

Catherine Liu

# Interview with Laurence Rickels

## Introduction

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*"If post-modernity is post-marked (like the repressed according to Freud) 'made in Germany' (SE 19:236), then California is its address and tech-no-future."*

Laurence Rickels: ***The Case of California***

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Browsing the theory and cultural studies sections of my local bookstore has become an increasingly frightening experience. There seems to be, despite or because of the advent of a widely proclaimed "backlash against theory," a proliferation of theoretical and cultural studies publications each of which are super well packaged with seductive graphics and glowing cover blurbs. How to pick and choose?

In my consumer guide to contemporary theory, Laurence A. Rickels' two books, *The Case of California* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) and *Aberrations of Mourning* (Wayne State University Press 1988) would figure high on my list of must reads. Rickels, along with Slavoj Žižek, is one of the only theoreticians around who is able to think technology through psychoanalysis and vice versa: this is crucial because both technology and psychoanalysis are everywhere. I mean Everywhere. Those who know their technology but not their psychoanalysis fall into a trap which can be very well illustrated if we look at the recently broadcast TV miniseries, *Wild Palms*. Those who do not know their psychohistory are bound to repeat the same story. *Wild Palms* turns out to be an elaborately staged confrontation between father and son (just like *Star Wars*), literally translated in the series as a struggle between the "Fathers" and the "Friends," i.e. the father of the primal horde and the brothers of the primal group. One finds a description of this precise story in Freud's "Moses and Monotheism" (1938) and "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." (1921). The producers and writers got the story so right that they knew (unconsciously) that with the primal horde, it is the youngest son, the Benjamin (a.k.a. Cody here) who survives (intact) the Primal Father's castrating rage to be handpicked as Dad's successor. Harry Wyckoff manages to get rid of Dad however, in order to reconstitute a nuclear family, with who else? You guessed it. Step-Mom or just a step away from Mom, Dad's widow.

Oedipus is the popular image of Freudian psychoanalysis and the site of most power turf wars about the psychoanalytic model; the psychoanalytic take on the group however, is completely ignored. What Rickels reads for us in *The Case of California* is, precisely,

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## **Interview with Laurence Rickels**

### **Part One**

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**Q.** In your latest book, *The Case of California*, you take on the Californian symptom in relationship to a German past. Could you tell us how you came to this study. Was California referred to you or were you recommended to California?

**A.** To some extent, an extent which is misleading, California was already a theoretical ready-made when I arrived here. Countless French theorists and also the Frankfurt school had libidinated California in a big way. I guess the French tended to be affirmational and the Frankfurt School went for the down-side. What I wanted to do, however, was to read California with ambivalence and that means, among other things, not just giving the former readings in stereo broadcast, but reading California in terms of what is missing from it. That led me to a series of connections which might not have been available otherwise. Certainly looking at the Frankfurt School itinerary gives one a kind of trajectory I followed out, namely their exile from Nazi Germany brought them to this coast and then they switched registers, no longer interpreting the rise of National Socialism on location, but rather, they began to read the California Culture industry as though it were the future of the same problem. But more than that, I had the sense that California was something like the unconscious of Europe, but it's more specific than that. There's a whole unconscious channel that belongs to so-called Western Civilization and it's comprised of California and the most symptomatic center of Europeanicity, namely, Germany. So it's the German-Californian connection which I saw as a kind of unconscious, an uninvestigated unconscious which I decided to go for, but at the same time, California more so than any other place, is instantly saturated with psychoanalysis. Whether you're thinking of Hollywood or the various Frankfurt School investments that met up with Hollywood and started interpreting it along the lines that were probably already given inside Hollywood, what it suggested to me was the ambivalent reading of California would also at the same time, take place inside psychoanalysis. What was missing thus from psychoanalysis became clear through California: adolescent psychology. Most people give Freud credit for having missed that one and yet I sense that it was there just the same, hovering about between various headlines and punchlines in his work.

I had performed similar service when it came to obvious manifestations of unmourning in Freud's work. I felt that you had to go all over the place and not just remain in the essay "On Mourning and Melancholia" to find out what was truly improper to mourning. This investigation took me to "Totem and Taboo" all sorts of places and even places like the cargo cult which were supposed to be on the outside of psychoanalysis but were arguably really on

the inside or at the same time on the inside. I was able to do something similar then with California as a concept or philosopheme that does duty within a psychoanalytic era of German thought. There is an equation that sounds kind of instant, but actually takes a while to get to in my work and that is that everything that Freud put into "group psychology" comes out again as adolescent psychology. That's where I did my work, work that lines up the various political fronts going down around World War II as a front between Self and Other. It has to do with all the static and confusion that Freud diagnosed as group psychology which I tried to bring into focus as "adolescent psychology" or "teen self-esteem," or more the point, perpetual adolescence.

Q. Maybe, just for the record, we should go over what group psychology is.

A. I'll sketch out the composite picture that I assembled from Freud's take on it. We have to look at group psychology in a split-level way. On the one hand, it's the Other of the couple and it stands in a relationship of big-time tension to the couple. In the movie *Fatal Attraction* for example, I argue that the husband is always under the remote control of the group, his group of friends is the teen-age group from which he received his sexual license because you have to skip the parents for Oedipal reasons, and so the group of friends becomes the way into sexuality for the first time. But the group somehow or other cannot reproduce itself so you have to make it back into some form of couple formation. This goes for women too of course, but for men, husbands, the pull is more constant for all the Oedipal reasons; the body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" of the group is at the same time the maternal body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;". The problem for the husband is always the connection to the father. As Freud argued, any problems the husband is having with the wife, he's still having with the father and in the same way if the wife has problems with her husband it is because she still has problems with the mother, who stands (in my reading) for the group, the constant pull and attraction of the group. So the wife, then, in my reading, becomes representative of the father and also the defender of the law of the couple. So in *Fatal Attraction*, the other woman is the representative of the mother or of the mother encrypted in the group. She is always pulling the husband out of the couple, and the wife has to pull the trigger in order to defend the law of the couple.

There are many ways to read group psychology. I didn't want to read it along the lines which were given before Freud by LeBon, MacDougal and Trotter because it's not interesting just to diss the masses. In keeping with Freud, I wanted to see group psychology instead, in terms of a tension which is always there, in the home. That's what's so great about Freud: whatever you're talking about begins or belongs in the home. The more usual notion of group psychology is to go with a contrast between the individual and the group which I think is bullshit. It's the tension between the couple and the group that constitutes group psychology.

Q. Were there objections to the publication of a case history of California? In light of the fact that the subject in question, California, doesn't appear posthumous, the publication of its case history might be somewhat scandalous.

A. Well, California is kind of posthumous. You will have noticed that (since we are in

California right now) as we theorists tour California, we are always thinking that we are finding out there in the real, the symptoms that we're talking about, but in fact we project and hallucinate big time when it comes to California. That suggests to me that California doesn't really exist except as a placeholder that invites hallucination. One of the contributions of my book is to bring into focus the fact that California is already, for lack of a better word, posthumous.

One could also say that part of California's conceptual or meta http-equiv="Window-target" content="\_top"phorical appeal is that underneath its happy face appeal, California easily suggests something of a death cult. One the outside happy face, on the inside suicide. So there is something already given over to the post-mortem in California. body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" building of course, is about building the one interchangeable body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;": along the lines of one nation, one God, one race, one sex, in ways that Michael Jackson has to act out on his own person. But what is being built is the one exquisite corpse and so there are so many ways in which there can't be copyright problems.

Q. You mention in your book that the adolescent is the one who is outside or beyond the transference relationship and California seems to have a privileged relationship with adolescence. Is transference possible in California? How did you get California to believe that you knew something about it that it didn't know about itself?

A. I'm making a media argument there. When I do internal readings of psychoanalysis and at the same time go for the analogies that bring media technologization into the discourse of psychoanalysis, I wanted to draw a distinction between the analogs that are there and the ones which are missing. I tried to bring television into focus as a special medium of the teen-age and also the special medium of Nazi Germany. We are used to McLuhan and company emphasizing Nazi reliance on the radio which is of course accurate, but the Nazis wanted to go on television, they just weren't ready to use it within the history of technology's progress. They sure tried. The Berlin Games were televised. Throughout the history of the regime, those TV studios were up and running in Berlin. I just read recently an article from 1937, I believe, which is report on TV progress within the Reich. Apparently, they already had telephones with video contact lined up between Berlin and Leipzig. I don't think anyone knows about this. They talk about telephone with video contact as already existing and they want to expand it throughout the Reich. The TV medium is something that explains best the total war structures that the Nazis were after. I asked myself why psychoanalysis seemed to be not the place to think television. Transference is what offered itself up to me to the extent that transference is always something haunted in Freud's thinking, something that is still within the alternation between identification and projection. Cinema fits in here whereas TV seems non-transferenceal.

Q. Lacan went on TV and did that televised interview with Jacques-Alain Miller and Lacan began the interview with 'I always speak the truth, insofar as the truth can be spoken.' That statement for me was a very ingenious use of the televisual medium because is precisely the

medium that implies that in it the truth is always spoken.

A. Transference is a very big concept that always needs to be diversified and I don't really mean that TV and adolescence are non-transferential in an absolute sense. I rather mean that they are more on the side of psychotic structures. Freud doesn't really say that psychotics are non-transferential. Psychosis and neurosis are different modes. I do think that Lacan is the theorist and therapist of psychosis: that's why he could get on TV as he always already was on TV. In *The Case of California*, I talk about what he did right after having presented the essay on the "mirror stage" in Marienbad for the first time in public. He had an altercation with Kriss about his travel plans: he wanted to go to the Berlin Olympics right afterwards. Kriss said that that's not something that one can do for political reasons. Lacan said in reply that that kind of phobicity on Kriss's part is symptomatic of his inability to read certain transferences in his own case material. Lacan says that he goes to Berlin to read the "spirit of the times," which is such a Jungian statement to boot. There are ways in which Lacan lines up with a televisual, psychotic culture.

Q. When he said, "I always speak the truth," on TV, transference was either a given or just such a non-issue at that point, because what one transfers to is the silence of the analyst and not the fact that the analyst says, "I always speak the truth." For some one to get on TV and say what TV has been trying to say for fifty years constitutes a really important moment in the history of the medium.

A. I want to comment on the tail end of your question. You make the good point, that I am simply endopsychically adding an interpretation to something that's already out-interpreted here in California. Do the Californians really not know about themselves? Have I said anything that isn't already folded into the preconscious, that is the advertising aspect of Californian culture and I'd say the only thing is this odd business of the connection with Germany. Even though there are so many examples of this news breaking out, I don't think Californians really know that they are part of a culture of interiority. I wonder whether they don't see themselves as part of a sensual, coastal beachy culture, as individuals who have problems with this feel-good place. They call it abuse, they plug into support groups, they think that there's something in the way of their enjoying themselves, their feeling good about themselves. This is completely a culture of interiority as was established in Germany around the eighteenth century. It's one part of my study that hadn't been articulated in a systematic way before. Anyone could have made the comment that California beach culture is about as sexy as a German nudist colony, but I pulled a few more connections out of the relationship between the two.

Q. You're saying that this culture of interiority is like the cult of the beautiful soul which, it seems, Californians are always trying to reclaim.

A. It's no longer in the mode of sickness, but in the mode of health, but as Adorno already taught us, same difference.

Q. We can hear this in everyday language, in statements like, 'No one knows what's really

inside me.' 'I'm trying to get this out.' 'Don't judge a book by its cover.' Applied to human beings, it means that there is something precious beneath the surface, something inside of us all which is difficult to express, but infinitely unique to each one of us and ineffable at the same time. There is a whole rhetoric of interiority which doesn't exist in Latin cultures.

A. It's radical. It's all about spaces outside and inside which have to be colonized.

Q. This hidden profundity is the field which depth psychology wants to cover.

A. That's the paradox of course of Californian teen individuality. As I put it in my book, the Californian or the adolescent or the group member or the gadget lover likes to be different like everyone he likes to be like.

Q. Perhaps we could at this point make a connection between these ideas and what you're working on now, namely a study of Nazi psychotherapy, beginning with the problem of depth psychology.

A. By depth psychology you mean?

Q. American ego psychology. Psychology of interiority. Psychology of feelings.

A. Depth psychology is actually a pseudonym for psychoanalysis once you're in the context of eclecticism. When you read the Nazi pieces, whenever they are referring to psychoanalytic interventions, especially as the war goes on and things become more difficult to mention by name, depth psychology becomes a code name for psychoanalysis. It's probably the primal context.

Q. In a Lacanian context, what Lacan calls depth psychology is American psychology - which he of course hates.

A. Now that's interesting to me. Americanization is used as the complete displacement of what in fact was already there creating all these differences and neologisms and spreads of a greater psychotherapy and psychoanalysis - namely, Nazi psychotherapy and Nazi psychoanalysis. After the war it all gets displaced onto Americanization, but the real continuity within the history of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy has been overlooked and that is the continued existence in a big way of all the psychotherapies, including psychoanalysis, in the Third Reich under the special protection of Field Marshal Göring, under the direction of Göring's cousin, Göring who was an Adlerian therapist, and under the international leadership of Jung until he was getting so much flak back in Switzerland that he just had to pull out. Of course, Jung got his total revenge after the war by coming up with the thesis of collective guilt, whereby all the people, the persecutors and the victims alike shared in the symptom of National Socialism. The work I'm doing now is closing off the trilogy which I began with *Aberrations of Mourning*, which is ultimately on unmourning and its various manifestations. My first book focuses on the outbreak of mourning and melancholia in the one on one. In *The Case of California*, it's the same problem, but in group

format. In this final book of the trilogy what I end up looking at is the continuity which is otherwise missing from histories of modernism, psychoanalysis, and Nazi Germany. There was no station break really in the German application of intrapsychic theory and therapy. In fact there are many ways in which one could argue that the theory and therapy of eclecticism grew strongest during the Nazi era. Nazi Germany offered extensive insurance coverage for psychotherapy. At the institute in Berlin, psychotherapy won decisive victories against psychiatry in the corridor wars of legitimation. That has to do with psychotherapy's ideology of wholeness. Psychotherapy goes for the complete person: this probably appealed to Nazi cant. What was more important was that the Nazis very quickly ran up against the limit of their bio-destinal read of difference because once the obvious others had been disposed of, how could the outbreak of neurosis and especially war neurosis and homosexuality (which they chose to read as a neurosis) be explained?

Q. Did Nazi psychotherapists believe in stages of infantile development?

A. You know, Nazi psychotherapy is as modelled on psychoanalysis as is eclectic psychotherapy as it exists in California to this day. This means that what psychotherapeutic eclecticism in California today and in Nazi Germany back then shares is the intrapsychic view. Once you base everything on the intrapsychic dimension rather than on the interpersonal connection, you are toeing a certain line. The first time that this line was drawn in such a big way was in Nazi Germany, under the duress of competition with the neuropsychiatrists and the other proponents of biodesnity, but still incredible victories were achieved. In the case of homosexuality for example, the neuropsychiatric types, of course, felt that homosexuals needed to be sterilized, castrated or eliminated, but the psychotherapeutic view which really triumphed for a long period was that homosexuality could be cured. Now that's naive, but that also means that the Nazi psychotherapists and the Nazi military establishment became one of the first in the whole international complex of militarism to accept the fact of neurosis and war neurosis and to accept the fact of homosexuality. They could accept it because they were able to subscribe to the upbeat belief that everything could be cured.

Q. In much the same that Californians believe that everything can be cured.

A. Exactly, everything is supposed to be curable through the intrapsychic theory and/or therapy.

Q. Did Nazi psychotherapy take the form of the talking cure as well?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Jung is so popular out here. Jungian imagery fills New Age rhetoric.

A. But it's not something that's used so much by Californian psychotherapists. There are of course those who specialize in Jungian psychology, but it's kind of a luxury item to have a Jungian interpret your dreams. That's exactly how it was in Nazi Germany too. Jung was

used as a figurehead, as a cover-up because of his international reknown. There was a kind of lip-service connection between him and Nazi ideology when it came to mythification and stuff like that, but when it came to the actual work of treating people, Jung was never used. The Nazi German psychotherapists were way closer to Freud than to Jung when it came to treatment. So Jung comes off looking doubly foolish, I think. First off, he's purchased as a figurehead, used for representational speeches on behalf of the Nazi psychotherapeutic movement, but not even the Nazi psychotherapists fell for what he was doing in theory or in therapy.

Q. Do you think California's self-esteem has suffered after the Rodney King incident and the L.A. riots? Do you think that that has made a dent California's self-image?

A. The constant talk here of self-esteem means that that is precisely where the crisis is always to be located in California. But about Rodney King, I'd like to emphasize that just as we had said that the Chicago Convention riots were a bringing home of the Vietnam War, so the Gulf War was clearly brought into the streets of America in L.A. Where else? I would say because this was a war that could only be read in terms of the California criticism that I've been pushing. I don't want to go into the obvious media angles on this war. I think that's been sufficiently addressed. Clearly there's a TV and video connection going on. Where I saw the Gulf War as being supremely Californian was when it came to the way the war shifted out of its original defeatism and mournful quality when the first casualties were listed. It seemed that we were clearly going to drop back into Vietnam mourning and grief stuckedness and stuff like that and instantly we were out of it. We were out of the body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" bag when it was announced that these were victims of friendly fire. It was like we had switched the channels, left the funereal media of newsreels (really a grafting of film onto television) and we had channel surfed onto a sitcom. Friendly fire. So efficient, so friendly that we are killing ourselves. Friendly fire is a supremely Californian concept. The mix of friendliness and self-destruction as the beyond of mourning and melancholia. The same beyond that group psychology occupies. The whole Rodney King situation hasn't settled yet, but surely we've noticed that it's the same kind of friendly fire body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" count. It's hard to tell who did what. It's hard to tell what was achieved. But these were two conflicts that were supremely efficiently run, while they were happening in real time at the level of psychological warfare, which is of course the level of group psychology. The Gulf War while it was happening was America's most successful war group psychologically-speaking. Back then, the Nazis were way better at it than we ever were. Only now have we caught up with the Nazis and even the mounting and the launching of the Patriot System, symbolically speaking I think, was our first successful attempt at out-maneuvering Nazi control of the airwaves, whether it be the rockets or other forms of psychological warfare.

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psychoanalysis and group psychology. He does so by theorizing California and its symptoms (perpetual adolescence, death cults, body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" building, group therapy, gadget-love, etc.). Freud's analysis of the group differed from those of his contemporaries in two important ways: 1) he didn't merely denigrate the masses and mass psychology 2) he emphasized the crucial role which the leader played in capturing and arranging the libidinal energies of many, disparate human beings. Freud sketched out how the individual in a group put the leader of the group in the place of his/her ego-ideal and thus was able to overlook his/her own interests, operate at a lower level of intellectual activity and expose him/herself to extremely dangerous situations, all in the interest of the group and its leader or an abstract concept which might stand in for a leader.

In the following interview and extensively in *The Case of California*, Rickels shows how group psychology and the adolescent are related. In doing so, he establishes a crucial link between Germany and California, which according to Rickels, is only Germany's other coast. Rickels offers us one of the really provocative readings of our century and sketches out a theoretical and historical study of how we got to post-modernism, or how post-modernism got to us. He is at work on the third volume of the trilogy which began with *Aberrations of Mourning*, a reading of mourning and melancholia inside and outside of psychoanalysis and nineteenth century German literature which includes an analysis of *Mummies and the un-Dead* which is not to be missed. The third volume will be about Nazi psychotherapy and describes the work of Nazi psychotherapists and psychoanalysts under the Reich. Rickels is uncovering lots of information which will no doubt disturb the self-imposed and radical discontinuity between the Nazis<sup>1</sup> psychotherapeutic innovations and techniques of research with our own. Read Rickels, it's worth it.

*Click and read the [interview](#) (in two parts)*

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## **Interview with Laurence Rickels**

### **Part One**

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**Q.** In your latest book, *The Case of California*, you take on the Californian symptom in relationship to a German past. Could you tell us how you came to this study. Was California referred to you or were you recommended to California?

**A.** To some extent, an extent which is misleading, California was already a theoretical ready-made when I arrived here. Countless French theorists and also the Frankfurt school had libidinated California in a big way. I guess the French tended to be affirmational and the Frankfurt School went for the down-side. What I wanted to do, however, was to read California with ambivalence and that means, among other things, not just giving the former readings in stereo broadcast, but reading California in terms of what is missing from it. That led me to a series of connections which might not have been available otherwise. Certainly looking at the Frankfurt School itinerary gives one a kind of trajectory I followed out, namely their exile from Nazi Germany brought them to this coast and then they switched registers, no longer interpreting the rise of National Socialism on location, but rather, they began to read the California Culture industry as though it were the future of the same problem. But more than that, I had the sense that California was something like the unconscious of Europe, but it's more specific than that. There's a whole unconscious channel that belongs to so-called Western Civilization and it's comprised of California and the most symptomatic center of Europeanity, namely, Germany. So it's the German-Californian connection which I saw as a kind of unconscious, an uninvestigated unconscious which I decided to go for, but at the same time, California more so than any other place, is instantly saturated with psychoanalysis. Whether you're thinking of Hollywood or the various Frankfurt School investments that met up with Hollywood and started interpreting it along the lines that were probably already given inside Hollywood, what it suggested to me was the ambivalent reading of California would also at the same time, take place inside psychoanalysis. What was missing thus from psychoanalysis became clear through California: adolescent psychology. Most people give Freud credit for having missed that one and yet I sense that it was there just the same, hovering about between various headlines and punchlines in his work.

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Q. Lacan went on TV and did that televised interview with Jacques-Alain Miller and Lacan began the interview with 'I always speak the truth, insofar as the truth can be spoken.' That statement for me was a very ingenious use of the televisual medium because is precisely the

medium that implies that in it the truth is always spoken.

A. Transference is a very big concept that always needs to be diversified and I don't really mean that TV and adolescence are non-transferential in an absolute sense. I rather mean that they are more on the side of psychotic structures. Freud doesn't really say that psychotics are non-transferential. Psychosis and neurosis are different modes. I do think that Lacan is the theorist and therapist of psychosis: that's why he could get on TV as he always already was on TV. In *The Case of California*, I talk about what he did right after having presented the essay on the "mirror stage" in Marienbad for the first time in public. He had an altercation with Kriss about his travel plans: he wanted to go to the Berlin Olympics right afterwards. Kriss said that that's not something that one can do for political reasons. Lacan said in reply that that kind of phobicity on Kriss's part is symptomatic of his inability to read certain transferences in his own case material. Lacan says that he goes to Berlin to read the "spirit of the times," which is such a Jungian statement to boot. There are ways in which Lacan lines up with a televisual, psychotic culture.

Q. When he said, "I always speak the truth," on TV, transference was either a given or just such a non-issue at that point, because what one transfers to is the silence of the analyst and not the fact that the analyst says, "I always speak the truth." For some one to get on TV and say what TV has been trying to say for fifty years constitutes a really important moment in the history of the medium.

A. I want to comment on the tail end of your question. You make the good point, that I am simply endopsychically adding an interpretation to something that's already out-interpreted here in California. Do the Californians really not know about themselves? Have I said anything that isn't already folded into the preconscious, that is the advertising aspect of Californian culture and I'd say the only thing is this odd business of the connection with Germany. Even though there are so many examples of this news breaking out, I don't think Californians really know that they are part of a culture of interiority. I wonder whether they don't see themselves as part of a sensual, coastal beachy culture, as individuals who have problems with this feel-good place. They call it abuse, they plug into support groups, they think that there's something in the way of their enjoying themselves, their feeling good about themselves. This is completely a culture of interiority as was established in Germany around the eighteenth century. It's one part of my study that hadn't been articulated in a systematic way before. Anyone could have made the comment that California beach culture is about as sexy as a German nudist colony, but I pulled a few more connections out of the relationship between the two.

Q. You're saying that this culture of interiority is like the cult of the beautiful soul which, it seems, Californians are always trying to reclaim.

A. It's no longer in the mode of sickness, but in the mode of health, but as Adorno already taught us, same difference.

Q. We can hear this in everyday language, in statements like, 'No one knows what's really

inside me.' 'I'm trying to get this out.' 'Don't judge a book by its cover.' Applied to human beings, it means that there is something precious beneath the surface, something inside of us all which is difficult to express, but infinitely unique to each one of us and ineffable at the same time. There is a whole rhetoric of interiority which doesn't exist in Latin cultures.

A. It's radical. It's all about spaces outside and inside which have to be colonized.

Q. This hidden profundity is the field which depth psychology wants to cover.

A. That's the paradox of course of Californian teen individuality. As I put it in my book, the Californian or the adolescent or the group member or the gadget lover likes to be different like everyone he likes to be like.

Q. Perhaps we could at this point make a connection between these ideas and what you're working on now, namely a study of Nazi psychotherapy, beginning with the problem of depth psychology.

A. By depth psychology you mean?

Q. American ego psychology. Psychology of interiority. Psychology of feelings.

A. Depth psychology is actually a pseudonym for psychoanalysis once you're in the context of eclecticism. When you read the Nazi pieces, whenever they are referring to psychoanalytic interventions, especially as the war goes on and things become more difficult to mention by name, depth psychology becomes a code name for psychoanalysis. It's probably the primal context.

Q. In a Lacanian context, what Lacan calls depth psychology is American psychology - which he of course hates.

A. Now that's interesting to me. Americanization is used as the complete displacement of what in fact was already there creating all these differences and neologisms and spreads of a greater psychotherapy and psychoanalysis - namely, Nazi psychotherapy and Nazi psychoanalysis. After the war it all gets displaced onto Americanization, but the real continuity within the history of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy has been overlooked and that is the continued existence in a big way of all the psychotherapies, including psychoanalysis, in the Third Reich under the special protection of Field Marshal Göring, under the direction of Göring's cousin, Göring who was an Adlerian therapist, and under the international leadership of Jung until he was getting so much flak back in Switzerland that he just had to pull out. Of course, Jung got his total revenge after the war by coming up with the thesis of collective guilt, whereby all the people, the persecutors and the victims alike shared in the symptom of National Socialism. The work I'm doing now is closing off the trilogy which I began with *Aberrations of Mourning*, which is ultimately on unmourning and its various manifestations. My first book focuses on the outbreak of mourning and melancholia in the one on one. In *The Case of California*, it's the same problem, but in group

format. In this final book of the trilogy what I end up looking at is the continuity which is otherwise missing from histories of modernism, psychoanalysis, and Nazi Germany. There was no station break really in the German application of intrapsychic theory and therapy. In fact there are many ways in which one could argue that the theory and therapy of eclecticism grew strongest during the Nazi era. Nazi Germany offered extensive insurance coverage for psychotherapy. At the institute in Berlin, psychotherapy won decisive victories against psychiatry in the corridor wars of legitimation. That has to do with psychotherapy's ideology of wholeness. Psychotherapy goes for the complete person: this probably appealed to Nazi cant. What was more important was that the Nazis very quickly ran up against the limit of their bio-destinal read of difference because once the obvious others had been disposed of, how could the outbreak of neurosis and especially war neurosis and homosexuality (which they chose to read as a neurosis) be explained?

Q. Did Nazi psychotherapists believe in stages of infantile development?

A. You know, Nazi psychotherapy is as modelled on psychoanalysis as is eclectic psychotherapy as it exists in California to this day. This means that what psychotherapeutic eclecticism in California today and in Nazi Germany back then shares is the intrapsychic view. Once you base everything on the intrapsychic dimension rather than on the interpersonal connection, you are toeing a certain line. The first time that this line was drawn in such a big way was in Nazi Germany, under the duress of competition with the neuropsychiatrists and the other proponents of biodesnity, but still incredible victories were achieved. In the case of homosexuality for example, the neuropsychiatric types, of course, felt that homosexuals needed to be sterilized, castrated or eliminated, but the psychotherapeutic view which really triumphed for a long period was that homosexuality could be cured. Now that's naive, but that also means that the Nazi psychotherapists and the Nazi military establishment became one of the first in the whole international complex of militarism to accept the fact of neurosis and war neurosis and to accept the fact of homosexuality. They could accept it because they were able to subscribe to the upbeat belief that everything could be cured.

Q. In much the same that Californians believe that everything can be cured.

A. Exactly, everything is supposed to be curable through the intrapsychic theory and/or therapy.

Q. Did Nazi psychotherapy take the form of the talking cure as well?

A. Absolutely.

Q. Jung is so popular out here. Jungian imagery fills New Age rhetoric.

A. But it's not something that's used so much by Californian psychotherapists. There are of course those who specialize in Jungian psychology, but it's kind of a luxury item to have a Jungian interpret your dreams. That's exactly how it was in Nazi Germany too. Jung was

used as a figurehead, as a cover-up because of his international reknown. There was a kind of lip-service connection between him and Nazi ideology when it came to mythification and stuff like that, but when it came to the actual work of treating people, Jung was never used. The Nazi German psychotherapists were way closer to Freud than to Jung when it came to treatment. So Jung comes off looking doubly foolish, I think. First off, he's purchased as a figurehead, used for representational speeches on behalf of the Nazi psychotherapeutic movement, but not even the Nazi psychotherapists fell for what he was doing in theory or in therapy.

Q. Do you think California's self-esteem has suffered after the Rodney King incident and the L.A. riots? Do you think that that has made a dent California's self-image?

A. The constant talk here of self-esteem means that that is precisely where the crisis is always to be located in California. But about Rodney King, I'd like to emphasize that just as we had said that the Chicago Convention riots were a bringing home of the Vietnam War, so the Gulf War was clearly brought into the streets of America in L.A. Where else? I would say because this was a war that could only be read in terms of the California criticism that I've been pushing. I don't want to go into the obvious media angles on this war. I think that's been sufficiently addressed. Clearly there's a TV and video connection going on. Where I saw the Gulf War as being supremely Californian was when it came to the way the war shifted out of its original defeatism and mournful quality when the first casualties were listed. It seemed that we were clearly going to drop back into Vietnam mourning and grief stuckedness and stuff like that and instantly we were out of it. We were out of the body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" bag when it was announced that these were victims of friendly fire. It was like we had switched the channels, left the funereal media of newsreels (really a grafting of film onto television) and we had channel surfed onto a sitcom. Friendly fire. So efficient, so friendly that we are killing ourselves. Friendly fire is a supremely Californian concept. The mix of friendliness and self-destruction as the beyond of mourning and melancholia. The same beyond that group psychology occupies. The whole Rodney King situation hasn't settled yet, but surely we've noticed that it's the same kind of friendly fire body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" count. It's hard to tell who did what. It's hard to tell what was achieved. But these were two conflicts that were supremely efficiently run, while they were happening in real time at the level of psychological warfare, which is of course the level of group psychology. The Gulf War while it was happening was America's most successful war group psychologically-speaking. Back then, the Nazis were way better at it than we ever were. Only now have we caught up with the Nazis and even the mounting and the launching of the Patriot System, symbolically speaking I think, was our first successful attempt at out-manuevering Nazi control of the airwaves, whether it be the rockets or other forms of psychological warfare.

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**Catherine Liu**

## **Interview with Laurence Rickels**

### **Part Two**

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Q. I wanted to go back for a moment to the casualties of friendly fire. Do you think that these ambivalent losses - after all they were caused by friendly as opposed to hostile fire, is media out for mourning?

A. Out of mourning...I don't mean to be Californian and feeling based about my argument right now, but I knew that we were all relieved when the news was broadcast that this was all friendly fire and not casualties of war that are usually received as casualties in the one-on-one. That's always where melancholia or mourning will have to go down. Once you have friendly fire, once you have the prospect of suicide, which is ultimately the prospect of everyone dying at the same time, you're in the mode of catastrophe and catastrophe preparedness which is one way avoiding mourning altogether. That's exactly how the Nazis ran their psychological warfare, was to convert all casualties into the register of catastrophe, the register of catastrophe-preparedness, the register of the group psychological. That's what total war is all about.

Q. There's a new category of death out there, different from all other previous forms of death.

A. The new category is actually an old category: the Nazi category. This allowed us not to see that deaths that were happening. It's not just that the video control didn't show the deaths. Even if we had seen the deaths, the notion of friendly fire already invited us not to see, or as I like to say, not see.

Q. What do you think about the status of the Freudian cure. You mentioned briefly that you were working on the third volume of the trilogy which is going to be on Nazi psychotherapy. So could we get a preview?

A. You were asking about the status of the cure in the Freudian field. There has always been a tension between theory and practice when it comes to the cure. Therapy requires the notion of closure which theory can't admit. That tension is already there. The all out emphasis on the cure is something I think we find here in California and I think it's acted out as the perpetualism of support group psychology. That brings us to the project where the cure, the solution was being suggested on intrapsychic lines. The reason I bring that back to California and I'd like even to include the splinter cultural studies groups going down right now in their identity has to do with the larger frame or impact of the project. What I'm digging up is a real continuity, a direct hit between the most protected and progressive sources of our

modernism and what we take to be the biggest symptom in the register of discontinuity, namely National Socialism. This time rather than travel circuitous routes, the routes of dialectical Enlightenment to make the connection between California and Germany which I did in the second book, now, it's time to consider the direct hit that usually and for all sorts of phobic reasons has not been addressable. I think that's important because that connection is being acted out, in other words, it's there, it's just unconscious and there are incredible similarities between the proliferation of identity theories right now and special interest group theories and what was being accomplished in Nazi Germany. The one point I want to make is that what this new chapter tells us in the history of psychoanalysis, which is at the same time the history of modernism and the history of world war II is that psychoanalysis once again has to be credited with having incredible sway in our culture. It's not really one discursivity among others to be treated, but it is thte culture we live in. It is the history we live in and what I find dangerous about living in a culture that lives and breathes that insight and that's also Nazi culture because it was a culture which in large part, privileged the intrapsychic, what's dangerous is at the same time, to disown that connection even while you're living it. That's true of both sides of the cautious comparison I'm making. I find that every theory right now of closure or anti-closure (same difference) whether it belonged to the women's movement or the gay movement or what have you, are always issuing yet another disowner's manual to psychoanalysis and that's where the danger lies. There are all these lifestyle celebrations going on in the name of theorizations of some kind of marginal difference that just pay protection to pathologizations in the group psychological register.

Q. I was recently at a big queer theory conference in which someone actually stood up and said, can we think beyond Freudian narcissism and find a way of mode of affirmative self-love. I suddenly realized that I was actually at a giant group therapy session from which I was promptly psychically ejected after I posed my question about our group identification as intellectuals.

A. You're right on the mark. These are all support groups and the infinite distance between support group psychology and where it's coming from, namely psychoanalysis, is the space where I would anticipate or read all sorts of dangerous symptoms, but at the same time what's strange and uncanny about my project is that the refocussing on Nazi psychoanalysis gets us out from under yet another denial, the denial of psychoanalysis' force as a social theory. The other terms I'd like to bring up are, in the more recent past, there were divisions of labor between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis had to deal with the home, which is fine, but was never allowed to leave the home, at which point, Marxism took over and that was a way of cutting off the real range of psychoanalysis already in Freud. Group Psychology has only been considered within the hybrid within of Marxism. Group psychology is severely limited to...It's not enough just to say that we live in a culture that is so saturated with psychoanalyss that any move made away from that intrapsychic dimension of our culture has to be considered another form of disowning. The place to look to see how this actually came about is the unprecedented success that psychoanalysis enjoyed at least in terms of the press coverage when it came to the treatment of war neurotics in World War I. That's when psychoanalysis was admitted into the military, the

psychological and the military/ psychological establishments big time and world-wide. That wasn't only something that happened on the outside in a purely external P.R. way, but also all the innovation that go into Freud's thinking on the way to the second system happen over the psychological casualty of world war I. That's where he suddenly systematically sees how narcissism fits into his theory. He is able to place narcissistic or ego libido right up there next to the outwardly directed libido as having equal rights when it comes to the theorization of the psyche, but also the treatment of disturbances. He felt at that point, that everything was opened up to psychoanalysis inside and out once he had cracked the case of war neurosis. That's what is repeated in Nazi psychoanalysis over the body onLoad="if (self != top) top.location = self.location;" of the homosexual. They wanted to score a second victory and also cure homosexuality which was always conceived as a threat to the military establishment not just for all the usual sexual reasons, but because already when it came to war neurosis, it was felt that unresolved homosexuality or a homosexual component always contributed to the outbreak of war neurosis. So that there are these Nazi psycho-theories about the psychology of desertion and espionage and betrayal that are read in terms of homosexuality.

Q. We're sort of reliving that with this issue of Clinton and gays in the military.

A. That's a concrete way in which we see psychoanalysis enter our total war or media war cultures. While something like a greater psychoanalysis is being erected, even before it's Nazi chapter was formed, all sorts of perspectives were not only breaking away from psychoanalysis around the time of WW I. I'm thinking of the Adlerians and so on and so forth, but other perspectives coming out of sociology and psychology were wanting in a kind of disownership way to be linked to the psychoanalytic victory which first came into focus over the treatment of war neurotics. That went for Marxism or for all the sociological perspectives clustered around Marxism.

Q. How?

A. With the Frankfurt school for example. Throughout the twenties, it was almost the symptom within sociology to be trying out the rules of psychoanalysis and precisely because always it was felt that WW I could not be explained along strictly Marxist lines. We're more used to thinking that the emergence of National Socialism or WW II could not be explained along Marxist lines. That's usually how the merger between psychoanalysis and Marxism is sold in this country (in the Frankfurt School), but it actually predates that and is directly linked to war neurosis. As a result of all these disownership problems, the biggest one has been the alliance between psychoanalysis and Marxism because that cut off psychoanalysis right in front of the socius. So the division of labor that I'm objecting to is the one that keeps psychoanalysis in the home. It belongs there to a certain extent, but it keeps it grounded there, the sense of interdiction of adolescents which doesn't allow them to travel beyond in a strong way and oddly enough, the missing continuity that I am researching now, namely Nazi psychoanalysis, is the place to look to recuperate the range of psychoanalytic thinking because there you have a reading of the social, a whole mobilization of war, a whole waging

of psychological warfare which was based lopsidedly based on the intrapsychic view. Now that doesn't recommend itself to the goals of National Socialism because N.S. is just another example of disownership, but for reasons of its own, the Nazis psycho-leadership gives us an example of the complete habitat of psychoanalytic thinking. It's still more symptomatic than openly admitted in theoretical registers. Still, it's possible to argue that the only reason the Nazis lost is that they didn't know when to stop winning. That failure to know when to stop, that's symptomatic. I'm leaving aside the contents of their murderous ideology of course, but just now within the gadget loving waging of the war, because it was a war society, but there is stuff going down there that we really need to take into consideration when it comes to rethinking the boundaries of psychoanalysis. That goes point by point. That's only the outside, acting out mode, but also inside psychological, psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic theorizing throughout the Third Reich, there are different takes on what the fetish means, and what all sorts of things mean than what we are used to, because we have been constrained by the division of labor that keeps psychoanalysis only on one side of the socius.

Q. Do you see any relationship between this boundary and how psychoanalysis runs aground in academia? It finds itself always only as an application, or in film studies programs...

A. For Nazi psychotherapy, fetishism for example had to do with war neurosis, and with the overcoming of total loss the first time around, by the mounting of the substitute success, that would be their achievement in rocketry. Anyway, these readings in Nazi psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are much closer to technology, to group psychology, and to all of that, whereas the total limitation within an American appropriations of psychoanalysis would be this real inability to read technology as technology or group psychology even when dealing with a technological medium. So there's this paralysis within the dialectic of sexual difference, all sorts of rearrangements of that which we all agree is limiting, namely the Oedipus complex itself, but nowhere is the most reduced form of the Oedipus complex more current than in these academic appropriations of psychoanalysis whether in film or literary studies. Lacan who in many ways was a Nazi psychotherapist.

Q. Our cultural resistance to letting psychoanalysis into the social keeps coming back to an overvaluation of the power of the analyst. For instance, in films like *Silence of the Lambs*, we find a super-efficacious analyst, super-powerful analyst who is embodied by Hannibal Lecter who is actually able to produce a suicide in one of his jailmates. There is this Hollywoodian fantasy of the super-efficacious analyst who has to be kept behind bars, behind a hockey mask and tied to a chair. There's a super-investment of the word of the analyst as well. If you recall, how powerful he was and how he had to be constantly restrained and surveilled.

A. *Silence of the Lambs* belongs to a whole new genre of transference transgression film. It's now accident that this genre has grown up alongside the Gulf War. I think there is this incredible dread of the transference that's been there before, but it's come up again, the dread of transference as something utterly controllable. I think that's how the Gulf War was received while it was going on. Transferences seemed superimposable onto live

transmissions. Freud himself thought, when he first discovered transference, that this is the way analysis had to go, you had to control the transference. He also said, after he entertained that thought for a moment, that this would be the most terrifying prospect of all if one could really achieve remote control over the transference. If anyone could, that would be the living end. I think that's what, in more specialized ways, this new cinema symptom reflects. That also brings us back to the Nazi take on psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in particular because it's almost as if it was the transference that the Nazis wanted to control too. I'm not just talking about TV and stuff like that, but even little details like psychoanalysis while it was included as Arbeitsgruppe A (/) in the Goring Institute in Berlin, there were increasingly limits set to its activity, to the activity of that group. Your training analysis could not be with a psychoanalyst, but only the second analysis could be with an analyst. The Adlerian Goring's son, or the Field Marshal's nephew trained as an analyst during WW II, but because of that proviso, his father had to fake the records and claim that he had already trained with an Adlerian so that he could in fact have a training analysis under the cover of pretending it was the second time around. We've been right all along, that the business of transference is the trickiest business when it comes to psychoanalysis and its where all of our fears of control, certainly if you are on the couch, come to play.

Q. One of the most powerful things about Lacanian psychoanalysis is its constant insistence on the instability of a cure and the impossibility of wholeness. I understand what you're saying about Lacan as a Nazi psychoanalyst because Lacan makes claims to transference and demands a kind of transference that goes beyond the Freudian demand. The way in which he assumed the word demanded and implied a more intensive transference. His transference management was different from Freud's transference management, but thing about wholeness and fulfillment is so impossible in the Lacanian register. That's in fact why Americans have never been able to apply it clinically, whereas in South American and European countries, there is a lively Lacanian clinical practice. This is impossibility here because of the pessimism of Lacan's practice. In a certain sense, Lacanian discourse offers one of the most rigorous refutations of the possibility of intrapsychic fulfillment.

A. When I talk about the ideology of wholeness, I was really talking about a certain dialogue of misunderstandings that allowed psychotherapy to triumph over psychiatry in the Third Reich. I don't think case by case, or analyst by analyst the notion of wholeness was always being pursued. Even in the relationship between the technologists and the psychologists, a certain emphasis on disintegration was recommended when it came to choosing pilots. It was felt that pilots (who as you can imagine are at the front of the line in cyborg production, they are the first soldiers who had to become the machine) it was recommended that disintegrated types be turned into pilots because they would be able to observe themselves and live out better the whole structure of traumatic neurosis in a sense. Already to enter a plane the Nazi psychologists realized, was to be traumatized beyond belief. Only if you were already in that mode would you do well with the machine. I want to emphasize the way in which even though they are constrained by the ideology and the cant they had to follow, the Nazi psychotherapists were real good at facing the facts of the intrapsychic. When I said that Lacan was a Nazi psychotherapist, I rather mean that within the restored continuity of our

history, some one like Lacan, I think, is probably non-phobic about the ways in which psychoanalysis went beyond the home and could be there, everywhere. So when I say that he's that, I mean outside of the constraints of Nazi ideology, outside of the constraints of this chapter of Nazi history, his power is very much that of some one who came into the complete history of psychoanalysis.

Q. I wanted to be precise about this point because there's this propensity right now to diss Lacan at every point. He was some one who refused all recourse to the beautiful soul...

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