

## Books and Issues

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### *Spectacular Seduction:*

### *The Case of Freud, Masson, and Malcolm*

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*In the Freud Archives* by Janet Malcolm, Alfred A. Knopf, cloth, \$11.95, paper, \$4.95. *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$16.95. *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess (1887-1904)* translated and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Harvard University Press, cloth, \$25.00, paper, \$8.95.

EARLY IN 1984, Janet Malcolm wrote in the *New Yorker* about the rise and fall of a certain Jeffrey Masson, who became heir apparent to the directorship of the Freud Archive, only to be dumped for actions offensive to the psychoanalytic establishment. What were these actions? Masson used his privileged access to the archive to develop, and then publish, a theory as to why Freud rejected his own early "seduction theory," in which neurotic symptoms were traced back to the seduction of a child, usually a daughter, by a family member, usually the father. Masson's exposé of Freud's "suppression" of this "theory," as reported in his book, *The Assault on Truth*, hinges upon sordid disclosures and the charge that Freud retreated from the truth that he grasped, so as to protect his friend Wilhelm Fliess and ease the acceptance of Freud's own theories. Rather than rehearse this story as it is told in strikingly different ways in Freud's letters and articles of the 1890s, in Masson's book, and in Malcolm's *New Yorker* articles, I would prefer to interpret this hectic interplay of vision and revision as symptomatic of two very different tendencies. If recent rereadings of Freud's text — by Lacan, Derrida, Weber, Bersani, and others — have made Freud's writings an influential and exemplary locus of the kind of arduous self-reflexive interpretation associated with the critical theory of the 1970s, Jeffrey Masson recasts Freud's work so that it becomes the locus for scandal. Masson's

willed reduction of Freud's theory and text allows it to become the pretext and lure of Malcolm's entertaining reportage. So situated, we witness a seduction of theory by spectacle.

The lure of beginning: in the pages which follow, you will find the object of an unveiling, the solution to a riddle, the disclosure of the mystery—such is the alluring promise with which Freud, Masson, and Malcolm draw their reader into the spectacle of their discoveries. Several sentences from Masson's introduction to *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* feed upon the gothic tendency of the dark spectacle Freud suspected to be at work in shaping the self during the earliest scenes of life. Masson's words play these scenes as ripe for melodrama:

In 1895 and 1896 Freud, in listening to his women patients, learned that something dreadful and violent lay in their past. . . . Freud was the first psychiatrist who believed his patients were telling the truth. These women were sick, not because they came from "tainted" families, but because something terrible and secret had been done to them as children.

Our three writers stage three unveilings in three quite different settings. In the early years of psychoanalysis, Freud presents to a small circle of his Viennese colleagues a theory which makes early seduction the origin of later neurosis. In our own day, Masson unveils the scandal of Freud's suppression of the seduction theory before the offended eyes of the institution of psychoanalysis. Finally, Janet Malcolm displays an engaging species of journalistic irony to construct another spectacle—the warfare in the archive between the psychoanalytic establishment and its Young Turks, Jeffrey Masson and Peter Swales. In this way, an abstruse argument about the seduction theory becomes entertainment for the million readers of the *New Yorker*. In each case the spectator is seductively invited to see a hidden but visible truth, whether its theater be the earliest childhood scenes of Freud's patients, the operating table where Fliess botches his operation on Emma Eckstein, or the recent contention in the Freud Archive. By turning the action of each scene into a vivid surface of lucid intensity, each of these three writers assumes that to see is to know and produces a pleasure in seeing which depends in part upon the sorts

of knowledge it puts out of play. Dana Polan, in “‘Above All Else to Make You See’: Cinema and the Ideology of Spectacle,” which is part of the recent *Postmodernism and Politics*, edited by Arac, puts it this way: “The very fact of showing (regardless of what is shown) becomes a spectacle (and spectacularly seductive) in the ways it blocks, ignores, shuts out, other forms of cognition.”

In all three of these accounts something in the rendering compromises the scenic unity of spectacle each promotes. Thus, in the late 1890s, Freud’s work with the dreams, memories, and free associations of himself and his patients leads him through and away from the spectacular dimensions of his early speculations, toward a more textual and antiscenic conception of the etiology of neurosis. Masson insists upon the prior truthfulness of a simple spectacular scene back there, but his own editing of the “complete” letters of Freud to Fliess suggests crucial gaps in knowledge and transmission which can never be overcome completely. Even as Malcolm effects a kind of spectacular media event, the framing and editing of her writing technique allow her book to mock the spectacle of Masson’s ambitious hype and to inhabit ironically the truth-value of any theory Freud or Masson might proffer. The way each of these texts speculates on seduction can help us understand the limits of spectacle and its seductions. Doubly embedded as Freud now is in both Masson’s theory and Malcolm’s book, covered as Freud has been by the follower who got his hands upon his letters and by the reporter who told the whole story so seductively, I will ask if Freud, or Freud’s text, has anything to say for itself in its turn. How does Freud’s text allow us to resist seduction by spectacle?

In the 1890s Freud was absorbed with thinking about one scene above all others — the scene which he supposed to lie hidden back in the earliest reaches of life, where some traumatic wounding had happened which would become the origin of neurotic symptoms. After conceiving this scene, on the one hand, as the memory of a real event which is subsequently repressed, and on the other, as a wishful fantasy projected after the fact, Freud worked out a complex double position which enables psychoanalysis. I will give my sense of that position very concisely. In Freud’s search for the original scenes of psychic life, “memory” is conceived as beginning outside the sub-

ject, in some actual event, and then undergoing modification by its transcription into the psyche; by contrast, fantasy emerges from inside the psyche, where it obeys the pleasure principle by winning pleasure through the discharge of unpleasure. As the 1890s proceed, the intrapsychic function of fantasy assumes increased importance in Freud's explanations of dreams, slips, and neurotic symptoms. But fantasy never becomes a simple alternative to his analysis of the function of memory. Fantasy and memory sustain an obscure relationship to each other, as part of what one might call Freud's systematic equivocation upon the origin of neurosis. If neurosis is the product of two discontinuous functions like memory and fantasy, organized along the axis of fact/fiction and strung between the empirical event and the play of unconscious desire, how then could one locate the spot, the place, the time, the origin of hysteria? How could one really reach the wounding primal scene if memory and fantasy are the only pathways back, and if they function sometimes as complementary pairs and sometimes as deflections and subversions of each other?

But to say the words "both/and" of an unmatched pair like memory and fantasy suggests that Freud's account of the psychic process will never allow us to say only "memory" or only "fantasy." His strategic, nonsynthetic equivocation upon memory and fantasy confronts us with two impossibilities. First: there never is in the mind, not even in the deepest reaches of the unconscious, something which is just memory — a pure, repeatable fact in the mind that one could retrieve. The psyche is always affecting, shaping, repressing, sublimating, and symbolizing a term which cannot be lifted away from the interested, desire-laden work of the unconscious. And even if you could get back to the very instant of the postulated event, you could never keep the unconscious away from the term to be traced into the unconscious, because in order to record this term the mind must offer itself and its language to that term. It must go out half-way to meet it, and this forever compromises the event in its purported purity. There is, moreover, a second impossibility: the direction of Freud's inquiry into the etiology of hysteria takes him further and further toward an appreciation of the powers of fictive transformation at work in fantasy. Thus, Freud eventually discards the

theory of an actual seduction and replaces it with seduction as a wish, which is later subject to repression. But he never accepts the idea that fantasy is so determined by fictive revision that the psyche loses all contact with an event “out there.”

The transrational placement of the primal scenes of life invites the sorts of simplifications Masson performs. Masson ignores what Sam Weber and others have shown — how, over the trajectory of Freud’s meditation, theory becomes something provisional, fictive, and open to discontinuous transformation. In Freud’s text, “truth” is not a fixed and definable relationship between language and that which is. Instead it is the function of an analytical process and of discrete acts of interpretation. This kind of truth is complex in shape, arduous in achievement, and forever compromised by the language in which it appears and disappears. It is necessarily partial — both fragmentary and biased. By writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud brings language to the forefront of his work as a vehicle for knowing which shapes the direction of his discourse in unexpected ways. He does not fulfill his apparent promise to take us back to a particular gothic scene, charged with forbidden desires, which has decisive effect upon what the person becomes. From being so implicated in word work necessary to their reconstruction, the primal scenes investigated in the 1890s never attain the visibility the terms “fantasy” or “scene” seemed to promise. They are no longer accessible to the gaze or consciousness of the observing subject. Rather, Freud puts this desired scene of desire through a “dissolve” which erases its spectacular visibility and self-evidence. These scenes become a conceptual byproduct of the sort of labyrinth of echoes which Freud’s text and textual practice turn us into.

In *The Assault on Truth*, Jeffrey Masson is concerned to call psychoanalysis back to the literally real — the wounding scene of violation at the origin, that true scene of victimization of women by men, of which Freud caught a glimpse in the bold early days of psychoanalysis but then concealed. According to Masson, it is this scene of the original seduction theory which has the brutal facticity and literalism to cause neurotic symptoms. But as theoretician of neurosis, Masson does little but repeat the Freud of the mid-1890s. Masson’s narrative instead becomes preoccupied with another scene — that

single fateful scene withheld from sight by the censorship of first editors of the letters, but now given new emphasis by Masson's scholarship. It is a grim scene of a botched nose operation, where gauze is left in the body of a woman by careless but all too powerful male hands. As part of a subsequent coverup for Wilhelm Fliess's malpractice and his own complicity in letting Fliess operate upon Emma Eckstein, Freud reinterprets Emma's bleeding so that it ceases to be the result of Fliess's surgical ineptitude. It becomes rather a hysterical symptom which expresses Emma's desire for Freud himself. In Masson's account, this interpretive move involves Freud in the conceptual turns which have compromised psychoanalysis ever since. Within the context of Masson's exposé of this episode, all Freud's theories about the province of fantasy in psychic life begin to seem like elaborate sophistry — a way for the victimizer to blame the victim, a way of exculpating the analyst by inflicting guilt upon the patient.

All searchers after knowledge — be they detectives, scientists, or critics — win their moral authority, and the spectator's admiration, through the quality of their commitment to uncover the truth. In his introduction to *The Assault on Truth*, Masson figures himself as a plain-speaking truth teller, who has suffered a disillusionment with Freud which requires corrective disclosures. Masson enunciates the ethos that guides his investigations this way:

With the greatest reluctance, I gradually came to see Freud's abandonment of the seduction hypothesis as a failure of courage. If I was wrong in my view, surely I would meet with intelligent rebuttal and serious criticisms of my interpretation of the documents. Wherever it lay, the truth had to be faced, and the documents I found had to be brought out into the open.

For Masson truth has a spatial locus; it can be faced and opened; it may even be located in the "large black cupboard outside Anna Freud's bedroom," where, he announces, "I found many original letters to and from Freud written during this same period, letters that were previously unknown."

But how does one assess the value of Masson's discoveries? Is the grim scene of Emma Eckstein's operation an accurate reconstruction of a decisive repressed memory from the early history of psycho-

analysis? Or is it Masson's fantasmatic after-the-fact projection? Or something of both? Whatever our answer, we need to know how Masson's story has come to catch our culture's attention and win a brief notoriety in the intellectual press. Like all seducers, Masson stimulates, and then promises to gratify, desires latent in the seduced. By turning a cultural giant into one of us, Masson would free us from worry about our relationship to Freud's thought; by turning the family romance into a tale of virtue in distress, Masson mines our current attention to the sexual abuse of children and the woman as wronged victim. In the scene he constructs, Masson casts himself as that honorable and truthful hero of romance who protects the innocent and powerless heroine — the patient — from victimization by the subtle, sophisticated villain — the analyst. In this sentimental fiction, one doesn't need to ask who will win the heroine.

Masson's narrative tries to seduce readers away from what I take to be one of Freud's cardinal assumptions, that interpretation is a necessary pathway to knowing. The moral polarities of Masson's staging of Emma Eckstein's operation and its sordid physical details would convince us that this is a surreal space containing a certain definable meaning. Here the brutality and seriousness of events foreclose any drift of meaning; here, if anywhere in the psychoanalytic text, something surely means one unequivocal thing: in this scene, nothing of significance is happening but the woman/patient's victimization by the man/analyst. Through the rhetoric of this figuration, Masson would have figuration come to rest in the literal. Such a scene not only frees readers from any arduous interpreting of language; now the subtlety of Freud's reading is turned into a species of moral delinquency.

If Freud's researches in the 1890s issue in a language-centered hermeneutic, and Masson's exposé in the 1980s in a stubborn literalism, Janet Malcolm's informative narrative, *In the Freud Archives*, suffuses all the action with an urbane irony. Perhaps because she doubts the global claims made for the seduction theory by Masson, or the early Freud, Malcolm does not seem terribly interested in the content or efficacy of the original theory, in Freud's revisions of it, or even in the counterposition which Masson champions. Instead, she makes of the Freud archive a site for a universal drama of human

vanity. In this chimerical theater of ambition, Malcolm's narrative encourages a sophisticated condescension to the inflated claims to truth which seem to be the occupational hazards of the psychiatrists and academics most important to her story. The resulting narrative has some of the tonality of a *New Yorker* version of "Dynasty." In this sphere, new ideas are the currency of the rise to wealth and power, but fortune being fickle, and everyone having that fatal flaw which will bring them low, all her characters eventually fall victim to balked ambitions and chiasmic desires: the venerable analyst Kurt Eissler is chastened by his disastrous vulnerability to Masson's charms; Swales ends despondent that he will never win over Eissler; and Masson himself has descended from his perch in the Berkeley Hills and swank interviews over lunch at Chez Panisse, to preparing Stouffer's instant dinners in the kitchen of his girlfriend's modest house in the lowlands.

In her presentation of Jeffrey Masson, Janet Malcolm performs an entertaining, and devastating, critique of a modern personality type. Part narcissist, part con man, Masson's disarmingly open self-promotion makes him ideally fitted to create, and become, spectacle. I suspect the reader may enjoy the ruthlessness of Malcolm's narrative because most of us know this type and may feel victimized by his values. But Malcolm's book is more than what Harold Bloom calls it, an "essay in personality." Malcolm also allows us to see Masson's career as a species of seduction through spectacle or spectacular seduction. Thus in her short responses in dialogue with him, and in her framing narratives, her lucid neutrality on polemical issues reminds us that in Masson's accounts the partial is constantly being passed off for a more complex whole. Malcolm's language catches the way hype and exaggeration have become an ingrained reflex of Masson's personality. This hyperbole is not like the conscious strategy of a cynical sideshow caller; it is woven into the very syntax and rhetoric of self-representation, as with network TV and advertising. The aura of crisis he wishes to produce around the establishment of psychoanalysis becomes in Malcolm's narrative simply a way to achieve the effect of the urgent real, so we must all watch right now, while the "crisis" (the collapse of psychoanalysis) happens.

Although Masson's own writing presents a certain rational ac-



count and critique of psychoanalysis, the Masson in Malcolm's text is never presented as someone engaged in analysis, criticism, speculation, or any sustained encounter with ambiguity. Instead, we get someone who, despite the reports he offers Malcolm about his "intellectual development," always seems to have known what he now thinks. His hasty overinvolvement in the heraclitean now makes him capable of taking in everything only in the mode, to use Benjamin's formulation in "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," of "reception in a state of distraction." Finally Malcolm gets us to see, in every scene with him, how the verve of his performance discloses a (finally self-defeating) compulsion to be seen. Masson becomes the eager, only partially self-conscious director of a media event, produced with an eye to the various sorts of value — celebrity, sex appeal, and wealth — it can bring to Jeffrey Masson. There is, however, an undeniable power in Masson, as Malcolm presents him: whatever our critical doubts, his words and actions are so much fun to watch that he becomes a spectacle and thereby achieves a certain seduction of the spectator.

Malcolm's critique of Masson is dogged by this irony: the critique becomes a kind of media spectacle in its turn. In fact, it is doubtful if Jeffrey Masson would have achieved his broad (if brief) celebrity without the assistance of Malcolm's involving prose and storytelling powers. How does Malcolm end by repeating some of the same tendencies toward spectacle — a turning of everything represented into a pleasing visible surface — which her journalism seemed to criticize in Masson? It may begin with what Harold Bloom celebrates in his review of Malcolm's book for *The New York Times* — her cool detachment from the craziness she covers: "Mediating between these agonists is the story's central consciousness, the calmly rational Alice in this Wonderland, Janet Malcolm herself. She is skeptical, lucid, informed, just as she was in her earlier book, but even cannier now." What wins Malcolm the power to convince her reader of her "lucid" rationality, her authority to tell without bias? I suspect it comes from the medium she manipulates — the subtle art of narrative with which she shapes her acts of presentation. Her narrative achieves visual seductiveness, by making everything seem to be available and intelligible in advance to the camera eye of language. Her writing

has the richness and variety of images and ideas one associates with film and TV, all finely coordinated by quick cuts, vivid quotations, and telling anecdotes. Little wonder that her language achieves the intensity and vividness characteristic of contemporary spectacle. The most pleasing effects derive from a subtle editing, the kind practiced by the best film directors, where meaning is produced not through assertion, whether moral or intellectual, but indirectly through positioning and juxtaposition. Thus, in portraits of character, interpretations and value judgments are encoded into description and dialogue. Malcolm's writing is not simply shaped according to a journalistic need to be objective. Instead, this spectacular style of writing seems to be ruled by a commercial imperative: the need to move quickly, be witty, entertaining, and never get too bogged down in one scene or issue. The never forgotten goal is to produce a product — the spectacle — which can win the attention of the largest number of spectators.

Malcolm's journalistic medium, through its very modesty and self-limitations, systematically underestimates the discursive importance of theory. Her spectacular narrative frames action — a theoretical debate about the etiology of neurosis — so as to divest the content of that theory of any consequence. Explanations of psychoanalytic debates convey the sense that "you are there," but they are never long enough to seem tedious. Malcolm's rendering of the intellectual enterprise becomes delightful precisely because its accounts of intellectual issues are brief, finely blurred, and deftly subordinated to the action of the story. For the reader following Malcolm's events "in the archive," it scarcely seems plausible that Freud's text, or psychoanalysis itself, could have provided our culture with one of its most acute instruments of thought. Finally, all the assembled fragments of *In the Freud Archives* — the people, ideas, occasions, moral aperçus — become fetishistic objects which are arranged upon the surfaces and screens of her language, for the reader's delectation. Spectacle has emptied the archive of its content — a theory of the self and culture and a practice for testing both seem to lose any power to matter.

What could challenge the incorporative power of this movement toward spectacle? I can begin by noting that both Masson and

Malcolm, whatever their differences, are narrators of an accessible "actual." Masson thinks he has unearthed the original event behind psychoanalysis in thus protecting moral probity and truth from assault. Malcolm is a more ethically neutral and epistemologically skeptical narrator. But her "history" becomes a sequence of vivid tableaux and concise arguments arranged into an intelligible causal chain. The few enigmas of the story — like Masson's refusal to use a little calculated discretion to protect his custodianship of the Freud archive — confirm rather than disturb the assurance of Malcolm's narrative. But how might we read these two realists through Freud's text from the point of view of the object of their writing?

One first notices what is absent in both Malcolm's narrative and in Masson, as both author of his own book and hero of Malcolm's — any conception of the necessarily repressed and censored. Thus Malcolm's narrative, like so much of psychoanalysis, turns upon censorship and disclosure. This is the action of Masson's seduction of Anna Freud and Kurt Eissler. But when Masson gets them to deliver their secret legacy into his keeping, he naively imagines that if he brings the sordid story buried in this archive into public view, he can lift the repressions effected by psychoanalysis. However, something leaves this lifter of veils exposed to Malcolm's very differently focused act of unveiling. Masson has an Achilles' tongue: he cannot withhold anything. He keeps showing Malcolm letters which begin, "no one must see this but you." And Malcolm cites them with abandon. Thus the seducer gets seduced. Masson's very idea of himself as a transparent medium of truth allows him to become the opaque and problematic object of Malcolm's narrative. Masson thought he could use the *New Yorker* as a public address system. But he does not comprehend the transforming power of the medium which Malcolm manipulates. Here, ideas don't down empires; they make one sexy. Masson's zeal in the cause of "truth" makes him appear endearingly earnest and destructively naive; and finally, he who would rescue us from "the assault on truth" becomes a fascinating figure of modernity — the confidence man.

During his career of disclosures, however, even Jeffrey Masson — that most notorious teller of hidden secrets — shows revealing moments of hesitation and reserve. In a narrative which never seems

reluctant to name names, Masson's woefully inadequate Toronto analyst is referred to as "V." What reticence in Masson (or Malcolm, or her editors) explains this respect for the confidentiality of the patient-analyst relationship? Then, near the end of Malcolm's book, Masson pauses to wonder if he should show her Kurt Eissler's final letter to him: "[It's] an incredible letter, a kind of love letter. I got it out of my files to show you, but now I'm not sure I ought to show it to you.' Masson deliberated, and then went and got the letter. 'You might as well see it.'" He must show her everything. This may be his peculiar compulsion, but she has also won his trust. The special tie that has developed between Masson and Malcolm over the course of her narrative is one of the suppressed terms of that narrative. Thus Malcolm concludes *In the Freud Archives* with a letter she received from Masson, perhaps the last before she published her articles. He thanks her for sending him a book, reports upon his recent work, and ends with a note of regret for the opportunity forever lost for further work in the Freud archive. Significantly, Malcolm omits the salutation and signature which presumably closed the letter, thus effacing further evidence of the friendship which has developed between reporter and subject and avoiding any confusion about the authorship of a text which bears no small debt to the wit of Masson's outrageousness. After Malcolm's articles are published, Masson accuses her in a letter to *The New York Times* of two partially contradictory offenses: you have distorted the picture by saying things that were untrue; and you have violated my trust. Malcolm responds coolly: what I have published holds back much that would have been truly damaging to you, and besides, everything I've quoted is on tape. Their alliance of purposes has ended.

Masson's inability to withhold any part of himself or his story not only vitiates his seductive power; it also makes him Malcolm's appropriate object, protagonist, and victim. For Masson's subversive strategy — an open, apparently uncensored revelation — is fully compatible with the ethos of the medium within which Malcolm operates. Reality exists to be made visible; one can and should bring all that's important to the surface, or at least one should seem to. Malcolm's narrative seduces by making everything within the viewfinder of its language seem readable, or potentially readable. Such a

narrative has no way to accommodate the punctured intermittence of a text broached and constituted by the interplay of consciousness and the unconscious, or memory and fantasy. Instead, Masson and Malcolm offer us narratives which encourage the illusion that this is reportage without censorship, and memory without lapses. You are there, and that's the way it is. They acquire that seamless visibility and vibrancy which is the chief property of fantasy. In the terms of Freud's meditations in the 1890s, their texts become fantasy constructs which pass themselves off as the reconstituted memory of the real event.

What might impede this media operation? First of all, some reality Malcolm or Masson would like to represent — whether it is Freud, Freud's relationship to Fliess, "the human psyche," or "the history of an event" — which, because it is fragmentary, diachronic, overdetermined, and embedded in language, is impossible to represent as a visible scene. Jeffrey Masson's effort to edit the complete letters of Freud to Fliess offers an instance of a resistance to the kind of spectacle we have been reading. In speaking of the origins of his editing project, Masson writes, "The publication in German in 1950, then in English in 1954, of *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis*, a selective edition of Sigmund Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess, stimulated every reader's desire — including my own — for a full and unabridged edition of these extraordinary documents." In the introduction to *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, Masson calls attention to what is new in his editing of the documents which reveals "so dramatically Freud's inner-most thoughts as he was in the very act of creation": "They are presented here, for the first time, without any excisions." And at the end of the introduction, Masson repeats this fanfare to his own project in slightly different words: "Now, at long last — nearly a hundred years after they were written — we have a definitive edition of the complete letters."

But to offer an edition which is "unabridged" and without "excision" is not the same as offering the "complete letters" of this correspondence. For in the course of his introduction, Masson himself refers to a gap in his collection, one which is alas very important — a letter about "a dream relating to Martha Freud." Masson writes,

The letter concerning a dream about Martha is something of a mystery and has never been found. It is probably the letter that describes the "lost dream," the dream that Fliess persuaded Freud to remove from the *Interpretation of Dreams* and that is often referred to in the subsequent letters. . . . There is still a faint hope that the letter will one day be found. It would no doubt be the most important letter of the collection, since it contains the only dream Freud ever analyzed completely.

There is nothing necessary and final, Masson's words seem to imply, about this gap in the collection; this loss can seem to be a mere contingency. Masson can still harbor "a faint hope" that the letter will be found and the collection be made truly "complete." But the perversity of this particular loss should give us pause. What's missing from the "complete letters" is "the most important letter of the collection" because it is something crucial to but missing from the dream book — "the only dream Freud ever analyzed completely." The letter with the lost dream, which carries our dreams for a complete analysis of a dream by Freud, is lost. Here we encounter one of the most familiar structures in psychoanalytic interpretation and something unthinkable within the ideology of spectacle. It is the idea that the determining "truth" of the text consists in that which is either outside the text — lost, forgotten, repressed — or encrypted forever within it. This strange unconscious truth is mobile and elusive and plural enough to resist any final unveiling.

Readers of the *Interpretation of Dreams* should recognize this idea of the necessary limits of interpretation. One wishes to interpret a dream completely; this is the desire which motivates dream interpretation. But since each set of associations to the dream text branches down endlessly into unconscious memory, touching the most obscure and multiform traces of psychic life, there is strictly speaking no point or place where an interpretation can become complete. Thus Freud writes in the *Interpretation of Dreams* that "during the work of interpretation . . . there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown." What finally limits the speculation on dreams and prevents the solar agency of

interpretation from compelling the dream text to foliate into spectacular clarity is figured by Freud in this strange metaphor of the navel. Just as the navel is the trace of a relationship to another of which the person was once a part (the mother's body), it also marks the person as delivered of, cut off from, the very body which is its origin. For Masson-as-editor, the navel of his text must be "the letter concerning a dream about Martha," all traces of which cannot simply be effaced from his collection, because as he writes, it is "often referred to in the subsequent letters." Masson's (and our own) desire for completeness gives this particular letter its special force. This lost letter, a fragment which encrypts within it a whole (the *only* "whole" dream interpretation), fragments and makes incomplete what Masson has assembled, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess (1887-1904)*.

Whatever their genuine contributions, Masson and Malcolm's texts become spectacular seductions through the way they engage in a seduction to spectacle. Their writing receives its deepest tendency from the particular exchange systems they unfold within: a network of words and images which produces familiarity, celebrity, and wealth as it moves toward a species of spectacle which can be sold and bought. What scandalizes their effort to report the actual is the possibility that this way of representing can conceal as much as it reveals, that this way of "covering" an event is in fact a form of repression and censorship. Of what? Spectacular seduction represses the fact of repression itself — as repression operates in our culture's constructing of simplified media renderings of the social and political, the cultural and the personal. Just as television often seems to cover the news so as to repress history — history understood, for example, as those forces which drive an arms race that cannot be reduced to the matter of Reagan's supposedly new interest in peace or to the charm of a new Soviet leader. Just as television covers the news by repressing history, so Jeffrey Masson exposes Freud's "assault on truth," and Janet Malcolm covers the doings in the Freud archive, in order to repress Freud's text, the power of that text, and its conceptual work — to read a culture whose media only seem to operate at a blithe remove from the necessities Freud's text tries to read.