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## Is Freud Necessary?

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**Freud and American Sociology**

By Philip Manning  
 Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005  
 \$64.95 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper)

Sociologists like myself, committed to the sociological psychologies of Durkheim, Mead, and Goffman, have, at one time or another, wrestled with the formidable figure of Freud. Having studied psychoanalytic theory closely, we have opted to leave Freud behind, certain that his ideas conflicted with social and interactionist theories about mind and self. Reading Philip Manning's *Freud and American Sociology* has unsettled these long-standing convictions of mine. Even for those like me who choose to stand outside the "theological structure" known as psychoanalysis, Manning makes a strong case for bringing sociology back into conversation with psychoanalysis, as a reservoir of ideas and insights from which sociology can draw.<sup>1</sup>

An important work of social theory as well as of the history of U.S. sociology, this book principally addresses qualitative sociologists writing ethnographies, particularly those in the sociological tradition of symbolic interactionism. The project of a reflexive and critical ethnography preoccupies Manning, as it has preoccupied so many of us today, sociologists and anthropologists, for whom the tasks of doing fieldwork and "writing culture" are fraught with the new problems of changes in the status of "cultures" globally. Particularly important is the growing interdependence of world cultures that has ushered in a period where ethnographic description and writing have become intensely self-conscious, critical, and experimental. At this "experimental moment" (Marcus and Fischer 1986) the problems we face are those made present to us by the debates across the sciences and humanities about representation in contemporary discourse and about the status of ethnographic "subjects" relative to ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Ethnography has become a form of engaged and critical discourse of cultural "analyst" and "analysand," which takes into account the complex ways that ethnographers and their subjects interact with each other in the situation of "the field." Close study of the research process itself—especially the dialogues of ethnographers and informants—will, according to many commentators today, yield knowledge about another culture. This has been a corrective to older

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*Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp. 613–617, ISSN 0195-6086, electronic ISSN 1533-8665. © 2007 by the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/si.2007.30.4.613.

and differently situated ethnographies where informants provided “facts” and where the model of ethnography was not “dialogical” but information gathering, in effect, suppressing dialogue.

Manning’s work is best understood relative to these contemporary discussions about the nature of social scientific description and writing. In fact, he places his own project alongside some of these new inquiries, especially auto-ethnography and psychoanalytic works by sociologists such as Nancy Chodorow and Jeffrey Prager, which offer ways to put people and their experiences into theories of culture (chap. 6). The centerpiece of the book is Manning’s argument that psychoanalysis is able to offer—principally through its concepts of transference and countertransference—important ways to understand the cultural worlds we inhabit and study. The study of culture and psyche (to frame this in its broadest terms) is not something we observe going on outside ourselves, in the transactions of our subjects and the life worlds they inhabit and internalize. Rather, our investigations require us as ethnographic analysts to sweep ourselves into the process of description and interpretation. Manning takes this contemporary argument toward a sociology of “internal worlds,” a psychoanalytic sociology where the richest aspects of ethnographic work benefit from the uses of clinical phenomena such as fantasy, projection, introjection, anxiety, and so forth. Chodorow’s work (1999) is central to this discussion, particularly her argument concerning the integration of psychoanalytic phenomena into ethnographic practice. Fieldwork, she argues, is a highly charged interpersonal and intercultural site that cries out for psychoanalytic insights. Foundational to both psychoanalysis and anthropology, the interpersonal encounter and dialogue (whether clinical or ethnographic) is the site for both the work of culture and the interplay of “deep motivation.”

Manning also provides a valuable history of American sociology’s uses of Freud and psychoanalysis, highlighted by treatments of the social psychological theories of W. G. Sumner and Charles Horton Cooley (chap. 2); Mead, Blumer, and Goffman (chap. 3); Talcott Parsons (chap. 4); and Philip Rieff (chap. 5). This is, however, intellectual history with a clear agenda, for Manning will use it to propose a “theoretical fusion” of the best of interactionist sociology with a culturally sensitive psychoanalysis. The contributions of sociologists are measured and assessed against a gold standard: the ability of their work to mate with a psychoanalytic “relational theory,” incorporating into it the ideas of transference and countertransference. In the concluding chapter, “Sociologists as Analysts and Auto-Ethnographers,” Manning develops the idea that ethnographies written out of the sociologist’s “internal” world (experiences, motivations, emotional conflicts, fears) provide the data for studying the everyday internal worlds of others with whom they share a social world.

As stated above, Manning’s arguments are enhanced when read alongside other works on ethnographic theory and methods. I would like to single out several of these that, when read alongside Manning’s, situate the issues of ethnographic practice as problems of *representation* (epistemology, hermeneutics, discursive forms) in a world where “culture” itself—the object of ethnographic practice—is both contested

and emergent. The arguments of Clifford Geertz, George Marcus, and James Clifford on today's practice of ethnography come to mind, as does John Van Maanen's now-classic *Tales of the Field* (1988), reminding us that all ethnographies engage *narrative conventions*, even those that employ confessional tales of the participant-observer like those Manning privileges in his treatment of auto-ethnography. These conventions of writing are integral to ethnography and are, among other things, matters of choice, as they are related to moral and aesthetic judgments about the value of ethnography itself as a written cultural product. Other works that take up the task of reflexive ethnography are those of the psychoanalytic anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, especially *The Work of Culture* (1990). There he proposes a hermeneutical reading of Freud, one that breaks away from Freud's pathological model and enables one to use Freud to read art, religion, and culture without recourse to the clinical meanings of, say, transference, countertransference, and transference-neurosis. Obeyesekere (1990:217–36) also offers a mild corrective to Manning's insistence that sociology adopt the primary psychoanalytic models of transference and countertransference. There are times when Manning's arguments about using psychoanalytic ideas sound far too literal and formalistic, as if Freudian theories are essential complements to, say, Goffman's sociology. By contrast, Obeyesekere argues that psychological models are specific to the analytic situation and cannot be transferred and applied to other human "intersubjectivities." However, by *analogy* the ethnographer can use these accounts to examine some of the ways that a type of "cultural transference" between ethnographers and informants occurs, one that is unique to the transactions of ethnographers and their subjects and often involves deep motivations, sexual conflicts, anxieties and attachments, anger and aggression, solitude and loneliness. This is, I think, a more satisfactory way for sociologists to consider the value of psychoanalysis; it expresses a more eclectic (and ecumenical) sense that our reflexive ethnographies can draw from a wide range of theories of subjectivity (psychoanalysis, Bourdieu's socioanalysis, cognitive psychology, sociologies of the emotions) without privileging one of them as authoritative. This interpretive model does not find in any single theory a key for unlocking the cultural and personal dilemmas faced by ethnographers as cultural analysts.

In saying this, I am not closing the door on psychoanalysis, which can offer critical insights into the full humanity of the cultural interpreter. Psychoanalysis can surely provide a necessary corrective to the view of ourselves as neutral (rational) observers. For it shows us in our darkness and our depth (and shallowness), and opens us up to the domain of our attachments and entanglements with others we study. Put simply, I depart from Manning in his judgment that psychoanalysis is a necessary component to reflexive ethnographies. Yet I stand firmly with Manning in his claim that we are at our best as interpreters of culture or subculture when we are in contact with ourselves.

A reflexive ethnography can—but does not need to—end up in a morass of pointless self-reflections and fieldwork confessionals. What Manning and others today are proposing is a fully engaged ethnography where the ability of the ethnographer to

understand the meanings of an alien culture or subculture emerges through *dialogues*, the dominant metaphor of today's discussions and experiments in the new ethnographies. Ethnographic dialogues locate the processes of cultural production in *both* what our subjects tell us and what we, as cultural producers too, interpret the meanings of that "production" to be.

But there is more to these dialogues and meetings than meets the eye of the (realist) observer. As Manning has argued throughout this history of sociology's relationship with (and rejection of) Freud, scientific pursuits have the marks—if we are astute enough to decipher them—of the deeply personal. Our ethnographic pursuits—including sociology's and my own early rejection of Freud—contain reservoirs of strong feelings about what we study and how we construe it. This is very clear from Manning's own portrait of Erving Goffman (chap. 3), a powerful account of a master sociologist of deception in all its forms and one of sociology's greatest moralists and critics of "total institutions."

In fact, Manning's entire history of American sociology is a register of how strong feelings operated in the erection of that wall between sociology's theories of action and interaction and Freud's theories of intersubjectivity. At the heart of this scholarly account is a moral tale, a peculiarly modern story (recounted by a member of a thoroughly rationalized society) about the inescapable nature of the passions and the dangers that threaten us if we fail to recognize their force. This moral tale is at the heart of Manning's remarkable book about sociology's need for psychoanalysis and how U.S. sociology tried to keep Freud "in the closet."

## NOTES

1. I borrow the term "theological structure" from the psychoanalytic anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano, whose 1992 essay "Some Thoughts on Hermeneutics and Psychoanalytical Anthropology" introduces the term as a way to understand important differences between psychoanalysis and anthropology.
2. Included here are the many critical commentaries in anthropology that interrogate the enterprise of anthropology itself; several early influential statements on these themes include Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988, Marcus and Fischer 1986, and Schwartz, White, and Lutz 1992. In sociology, there are the new forms of "auto-ethnography," experiments in "performance texts," and studies that examine the cognitive and psychological dimensions of ethnographic work; for a recent statement see Denzin 2000. The works by Anthony Elliott examine the resurgence of psychoanalytically inspired social and cultural theories in contemporary works of social science; for example, Elliott's recent (2004) *Social Theory since Freud* is most relevant to Manning's arguments concerning the concepts of transference and countertransference and qualitative research.

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