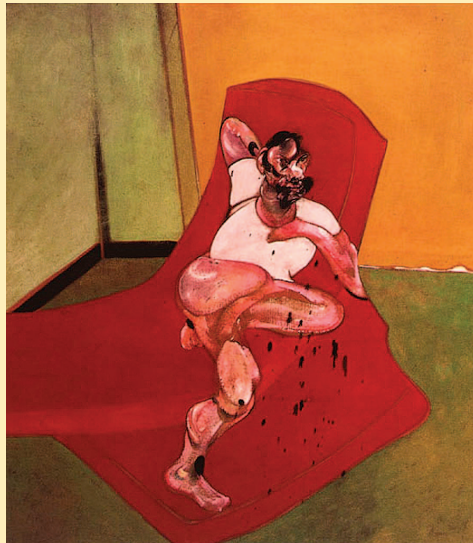




UNSPEAKABLE SECRETS AND THE
PSYCHOANALYSIS OF CULTURE



ESTHER RASHKIN

UNSPEAKABLE
SECRETS
AND THE
PSYCHOANALYSIS
OF CULTURE

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Esther Rashkin

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INTRODUCTION

Vexed Encounters: Psychoanalysis, Cultural Studies, and the Politics of Close Reading

In sum, academic criticism is, paradoxically, prepared to accept . . . the principle of interpretive criticism or, to use a different word (which still causes fear), ideological critique; but it denies that this interpretation and this ideology can function in a realm that is purely internal to the work; in short, what is rejected is *immanent analysis*: everything is acceptable as long as the work can be put in relation to something *besides* itself, that is, something besides literature: history . . . , psychology . . . , these *elsewheres* of the work will gradually be allowed; what will not be allowed is criticism that establishes itself *within* the work and posits the work's relation to the world only after having entirely described it from the interior, in its functions or, as we say today, in its structure . . .¹

—Roland Barthes, “The Two Criticisms”

The relationship between psychoanalysis and cultural studies is a vexed one. It need not be. I want to argue in this study that psychoanalysis galvanizes—in a way that no other discipline can—the contact between texts and social, historical, and political contexts. It illuminates

For the reader's convenience, page references to primary texts in each chapter appear throughout in parentheses following quotations. All ellipses within quotations are my own, unless stated otherwise. I most often use *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), cited throughout as *OED*, and *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, 2nd edition (Paris: Le Robert, 1985), cited as *Le Grand Robert*, to confirm the common usage and meaning of a word at the time it was used in a text because these reference works provide dates and examples of usage. Other reference works are used for confirmation and are cited where appropriate.

obscured ideology and exposes cultural connections that would otherwise remain unseen. It does this best when it is anchored in a focused practice of close reading, a practice that cultural studies has marginalized along with psychoanalysis itself. To retrace, psychoanalytically, the concealed lines of transmission between text and context thus also means to recast close textual analysis itself as an engaged political practice with formidable hermeneutic and heuristic powers.

This study springs from my investigations of literary and film narratives that conceal within themselves distressing, unspeakable, potentially psychopathogenic secrets. Uncovering these secrets and their vicissitudes, which psychoanalysis is well equipped to do, reveals powerful and too-often overlooked engagements between these works of literature and film and specific cultural and ideological constellations. This project is thus at odds with recent trends in cultural studies. Scholarship's intensive exploration of all dimensions of cultural production during the last fifteen years has dealt with psychoanalysis in only two ways: either it has ignored it (as a glance at cultural studies journal contents, anthologies, and conference programs reveals); or it has understood psychoanalysis to mean Freudian and Lacanian theory. When cultural studies *does* deploy Freud and Lacan in the service of ideological critique, they are primarily confined to support status. Freud's theory of "identification," for example, may be called upon to bolster a sociopolitical analysis of how race, class, or gender constructs public space. Lacan's concepts of the "phallus" and "the Other" may serve to reinforce a materialist critique of rap music marketing or gender inequities in public education. While these deployments have value, they barely touch the theoretical wealth that psychoanalysis has to offer the study of cultural practices.² It has not always been this way.

REREADING *MYTHOLOGIES*

Roland Barthes overtly appealed to psychoanalysis for help in reading certain cultural phenomena in *Mythologies*, a work that most regard as one of the founding texts of cultural studies. In the essay entitled "Soap-powders and Detergents" ["Saponides et Détergents"], first published in 1954 following a world conference on detergents held in Paris that year, Barthes turns his attention to the advertising of cleansing agents. In this, as in the other essays in *Mythologies*, Barthes elaborates "*in detail*" a semiologically based demystification of the discursive practices and soci-

ocultural representations that confuse the historical with the natural.³ To put it another way, he shows how these practices present as immanent and authentic what is symbolically and ideologically constructed in post-World War II French society. It is clear that *Mythologies* takes as its focus or “essential enemy” the “bourgeois norm.”⁴ What is striking about the essay on “Soap-powders and Detergents,” on which I want to focus, is its suggestion that psychoanalysis, a term Barthes uses “without reference to any specific school,” take a close look at the advertising campaigns being disseminated by the detergent manufacturers.⁵ These campaigns, Barthes argues, have been so massive that the laundry products

now belong to a region of French daily life which the various types of psychoanalysis would do well to pay some attention to if they wish to keep up to date. One could then usefully contrast the psychoanalysis of purifying fluids (chlorinated, for example) with that of soap-powders . . . or that of detergents. . . . The relations between the illness and the cure, between dirt and a given product, are very different in each case. (36)

[font aujourd’hui partie de cette zone de la vie quotidienne des Français, où les psychanalyses, si elles se tenaient à jour, devraient bien porter un peu leur regard. On pourrait alors utilement opposer à la psychanalyse des liquides purificateurs (*Javel*), celle des poudres saponidées . . . ou détergentes. . . . Les rapports du remède et du mal, du produit et de la saleté sont très différents dans l’un ou l’autre cas.]⁶

Barthes’s essay positions psychoanalysis as a valuable if not privileged heuristic instrument for deciphering the semantic and semiotic strategies employed in the marketing of soaps. We did not realize, until Barthes, that there were any such strategies. Barthes goes on to amplify his argument in the next paragraph, commenting that, “even in the category of powders, one must in addition oppose against advertisements based on psychology those based on psychoanalysis” (37). (It is worth noting, and I will come back to this, that Barthes distinguishes face creams from soap powders because the former, which he discusses in another *Mythology*, “have a very different psychoanalytic meaning” [37]). There is more to say about detergents, however: the essay reconfigures the discourse of detergents in terms of illness and cure, malady and

remedy. It thereby suggests not only that there is a psychopathological dimension to the French cultural practice of cleansing that justifies seeking consultation from psychoanalysis (as opposed to its presumably less sophisticated cousin, psychology) that would be sensitive to the workings of the unconscious. It also implies that the possibility of “cure” exists, and that there is some chance for relief or deliverance from the distress or pain embedded in the antagonisms between dirt and detergent, soil and soap.

Barthes’s analysis raises two questions. First, how might we explain this sudden onset of soap advertising in mid-1950s France? Second, what are we to make of his surprising invocation of psychoanalysis in the midst of a semiotically grounded demythifying of the bourgeois ideology that has been woven into the marketing of laundry products? The first question has already been asked, and to some degree answered, by another reader of Barthes, Kristin Ross, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1995). Ross’s thesis—that France’s rapid, postwar modernization was propelled not only by the forces of American technology and consumerism, but also by the decolonization of Algeria—illustrates the insights that strong cultural analysis can provide. It also reveals what cultural studies can miss, and what psychoanalysis can help us see.

Ross invokes Barthes to launch her examination of the cult-like status of hygiene in the postwar French domestic sphere. She is impatient with the clichéd narrative of wartime deprivation, which has long served to explain France’s postwar hunger for consumer goods as a natural outgrowth of the literal hunger France suffered during the Occupation. Ross claims that Barthes puts his finger on the real psychic need underlying this consumption at the end of his essay in *Mythologies* on skin cream, entitled “Depth Advertised” [“Publicité de la profondeur”], which she quotes: “Decay is being expelled (from the teeth, the skin, the blood, the breath): France is having a great yen for cleanliness.”⁷ If Barthes correctly identifies France’s deep need to be clean, however, Ross observes that neither he nor his contemporary chroniclers of the quotidian (Lefebvre, Baudrillard) ever explain *why* this is so, or how this hunger for hygiene is related to postwar modernization or France’s mutating concept of nationhood. This is Ross’s project.

Ross acknowledges briefly how metaphors of hygiene are woven through postwar discourses of anti-Pétainist political purges, campaigns for moral purification, and efforts by literary authors (notably of the “New Novel”) to clean up novelistic style. But she wants to focus on

even more immediate history. That is, she explains France's virtual obsession with cleanliness, which advertising campaigns and women's magazines stoke as they target (primarily) women, as an effect of the end of empire and the displacement of colonial administrative and disciplinary practices into the realm of everyday metropolitan domesticity. In soon-to-be postcolonial France, cleanliness is the means by which the French will maintain their difference from and superiority over the formerly colonized. France must become a modern nation, which means a technologically advanced and hygienic one, because Algeria is becoming an independent nation. "[S]ome distinction between the two must still prevail. France must, so to speak, clean house; reinventing the home is reinventing the nation" (Ross, 78).

Ross's thesis is a highly suggestive, provocative contribution to current thinking about postwar French history and culture. She illustrates it with an eclectic array of cultural artifacts and social practices ranging from advertisements for kitchen appliances and laundry detergents to film representations of domesticity and autobiographical accounts of French techniques of "clean torture" in Algeria. Some have questioned the accuracy of her history and her use of metaphor and unexpected juxtaposition to argue her case. Others have accused her of going too far in linking what she calls France's "modernization" and "culture of cleanliness" (Ross, 74) to decolonization and France's changing concept of national identity.⁸ I would argue that she does not go far enough. At least not in her reading of France's obsession with hygiene. Even as she seeks to provide an alternative "experience of the historicity" (Ross, 10) of France's modernization, which postmodernist theories, steeped in "the dissolution of the event and of diachronic agency, seek to efface" (Ross, 10), she herself stops too soon, abandons her own diachronic counter-discourse. A close, psychoanalytic reading of Barthes's essays on detergents and skin cream, to which Ross refers, will help illustrate my point. It will also suggest how psychoanalysis can expose ideology and unconscious political motives and dynamics, embedded within societal practices and discourses, that resist detection by materialist cultural analysis.

Ross has not paid close enough attention to the metaphoric dimension of Barthes's language, which is crucial to his project and to mine. Barthes observes a key semiotic distinction in the marketing of soap-powders and detergents that hinges on what these products do to dirt. Ads for chlorinated fluids, he notes, portray them as "liquid fire" (36), which must be carefully dosed or "the object itself would be affected, 'burnt'" (36).⁹ Such products alter matter in "violent, . . . chemical" (36)

ways: “the product ‘kills’ the dirt” (36).¹⁰ Powders, by contrast, have very different connotations. They are “separating agents” (36).¹¹ They “liberate the object from its circumstantial imperfection: dirt is ‘forced out’ and no longer killed [since this] puny enemy, stunted and black, . . . takes to its heels from the fine pure linen at the sole threat” (36) of the detergent’s action.¹² Barthes adds that advertisements for one very popular brand of detergent turn the consumer into an “accomplice of a liberation rather than the mere beneficiary of a result” (37) by explaining how the product cleans.¹³ The ads also invoke the semiotics of “foam”—connoting luxury, pleasure, lightness, and spirituality—to “disguise the abrasive function of the detergent” (37) and to reassure consumers that the fabric’s “molecular order” (38) will not be damaged by the harsh cleansing.¹⁴ Finally, Barthes suggests ethnographic correlatives for these hygienic behaviors. He sees chlorine and ammonia-based agents, which represent “a kind of absolute fire” (36), as extensions of the “washerwoman’s movements when she beats the clothes” (36).¹⁵ Powders, on the other hand, are “selective” (36).¹⁶ They have a “policing rather than a war-making function” (36) because they do not kill but “push, drive dirt out through the weave of the object” (36).¹⁷ As such, they correspond to “the housewife pressing and rolling the washing against a sloping board” (36).¹⁸

Barthes’s unveiling of these advertisements—their rhetorical appeal to the liberating pleasures of housewifery, and the underlying bourgeois ideology that constructs gendered domesticity as natural and necessary—is powerful and convincing. Accurate as his analysis may be, there is an even more complex and surprising narrative concealed within these soap ads and highlighted, albeit inadvertently, by Barthes’s own attempt to demythologize them. It may be that Barthes was as uncomfortable as the reader may now be upon encountering this language in the context of selling soap. This discomfort comes from the strange familiarity of the language, from the disturbing, uncanny feeling that we have seen and heard these metaphors before. We have. Barthes’s annotated taxonomy of cleansing solutions and his anthropomorphizing of their cleaning functions are readable as a reinscription or second-degree writing of the saga of postwar France’s shameful and (at the time) largely unacknowledged participation in the Nazi’s Final Solution. I want to suggest, in other words, that Barthes’s essay on soap-powders and detergents is not just about the hidden ideologies and discursive strategies deployed to sell products that eliminate dirt from French fabrics. It is also about the practice of eliminating Jews from the fabric of French society and the rhetorical whitewash used to cover it up.

It is Barthes's language itself that allows me to make this apparently outrageous argument. Just as dirt is "selected, separated, driven, and forced out" by the "policing" actions of soap-powders, so the Jews, portrayed in so much propaganda as a subhuman, "puny enemy, stunted and black," were selected, separated, and forced out from the "pure linen" of Christian France by Vichy's collaborationist police and driven to French internment camps like Drancy, Pithiviers, and Beaune-la-Rolande before being eliminated at Auschwitz. Expelled from the "teeth, skin, blood, and breath" of the French body politic to satisfy France's desire to be an "accomplice . . . rather than [a] mere beneficiary" of the Nazis' "great yen for cleanliness" and genetic, "molecular order," the Jews were gassed and then burnt, via the subterfuge of delousing, which "disguised the abrasive" function of "purifying" agents that alter matter in "violent, chemical" ways, "'kill' dirt," and burn "the object itself." Barthes's essay on skin cream ads amplifies this embedded narrative. While he codes as "scientism" ("Depth," 47) advertisers' emphasis on the "*ultra-penetrating*" (49; Barthes's italics), "deep cleansing" (47), "regenerative" (47) qualities of substances like "*bactericide agent R 51*" (47; Barthes's italics),¹⁹ these references to science, thorough cleaning, and mysteriously coded chemical agents evoke the notorious insecticide Zyklon B, which literally penetrated the "skin, blood, and breath" of its victims in order to (racially) purify and regenerate.²⁰

The advertisements for soaps, detergents, and skin creams, and Barthes's exposure of the semiotics of warfare, expulsion, and destruction inscribed within these odes to hygiene, can thus be read as telltale signs of the drama of the Holocaust, which permeated the social fiber, practices, and discourse of postwar France. This is where psychoanalysis comes in: the ads can be read as symptoms of the return of the repressed. They are ciphered signifiers of the nation's struggle—and in large part failure—to come to terms, in the aftermath of the Second World War, with its eager collusion in rounding up and eliminating the Jews. It is not necessary to repeat here the compelling accounts by historians, such as Rouso, Paxton, and Birnbaum, who have described the various ways in which France tried to suppress or deny this moment of its history and transmute the events of anti-Semitic collaboration into a story of unified resistance to Nazi occupation.²¹ I want only to suggest that the highly charged and cohesive language of the soap and skin cream ads, if read closely through a psychoanalytic lens, emerges as the cryptic narrative of French complicity in the expulsion and extermination of the Jews which, in the mid-1950s, the nation of France had still not made part of its

public discourse or accepted as part of its history. In lieu of washing its dirty laundry in public, acknowledging its guilt, and integrating within its ego-State the psychosocial and political changes necessary to begin to repair the damage to its national identity and enable it to reconstruct the institutions of Republican democracy, postwar France repressed the trauma of Vichy's craven pursuit of racial hygiene, only to have its symptoms return, under the aegis of "modernization," as a craving for soap.

The historical record and political context support this reading. While the rhetoric used to sell soaps and skin creams is readable as a narrative about the Holocaust, the signifier "soap" itself comes into the 1950s with its own highly charged backstory. Alain Resnais's classic film, *Night and Fog*, tells this story through poetic images and words. The thirty-two-minute film, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 after the French board of censors insisted that a reference to Vichy's participation in the deportations be removed, relies heavily on archival footage of the concentration camps, taken by allied military liberators and the Nazis themselves.²² The footage contains disturbing images of emaciated prisoners, carbonized corpses, gouged walls and ceilings of gas chambers, and the twisted metal and heat-scarred bricks of the crematoria. Toward the end of the film, the camera moves past mounds of eyeglasses, clothing, shoes, and women's hair, which were collected from the camps' prisoners. The narration, written by the poet Jean Cayrol (himself a survivor of Mauthausen), simultaneously describes what was done to the bodies of those killed.

Everything was saved. Here are the reserves of the Nazis at war, here are their warehouses. . . . Nothing but women's hair. . . . At 15 pfennigs a kilo, it was used to make cloth. From the bones . . . fertilizer—at least, they tried. From the bodies—words are insufficient. . . . From the bodies, they make soap.²³

[Tout est récupéré. Voici les réserves des nazis en guerre, leurs greniers. . . . Rien que des cheveux de femmes. . . . A 15 pfennigs le kilo, on en fait du tissu. Avec les os . . . des engrais—tout au moins on essaie. Avec les corps . . . mais on ne peut plus rien dire . . . avec les corps, on veut fabriquer du savon.]

The idea that the flesh of the Jews was rendered into soap has been refuted as rumor by several authorities on the Holocaust, despite various

survivor accounts asserting its truth.²⁴ Its presence as fact in Resnais's film (upon which the director, coincidentally, began work shortly after the World Congress on Detergents and the publication of Barthes's essay on soap) suggests that the notion was nonetheless well ensconced in the French zeitgeist or collective unconscious of the postwar period. In light of the advertising rhetoric for skin cleansers, which supposedly "vivify, revitalize, and regenerate," and given the sudden ubiquity of soap products in the 1950s, this "fact" invites us to read "soap" differently. Soap, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, is not just a signifier of the return of France's repressed collusion in the Final Solution. Soap is also a symptom of France's *denial* of the murder of its Jews. If the Jews were turned into soap, the unspoken, unconscious narrative goes, and if soap is now everywhere in French society, then the Jews of France were never killed. They were driven out, yes, but they have returned—revitalized and regenerated. Soap, in this admittedly grotesque intrapsychic logic of defense, becomes the vehicle of a fantasy of return, and the symbolic medium of a radical denial of the fate of French Jewry. (This, interestingly, is one of the common forms of contemporary anti-Semitic discourse. While Jean-Marie Le Pen, head of France's right-wing National Front party, infamously refers to the gas chambers as a mere "detail" of World War II history whose "truth" is still being debated, other virulent Holocaust deniers, like Faurisson and Irving, state categorically that the gas chambers never existed, that millions of Jewish deportees were not methodically exterminated, and that most survived and eventually returned from the camps.)²⁵

The yen for cleanliness in the mid-1950s can thus be related not only to France's efforts to contain emergent nationalist forces in Algeria and to reinvent itself as a modern nation in order to maintain its sense of superiority over its former colony, as Kristin Ross argues. France's desire for hygiene, along with the advertising rhetoric that constructs and feeds it, cryptically expresses what postwar France could not put into words, could not share in a communal discourse of national contrition, and thus could neither introject nor mourn: its willing collusion in the eradication of the Jews, and its loss of identity as a republic founded on principles of human and civil rights, and universalism. In the absence of any working through or psychic digestive process that could enable this traumatic loss to be absorbed and integrated within France's evolving identity as a democratic nation, the trauma remained unassimilated, unburied, and unmemorialized—and a source of ongoing internal disarray or "illness."

We remember that Ross also found links between what she called France's "modernization" and the use of torture against Algerian nationalists. I would argue that France's use of torture could be reconsidered as a symptom of this illness. Without ignoring the military, political, and psychosocial justifications France invoked to support the practice (or that other countries regularly invoke to support their practice), we can surmise that this sadistic behavior also functioned as an unrecognized reenactment or unconscious return of France's repressed or unintrojected participation in the torture of the Jews. Vichy's identification with the Nazi aggressor, which led to barbarous cruelty initiated and pursued by the French themselves, in a sense came into its own during the Algerian conflict. With the Nazis out of the picture, the French became "Nazis" toward their "new (dirty) Jews": the "dirty" Algerians. The fact that the torture was referred to as "clean" (meaning it left no physical traces) may not just be linked, as Ross contends, to the interwoven forces of decolonization, modernization, and the commodification and marketing of cleanliness. It may have as much, if not more, to do with the idea that "cleaning," with its associations of disinfection and delousing, repeated or reenacted France's repressed "disinfection" or self-cleansing of the Jews, of which there was also to be no trace (hence the censoring of *Night and Fog*). We are left to wonder whether torture against Algerians would have been as prevalent—or practiced at all—if France had come to terms with its World War II history, been able to voice its shame and articulate its sense of loss, and thereby transcend its inability to mourn in order to begin the process of psychic repair and self-restoration.

The metacritical question I posed earlier—why Barthes invokes psychoanalysis in the midst of a semiotically grounded project of materialist and ideological critique—can now be addressed. If Barthes hails psychoanalysis without doing a psychoanalytic reading, if he evokes the metaphors of illness and remedy in conjunction with soil and soap but does not analyze what this "illness" might be, how it could be remedied, or what "illness" and "remedy" would mean in such a context, it may be because he somehow "knows" that his methodology is inadequate to expose a crucial dimension of French advertising's commodifying of hygiene. And if, even as he astutely culls from the ads their overdetermined tropes and unmasks them as agents for a bourgeois ideology of 1950s normative domesticity, he unsuspectingly writes the story of a national trauma of genocidal collaboration and its undiagnosed sequelae, it may be because he wants to see something his own reading lens cannot

bring into focus. Barthes's repeated conjurings of a psychoanalysis that he does not practice, in sum, and his musings about the insights this practice could offer about the rhetoric of cleansing, suggest that psychoanalysis in some sense haunts Barthes's readings of culture. It hovers, ghostlike, as an ethereal but potentially illuminating, even therapeutic presence that he nonetheless cannot grasp.

Barthes's essays on soaps and skin creams are thus not only readable as cryptic tales of France's unsuccessful struggle to mourn its Jews and transcend its shamefully traumatic turn toward fascism. They stand, in their unanswered invocations of psychoanalytic interpretation, as a kind of memorial or monument to loss—the loss of curiosity about what psychoanalysis might contribute to cultural studies. What makes Barthes's essays so refreshing in general and so relevant for my project is that, while his frame of reference is clearly semiotic, materialist, and ideological, he acknowledges that psychoanalysis has a role to play in the study of culture, and he appeals openly, even if only rhetorically, for its help. Despite referencing *Mythologies* as a foundational text, cultural studies, as it has been practiced over the last fifteen years, rarely if ever has.

PSYCHOANALYTIC CULTURAL STUDIES

How can we understand the disparity between Barthes's hailing of psychoanalysis and the invisible or at best marginal position to which psychoanalysis has since been relegated within cultural studies? There are, I think, two main reasons for this disciplinary disconnect. The first is cultural studies' rather narrow view of what psychoanalytic theory itself has to offer. The second is cultural studies' aversion toward (if not outright rejection of) the practice of close reading. Let me address the second reason first since, whatever one might think of Barthes's more general claims about literature, culture, reading, writing, pleasure, love, or psychoanalysis itself, Barthes is, indisputably, a close reader. From his detailed unravelings of semantic strings in the *Mythologies*, to the semesensitive reflections of *A Lover's Discourse*, to the exhaustive—some would say exhausting—word-by-word decoding of Balzac's "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* (the subject of my fourth chapter), Barthes reads closely. Thus, while claiming his work as an inspiration and touchstone of their critical enterprise, cultural studies practitioners generally eschew the very practice of reading at the core of Barthes's own. We have to wonder why.

This aversion to close reading might be construed as a sign of fatigue from what is, admittedly, a demanding and painstaking mode of analysis. It could have to do with market forces and shrinking publishing budgets that privilege scholarly books' profitability and thus broader, less intensively focused studies. Or it might be a response to the notion that some of what cultural studies addresses—such as popular culture—does not require, benefit from, or even hold up under close reading. While these hypotheses can be debated and nuanced, they no doubt play some role in the reluctance to read closely.

A more intellectually reasoned and yet more subtly disturbing argument for the disfavor in which cultural studies generally holds close textual analysis has been made by Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler in the introduction to their cultural studies anthology.²⁶ Their argument is disturbing because, if we read it closely, we find embedded in it a conservative, even repressive conception of disciplinary history that is itself ahistorical and that handcuffs cultural studies by restricting its capacity for political and ideological critique. As the editors discuss the difficulty of defining the theories and methods upon which cultural studies relies to do its work, they observe that cultural studies could “best be seen as bricolage,” since it has “no distinct methodology . . . to call its own” (Grossberg, 2). They add that, while “no methodology can be privileged, or even temporarily employed with total security and confidence, . . . none can be eliminated out of hand” (Grossberg, 2). Significantly, however, as they justifiably contend that cultural studies must carefully assess any methodology it adopts, the editors single out close reading to make their point.

It is problematic for cultural studies simply to adopt, uncritically, any of the formalized disciplinary practices of the academy, for those practices, as much as the distinctions they inscribe, carry with them a heritage of disciplinary investments and exclusions and a history of social effects that cultural studies would often be inclined to repudiate. Thus, for example, although there is no prohibition against close textual readings in cultural studies, they are also not required. Moreover, textual analysis in literature studies carries a history of convictions that texts are properly understood as wholly self-determined and independent objects as well as a bias about which kinds of texts are worthy of analysis. That burden of associations cannot be ignored. (Grossberg, 2)

It is true that the practice of close reading is connected with the “formalized disciplinary practices” of, most (in)famously, New Criticism. Formalist schools of interpretation view the text as a self-determined and independent object, and they use textual analysis to articulate and enforce a conservative, discriminatory cultural agenda that classifies certain authors, genres, and genders as more worthy of study than others. It is also true that close reading is strongly associated with deconstruction, which has been accused, in extensive and ongoing debate, of concealing an ahistoricist, apolitical ideology behind radical claims for the indeterminacy of textual boundaries and the undecidability of textual meaning.

But it is precisely because these close reading practices, first used in the 1940s and peaking in the 1980s, are part of a *history* of reading that they cannot, and must not, be assumed to be the only way in which close textual study can be done. Nor should these practices be seen as ineluctable *burdens* on any other forms or modes of close analysis. It is certainly important to be aware of literary and critical history and of the biases past reading approaches may have borne and enforced. But to diminish or restrict the potential contributions and validity of close textual analysis because of the way it has been—or is accused of having been—practiced in the past is itself both ahistorical, in its denial of diachronic agency and change, and transhistorical, in its universalizing, essentialist assumptions about what close reading will always necessarily entail. Cultural studies seems to have decided that close reading will always be suspect because it has, in the past, been used by some in the service of a biased, non-contextualized, isolationist view of the text as “not-in-the-world.”

I want to argue that cultural studies, by explicitly or implicitly maintaining this position, deprives itself of a formidable intellectual and critical tool. It denies itself—and its readers—the unrestricted freedom to seek out and expose ideologies that are concealed within texts and that can only be seen *through* close reading. Even if certain culturally focused studies are remarkably significant for revealing hidden political, social, or material dimensions of texts, too many others stay too close to those texts’ surface, perhaps “burdened” or restrained by the history of close analysis. As a result, they fail to identify the profound individuality of these cultural products, and they miss their more deeply buried sociohistorical aspects and encrypted ideologies. So Ross effectively locates, in France’s modernization efforts and passion for hygiene, an ideology of a sustained will to power and a need to maintain the colonizer/colonized relationship between France and Algeria. But she does

not identify, in the French yen for cleansing, the cryptic narratives of the return of France's repressed anti-Semitism and denial of its genocidal collaboration.

In this study I propose a radical politics of sustained close reading that joins cultural studies and psychoanalysis. I elaborate detailed analyses that expose the deeply embedded and unimagined social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of texts that have thus far resisted exposure. This reading process, while tightly focused, is rigorously opposed to the conservative, restrictive practices of formalist schools such as New Criticism. It also goes against the grain of poststructuralist approaches, like deconstruction, which concentrate on showing how texts reflect on or allegorize their own self-subverting modes of producing meanings. Close reading, as I practice it, is above all a *psychoanalytic* process. It aims to uncover aspects of textual psychic histories, which have been inscribed within literary and film narratives, as a crucial and necessary prerequisite to unveiling and assessing the narratives' concealed sociocultural, historical, and ideological contexts. This means that, as I take up Barthes's invitation to think psychoanalytically about culture, I seek to challenge cultural studies' tendency to marginalize psychoanalysis by providing a broader, less restrictive view of its theoretical offerings and a more fulfilling (and admittedly provocative) demonstration of what it offers as a method and instrument of heuristic inquiry and cultural critique.

Simon During, while sketching out the history of cultural studies and its theoretical underpinnings in the introduction to his own anthology of cultural readings, confirms that psychoanalysis, which he identifies as the "politico-psychoanalytic structuralism" of Lacan (often infused with Althusser), has never made much headway in the discipline. He suggests why.

It did not concede enough space to the capacity of the individual or community to act on the world on their own terms, to generate their own meanings and effects. It was too theoretical in the sense that it offered truths which took little or no account of local differences; indeed, its claims to be scientifically true lacked support from scientific method. And it did not pay enough heed to the actual techniques and practices by which individuals form themselves and their lives.²⁷

In my view, Lacanian theory makes an important contribution in underscoring the centrality of language to the psychoanalytic enterprise. I

nonetheless agree that it tends to yield readings that are too often predetermined or predictable because it relies so heavily on the oedipally organized paradigms of the imaginary and the symbolic, or on the inevitable links connecting trauma, fantasy, jouissance, and the real. It also assumes as ontological truth that subjectivity is marked by castration and the irremediable lack at the core of being, and that meaning is always inaccessible and constituted by the infinite slippage of material signifiers over irretrievable signifieds. Readings that use Freudian theory uncritically suffer a similar fate, since many of its core concepts—such as the death instinct, oedipal desire, orality, anality, and castration anxiety—are highly debatable (perhaps even more so within psychoanalysis itself) and can straitjacket a reading, preventing it from identifying what is specific about a text or local about a context.

But these criticisms cannot be generalized to all of psychoanalysis. There are psychoanalytic theories and orientations that are acutely concerned with the individual's capacity to change, with the specific ways in which personal and societal traumas interrupt or block a subject's development and ability to act in and on the world, with the psychopathologies that emerge from such blockages, and with the means by which such blockages can be transcended. The theories of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, and of Sándor Ferenczi who preceded them in the tradition of Hungarian psychoanalysis, are key examples of these. Abraham and Torok's concepts of introjection, incorporation, crypt, phantom, cryptonymy, and illness of mourning, in particular, and Ferenczi's work on introjection and his idea of the identification with the aggressor, offer an array of interpretive possibilities to readers of all theoretical persuasions. They are also vital for my study because, as I extend them into the realm of cultural and ideological critique, they allow me to propose a new way of bringing cultural studies and psychoanalysis together that is mutually enhancing, intellectually productive, and politically engaged.²⁸

Abraham, Torok, and Ferenczi were all centrally concerned with how certain events or dramas could be experienced as so psychically disruptive that any attempt to absorb or integrate them within the ego would destabilize it and block if not destroy the subject's ability to be. Abraham and Torok emphasized that it was not the content per se of an event but the fact that an individual lived it intrapsychically as shameful, humiliating, and thus potentially annihilating that made the event "traumatic" and that compelled the individual, consciously or more often unconsciously, to envelop it in silence and render it "unspeakable." Moving beyond Ferenczi's earlier writings on introjection and transference,