscious is the condition for language [. . .] language is the condition for the unconscious.
　　　　　　　—Jacques Lacan, "Preface byJacques Lacan," xiii

Everything can now be a text.
　　　　　　　—Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 77

From Freud, that which takes us toward Jacques Lacan is an embedded concept of 'textuality.' Necessary for analysis, textuality, as an instance of a "vanishing mediator," may simply be assumed or safely disappear in analytic praxis. Concurrent with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, textuality emerged as a pervasive ideological concept by the 1970s. Fredric Jameson defined it then as "a methodological hypothesis whereby the objects of study of the human sciences [. . .] are considered to constitute so many texts that we *decipher* and *interpret*, as distinguished from the older views of those objects as realities or existents or substances that we in one way or another attempt to *know*" ("Ideology of the Text" 18). As we trace a path from Freud through such adjectival notions of the unconscious as Jung's "collective," Walter Benjamin's "optical," and Jameson's own "political," we realize that from the start any *available* unconscious is a textual one. Lacan does not use the term *textual unconscious*. The term, if not the concept itself, seems to have originated in the work of a French critic—Jean Bellemin-Noel—indebted to Lacan. Bellemin-Noel says he used a term—*l'inconscient du texte* "the unconscious of the text"—as early as 1970, in a book to be titled *Vers l'inconscient du texte* ("Towards the Unconscious of the Text"). He claims that others such as André Green, Jeanne Bem, and Bernard Pingaud later used the term in essays published between 1973 and 1976 (see 191n2). By 1979, the year *Vers l'inconscient du texte* was published, American scholars

began to use the concept more or less emphatically. Since in his book Bellemin-Noel does not use the precise phrase *l'inconscient textuelle* "the textual unconscious" as such, it seems to have been Jerry Aline Flieger who first used it. In 1981 ("Trial and Error"), reviewing Bellemin-Noel's book, she converted *l'inconscient du texte* into the noun phrase *the textual unconscious*. In 1983, Robert Con Davis employed the concept of a 'textual unconscious' in "Lacan, Poe, and Narrative Repression" (989). In 1984, although more interested in the *literary* unconscious, Jonathan Culler not only used the noun phrase in a significant way but also theorized it more fully than any before him.

After Flieger, Davis, and Culler, as well as Michael Riffaterre, Shoshana Felman, Jameson, and others, the concept of the textual unconscious essentially becomes an unacknowledged legislator, a vanishing mediator, a term taken from Fredric Jameson ("The Vanishing Mediator") that Slavoj Žižek disseminates to Lacanians in *Tarrying with the Negative*. Textual unconscious is a concept intrinsic to the *intertextual* activity of interpretation of the unconscious and of literary texts, but once assumed (as in Freud) it may simply disappear and still do its work. By the late 1980s, explicit invocations of textual unconscious, while not rare, generally do in fact disappear, but the term still shows up often enough to suggest its mediatory primacy. Indeed, from psychoanalysis, it even invades psychology (see Steele); moreover, a number of literary studies—besides my own *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction*, including ones by Friedman, Downing, Rickard, and Tate—use it and draw directly upon its genealogy in Flieger, Jameson, Culler, Riffaterre, and others. Providing a thumbnail sketch of how the concept grounded different theorists and ideologies, Friedman also suggests how necessary but invisible is the concept:

> Adapting Kristeva's formulations of the text-as-psyche, critics such as Culler, Jameson, Shoshana Felman, and Michael Riffaterre [...] suggest that a text has an unconscious accessible to interpretation through a decoding of its linguistic traces and effects. For Culler and Felman, this textual unconscious is located in the interaction between reader and text, which they see as a scene of transference in which the reader "repeats" the complexes of the text. For Jameson and Riffaterre, the textual unconscious resides in the text, subject to the decoding of the reader, who occupies the authoritative position of the analyst. (164)

The very portability of the concept from one critical approach to another, in short, suggests its essential role as a mediator that effectively vanishes once analytic praxis begins.

1

> What is revealed here is [...] a textual unconscious in which the critic
> gets caught up.
> —Jonathan Culler, "Textual Self-Consciousness
> and the Textual Unconscious," 376

Since my interest necessarily foregrounds literary criticism, not clinical issues, Culler's essay provides a useful relay between the "literary" and the "textual." In his discussion of how the literary unconscious works, Culler invokes principles on which Julia Kristeva based her highly influential concept of 'intertextuality.' Since semiotics posits a subject of interpretation vis à vis an object of interpretation, it requires some form of relay or interface, either codes or structures, operating between the two. Kristeva started at the most fundamental ground of structure in using Roman Jakobson's premise that language operates along two axes, one of selection, one of combination (a premise underlying virtually all semiotic theory). Kristeva then argued that since any text is language based, every text in some critical sense must exhibit an intertextual relation to every other at least through the structural axes they share. That is, they relate through the fundamental semiotic structure of language. The concept of intertextuality provides Culler that interface between the literary and the textual unconscious because both conceptualizations depend upon Jakobson's grid—the axes of selection and combination—underlying language itself.

In a complex argument in which he takes a seemingly unpromising tack, Culler slides from one "unconscious" to the other. Focusing not on the textuality of the literary text as such, he addresses the transference between the analyst and the analysand. Describing transference, on the one hand, as a "drama of the analyst's involvement" with the patient and, on the other, as "the enactment of the reality of the unconscious" (371), he ends by reducing transference to a textual relation he in fact calls a "textual unconscious." But he finds this unconscious in the self-referentiality of the literary work, in how the text offers a way in which to read it. Culler says,

> I am arguing that what critics identify as moments of self-reference or self-consciousness in literary works may be the marks of a situation of transference. The critic who claims to stand outside the text and analyze it seems to fall into the text and to play out a role in its dramas. What is revealed in this

> transference is the *mise-en-acte de l'inconscient*, a textual unconscious, a structure of repetition: and it is the uncanniness of this repetition, continued in critical writing, that confirms the appropriateness of speaking of this as a literary *unconscious*.

Nonetheless, Culler would argue that the importance of the fit between literature and the unconscious lies not in what it says of "the literary," but in what it says of the unconscious. Indeed, the "literariness" of the unconscious suggests it is the very nature of the textual itself that it shares with literature. Ultimately, says Culler, "What is revealed here is not the unconscious of the author but a textual unconscious in which the critic gets caught up" (376).

Although Freud no more than Lacan ever used 'textual unconscious,' clearly, the concept would have been understandable—and probably acceptable—to both. In "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud," Lacan essentially explains why this is so. The entire thrust of the essay is to lay out both why "the unconscious is structured like a language" and why the most appropriate way to analyze is based on linguistics, neither language nor linguistics taken literally but both taken metaphorically. Regarding Lacan's metaphorical "like a language," Bruce Fink, in *The Lacanian Subject*, has made a helpful suggestion. "Lacan did not assert that the unconscious is structured in exactly the same way as English, say, or some other ancient or modern language" (8). Rather, writes Fink, Lacan says "that language, as it operates at the unconscious level, obeys a kind of grammar, that is, a set of rules that governs the transformation and slippage that goes on therein" (8–9). Further, Fink points out, we may see this operation in how the unconscious "has a tendency to break words down into their smallest units—phonemes and letters—and recombine them as it sees fit" (9). It seems plain enough, then, that the repressed notion in this conceptualization of the unconscious is the textual. It is the "text" of the unconscious of the analysand that, in analysis, in the "talking cure," becomes available for "linguistic" study.

In "The Agency of the Letter," perhaps the most systematically rigorous defense of his linguistic approach Lacan ever offered his disciples (see Mellard, "Inventing"), he also makes certain claims about Freud's theory and practice that suggest why for Freud also the unconscious might well have been called "textual." In the essay, Lacan claims that whenever Freud spoke of the unconscious, he also, inevitably, spoke of "language." "Thus, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams,' every page deals with what I call the letter of the discourse, in its texture, its usage, its

immanence in the matter in question. For it is with this work that the work of Freud begins to open the royal road to the unconscious." On this road to the unconscious, dreams are "read" quite literally as a rebus because of an "agency in the dream of that same literal (or phonematic) structure in which the signifier is articulated and analysed in discourse." Lacan takes the images of dreams as "signifiers" with which the analyst is to "spell out the 'proverb' presented by the rebus of the dream." Those signifiers are founded, Lacan argues, on the "principle" of a linguistic structure giving the analyst "the 'significance of the dream,' the *Traumdeutung*," the dream work (159). Thus, Lacan insists that linguistics has become necessary for him because Freud had already used a form of linguistic theory. "The unconscious," Lacan suggests, "is neither primordial nor instinctual." Rather, "what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier" (170). In that premise, he claims, Freud was there ahead of him in principle if not in expression. Consequently, given Lacan's premise, the unconscious is "like" a "language," and the ground upon which it operates is text or textuality. Indeed, Lacan recognized that, mutatis mutandis, the figural grounds of our thought change. What is more, if he had been a young psychoanalyst starting out in the 1970s instead of the 1930s, he would not in effect have said, "The unconscious is structured like a language and we must interpret it through the agencies of the letter." Rather, he would have said, simply, "The unconscious is a textual unconscious and we must interpret it as we would interpret any other text." By whatever name, ranging back to Freud's earliest enfigurations, the unconscious has always been textual.

2

[Tropes] are especially useful for understanding the operations by which the contents of experience which resist description in unambiguous prose representations can be prefiguratively grasped and prepared for conscious apprehension.

—Hayden V. White, *Metahistory*, 34

Psychoanalysis is constituted through figures of speech—tropes, that which Lacan might call "agencies of the letter." By way of a metaphor and extensions of it through metonymic associations, Freud brought about a revolution in the way we make meaning of our psychic

life by transforming then-contemporary conceptualizations of the psyche. While he used many figures, he invented psychoanalysis through metaphors grounded in archeology. He developed his psychoanalytic theories at a time when both history and archeology were making great strides as intellectual disciplines. But while he loved history, he loved especially the thought of psychoanalysis as a kind of archeology (which also, of course, inevitably historicizes data) and even thought of himself as an archeologist of the psyche. It is the scholar, not Freud, who regards him as "the biologist of the mind" (Sulloway). Thus, in part because it was an almost inevitable figure of speech within his epoch and in part because Freud himself used it so frequently, the metaphor of archeology came to be identified with Freud's method. It is well known that Freud so loved the archeological metaphor that many, many instances of it are indexed in volume 24 of the *Standard Edition*. He coined it in the 1890s and used it throughout his career. It appeared as early as *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–95), "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), and *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* (1909), and as late as *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). As Lis Møller has shown in *The Freudian Reading*, the archeological is not just any figure; it is Freud's dominant metaphor for regarding the unconscious and constituting psychoanalysis.

But the value of the archeological trope to Freud and to us in understanding psychoanalysis is not merely its association with Freud's method. The trope's main value lies in the diegetic or explanatory extensions of the new discipline that archeological figures permit Freud. Typically appearing in metonymic associations permitted by the metaphoric ground, these extensions involve Freud's working out the implications of the originary metaphor. This process is essential to what structuralists and poststructuralists call "naturalization," the ways in which a new field becomes accepted as natural or ordinary. The metaphor, like any metaphor used in this cognitively constitutive way, served Freud well precisely in those moments when he needed to naturalize his method in a set of familiar terms. It not only both explained and justified his method, but it also defended him at those times he may have felt a weakness in it. "In face of the incompleteness of my analytic results," he writes in 1905, in *Fragment of an Analysis,*

> I had no choice but to follow the example of those discoverers whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiq-

uity. I have restored what is missing, taking the best models known to me from other analyses; but, *like the conscientious archaeologist*, I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin (*SE* 7:12; my emphasis).

Because Freud's explicit references like this one are thus quite numerous, and because there are as well so many other, less extended allusions to archeology, we begin to see that, indeed, the metaphors of archeology constitute for him, in Hayden White's terminology, a rather unconscious "tropology" (see *Metahistory*, for instance, and *Tropics of Discourse*). They represent a persistent way of thinking, speaking, explaining, and defending psychoanalysis. Indeed, as Møller says, archeology becomes the foundation for a "metalanguage of psychoanalysis, the language in which psychoanalysis represents itself as a depth psychology or a depth hermeneutics—an uncovering, a bringing to light, an unearthing, or an excavation of a hidden reality" (33–34).

As the metaphor of archeology constitutes the Freudian field, it also drives what White would call Freud's "diegetic" and "metonymic" extensions of it. According to White, metaphor constitutes by a naming, metonymy extends by dividing into parts, and metaphor and metonymy, together, function by the latter's converting an implicit "story" found in metaphor into an explicit narrativization of parts acting upon or in relation to other parts. As a metaphoric analogue, archeology provided the Freudian method two basic elements on which psychoanalytic discourse and understanding came to rely. One was a *topology*, the other was a narrative. From the metaphor's presumption of structural differences between surfaces and depths, Freud could construct a narrative based upon the movement from one to the other and back again. In their contribution toward the constitution and naturalization of the field and its methods, both topology and narrative perform functions essential to understanding and to the Freudian discourse.

Structural and topological features of the metaphor suggest at least two aspects of psychoanalysis. On the one hand, topologically, an implicit relation between a knowable surface and a mysterious, if not totally unknowable, depth represents the structural relation among the levels of Freud's topological spaces, whether the early one positioning conscious, preconscious, and unconscious or the later one positioning an id, ego, and superego. These topologies and the structural relations they entail permit one to claim, as Paul Ricoeur does, that "Freudianism is an explicit and thematized archaeology" (461). This

claim suggests that whatever one does when positing Freudian reading, one has to posit levels of psychic functioning as much as the archeologist posits levels of cultural history. On the other hand, by its structural features, the metaphor of archeology suggests that psychoanalytic work is capable of moving from one level to another, from the known to the unknown, the conscious to the unconscious. In its physical way, archeology does precisely that in reclaiming buried levels of a culture's history and, by bringing them to the surface, permitting an understanding of their meanings. In recovering cultural artifacts from different levels or strata of an archeological site, artifacts that constitute a sort of iconic, physical history, archeology works with concrete objects that lead to representations of a history. Clearly, while psychoanalysis does not work with objects quite so material as archeology's, archeology makes both the data and the representations of psychoanalysis more easily comprehensible. As White suggests in *Tropics of Discourse*, understanding here moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar and back again, so that the comparison to the better known, though still rather new, discipline of archeology contributes immensely to our understanding of the yet newer discipline of psychoanalysis (4).

Where the first element the archeological metaphor brings to Freudian analysis is structural, enabling a dividing into parts by the spatial implications of the metaphor, the second element is narrative. Tropes imply stories. Constitutive metaphors invoke temporal and causal relations among parts or features the metaphor encompasses. The reason metaphor generates narrative is that "narrativity" seems a primal human heuristic, a fundamental way of encoding to make sense of the world. It is a virtual sine qua non of human cognition or perhaps even the condition of being human, a feature defining humanity we may add to the standard list of speech, laughter, and awareness of death. Whether or not it makes us human, within archeology and psychoanalysis, as various tropes enable or describe discourse and understanding, a move to narrative is, perhaps, inevitable because it is necessary to the very types of understanding of which these disciplines are capable. Neither archeology nor psychoanalysis makes merely bringing data to light the aim or end of their projects to achieve understanding. Neither discipline makes raw data (that is, the discrete unexplained metonymic objects) sufficient for an investigator. Investigators have to do something else. They have to construct a story, a narrative that organizes mental or physical objects (divided by metonymy into separate parts) into a sequence involving temporal succession and causal relations. As a constitutive metaphor of psychoanalysis, archeology brings narrative to a discipline that may not seem to need it. While

all understanding may work by way of narrativization, narrativization certainly operates in some fields more overtly than in others. Clearly, it operates more overtly in archeology and history than in psychoanalysis. Thus, in bringing narrative to psychoanalysis, archeology focuses that point where history, archeology, and psychoanalysis converge. While, now, all three fields virtually compel practitioners to put their data into coherent narratives if their results are to bear meaning for their consumers, psychoanalysis does so *because* Freud's constitutive trope brought narrativity to Freudian praxis.

But practitioners may learn that narrative is a mixed blessing, for specific narratives in all three disciplines are subjected to questions of the same type. The major question bears on truth or referentiality: what is the referential relation of the narrative to "fact" or "truth"? In their links through narrative to history, both archeology and psychoanalysis invoke "others" critically important to notions of truth often taken for granted in the nineteenth century. For archeology, the metaphoric other is history, for archaeologists in the formative stages of the discipline saw themselves as simply practicing history by other means. The historian could merely assume what by his discourse the archeologist had to earn. Since truth and the specific narrative are so integrally related, nineteenth-century historians, for their part, generally assumed that the one yielded the other. In the nineteenth century, as White shows very fully in *Metahistory*, often in *Tropics of Discourse*, occasionally in both *The Content of the Form* and *Figural Realism*, truth and the narrative are construed as one, and what that "one" itself becomes *is* history. In the past two or three decades, however, any presumably secure connection between truth and narrative has been broken. And *history,* as White's work stresses, poses no fewer problems in regard to truth than had archeology itself in its formative stages. Nowadays, history connotes an origin, a signified, that to all but the naive realist is thought unavailable to the means—discourse—given to historian *and* archeologist alike for "recapturing" the past. In the nineteenth century, the golden age of historiography, history and historical meaning were thought simply a matter of *re*covering or *un*covering or *dis*covering something. In the twentieth century and after, particularly in our poststructuralist, postmodernist age, historical narrative, whether from a historian or an archeologist, is regarded as a construction, something that historians and archaeologists make, build, fabricate for themselves through language and the strategies of discourse.

While "fact" is important, the concept of 'truth' focuses another level of discourse. On the discursive or rhetorical levels of constitution and explanation found in classification and division, metaphor names a

"field," and metonymy divides it up, but there is a "higher" level where synthesis occurs and draws together prior levels. The synthesis yields, it is always presumed, a sense that a discourse is adequate to handle the objects it inscribes. Truth, within a discursive field, is then the adequation of mimesis to explanation in a synthesized "whole." So long as we regard the Freudian discourse constituted by Freud's basic enfiguration as adequate to objects determined, tropologically, within its field, we can look upon psychoanalysis as a natural, ordinary, and, perforce, truthful or realistic domain. In all disciplines, as Thomas S. Kuhn famously argues in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, once they are constituted within a discursive field that actually comes alive, a situation of normal or ordinary practice occurs within the standard paradigm. A standard paradigm operates precisely during that period when a synthesized whole, founded on its constitutive metaphor, is in praxis taken to be a representation of truth, fact, reality. But paradigms and practices and founding metaphors suffer vicissitudes. They fall on hard times. They come, almost inevitably, to seem inadequate. The moment we begin to suspect the unity, the adequation of the parts to the wholes, of practices to paradigms, as well as the arguments and stories predicated upon them, at that moment we cast a discipline into a period of crisis. Such a period of crisis may last for years or decades, or, if recovery never comes, a field may simply die out. But if recovery does come, it comes because there is a means of escape from crisis, and it is the same means used in the beginning in construction of the field. That means, of course, is tropological. If we save a field, we do so by discovering a new trope, a new founding or originary metaphor that will so *re*constitute that field as once again to make discourse congruent with or adequate to objects it creates.

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> [W]e only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of it which is articulated by passing into words.
> —Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 32

While psychiatry and clinical psychology simply abandon the field of psychoanalysis, there have been many attempts to "save" the field Freud invented largely within his archeological metaphors. Some of these attempts can be found in adjectival modifications of the notion of the unconscious. The word *unconscious* has become almost as important for the modifiers attached to it as it is in itself, for nowadays adjectives modifying '*unconscious*' become more and more critical to the

noun itself. The reality of the unconscious uncovered by Freud has been immensely important in our time, but the conceptual possibilities, without ever overshadowing Freud's foundational achievement, opened by it now seem equally important. Those possibilities are ones made visible in some of the modifiers we have come to associate with it. While the modifiers must always be subordinate to the basic Freudian noun, it is nonetheless the case that much of the history of developments in psychoanalysis and its related fields—including literary analysis—lies in those adjectives. These emerge, apparently, with Jung's *collective* unconscious and include others in no particular historical order such as *literary* unconscious, *optical* unconscious, and *political* unconscious. Indeed, several of these—namely 'collective' and 'political'—in fact represent major efforts, in instances perhaps of tail wagging dog, to alter or redefine Freud's basic concept. Jung's idea of the collective unconscious represents a serious effort to modify, and in Jung's view to save, Freud's original view of the unconscious. Though always in a process of modifying and elaborating his ideas, Freud conceived of the unconscious as existing in a system of levels or operating through separable functions. In the first topography, developed between roughly 1895 and 1915, Freud sees the perceptual system of the preconscious and consciousness as topographically separated from the unconscious. In the second topography, developed after 1920 and focusing more on functions than locations, he names the functions id, ego, and superego and claims the three encompass the entirety of consciousness and the unconscious. Whereas he makes the first topography descriptive and nominative, he makes the second functional and adjectival: that is, he himself uses '*unconscious*' as an adjective to identify types of functioning rather than as a noun identifying psychic places or topoi. In the second topography, Freud tended to anthropomorphize functions, speaking, for instance, of the superego as punitive or sadistic toward the ego. But as we shall see later in a discussion of Lacan's revision of Freud, these personifications do not constitute either the most important or the most epistemologically significant figures of speech available to Freud.

In articulating his concept of the 'collective unconscious,' Jung defines it as a place, a "region of the psyche." He distinguishes it from two other areas (presumably regions as well) he calls "consciousness" and the "personal unconscious." The personal unconscious, he says, is constituted by both ordinary forgetting, when content loses "intensity," and psychic repression, when consciousness is "withdrawn" from material, but it also includes "sense-impressions" that were never intense enough "to reach consciousness but have somehow entered the psyche"

(62). In any case, the personal unconscious is comprised of individual materials. "The collective unconscious, however, as the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche" (38). Arguing that this basic structure is transmitted genetically (60), Jung claims a biological or physiological basis for the collective unconscious. "This whole psychic organism," he says, "corresponds exactly to the body, which, though individually varied, is in all essential features the specifically human body which all men have." It is, shall we say, a matter of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny. "In its development and structure," Jung avers, "it still preserves elements that connect it with the invertebrates and ultimately with the protozoa. Theoretically it should be possible to 'peel' the collective unconscious, layer by layer, until we come to the psychology of the worm, and even of the amoeba" (38). Whereas Freud represents the functions of the unconscious in terms of energy (as a kind of electrical system), Jung argues that where the personal unconscious functions through "complexes," the collective unconscious functions through "archetypes" that he calls "mythical traces" or "myth-motifs" (42). Among these archetypes, for example, are those representing the family as found in the holy family of Christian religions. "The deposit," says Jung, "of mankind's whole ancestral experience—so rich in emotional imagery—of father, mother, child, husband and wife, of the magic personality, of dangers to body and soul, has exalted this group of archetypes into the supreme regulating principles of religious and even of political life, in unconscious recognition of their tremendous psychic power" (43).

Archetypes function in the collective unconscious not through images but through the fantasies the primordial images generate. What is more, the archetypes are transformations—the "forms they assume"—of the instincts recognized by both Freud and Jung. The unconscious, "as the totality of all archetypes," says Jung, "is the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings" (43). It is a "living system," however "invisible" it may be, that determines how individuals are constructed and live their lives. Thus, in the individual subject, the two regions of the psyche function in a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, "The collective unconscious," Jung says, "contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual. His [or her] conscious mind is an ephemeral phenomenon that accomplishes all provisional adaptations and orientations, for which reason one can best compare its function to orientation in space" (45). On the other hand, the unconscious

is the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes. All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes. This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas, created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us. (45–46)

Thus, while Jung retains Freud's general idea of the unconscious, he modifies it significantly by positing a separate region in it that collects the deposits of the universal human experience.

Although not really a concept meant to save or replace the Freudian field, the concept of the 'optical unconscious,' originated in 1931 by Walter Benjamin in "A Small History of Photography," has been given new life by Rosalind E. Krauss. The concept has interesting consequences for any understanding of "the" unconscious in a postmodernist age. In *The Optical Unconscious* (1993), Krauss examines the unconscious subtending modernist art. Regarding modernism as an object structured as a discursive field, Krauss perceives that she can study the field of modernism not as a history but as a graph or table. "It struck me one day," she says, "that there was something to be gained from exploring [the] logic [of modernist art] as a topography rather than following the threads of it as a narrative," a logic focusing on what she calls "an ever more abstract and abstracting *opticality*" (my emphasis). She begins with an intuition that modernist painting is constructed upon a grid consonant with several other structures familiar to postmodernists: the Klein Group, the Greimasian square, the structuralist square, and Lacan's Schema L. The four terms of her modernist square are *ground* and *figure* across the top and *not ground* and *not figure* across the bottom. "I want this square," she says, "to represent a universe, a system of thinking in its entirety, a system that will be both bracketed by and generated from a fundamental pair of oppositions. This of course is the universe of visual perception, the one that is mapped by a distinction between figure and ground so basic that it is unimaginable, we could say, without the possibility of this distinction. The Gestalt psychologists have told us that: if no figure-detached-from-ground, then no vision" (13). Art prior to the modernists focused on the figure, but not so much at the expense of ground as in relative innocence of it. The modernists

we might say foregrounded ground at the expense of figure. But if modernism shows that in premodern art there is an unconscious repression of ground, then its lesson must also be that in modernism there is a repressed or unconscious as well.
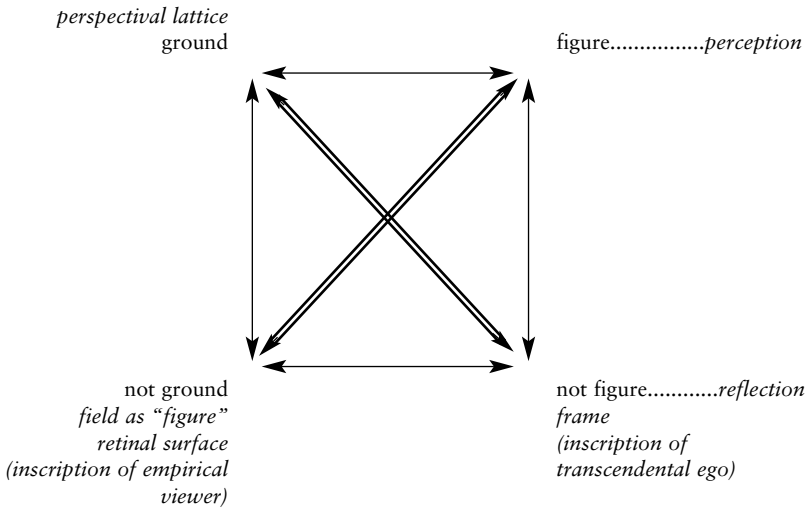

perspectival lattice
ground

figure...............*perception*

not ground
field as "figure"
retinal surface
(inscription of empirical viewer)

not figure............*reflection*
frame
(inscription of transcendental ego)

Fig. 1. Graph of the Optical Unconscious

In modernist art, as Krauss sees it, it is opticality—the presence of the components figure and ground making "pictures" and "vision" possible—that is the repressed. Her reasoning is complex. She begins her discussion of the optical unconscious *in medias res* with a description of the way the young John Ruskin viewed the world almost entirely as visual patterns. But Ruskin himself is not modernist. Rather, it is his way of viewing that—quite paradoxically—will eventually lead to modernism. The difference between modern and premodern, for Krauss, lies in the lessons of the grid she has constructed, the one rhyming with those several other grids, eventuating in Lacan's Schema L. Her schema—and Lacan's—leads her to perceive the dark or negative side of her square. Speaking of Lacan's schema as well as of her own, Krauss says, "Something dams up the transparency of the graph, cuts through its center, obscuring its relations one to the other." The ensuing darkness leads her to say what Ruskin cannot know. "Ruskin sees the pattern in the carpet," she writes, "in the sea, in the aspens. Sees their form, their 'picture.' What he does not see, cannot see, is how he has been made a captive of their picture." It is this area of darkness Krauss will name "the optical unconscious" or, rather, she will say "the

darkness" is the area the optical unconscious possesses. "The optical unconscious will claim for itself this dimension of opacity, of repetition, of time. It will map onto the modernist logic only to cut across its grain, to undo it, to figure it otherwise" (24).

Thus Krauss, in her study of modernist painting, will look for this dark side, this photographic or mirroring negative of modernism's dominant ideology. Indeed, she will read the discursive field as a text and show that as a text mapped by those graphs it has an unconscious founded on the optical. "The problem of this book," she says, "will be to show that the depths are there, to show that the graph's transparency is only seeming: that it masks what is beneath it, or to use a stronger term, represses it" (24, 26). Still, Krauss does not expect to claim too much for the graph. As she says, the graph, like Lacan's Schema L, shows only that there is repression, that there is something outside the dominant system. It shows, she says, only "the repressive logic of the system, its genius at repression." It cannot show the content that is repressed. Because Krauss desires to reveal the repressed, the unconscious of modernist art, her study takes on a "political" aim. Thus she is especially eager to affiliate it with another whose aim is much more evidently political. "And so this book will be called *The Optical Unconscious*," she says. "Does the title rhyme with *The Political Unconscious*? It's a rhyme that's intended; it's a rhyme set into place by a graph's idiotic simplicity and its extravagant cunning" (26).

While Jung's notion of the collective unconscious remains the most familiar modification, its influence peaked in the 1960s with the rise and demise of archetypal criticism. In the last decade or so, as Krauss's invocation of Fredric Jameson suggests, the most influential *adjectival* modification of the basic concept of the Freudian unconscious has been Jameson's 'political unconscious.' Noting ideological changes, as his "Ideology of the Text" indicates on textuality itself, Jameson has often been ahead of the curve. In effect, joining the ideology of textuality to the unconscious, the concept of the political unconscious has gained widespread acceptance because the epistemological presumptions of the age itself—that which Michel Foucault, in a word, calls the "*épistèmé*"—clearly has taken a turn toward both the textual and the political. Jung's concept was especially useful to intellectuals at a time when the new knowledge from folklore, mythology, comparative religion, and cultural anthropology competed with psychoanalysis as means to explain human thought and conduct. The collective unconscious combined the fields of new knowledge by making the archetypes illuminated by those related social sciences an actual functioning part of the unconscious, by, indeed, making it the part that most determines

the features of individual subjectivity and culture itself. These days, the authority given the notion of the political unconscious comes no doubt from its likewise combining two presumably competing modes of explanation of subjectivity and culture. One of these, of course, is the psychoanalytic, the other the social and, especially, economic mode of explanation found in Marx. For Jameson, the Marxist explanation—broadly construed as "political"—is the master modality.

The Political Unconscious, Jameson argues, will demonstrate that political interpretation of literary—and, perforce, other—texts must take priority over all other modes of explanation. "It conceives of the political perspective," he says of his book, "not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today—the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural—but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation." By this claim, Jameson assumes that only Marxism offers a way to explain social or historical phenomena and the construction of the individual subject. His argument is distinctly contrary to a dominant theme of postmodernism, its opposition to master narratives. Instead, Jameson claims that these "matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme" (17). That theme is, "for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot" (19–20). Jameson's description of that plot of course comes from "The Communist Manifesto" of Marx and Engels. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," Jameson argues. It is always a conflict of freeman against slave, patrician against plebeian, lord against serf, guild-master against journeyman. In this view, "oppressor and oppressed" stand "in constant opposition to one another," carry "on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time end[s], either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (81). Looking a bit like Jung's notion of archetypes working through the fantasies surrounding primal instincts, this story leaves traces in the cultural manifestations of the subject that Jameson expects to find when uncovering the political unconscious in literary and other texts. In the form of criticism determined by the political unconscious, the critic's job is precisely to bring those "repressed and buried" traces to the surface in order to show the real truth of the subject or the cultural object.

Like Jung, who is compelled to establish the dominance of the collective unconscious over the Freudian, Jameson must establish the dominance of the political over the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious. Because history is its subtending ground, Marxism dominates all other interpretative modalities simply by historicizing them. As Jameson says, Marxism subordinates other interpretations by showing that their limits "can always be overcome, and their more positive findings retained, by a radical historicizing of their mental operations." In this way, he says, "not only the content of the analysis, but the very method itself, along with the analyst, then comes to be reckoned into the 'text' or phenomenon to be explained." To show how the political dominates the unconscious in his concept, Jameson performs this historicizing on psychoanalysis. Suggesting that two of the main emphases of Freud's development of psychoanalysis were the family and sexuality, he argues that whereas Freud made each of these autonomous, "qualitatively different," features of a *private* biography of the subject, the two in fact belong to a larger *social* process. Freud especially emphasizes sexuality as an autonomous sphere subsumed in a dynamics of desire existing apart from social life. But, Jameson claims, while desire and sexuality gain their symbolic (or ideal) power from isolation from the social, they, like the family, cannot be separated from the materiality of the social world and its history. Psychoanalysis, Jameson argues, can demonstrate that "overtly nonsexual conscious experience and behavior" have sexual meanings only because it has made the "sexual apparatus" into an independent system of signs or symbols by that very "process of isolation, autonomization, specialization" (36). Jameson's view is that "as long as sexuality remains as integrated into social life in general as, say, eating, its possibilities of symbolic extension are to that degree limited, and the sexual retains its status as a banal inner-worldly event and bodily function" (64). In other words, says Jameson, the possibilities of sexuality as a symbolic field depend on its not belonging to the social—and therefore historical—field. But, for Jameson, the historicity of sexuality, as studied by such scholars as Michel Foucault, becomes evident in the ways "primitive sexuality" is transformed into modern sexuality in "the symbolic trajectory that leads from tattoos and ritual mutilation to the constitution of erogenous zones in modern men and women" (64). By such arguments, Jameson reverses the priority of his two terms: the political (meaning the social and historical) is made more determinative in human life than the unconscious. The adjective, again, dominates the noun. The 'political' is more important than the 'unconscious.'

4

> It is, of course, no accident that today, in full postmodernism, the older language of the "work"—the work of art, the masterwork—has everywhere largely been displaced by the rather different language of the "text," of texts and textuality.
>
> —Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 77

All these adjectival versions of the unconscious have, as it were, an unconscious or a repressed element in common. Collective, optical, political—all depend for their conceptual existence on a notion of texts/textuality. With the concept of text, textuality has become perhaps the dominant figure in a poststructural, postmodernist age for all sorts of social and intellectual activities. (For theorists or critics engaged in discussions of text and textuality, see Barthes, Derrida, Ducrot and Todorov, Jameson, Kristeva, McGann, Mowitt, and Rorty.) If Freud's archeological metaphor derives from a modernist age of history and historicization, textual metaphors emerge in a postmodernist age of semiology and semiotics. According to John Mowitt, there are two basic notions or traditions of text, the "philological" and the "semiological." It is the semiological tradition, with help from phenomenology, that drives postmodern reconceptualizations and extensions of the notion. "From the philological tradition," Mowitt writes, "the text has retained the notion of material boundaries, or what within the tradition of textual criticism was understood as the definitive edition or version." Philology was concerned with an "original" text, one in which writers inscribed their "intentions." But "it nevertheless insisted upon the material force of what the text 'said.'" It was this "material force" that semiology took from philology, but in doing so it eliminated "its idealist account of a fixed meaning." The "constitutive force of interpretation" enters from phenomenology. In the phenomenology of reading, says Mowitt, theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur focused on how readers engaged themselves with texts in ways that brought to bear their subjectivity in producing meaning. In making the interpreter the "bearer" of a writer's meaning, this tradition not only raises ethical issues but also "foregrounds the problem of the subject's relation to a symbolic system which addresses him/her from afar. Obviously," Mowitt concludes, "these inheritances undergo profound change in the elaboration of textuality during the sixties and seventies" (224n2).

It is the interrelation between a subject of interpretation and an object of interpretation that gives us the semiological universe of postmodernism. In this universe, everything becomes a text, and everything

can be regarded as possessing textuality. Jameson, though seeing problems in the premise, puts it plainly. Textuality, he says, "now seems to reorganize the objects of other disciplines and to make it possible to deal with them in new ways which suspend the troublesome notion of 'objectivity.'" Nothing seems to escape the label *text* or *textual*.

> So it is that political power becomes a "text" that you can read; daily life becomes a text to be activated and deciphered by walking or shopping; consumers' goods are unveiled as a textual system, along with any number of other conceivable "systems" (the star system, the genre system of Hollywood film, etc.); war becomes a readable text, along with the city and the urban; and finally the body itself proves to be a palimpsest whose stabs of pain and symptoms, along with its deeper impulses and its sensory apparatus, can be read fully as much as any other text. (*Postmodernism* 186).

With Michel Foucault's concept of '*épistèmé*,' it becomes plain that every age, defined by its ways of knowing, redefines essential concepts within its dominant metaphorics. In the postmodern, as Jameson says, the dominant metaphor has become text or textuality. In postmodernism, everything, not merely the unconscious, becomes text and operates through an overt or a covert grounding in textuality. With the epistemological reorientation wrought by textuality, when we review Jung and Krauss and Jameson, we inevitably find it. Indeed, the unconscious grounding of the optical, the collective, and the political unconscious is a textual unconscious. In Jung, we find the unconscious textuality of the collective unconscious in the means by which Jung "proves" the existence of the collective. This proof we find in "The Structure of the Psyche." There, Jung begins by recounting the mysterious symptoms of a young officer who suffered from pain around the heart, a choking sensation in the throat, and pains in his left heel. Analyzing the officer as a patient, Jung found that the symptoms began when the youth's fiancée jilted him for another man. Though the officer denied the importance of the story he told Jung, upon the telling the first two symptoms disappeared almost immediately, because they had a "textual" dimension, the conventional heartache of failed love and the lump in the throat resulting from swallowed tears. The bodily symptoms, that is, simply became signs for actual verbal messages the young man was unwilling or unable to express in words until the occasion of the analysis with Jung.

The pain in the man's heel, likewise, has a textual origin. As the necessary information about the other two symptoms came to Jung

through the man's account of his dreams, so came information about the painful heel, for he had dreamed he had been bitten there by a snake and paralyzed. In claiming the existence of the collective unconscious, Jung argues that the serpent came not from any image in the man's personal experience, but from a collective one. But I suggest that in fact it is in the textual that the experience is collective. As Jung himself shows, its actual roots are sunk in literary texts, and these texts tie his being lamed to women, not only his fiancée, but also his mother. In those literary texts, as in his dream, women and serpents belong together. "We are evidently dealing here," says Jung, "with that same old serpent who had been the special friend of Eve." The text he has in mind is the biblical one: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). What is more, this text echoes one even older, an Egyptian hymn carrying much the same message. Here, it is Isis who exacts vengeance upon a god, but she does so by creating a serpent from earth and the god's spittle.

> The mouth of the god trembled with age,
> His spittle fell to the earth,
> And what he spat forth fell upon the ground.
> Then Isis kneaded it with her hands
> Together with the earth which was there;
> And she made it like a spear.
> She wound not the living snake about her face,
> But threw it in a coil upon the path
> Where the great god was wont to wander
> At his pleasure through his two kingdoms.
> The noble god stepped forth in splendour,
> The gods serving Pharaoh bore him company,
> And he went forth as was each day his wont.
> Then the noble worm stung him [. . .]

Whereas Jung focuses here on use of this example as proof of the collective unconscious, in fact it is in a text that this unconscious exists. It lives in textuality. "The patient's conscious knowledge of the Bible was at a lamentable minimum," says Jung. "Probably he had once heard of the serpent biting the heel and then quickly forgotten it. But something deep in his unconscious heard it and did not forget; it remembered this story at a suitable opportunity. This part of the unconscious evidently likes to express itself mythologically, because this way of expression is in keeping with its nature." Thus the "mythological" to which Jung