

The Psychoanalyst of Modern-Day Life¹

An Homage to Charles Baudelaire

In 1929, Freud peered into the phenomena of “discontent in civilization,” *Unbehagen in der Kultur*, and rightly claimed that the remedy for it could never be kindness, goodwill or love for one’s neighbor. To do this he used the genius of the German language itself to put his finger on precisely what is “uneasy” about civilization, something *un-behagen* or, more precisely, the existence of a lack – an *un* – at the core of ease, *behagen*, itself.

This displacement onto the avatars of civilization was also indicative however of one of Freud’s more fundamental stumbling blocks, his studies on “feminine sexuality” in 1931 and “femininity” in 1932, which he similarly began based on what was “thinkable” about these phenomena.

This is all the more surprising because Freud the Thinker would seem to have forgotten the step forward his muse Lou Andréas-Salomé enabled to take in 1931 on the occasion of his 75th birthday. It was then, I have argued,² that he would seem to have unearthed a dimension of the feminine within himself that she had secretly made it possible for him to hear.

The feminine, Lou whispered in his ear, is neither femininity nor feminine sexuality – two fields encompassed by civilization. It cannot be thought...

Freud heard her and even applauded what she said, but then fell deaf to her once more. This is witnessed in what he later confided to Marie Bonaparte, in whom this element was obviously less distinct: “the great question that remains unanswered, and to which I myself have never been able to find a reply after thirty years of work on the feminine soul, is the following: ‘What does the Woman want?’”³

This admission would later strike someone who could really hear what it was saying.

Jacques Lacan was constantly questioning the way civilization had secreted away its own ‘neighbor,’ the feminine, by imagining it was already covered by the love of the neighbor:

Every speaking being, whether it flies the flag of man or woman, harbors this elusive feminine part.

Civilization cannot hear it though, because it is boxed in by the bodily observations made by the gaze of Christianity and Science.

However the man I have dubbed here the Psychoanalyst of Modern-Day Life *was* able to keep this missed appointment with the feminine, which I am contending is one of the causes of discontent in civilization. But he did so along the lines of the transference Lacan laid out, *again and again (encore et encore)*, in the wake of Freud. In other words the appointment was kept not so much via commentary and thinking, but in the aftermath of an

¹ Paper delivered during a Seminar at “Interassociatif” (June 10-11, 2006 in Paris), entitled: “Anguish in Civilization” (TR: The French title of Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* is *Malaise dans la civilization*.)

² J. Charmoille. *Lou Andréas-Salomé et Sigmund Freud. Une mystique inespérée de la foi et de la raison*. Freud et Vienne. Erès 2004 pp. 191-203. (*Lou Andreas-Salomé and Sigmund Freud. An Undreamt-of Mysticism of Faith and Reason*).

³ E. Jones. *La vie et l’œuvre de Sigmund Freud (Life and Works of Sigmund Freud)* T.II. PUF. p.445

esthetic experience through which the feminine part of speaking being managed to make itself heard.

This was the same field into which Charles Baudelaire allowed it to escape in his 1863 “the painter of modern-day life.”

And thus the curtain rises.

Rome, 7 a.m. A man is walking along the street. Why is his presence felt by various onlookers, even though he is trying not to be noticed?

Where is he going? What is he looking for?

Suddenly, he crosses the threshold of a Baroque-era church. He does not know it yet, but in the darkness that enshrouds him, the new will mix with the already-there.

In the late afternoon of the previous day he had observed how the bursts of color conveyed by the movement of Baroque art caused the lines between the paintings and sculptures to overlap. His delight having been interrupted by the church’s closing, he had resolved to return early the next morning and prolong this moment of happiness.

But now, he fails to comprehend what it is that is affecting his view of these same images he had thought about so clearly the night before, as if immaterial beings, waiting in the wings backstage for acknowledgement as signifiers, were silently speaking to him.

As he listens to them all at once a feminine voice makes itself heard. For brief moment, he can’t say how long, longer knows whether the voice is emanating from behind these invisible presences that seem to leap from the paintings with their gazes, or from some elsewhere he does not know.

Time and space are no longer the same.

Later, he would come to believe that this undreamt-of moment had already transported him to the point of being a kind of stain in the eye of his onlookers, and that he had had to come back and say yes to this passage in the drive from invoked to invocatory.

For the moment, he remains under its spell and gives in to the *jouissance* of this feminine voice, in which he discerns the Italian version of the prayer depicting the Angel Gabriel’s Annunciation to Mary that she would give birth to the Saviour:

Ave o Maria, piena di grazia, il Signore è con te, tu sei benedetta fra le donne (Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women)...

The enchanting melody is stopped suddenly by forces unknown. Time and space grind to a halt and the omnipresent atmosphere of the Baroque withdraws. He sees the immobility gazing at him through the paintings again.

Had the human voice that had been rocking him back and forth heard him?

Things are happening fast, his analytic practice becomes his guide.

But then it begins again on the wings of a new tempo, and the voice continues on in the right key:

e benedetto è il frutto del tuo seno Gesù (and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus).

In this moment of hesitation (between the two verses of the prayer), something transpired which was made heard by the drum roll of inhalation that culminated in its meeting place, the word *frutto*.

An other composition suddenly appeared at the heart of his ready-made knowledge, borne by the twists and turns of the unheard of made heard in this voice that had been raised to the status of object (a). It was like a painting whose elements are suddenly juxtaposed differently following an experience of the stunning of thought – like the moment when a dream that has been stated and restated repeatedly suddenly takes on a composition entirely new.

Alone, he advances towards the “uneasiness” in civilization and in history, because a history that does not yet exist can only be written, and thereby free civilization from its own anguish, on the basis of this fracturing that perforates their pleasure.

This moment of wavering to be heard in the singing of the *frutto* had managed to change the canonical dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, as given in Pope Pius the IX’s Papal Bull of 1854, the famous “*Ineffabilis Deus*.”

An invisible and ineffable mark of the feminine would appear to be at the heart of Christianity for over 2000 years, simultaneously re-vealed and re-veiled by the conception of a Woman, blessed among women.

What is “this” body that resists the observation of Science and Reproduction?

At that moment a multitude of previously immobile figures and numbers came to life and led him along in a mad dance:

Freud was born 2 years after and died 11 years before another dogma, the dogma of the Assumption, affirmed that Mary went up into Heaven with “her” (“*son*”)⁴ body after her death, whereas psychoanalysis appeared in the meantime, and Lacan’s teaching came after.

In 1857, Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* was suppressed, one month after its conception, because Pinard had not heard what the poet’s sonnets were saying.

What was the connection, he wondered, between the sound (*son*) that yielded the body of the “flowers of evil,” and that of “her” (*son*) immaculate body?

This subversive question found its reply in the work of the one who awaited its call, Baudelaire and his “Correspondences:”

⁴ TR: Charmoille has put this word in quotes because the French for “her” is “son,” which is the same word as “sound.”

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles :
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.*

*Comme de longs échos qui de lui se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se confondent.*

*Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
Et d'autres corrompus riches et triomphants,*

*Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.*

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Sometimes issue confused words;
Man crosses it through forests of symbols
Which watch him with intimate eyes.

Like those deep echoes that meet from afar
In a dark and profound harmony,
As vast as night and clarity,
So perfumes, colours, tones answer each other.

There are perfumes fresh as children's flesh,
Soft as oboes, green as meadows,
And others, corrupted, rich, triumphant,

Possessing the diffusion of infinite things,
Like amber, musk, incense and aromatic resin,
Chanting the ecstasies of spirit and senses.⁵

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Jean Charmoille

⁵ TR: The source of this translation is: <http://www.artofeurope.com/ baudelaire/bau7.htm>.