

Rosemarie Rowley:

THE TERRIBLE TWINS – how Freud and Marx legitimised our throwaway society¹

One of the difficulties facing eco-critical discourse, which is at the centre of this conference, is to make that leap – an extrapolation or Kierkegaardian necessity – from theory or literary excerpt to the field of action, that is from the passive reader, the self, the “ego”, to a sense of responsibility towards the environment, to “eco”.

I propose to look at how some ideas in the thought systems of seminal thinkers like Freud and Marx were used to create in different ways, *sometimes unwittingly to their originators* – were they alive to peruse them – a discourse of a false self or ego, leading to the present state of individual unaccountability towards the real world, the environment, or eco.

I will draw on particular expostulatory works, among the vast literature, which have been compiled in recent years on the questions which readers have interrogated and which are germane here, i.e. “Freud on Women”, edited by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, and “Why Marx was Right” – by Terry Eagleton: both provide readings of Marx and Freud which form a background to this essay.

I call Freud and Marx the terrible twins because they share broad cultural similarities and because of the huge dissemination of their works in the academy, and particularly in the wider society, where they interacted with each other, and where often problematic areas in their discourse had been simplified for rapid communication through the mass media and popular understanding.

¹ This essay is based on a paper given to the Ego to Eco conference at NUI Galway in June, 2011, and has been updated to include references to scholars and academics who over the years have contributed to the questions outlined here

The idea of the self in Freud is entirely subjective, but supported by some empirical evidence, while in Marx the idea of the self belongs entirely to the objective, empirical discourse of scientific philosophy or epistemology. These difference discourses, between subjectivity of the self, and objectivity of the self, were at the heart of the Cold War, and have been promulgated in the academies and throughout societies from the early and middle part of the last century, and have their resonance today in the constructs of our culture, where they have, in fact, impeded understanding of the environmental crisis, (especially the dangers of climate change in which we find ourselves at present), indicating strongly that in the very idea of the self or individual there is a disconnect with nature at the present time.

The ego, itself a Freudian term, initially in a narrow sense of the active or conscious self, has now been understood to mean in popular parlance the self in a broad sense, (where originally Freud had distinguished between the id, the ego, and the superego, now unhappily conflated), and although there is not a comprehensive biological theory as to how the brain works in constituting the self, it is generally understood to be the domain of what a person is in an active role in day to day scenarios, in seeking fulfilment, actualisation, gratification, and satisfaction, these latter adhering quite strongly to what is the core meaning of the ego.

These interpretations are important. We are living in a society where science is supreme, - with the effect that the self, and the ideology of the self, have become systemised in the discourses attending the works of Freud and Marx, however, the general consensus has led to a *Weltanschauung* which is not strictly scientific, but rather pseudo-scientific. In particular, through these differing interpretations of the self, the idea of agency, hence of responsibility, has been lost.

Because the initial theories of Freud and Marx had become accepted as normative in the middle years of the last century, as the ascent to technology was becoming intensified,

and had been universally accepted, and given authority, it is only in relatively recent years that attention has been focussed on the flaws in their theories, which may have an impact on the new sciences of ecology and the environment.

With regard to Freud, this paper will focus on two aspects of his work, viz. his intrinsic masculinist and patriarchal interpretations and theories of sexuality; and the consequences of his adopting the theory of seduction, and later abandoning this theory².with an examination of his theory, which became the clinical practice of repression.

To take the first point. that Freud was intrinsically patriarchal and sexist has been well recognised by women psychologists early on, such as Helene Deutsch, Anna Freud, and Karen Horney, and those feminists following on³. What I will recount here is how his theory of sexuality as masculine and aggressive became accepted as normative at a time when the ascent of technology and industrial development were intensified in the middle of the last century

“Sexual life is dominated by the polarity of masculine-feminine; thus the notion suggests itself of considering the relation of the libido to this antithesis. It would not be surprising if it were to turn out that each sexuality had its own special

² Robinson, Paul. *Freud and His Critics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1993 1993. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4w10062x/> Robinson writes: “The abandonment of the seduction theory promoted the emergence of the idea of infantile sexuality, and in particular the notion of the Oedipus complex – first mentioned in a letter to Fleiss of October 15, 1897, less than a month after Freud announced his rejection of the seduction hypothesis. At the same time, the new role assigned to fantasy considerably enhanced the importance of the unconscious in Freud’s conception of psychic life”

³ Robinson finds that the disenchantment with Freud can be traced to the revival of feminism. He writes: “Betty Friedan’s chapter “The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud” in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Kate Millett’s characterization of psychoanalysis as “The Reaction in Ideology” in *Sexual Politics* (1970), and Germaine Greer’s dismissal of “The Psychological Sell” in *The Female Eunuch* (1970) all excoriated Freud as a principal font of modern misogyny. Their diagnoses had been anticipated two decades earlier by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), whose chapter “The Psychoanalytic Point of View” already identified the particular analytic ideas that feminists found most invidious. Pride of place in this litany of abuse belongs to Freud’s theory of penis envy: the notion that women’s psychology is based on a feeling of genital inadequacy, from which follows their inclination to passivity, narcissism, and masochism. The theory condemned women to perpetual inferiority (because “anatomy is destiny”), representing them as castrated males whose lives were dominated by efforts to compensate for this fundamental defect. In the 1970s the attack on Freud’s ideas about women established itself as a fixture of neo-feminist discourse, rehearsed in countless books, articles, and reviews.”

libido appropriated to it, so that one sort of libido would pursue the aims of a masculine sexual life, and another sort those of a feminine one. But nothing of the kind is true. There is only one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual functions...Nature takes less careful account of (feminine) functions demands that in the case of masculinity. And the reason for this may lie – thinking once again teleologically – in the fact that the accomplishment of the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women’s consent.”

from the 1932 lecture entitled “Femininity”

(quoted in Young-Bruehl, 359)

My point is that the Freudian analysis had been uncritical of this element, save by feminists and those women who followed Freud: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, and Anna Freud, and later, feminists; however what Freud is saying here is that sexuality for men is normative for both men and women, even though in a wider sense he intended the meaning of “active” (for masculine) and “passive” (for feminine). The emphasis on male sexuality its chief distinguishing feature in the mature person, to have the affect of the ego, the self, as male, experiencing discharge after intense pleasure, after which the impulse towards the love object becomes relaxed and somnolent: was mostly investigated in the scenario of a dysfunctional desire. On the other hand, there is no complete agreement as to what constitutes the fulfilment of female sexuality⁴, whether the emphasis is on clitoral or vaginal orgasm or satisfaction, but most writers on the subject concurring that its teleological importance is to accept the substitution of its object – initially the penis – which has been transformed into a baby. The anthropologist Margaret Mead has responded directly that the Freudian construct

⁴ See Thomas Laquer’s review of Naomi Wolf’s recent book “Vagina” in the Times Literary Supplement of October 19, 2012

of penis envy reflects another reality as outlined in her book *Male and Female* (1949) – which was later described as womb envy, a term coined by Karen Horney, a neo-Freudian. (in *Feminine Psychology* (1967).

At this period, the ascent of technology, Freudians, on the whole accepted the theory of libido as having a masculine character, and therefore this was promulgated and given authority by leaders in society such as academics, and their followers, the popularisers. For example, in Marcuse's work, particularly in "Eros and Civilisation" which was widely read and adapted in the 1960s, the emphasis was on Freud's idea of the pleasure principle. While Freud had been clear that the ego mediates on the id (the unconscious and instincts) and the external world, in what he described as the reality principle, the tendency of his followers was to ignore the strictures of society demanded by the ego and to liberate the fantasies to the extent, as outlined by Jeffrey V. O'Conor, that mass repression whereby "consumers came to identify libidinally with the commodities they purchased" (O'Conor, 20). This has a direct bearing on the relationship between self and the environment.

Freudian scholarship in the decades following the mid-century has not entirely solved this problem of the bias to the masculine: Lacan took the view that desire had a symbolic quality, being only articulated through speech, and therefore because of this metonymic character could never be realised, to the point, as Yannis Stavrakakis has pointed out in his essay⁵, "that what was being desired was desire itself.

Stavrakakis has developed an analysis of desire and consumption⁶ where the relationship between consumerism, and branding are looked upon as a form of Lacanian "jouissance" where it is posited that the nature of desire has an eternal, timeless push towards

⁵ Objects of Consumption, Causes of Desire: Consumerism and Advertising in Societies of Commanded Enjoyment

⁶ in a paper entitled "Object of Consumption, Causes of Desire" (available at <http://www.edu.auth.gr/gramma/gramma06/stavrakakis/pdf>)

completion, but is never completed, and how capitalism interlocks with these psychoanalytical findings.

Stavrakakis writes of the hegemony of consumerism , a tripartite nexus “connecting *economy*, (capitalist market economy), inter-subjective desire (a *socio-cultural* administration of desire), and *power* (a particular power regime), a nexus reminiscent of Lacan’s ”Borromean knot⁷”. As Stravrakakis clarifies, Lacan himself referred to advertising – to the slogan “Enjoy coca-Cola” while speaking about *le sujet de la jouissance* in his Baltimore lecture of 1966, associating thus advertising and consumerism with the whole psychoanalytic problematic of enjoyment, specifically to a command to enjoy, which was further explored by Žizek⁸.

To return to Lacan, desire remains symbolic⁹, and following the psycho-analytical discourse, tends to have a masculine character.

Helène Cixous has criticised Freud and Lacan for looking at female desire as being defined as a lack: however her critics such as Professor Wayne.A. Borody¹⁰ in turn have pointed out that Western society as a whole exhibits this cultural phallogentrism and it is “indeterminate” as to its signification: although there is no doubt that the theories of Freud and those who followed him relied on a masculine interpretation of desire, which of course is different in the female experience, in that the object of desire is at times desire of oneself

⁷ The Borromean knot is a topological structure involving three rings linked in such a way that when one of them is cut the other two are automatically released. Lacan uses this knot or chain to present the way the three registers of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are linked together. This structure was included in the coat of arms of the Borromeo family whence it gets its name.

⁸ “The Superego and the Act: A lecture by Slavoj Žižek” The European Graduate School, EGS, 008, 1999

⁹ At no point does Lacan suggest that the “petit objet a” might indeed be a “petit object o” (ovum, or orgasm)

¹⁰ Figuring the Phallogocentric Argument with Respect to the Classical Greek Philosophical Tradition”, *Nebula*, A Netzine of the Arts and Science, Vol. 13, pp. 1-27(1998), “(<http://kenstange.com/nebula/feat013/feat013.html>)

through being desired, which often takes the form of objectifying oneself and complicates more than somewhat what has become the “desire for desire”.

Therefore Freud’s initial theory of assigning a masculine libido to both sexes, and the accompanying theories of what surrounds masculine sexuality, that is, completion, satisfaction, or its opposite, frustration, was not without consequence for society in general and for the environment. The psycho-analytical discourse which followed the discovery of sexuality in children and the Oedipus complex, when Freud developed his theory of repression, privileged fantasy in the role of the unconscious in patients, and this analytical tool was adopted in relation to all analysis and became normative¹¹.

Žažek has made a useful parallel with fantasy as it impacts on economics and societies, in which he develops the Marxist topics of “reification” and “commodity fetishism” to the point where money (once materialist in form, ie, silver, paper) now has become “virtual” in the sense that “money is precisely an object whose status depends on how we “think” about it: he gives the example that Kant’s “thalers” in your pocket may in fact be meaningless if they are relegated to a status of worthlessness, and this is amplified by virtual money transactions. This is particularly true of late capitalism, where fantasy and what is desired takes precedence over any kind of social or material reality. If we look at how the acceptance of fantasy can be traced back to Freud and his techniques, we can arrive at an understanding how we are looking at nature as a virtual, fantastic construction rather than as anything which has the notion of reality attached to it. The emphasis on male sexuality as being normative is tied into this notion of fantasy as being a supreme reality rather than a supreme fiction. The misunderstanding of the role of fantasy and desire has given us, along

¹¹ A close reading of Billig on “Freudian Repression: conversation creating the unconscious” is germane here.

with accelerated capitalism, the power to realise fantasy to the point that it is impeding our understanding of our environment and our relationship with nature, that is: it is male desire which is central to the Freudian analysis,

This pleasure-defined activity without reference to the autonomy and consent of females has resulted on a societal level, in the promotion, through the mass media, of the idea that pleasure and consumption are entirely unlinked to consequences, have a masculine character and do not reflect the experience of females, in particular those who have suffered non-consensual invasive sexual abuse, and in general the more normative patterns of women who desire to bear children

The central psychological problem therefore is how the actual experiences of women or children who found themselves in a situation of violation or rape found themselves unable to articulate their experience, and found they could only record it imperfectly, in Freud's practice, through the clinical tool of speaking about what had been repressed in the experience.

Therefore Freud developed a theory of repression which became a key concept.. According to his and his followers' interpretation of repression, and the idea that a person – usually a woman – can be cured by articulating the repression was conflated with all the symptoms, so the root cause of repression, whether it was real or imagined childhood violation, became obscure.

If we can separate Freud's general observations such as the masculinist libido, and his clinical practices, such as the theory of repression, we can see how confusion has taken place, and the lens through which we view society and culture has been distorted .Freud did amend his theories according to his observations, but sometimes he amended theories

because they could not be fitted into bourgeois norms, the main argument in Richard Webster's account¹²

For example, Freud's theories of child sexuality were shocking in their day, but came to be accepted by a common understanding, rather than being validated through a scientific proof.

In the wider culture of the post-war years, woman has been seen as acted upon, just as nature is acted upon in our relationship to the environment. Therefore the Freudian ethic, imported through the mass communication and mass industrialisation methods, has resulted in the throw away society and what is effectively the rape of nature.

To stretch this analogy further, in *The Plundered Planet – how to reconcile prosperity with nature*, Dr. Paul Collier, Professor of Economics at Oxford University, defines victims as “those who will suffer the most severe consequences of global warming without having been responsible for causing it.” (p. 195). The clearest example of the abuse of nature is where there is an unethical power relation, in this way, exploitation and plunder are analogous to rape, in that the person or part of nature acted upon has not willed or consented to the act which will affect him or her, notably her, in that her state may be altered without her wishing or willing it to do so - although the outcome when nature is exploited is not precisely the same, the cost is nearly always to the object of the oppression.

The power imbalance of the subject/object, agent/who or what is acted upon, is what causes the damage, and this analysis holds up in all comparisons with:

- the ravished state of the victim
- the seeming passivity to the point where the “I” cannot be articulated at all

¹² “Freud's False Memories” Webster. 511

- and what remains of the unequal transaction when it has been culturally interpreted and translated into commodity or exchange value,
- in that a person or thing despoiled the noumena takes on the phenomena of its oppression,
- and will therefore attract less harmonious and prosperous affiliations, due to the psychological and cultural factors,
- including despoliation, depletion, interference with the balance of nature, and the resultant economic effects¹³.

The rape victim cannot articulate an “I”, just as Nature cannot articulate its abuse, but it works at a level more fundamental than language by a threat to our understanding of our biology and even life itself, and this misapprehension and misattribution which changes nature is a significant part of the dangers we find ourselves in at the present time.

Freud himself did not rigidly adhere to his original theories or comments on them, and his interpretations were often confused and his errors compounded by himself and others: his analysis of hysteria for example, was arrived at by surmising an incomplete or interrupted story of sexuality, therefore he hit upon the idea of repression, and the talking cure for it, psychoanalysis, as a mechanism to protect the patient when the normal processes of child development had been arrested by abuse as explained by Michael Billig in his monograph *Freudian Repression: conversation creating the unconscious*

In reconstructing sexual crimes, which would usually involve other people, Freud saw the primary causation in the victim rather than the perpetrator, as he sought to persuade

¹³The direct human consequences are more apparent: in the case of rape, although the person is acted upon and becomes object to the actions, she is held to be responsible –in some countries, or some cultures, such as those upholding the “honour” code, the death of the victim is sought; and for the outcome, i.e. in the case of pregnancy after the rape, she has to assume decision-making and take 100% responsibility

his analysands that although they had no recollection of specific sexual events, as in the case of Dora, his daughter Anna, and the Wolf Man, that a sexual event had actually taken place, as he focused on incidents, impulses or ideas which were uncontroversial, private or unwitnessed, so ensured that his theory of repression was not only unverifiable but unfalsifiable (Webster, 16-17) – a point also developed by Karl Popper, cited in “Objects of Consumption” the essay by Yannis Stavrakakis¹⁴ referred to above.

Therefore, Freud’s theory of repression as located in the unconscious makes it too easy for the therapist to attribute sexual feelings to the analysand or patient when there were actually no sexual feeling present at the time, perhaps only a feeling of intrusion and violation which is the site of the neurosis, as the ego is violated, which under normal circumstances would have been forming in a healthy way. (a process described coherently later by Melanie Klein in her book “Envy and Gratitude”¹⁵)

The uncritical acceptance of the idea of repression means that there is a jump-cut to cover the violated space, and into that space the analyst will insert his or her understanding of sexuality, which is usually allied in their case to wanting, desire and pleasure, along masculinist lines,(as developed by Lacan and others in the idea of the “petit objet a”) and it is this idea of pleasure that causes guilt in the analysand as if in fact they had wanted the violation.

Therefore when patients presented in later years to the analyst, and the role of the unconscious was the means by which the present consciousness action or situation was understood, the unconscious then became the chief agent of action and personality, and the

¹⁴ Object of Consumption, Causes of Desire” (available at <http://www.edu.auth.gr/gramma/gramma06/stavrakakis/pdf>)

¹⁵ *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-63*)

theory of repression helped to create the idea that the unconscious was the real progenitor of action, or agent, so much so, that in the practice of free association, the patient was able to uncover his or her real personality, which had been hidden through repression.

The unconscious then was uncritically validated as the real avenue and focus of personality, and the machine behind the will, the consciousness merely a simulacrum of a more profound and truer reality.

The idea of repression as a mechanism for shielding desire, and the acceptance of discourse or method for releasing that repression, and the openness of sexuality which ensued, became the apparatus of a diffused yet concentrated onslaught on the environment and all rationale for preserving it and respecting nature. This was because fantasy became the mode through which desire was understood, and it was considered to have an inexhaustible quality (Lacan) until the idea of “partial” satisfaction became accepted.

Because desire was initially understood to be based on fantasy the idea was taken up at mass level and it dovetailed with accelerated capitalism and the increasing fetishisation of objects (consumerism) and reification of impulses, fantasy became concrete (as outlined by Žižek (302)

Furthermore, in his construction of the libido as male, Freud not only legitimised desire per se, albeit with the intention of therapy for the victim, but imposed no boundaries to it, which mean it was a given, almost a fact of life, which then was taken by leaders in society, such as advertisers and global corporations, to abandon any relationship with the real world and the actual ground of reality, the prime example and value, nature, was treated as a fantasy. This may not be Freud’s fault or responsibility, but the rationale was provided for by him, and adopted by capitalism which imposed no boundaries on the self as consumer and no boundaries on the self in relation to nature and the interactions of the self with nature.

The original misattribution of sexuality to what was in fact a transgression, to which there were no witnesses, nor factual details to find genuine objects of desire, mean that therefore there was no connection established between the desire and the object of desire, ergo the desire to love and the desire to acquire objects, that these objects, because desirable, brooked no examination of any kind as to their effects on society, and importantly, their effects in the objective realm outside the self, that of the environment and nature. The effect of recognising desire as a universal and innate human impulse mean that it was given validity irrespective of its effects on persons or places, these were treated as if they were fantasy.

If we accept as a foundational ethic that one person does not abuse another, and in this light consider the accumulating evidence that sexual abuse is endemic in our society, we can now perceive that Freud, in his theory of repression and his later abandonment of the theory, gave to his followers both the account of sexuality and the interpretation of it as it affects an individual, we can *mutatis mutandis* observe how as a culture we have soaked up this thinking in a way that affects how we deal with our environment: in particular, how fantasy has become a predominant mode and has been preferred over the reality principle, something which Freud himself would not have been endorsed, as we can see by his abandonment of the seduction theory in 1897.

Of course Freud did not foresee the consequences of some of his incomplete theories being taken up at a mass level, when the idea of gratification through any means became normative and was legitimised by his approach to sexuality: that it was the foundational meaning of all human experience, the reality behind the appearance and the motive, the real text of signification. The fact that there were few independent studies to countervail this development (except for Vance Packard and his pioneering works “The Waste Makers” and “The Hidden Persuaders” which unfortunately disappeared from view for a number of years) was crucial: that Freud arrived at his theories through studying hysteria in a few individuals,

rather than a mass experiment on human children which of course would be entirely impracticable, but for some people, economists and corporations, it provided an imprimatur to produce indefinitely with no thought of consequences or effects on the planet's resources.

This idea of the unconscious or id as the real agent of action became embedded in the culture, and its affect was to legitimate all desire; since desire was unconscious, it was therefore both innocent and valid as a way of understanding self and others, and in a cultural osmosis was the grounding of human behaviour in society and the real meaning of ambition, law, and transactions economic and sexual.

In fact, the economic became sexual, as the purveyors of mass culture and advertising fixed on the biological realities of the erotic relationship – normalised as the couple – was a hugely effective way of selling goods, goods became eroticised, and desire in all its forms was legitimised. Some thinkers, for example, Georges Bataille, wrote eloquently of the eroticisation of commodities, but the mass media and corporations who controlled the world economy ignored the work of such importance in their drive for completion of the capitalist ultimate fantasy. They appropriated traditional values¹⁶ to the point where capital became the only value and transaction and money the only *modus vivendi*.

An obvious effect is in the hierarchal value system which we have inherited from capitalism, desire and its object have become confused, there is no intermediate ground between feeling desire for an object and the object itself, so television viewers have only to see an object to desire it, parallel with male desire obvious here. . In his lecture “The Superego and the Act” (1999)¹⁷ Slavoj Zizek elaborates this thinking as a confusion between “the object of desire and that which makes me desire the object” and draws the interesting

¹⁶ For example: the migration of meaning from a faith-centred society to a transactional mode: as I write (2012) there is a pizza shop in Dublin called “Credo” a few streets away from a clothes shop called “Principles” – both surely an indication of how Reagan and Thatcher economics polluted meaning based on the fantasy that everything was a matter of finance/gratification

¹⁷ Available at <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/the-superego-and-the-act/>

conclusion that the more one is bombarded with objects the less is (the cause of) our desire, citing the huge increase in depression and in the taking of anti-depressives like Prozac, which runs into millions of prescriptions each year¹⁸. This may suggest that there is an underlying anxiety that our environment, which sustains us, is being abused and violated.

Usually, however, is no pause for thought on the effects the acquisition and distribution of objects – such as plastic bottles which are used only once but accumulate for hundreds of years in the environment.

Just as desire had no limits, the object of desire had no limits, therefore it was thought that nature had no limits, and could be exploited indefinitely as a real focus of satisfaction and erotic gratification.

This false construction of the self validated what was in fact a violation, by projecting that violation outside the self, and this means because of the freeing up of discourse to include and understand violation, it became a normative exercise to violate what was outside the self, i.e. nature and the surrounding environment. This was a norm in Western culture: even Freud told Fliess in 1900 (Robinson) “I am actually not at all a man of science, not an observer, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador, an adventurer if you want it translated – with all the curiosity, daring and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort”¹⁹, so in the broad cultural sense he typified the Western exploiter mentality.

However at certain times societies valued self-sacrifice as an answer to scarcity, and were judgemental as regards unnecessary waste, which was a common attitude in Great Britain during the last World War, and the years of rationing which followed, a vivid memory for those like myself born in that era.

¹⁹ Robinson “Freud and his Critics” op.cit

. The acceleration of capitalism in the post-war period was in part due to its combative and oppositional relation to communism, and combined with advancing technology, meant the result was the acceptance of waste and a disconnection with nature, what was looked upon as being outside the gratification-seeking self. The motor car is a case in point. The private self, which was founded on the subjectivity of ideas of personality from the psychoanalytical movement with its emphasis on techniques of free association, and hence boundless subjectivity, was privileged over the public self, which had arisen from the empirical and epistemological systems of objectivity within the framework of the iron laws of determinism(a point I will come to later in this paper), this meant that a private space, the motor car, was prioritised over a public space, the emissions into the air.

The legitimating of desire depends on presenting what is a subjective experience, a private one, and can be variously interpreted, yet the idea of desire grew into an abstraction or justification of desire, which can foreground the need for practical action That practical action was to gratify, after the impulses had been laid bare through the talking cure of psychoanalysis, and with their reaching consequences these desires to gratify attained both a rationale and a motive for further gratification. This ethos, taken up at mass level, meant that society as a whole was urged to gratification, and the consequences not connected to at all. . (Žižek “The Superego and the Act”²⁰)

My point is that since the sexual desire was imagined and symbolised as male, this masculinising of desire took place through- out the culture, and it was assumed that gratification and satisfaction were the only goal.

A female account as such would be of use in housekeeping or maintaining a true narrative of relationship, and to stretch the analogy further, the relationship of self to an

²⁰ Where he expands on the growing culturisation of the market economy itself

actual world, the self and the world acted upon, such as the surrounding events, the environment, the planet, the housekeeping or ecology whose etymology or root means precisely this.

If Freud had adopted a feminine interpretation of sexuality, which in fact was proposed by some of his women analyst disciples, such as Helen Deutsche, he would have found that female sexuality, once it arrived at desire for the phallus, which in turn symbolised a baby, the female nurturing apparatus would come into play. This nurturing apparatus, *which is still a matter for debate*, would mean the normalisation of consequences, the need to harvest and care-take, the need to align individual needs with the long-term welfare of society. But this didn't happen because the masculine ethos of sexuality as normalised by Freud became itself normative of society. What had happened was that the object of desire, the acted-upon, the female, and nature itself was treated as a fantasy and of the same ilk and import, when in fact we have a real world which needs to be addressed.

Moreover, without these engines of consent for women, society itself becomes blind to her needs, and rapacious, as the male libido, and its concomitant, self-gratification is taken to be entirely normative of human nature. When in Freud's day, female virginity, marriage and adaption to childbirth were considered normative, they only took place against the understanding that it was an inferior form of sexuality, hence the move by feminists to prioritise their subjective feelings of desire as being equal to those of men, when in fact they may be of equal importance but may be in particulars be quite distinct, so not identical in character or experience.

Therefore the incomplete theories of Freud on sexuality, and his confusion over his idea of repression as a cure, has in our day given us short-term answers to our human problems. As stated above, even the liberation of female sexuality has tended to follow the

masculinist definitions of Freud, in that women are liberated to being active, which in Freudian terms means acting as men, and consequently they then begin to exhibit the gratification urge as separate from their nurturing role, so they too do begin to embody the idea of the throw-away society. This is the core problem for feminists who wish to advance and enhance life choices for women: they tend also to favour the “active” or male role, so many women who wish to develop as individuals find it to be at a cost of their long-term adjustment and happiness, just as taking care of the environment demands a long-term nurturing response rather than quick gratification with no consequences.

Masculine and feminine sexuality need not be opposed, as they frequently are in commercials which advocate consumerism and waste. The sense of responsibility engendered by embracing care-taker roles in their respective biologies²¹ also enhances the possibilities they will care-take in other areas, such as in their relationship to the earth and the end result of their individual actions and choices.

Therefore our present impasse with our relationship to our environment has been caused by a huge wave of compounding capitalism – where the individual is supreme rather than any idea of society - with a false idea of the self, that there were no boundaries to desire, and that desire could be legitimised through Freudian principles, so even the wish for gratification became an overweening greed that through modern marketing methods and the media galvanised greed as normative as responsibility to the environment as non-existent. Nature became just a fantasy among other fantasies

²¹ In adult sexuality, when both partners take on the rearing of their offspring, the male’s individual self or ego is nourished by the family and his identity reinforced by the input he has into the education of his children: this in fact, is done at a cost to his evolutionary success which means that he curtails the number of children he has by other women in his choice to be a husband. For the woman, the sacrifice is at the personal level, as rearing infants takes toll of her time and her development as a cultured adult, but there is no cost to her in evolutionary terms as she will end up with a limited number of children in any case, and the finding of a supportive partner with an interest in his own children is also a contribution to her evolutionary success.

To take one example of how Freudian constructs have been adapted into advertising: the marketing of one of the fruit juices where the name itself implies transgression in the context of consumption and the vocabulary throughout is “juicy” “soft” “natural” and of course, a throwaway container. The drink itself is named, tellingly “Innocent”.

Since the sixties, the media have been flooded with ads of instant satisfaction, as for example, the milk flake (a phallic shape) which is consumed as a fountain gushes nearby.

During the Cold War era, there were really only two discourses: that of gratification which had its exegesis in the theories of Freud, and that of the group ethos, which had its apotheosis in Marxism.

It is quite extraordinary that these terrible twins were bedfellows in the culture over the decades since the end of World War II. A new world was promised, and the emphasis was on satisfying consumer needs, and greed. We have already seen how some concepts of Freud were used to facilitate advertising of consumer goods, but Marxist thought was also combined with it in a symbiotic relationship reminiscent of twins.

Deleuze and Guattari in their important work “Anti-Oedipus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia” dissect the myth of the unconscious in relation to society in the sections “Psychoanalysis and Ethnology”, and “Territorial Representation” (Deleuze and Guattari 166-168), an acute and profound examination, particularly of desire, exchange, and gift.

They write: “exchange is known, well known in the primitive socius – but as that which must be exorcised, encasted, severely restricted, so that no corresponding value can develop as an exchange value that would introduce the nightmare of a commodity economy.” (186)

A commodity economy is what we have today, when everything can be exchanged, including people (dispensable contracts, companies with no director legally accountable, etc) there can be ultimately no value at all.

Those who did not go along with desire and self-gratification being limitless were nevertheless obstructed by another definition of the self which is ultimately and equally false, that of the self as a materialist construct without any validation of the individual will or conscience. This was a consequence of accepting Marxist thinking on the relation of self to society. Again, this false idea of the self, which had its realisation in the overwhelmingly communist countries of the Eastern bloc, was taken up by mass marketers in the Western bloc where it was hugely effective in marketing plans for social groups which existed within the populations of these countries.

“It is social being which determines our consciousness”, wrote Marx in *The German Ideology* 1845 (quoted in Eagleton, 144). The idea of objectivity had taken ground since Hume and Locke, and what Marx did was to further alienate the person from any idea of subjective selfhood, hence the ground of individual ethical action was polluted. The problem was compounded by the ways in which ideological systems tend to obscure power relations²² Those who thought subjectively were accused of having a false consciousness, (a term later used by Georg Lucaks who originated it) their reflections and selfhood counted as *invalid* because they were assumed to be the product of the divisions between labour and capital. In fact, consciousness was then understood to express a self that was essentially bourgeois, ergo, flawed, incomplete, and which was determined.

Consciousness may be influenced by social being, but it is not determined by it. For example, we can imagine a hermit or a newborn baby in any circumstances where

²² (see [http://www.personal.umd.umich.edu/delittle/false consciousness](http://www.personal.umd.umich.edu/delittle/false_consciousness))

consciousness is an outcome of being able to express it in a different way than the mainstream. Therefore consciousness can be contingent rather than necessary, and if contingent, can be changed, and is not determined.

A hermit living without history or human society would still have consciousness, perhaps different to a particular social group, (Deleuze and Guattari make the point that the Eskimos can exist without a construct like the Oedipus complex (“Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 171-177) and that there is no determinant in these social groups, other than generalisations about history and human nature. For example, although without eating we would surely perish, thought is not dependent on eating, though the social customs established in relation to the procurement of eating, and the organisation to bring about the possibilities and probabilities of eating, can be closely related. However, missing from this relationship is the idea of necessity, although it may be necessary to eat, this is not to say that the forms and customs of eating have in themselves a character of necessity.

The normalisation of erotic desire and its expression in bourgeois marriage (where the woman married for financial gain or security, not being able to be employed herself) meant that desire was constructed as almost a determinate having a basic transactional and financial character, which also fitted in with the tenets of Marxism.

On the biological level, the superfluous and supernumerary multiplicity of sperm could not find their object in the ovum (what we could name a petit object “o”) but the majority were disappointed and unsuccessful, and with the male emphasis on sexuality, took the form of never-ending desire. This fitted into the idea of “surplus value” in Marxism (a point that Lacan developed, and Žižek elaborated (“The Superego and the Act”, p.1) and dovetailed into the accepted Freudian ideas of desire and its completion being largely a fantasy. Žižek wrote that “today, more and more, the cultural economic apparatus itself, in

order to reproduce itself, has not only to tolerate but to directly incite stronger and stronger shocking effects and products” in order to stimulate consumption that amounts to recklessness in our dealings with Nature (and Nature answers back in terms of catastrophes such as Storm Sandy (October 2012) and Hurricane Katrina (2004) about whose cause and the relation to climate change is still a debate.

On the societal level, the determinism of Marx had the result of attributing any theories of the personality to a group ethos, and if one person did not fit the group prescription, he or she became invalid or expendable. The group ethic meant that a kind of mechanisation became apparent, as people were defined according to their social group, and qualities attributed to them had an automatic, even a mechanistic character. This was in fact an extrapolation of the theory of biological determinacy: but human society does not resemble the patterns of biological determinacy: if it did, we would have ant-like societies rather than the class and striated cultural manifestations of diversity we recognise in society.

If people were completely defined by their social group, their culture or their history – since these have no intrinsic freedom attached – the idea of consciousness as the source of agency was lost. The definition excluded every personal attribute such as freedom of conscience. Therefore the *idea* of agency or causation which could be attributed to an individual was lost., (in practice agency may have been located in certain individuals, but again, it was a product of circumstances, social and economic, and was not fixed through necessity. Although Marx believed that “freedom was the recognition of necessity”, (see Eagleton, where he discusses the development of socialism as a historical necessity arising out of capitalism 56) this was true only in the realm of logic and dialectics, but did not encumber the individual will, which although it can have the character of preordained causality, is not strictly speaking determined. For example, the will can be compared to one driving a car on a road, at any point one can steer right, or left, or straight ahead, so the will is

quite free, but the course of action is usually decided by what one wants or believes one wants to do.

With the adoption of Marxist philosophy and biological determinism, the idea of the individual was lost, along with a coarsening of the modes that had defined people, such as motivation, good faith, integrity or intention. All these were lost in the adoption of a group ethic to comply with Marx's view that consciousness was defined by social reality.

This extreme rigidity in the application of what constituted defining the origin of consciousness had a deleterious effect on how the self was defined, its main result was the denial that there was subjectivity in individuals, but what was being essentially denied was the idea of freedom. However, without freedom, no human act can be considered fully ethical or human, since a human act involves both intentionality and teleology. (Marxists therefore understood that people were determined by the group, that the laws which determined them were the objective laws of history, and these laws, qua Hegel, operated without human will or necessity, were the dynamics of biology.

Therefore the self had no role to play which was grounded on awareness of nature, or conscience of the consequences of any act which affected Nature. In fact, the alienation which Marx wrote of in relation to workers and their productions may be intuiting a deeper more profound alienation: from nature.

That Freudianism and Marxism were an essential part of academic discourse in the western liberal democracies for over a century has had a paralysing effect on our understanding of the individual self, and its authority and meaning as an agent interacting with nature, as Paul Robinson wrote of Freud's influence:²³.

²³²³ Robinson, Paul. *Freud and His Critics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1993 1993.
<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft4w10062x/>

The two were polar opposites in arriving at an understanding of the self: the Freudian thinkers had little or no objective grounds for valorising the self; the Marxist error was on the other side, the objective criteria existed in a vacuum posited by epistemology and empiricism but which had no valorisation or vector in individual parameters of consciousness.

These extraordinary men, Freud and Marx, were flawed geniuses, and taking up positions of such authority in the academy and culture meant that their ideas were adapted and diffused at mass level, which discounted the exceptional factors in Marx's case and in Freud's case made the exception the norm.

I am not concerned, as Marcuse put it, with revolutionising Freud, or eroticising Marx, a subject that O'Casey is in his essay (cited below) develops fully, but rather looking at how the idea of agency has been obfuscated in both thinkers, primarily by their followers and popularisers. The loss of agency is central: as noted, Robinson's critique of Freud's critics has advanced the idea of the problematic self in post-modern discourse²⁴ while the errors in theoretical Marxism has resulted in an anomie on a vast societal level on the foundation of human personality and agency.²⁵

Both interpretations and theories of the self were in error here, and these errors were promulgated advocated and promoted throughout society, facilitating the mass marketers and

²⁴ Robinson writes: "This brings me to my final thought about the significance of Freud's fall from grace. I detect in it an underlying rejection of the modern, and in particular the modern conception of the self that Freud did so much to create. We might even characterize the reaction against Freud as postmodern if we agree to use that term analogously to the way it is used in architecture, where it denotes a rejection of the modernist aesthetic. In the intellectual and artistic realms, modernism entailed a loss of confidence in the stability and transparency of the self. It also entailed the recognition that all human knowledge is subjective and indeterminate. Freud's theory of the unconscious, which denies that the self is aware even of its own ideas, was the most powerful articulation of this modernist sensibility".

²⁵ The huge numbers sent to concentration camps or those thinkers who were "liquidated" point to how the deficiencies in the theory became amplified in bad practice

producers with a flawed ideology to encourage consumerism, and waste, with very serious repercussions for our planet.

These ideas, thus developed, in a symbiotic relationship like twins, has generally us to an ethical impasse during the past century and beyond, leading to our present anomie and indifference towards the real world of Nature where our actions as an ethical and true self or ego, with consequences as agents, are very important.

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