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## TRAUMDEUTUNG, TRAVEL, TRANSLATION.

«In previous decades I frequently had travel dreams in which the most marvellous landscapes followed one another; since I began travelling (1895), they have become rare.» (Siehe Freud, *Meine individuelle Traumcharakteristik*, Kopie im Freud Museum, London)

*Previous «decades», not «years». This sets the phenomenon in a wide time scale. Freud is looking back over his whole adult life from the vantage point of his mid-fifties. Those landscapes represented the future of his past, his past desires, now lost because subsequently fulfilled.*

If those dream landscapes are the form of that future in the past, space representing time, what are we to make of this other landscape which we find in a letter written on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1899 to *Wilhelm Fliess*:

*«The whole thing [i.e. «The Interpretation of Dreams»] is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. At the beginning, the dark forest of authors (who do not see the trees), hopelessly lost on wrong tracks. Then a concealed pass through which I lead the reader – my specimen dream with its peculiarities, details, indiscretions, bad jokes – and then suddenly the high ground and the view and the question: which way do you wish to go now?»*

At first sight this is evidently mythologico-metaphorical territory, the future and desired book laid out as if it were a landscape. And it is something like an echo of *Dante's Inferno*. The dark forest here is not only an equivalent of the «selva oscura» of *Dante's* opening lines, it is also the pathless wood of the 13<sup>th</sup> canto, in which the trees were once human, for this is a «dark forest of authors». Curiously, these hapless authorities of the dream cannot see the trees, that is, they cannot see themselves, since they themselves are the trees which form this wood. This is a reversal of the proverb about those «who cannot see the wood for the trees». These early writers have, it seems, all made a similar mistake, of being *unselfconscious*. They have sought a system but disregarded the part played by the self. Though many have used their own dreams as evidence, none of them have followed the devious tracks leading from the waking self that describes the dream to the desires it expresses. What *Freud* followed and the others had neglected is the form of the expression, since the only evidence of that devious connection between sleeper and

conscious self is encoded in the language of the description.

Five days before the letter to *Fliess* which I have just quoted, on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1899, *Freud* wrote to his friend of another landscape, and a real one this time – the scenery around *Berchtesgaden*:

*«Things are incomparably beautiful here; we take walks, long and short, and all of us are very well, except for my occasional symptoms. I am working on the completion of the dream book in a large, quiet, ground-floor room with a view of the mountains.»*

Like a quattrocento narrative painting, these sentences depict the scholar at work in his beautiful study and through its windows a view of the mountains, where, at the same time in the background, we also see the same figure walking in those mountains. Here the working and the walking are connected (as is the dreamed image to the waking reconstruction of the dream).

Following our guide out of the metaphorical dark wood of the book's opening chapters, we are lead through «a concealed pass» (the specimen dream). Having read the letter above, we might even be tempted to look for its original source in the landscape near *Berchtesgaden*, but perhaps it would be better to restrict the search to *Freud's* study. On the wall hangs a print of *Ingres' famous painting «Oedipus and the Sphinx»*, showing the narrow path between overhanging cliffs where the hero confronts the monster. This is certainly «ein verdeckter Hohlweg», as *Freud* called it. And since the parable of the guided walk was recuperated from the letter to *Fliess* for the opening of chapter 3 of «The Interpretation of Dreams», the pass not only shows us the path we have followed so far, it also

serves, in the context of the book as a whole, as an imagistic hint at what is to come, namely the first appearance of the Oedipus complex which we will not reach until part D of chapter 5.

Returning to the characterisation of his own early dreams, *Freud* notes that the «most marvellous landscapes followed one another». Each landscape was different, but each was another expression of the general desire to travel. But in 1895 they became rare, for *Freud* began travelling in reality. Now strictly speaking, he had already been travelling for years before 1895 – to England in 1875, to France in 1886 and 1889, many times to Germany and to various parts of the Austrian Alps for the summer holidays. However 1895 remained a key date for him as far as travel was concerned and for one reason – because that was the first holiday in Italy. Obviously real travel meant the Mediterranean world. In the summer of 1895 he travelled only to Venice. Rome was to remain the main object of his Italian desires and he did not reach it until 1901: there is a series of dreams in «The Interpretation of Dreams» related to this still unfulfilled longing for the Eternal City. But 1895 is also a key date for other reasons. In later years it was the date *Freud* chose as the founding year of psychoanalysis. It was the year that *Breuer* and *Freud* published the «Studies on Hysteria» with *Freud's* seminal chapter «The Psychotherapy of Hysteria». It was also the year during which he generated the unfinished, so-called «Project for a Scientific Psychology». And as far as the dreams were concerned, 1895 is the year in which he dreamt the dream of Irma's injection, the first dream he analysed to his own satisfaction: the key specimen that figures in his landscape metaphor as the «concealed pass» through which he leads the reader.

### Language's inadequacy

Travelling back, then, to the beginning of travels and the beginning of psychoanalysis, we return to another, metapsychological, dimension to the trope of the concealed pass, namely as a visual analogy for the phenomenon of consciousness. Near the culmination of his chapter on the «Psychotherapy of Hysteria» in the «Studies on

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Hysteria» *Freud* discusses the complexity of the hysterical symptom:

«If it were possible, after the case had been completely cleared up, to demonstrate the pathogenic material to a third person in what we now know is its complicated and multi-dimensional organization, we should rightly be asked how a camel like this got through the eye of the needle. For there is some justification for speaking of the «defile» of consciousness.»

Instead of Greek myth, this version of the mountain pass [«Enge des Bewusstseins»] hints at the famous Biblical camel parable. But in common with the Oedipus story, this parable also carries the connotations of a paradoxical riddle, a seeming impossibility. Many of *Freud's* similes and analogies seem to be improvised on the spur of the moment and this is one of the attractions of his style, but in the case of this «defile» it recurs in several places. And on first use here it is self-consciously introduced:

«For there is some justification for speaking of the «defile» of consciousness. The term gains meaning and liveliness for a physician who carries out an analysis like this. Only a single memory at a time can enter ego-consciousness. A patient who is occupied in working through such a memory [a pathogenic one] sees nothing of what is pushing after it and forgets what has already pushed its way through. ... The whole spatially extended mass of psychogenic material is in this way drawn through a narrow cleft and thus arrives in consciousness cut up, as it were, into pieces or strips.»

And it is important to note that the casual phrase «as it were» (in German simply the word «wie») is there to remind us, in case we forgot, that we are all the time dealing in analogies, similes, images.

At this point it might be useful to glance at the role of simile in *Freud's* theoretical formulations at this period, since it relates closely to his, highly significant, embarrassment about his literary style. He is at this time self-consciously concerned about his inability to describe the concepts he has conjured up. No single image is suitable: he repeatedly refers to his, or the language's, inadequacy. Earlier on in the «Studies on Hysteria», in his theoretical discourse on the arrangement of pathogenic memories, having introduced a basic linear and chronological sequence like «a dossier kept in good order», he then overlays that metaphor with a secondary geometrical pattern. This is where the embarrassment





Henri Rousseau, *Le Rêve (Der Traum)*, 1910. Öl auf Leinwand, 204,5 x 298,5 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Photo: © 1999 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Der Künstler beschrieb sein Thema in einem Brief von 1910: «Ich schreibe Ihnen in Antwort auf Ihren freundlichen Brief, um zu erklären, warum das fragliche Sofa ist, wo es ist. Die auf dem Sofa schlafende Frau träumt, dass sie in den Wald gebracht worden ist und den Klängen aus dem Instrument des Beschwörers lauscht». (Henri Rousseau an André Dupont, 1. April 1910, in: Roger Shattuck u.a., *Henri Rousseau*, New York, 1984).

begins to intrude. Freud elaborates the description as follows:

*«I have described such groupings of similar memories into collections arranged in linear sequences (like a file of documents, a packet, etc.) as constituting themes. These themes exhibit a second kind of arrangement. Each of them is – I cannot express it in any other way – stratified concentrically round the pathogenic nucleus.»*

This explicit unease about style is not the embarrassment of a novice. Even as a teenager Freud was a consummate letter writer and by the mid-1890s he had been publishing a stream of scientific papers, translations and reviews for the past twenty years. What concerns Freud here, what causes his unease, is uncertainty how he will be read. He is worried that readers may take his images too literally, as descriptions of physical facts. So in this same convoluted passage, in which he is trying to conceptualize the devious pathways of

the pathogenic memories leading to hysteria, Freud introduces layer after layer of schema. First the straight line of the chronological sequence, then the concentric strata of conscious and unconscious memories, finally the broken and zigzag pathways of the logical thread. At the end he admits:

*«I am making use here of a number of similes, all of which have only a very limited resemblance to my subject and which, moreover, are incompatible with one another. I am aware that this is so, and I am in no danger of over-estimating their value. But my purpose in using them is to throw light from different directions on a highly complicated topic which has never yet been represented. I shall therefore venture to continue in the following pages to introduce similes in the same manner, though I know this is not free from objection.»*

Here a discrepancy between the original and the English translation is worth mentioning. The English words «topic» and «represented» lack the force of the German



which is more concrete: «*ein höchst kompliziertes und noch niemals dargestelltes Denkbjekt von verschiedenen Seiten her zu veranschaulichen.*» The crux is in that final verb «*zu veranschaulichen*» and the hitherto unknown «*Denkbjekt*». Mental processes are «*thought-objects*», but ones that cannot be visualized in their entirety, only illuminated from various angles. Still photographs are inadequate. The best that can be achieved is the cinematic effect of travelling, the eye of the mind circling the representation. No single viewpoint or simile can capture the whole thing and subsequent similes will appear incompatible if we try to visualize the whole thing as a flat object or even as a three-dimensional structure. Our movement round the object – the different viewpoints or analogies – and the multiplicity of images are part of the «*topic*».

#### «Defile of consciousness»

Metaphorical travelling continues through the following pages: «*Whenever we have opened a new path ... we may expect him to advance some distance*», «*We undertake the opening of the inner strata, advancing radically ...*», «*We must get hold of a piece of the logical thread, by whose guidance alone we may hope to penetrate to the interior ...*» etc. The last of these images shows that we have entered new mythological territory, namely the labyrinth.

The description of mental phenomena results in a confused picture and only logic can simplify it. But the language of the description is itself part of the confusion. And this problem of adequate expression continues inevitably into the «*Interpretation of Dreams*» five years later. In a subsequent letter to his friend *Fliess*, of 11 September 1899, *Freud* speaks regretfully of his stylistic uncertainties:

«*The dream material itself is, I believe, unassailable. What I dislike about it is the style, which was quite incapable of noble, simple expression and lapsed into facetious circumlocutions straining after metaphors. I know that, but the part of me that knows it and knows how to evaluate it is unfortunately the part that does not produce.*»

This passage betrays a longing for a scientific description not implicated in the untidiness of the object. Yet the image of the «*defile of consciousness*» through which

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the unconscious material must pass, cut up and strung out in single line, had already shown that this is no longer possible, given the four-dimensional and unvisualisable nature of the object.

In the conducted walk that began this paper, the guide took us to a metaphorical hilltop and then asked where we wanted to go from there. This scenario recurs in another form, in one of *Freud's* Rome dreams: «*...someone led me to the top of a hill and showed me Rome half-shrouded in mist; it was so far away that I was surprised at my view of it being so clear. ... the theme of «the promised land seen from afar» was obvious in it.*» Moses is, of course, doomed never to enter the promised land he glimpses from afar. *Freud's* longing for Rome, on the other hand, was satisfied a year and a half after the dream book was completed.

But the relation between reality and the life of the mind remains «*half-shrouded in mist.*» At the end of the dream book *Freud* poses the rhetorical question: «*But what of the practical value of this study ...? ... Have not the unconscious impulses brought out by dreams the importance of real forces in mental life? ...*» And he responds to his own queries: «*I do not feel justified in answering these questions.*» The pathways by which psychical interacted with physical reality could not be traced in the abandoned 1895 «*Psychology for the Neurologist*» and *Freud* was not going to lose himself on a similarly futile mission only four years later. The two spheres remain segregated, as they still do today, and will be for as long as our present secular *Weltanschauung* prevails. *Freud* does not attempt to redefine the borders of the real. This is a philosophical task and therefore one he would habitually avoid. So in the last pages of his book he affirms:

«*Whether we are to attribute reality to unconscious wishes, I cannot say. It must be denied, of course, to any transitional and intermediate thoughts. If we look at unconscious wishes reduced to their most fundamental and truest shape, we shall have to conclude, no doubt, that psychical reality is a particular form of existence not to be confused with material reality.*»

Material and psychical reality are separate domains, and both are differentiated from the status of the «*transitional and intermediate thoughts*» which have no claim to any type of reality. In one stroke *Freud* has, like *Shakespeare's* Prospero, «*buried his*

staff», for these transitional thoughts are the very stuff that dreams are made of. Yet this magisterial dismissal is the grounding of dream theory. It is the same radical gesture as that which occurs in the «Psychology for Neurologists» in 1895 and is repeated in the «Interpretation of Dreams» – where consciousness is denied any independent existence and reduced to a mere organ of sense. At that theoretical moment we cross a «concealed pass» into new territories. This is the moment when space is transformed into time, when the chaotic spatial mass of the dream, or experience, is cut up and paraded in single file, words as consciousness. On the other side of the pass everything is reconstruction as language.

Here, finally, we are presented with another marvellous landscape, another fantastic sight of Rome. Not the Rome half-

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is the  
cinematic  
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travelling,  
the eye  
of the mind  
circling the  
representation.*

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shrouded in mist, as glimpsed in the «Interpretation of Dreams» but a new and even more hallucinatory vision of the Eternal City. It is found at the beginning of «Civilization and Its Discontents», where Freud is attempting to construct an analogy for the persistence of memory. He asks us to imagine Rome as if all its various historical periods were in existence simultaneously, from the founding to the modern city. This is the end of the dreams of travelling, that is, the end of projecting our desired constructions as visual images onto the world. For, as far as theory is concerned at least, there is no point in spinning out such phantasies, since they lead to something unimaginable:

*«Our attempt seems to be an idle game. It has only one justification. It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms.» ♦*

TITELBILD

## DREAM ANALYSIS



*Dream Analysis, 1998. Tanzstück nach einer Choreographie von Mark Dendy (USA). Aufführung des Mark Dendy Dance Theater, New York. Photo: Phyllis Graber Jensen.*

Dream Analysis spielt in der Praxis eines Psychoanalytikers, und die Aufführung dauert eine Stunde, genau so lange wie eine Therapiesitzung. Die Träume eines jungen Tänzers werden verbildlicht, während der Analytiker, in der Rolle eines Narren, sie für das Publikum auslegt. Hier ist der Klient

mit seinem Alter Ego, dem russischen Tänzer Vaslev Nijinsky, zu sehen. In einer Anspielung auf Tanz, Magie und die Behandlung von Neurosen zu Zeiten Nijinskys schwebt er hier in hypnotischer Trance. – Das Titelbild sowie die Illustrationen des Dossiers mit ihren Legenden wurden dem Katalog der Ausstellung «Träume 1900–2000. Kunst, Wissenschaft und das Unbewusste» entnommen, die vom 23. März bis 11. Juni 2000 im Historischen Museum der Stadt Wien stattfand. Der Katalog mit gleichem Titel erschien in diesem Frühjahr im Prestel-Verlag, München.

MICHAEL WIRTH