Psychoanalysis and the other
An essay on Freud’s metapsychology, hermeneutics and theory of sexuality

Psychoanalyse, de ander en het andere
Een verhandeling over Freud’s metapsychologie, hermeneutiek en theorie van de seksualiteit
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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De meningen die in dit proefschrift worden uitgesproken, zijn die van de schrijver,
en worden niet noodzakelijk gedeeld door de genoemde instellingen.
The opinions expressed in this thesis are those of the author, and cannot necessarily
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*Durban, 28 April 1998*
QUOTING CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

My references and bibliography are based on the Chicago 14B format. References in the text take the following basic form:

(Davidson 1987a: 258), or

Davidson (1987b)

The corresponding entries in the bibliography take the form:


Freud entries in the bibliography take the following form:

Freud, Sigmund. 1911b. Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning. SE XII: 213-226 (G: Formulierungen über die zwei Prinzipien des psychischen Geschehens. GW 8: 229-238)

The “1911b” is the standard numbering found in specialist bibliographies of Freud’s works; in contrast to the system of reference used in this thesis for works by other writers, the letter after the year does not change if no other works by Freud from that year are referred to in the text or listed in the bibliography. The “(G: …)” indicates the original German title and where it can be found in Freud’s Gesammelte Werke.

References to Freud’s works generally take any of the following forms:

(1911b) This refers to the above bibliographical entry


(GW 12: 35) This means page 35 of Volume XII of Freud’s Gesammelte Werke.

As long as it is clear that a particular text by Freud is being discussed, only page numbers in brackets will be given; where a second number, preceded by ‘GW’ is given, this refers to the German edition. For instance, Section I, Part 2 is devoted to a discussion of Chapter VII of Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams. In this context, a reference like

(406; GW 411)


References to Strachey’s editorial notes in the Standard Edition mimic the form of references to Freud’s works in the same edition, i.e.:
Strachey (1910h—SE XI: 167n), or
Strachey (167n), if it is clear from the context which text is being discussed.

A “p.” before a page number, or “n.” before a note number, indicates a page or note in the present thesis itself:

“(p. 32)” or “(n. 87)”

To avoid clumsy locutions like “his/her” or “s/he,” I alternatively use the masculine and the feminine forms where the gender of the person referred to is indeterminate.

Square brackets in quotes:

[xxx] Square brackets in original

[xxx] In foreign language: formulation in original language; if followed by non-italicised words in English: my suggestions for a better or alternative translation. Note that where I suggest a translation in this way, it does not necessarily mean that I find Strachey’s translation wrong, or my own translation superior, regardless of the perspective from which one reads Freud. (My translations are often less idiomatic than his). Often the intention is simply to point out relevant alternative translations as a way of bringing out other connotations of the word[s] used by Freud.

[xxx] In English: my addition

[xxx] My emphasis, in either of the two foregoing

[xxx] Italicised or emphasised in original (In Freud’s Gesammelte Werke emphasised words are printed with double spacing)
INTRODUCTION

What is most difficult … is to express this indeterminacy correctly and without falsification. (Wittgenstein 1968: II.xi: 227—my translation)¹

In this thesis two ongoing projects converge spontaneously: one a close, sometimes ‘deconstructive’ reading of central Freudian texts; the other an investigation into a cluster of themes centring around notions such as “the other”, “alterity”, “othering”, “dichotomies” and “difference”. I call the convergence of the two projects “spontaneous” because, whenever I set myself to reading Freud with no particular aim in mind, I invariably end up returning to this cluster of themes. This is no doubt largely because my own way of reading has been so decisively influenced by Derrida, whose reading strategy is typically concerned with the alterity of each text he reads, while his central themes also concern the other and alterity. (On both points, he was in his turn influenced by Freud and Levinas, who with Wittgenstein form the other main sources of inspiration for my reading strategy in this thesis).

Before I go into my intellectual debt to these thinkers, let me give a brief sketch of some of the existential determinants of my interest in the other, othering and alterity.

EXISTENTIAL SOURCES OF MY INTEREST IN THE OTHER, OTHERING AND ALTERITY

Having been born a White Afrikaner in South Africa in 1952, I was confronted with these themes constantly and directly. Let me sketch this situation in a necessarily simplifying, caricatured way.² The hegemonic culture of my middle-class Afrikaans childhood—more monolithic then

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¹ German: Das Schwerste ist hier, die Unbestimmtheit richtig und unverfälscht zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

² German: Das Schwere ist hier, die Unbestimmtheit richtig und unverfälscht zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

² The South African political scene, and more particularly Afrikanerdom, changed significantly in the first twenty years of my life, something this caricature abstracts from. For instance, a sort of pre-modern paternalistic racism was transformed into a typically XXth Century totalitarian state, in which the views of ‘enlightened’ Whites had little effect on how the machinery of this state ground Black lives to dust, preferably out of sight of White eyes. I say nothing about those parts of White Afrikanerdom that did not unambiguously belong to the apartheid monolith (except for my family, I was not exposed to them much), nor about the general White English complicity or apathy vis à vis apartheid and its prehistory in Natalian, and later: South African, segregationism before 1948, when Afrikaner Nationalism gained power. (Moreover, since 1948 the Afrikaans/English divide among White South Africans has been subject to a continuous process of erosion). I also say very little here about how I as a privileged White child experienced White racism because it is hard to find a description that does justice to both my acquiescence

footnote ctd. on next page—
than ever before or since—showed a rare unity of language (Afrikaans), race ("White"), religion (Reformed) and politics (the National Party and its policy of apartheid). To be an Afrikaner was to embody and subscribe to each of these dimensions unambiguously. Any doubt on any of them made your Afrikaans-ness suspect, so that you risked being classified as Other: that which Afrikanerdom defined itself as not being. The culture congealing around these identities defined itself very strictly, in terms of its utter difference from its various others: Rooinekke (the English, and English speaking White South Africans, that the words equate with each other), Kaffirs (or Natives or Bantu), Hotnouts (Coloureds), Coolies (Indians), Jews, Catholics, unbelievers, Saps (adherents of the South African Party), kafferboeties (bleeding hearts taking up the cause of the Black underdog), Communists, liberals and anybody else infected with the ideals of the Enlightenment. These others were represented in such a way as to minimise their points of similarity or overlap with Afrikaners. Being male further narrowed down acceptable identities: any trace of femininity raised the suspicion that you were a moffie (sissy; queer); you were expected not to cry, or be emotionally sensitive; to be accomplished in rugged sports—and like them; to be keen about cadets (the paramilitary training at school); to welcome—or in any case: willingly acquiesce in—your military service, where they would “make a man out of you”; and to support, as a matter of course, the use of armed force to get rid of “South Africa’s” enemies. (These experiences are in many ways close to those one could have had in many other (male) chauvinist (sub-)cultures).

I railed against this system mainly because of what it did to me, and its internal others in general, and only sporadically because of what it did to its external others—specifically, its major victims: South Africans of colour. Apartheid did not fall because of the likes of me, I am afraid. But from an early age I already felt like an outsider, and experienced the internal and external bigotry of Afrikanerdom as two sides of the same coin. At school, I was caned and endlessly reprimanded for dodging the periods intended for cadet training and for wearing my hair long. I shocked my classmates by asking why you couldn’t marry a Black woman if you loved her. A friend and his family, who had recently immigrated from the Netherlands, were treated as if they came from Mars. Like most Afrikaners, I was acutely aware of how little difference was tolerated before one was cast out as totally other.

Subsequently, a year at an English-language university in South Africa and fifteen years in Holland taught me that holding Afrikanerdom at arms-length and being held at arms-length by it did not preclude that others would hold you at arms-length because you were an Afrikaner. (My experience in both places often resembled that of the “good Jew” or “good Negro”: Boers are boors; White South Africans are intrinsically no good—but you are the exception).

and my moments of protest. In a country where almost everybody today presents himself as always having been against apartheid, care must be taken not to participate in this falsification of history.
Later, I discovered, partly thanks to psychoanalysis, that not being an archetypal Afrikaner did not mean that in my heart I was now not an Afrikaner at all. Much against my will I discovered that I shared in many of the ugly qualities I had hated in Afrikaners, and White South Africans in general. Later I discovered that there were parts of my Afrikaner heritage I could not repudiate, and parts I had no reason to repudiate. (One is never in rational control of one’s identifications and disidentifications; at times far more than is necessary appears to be tarnished; at other times far more than is justified appears to be sound). With both my father’s grandfathers having been shot dead by the British in the Anglo-Boer war, and my orphaned paternal grandparents reduced to penury in the aftermath of that war, I had grown up with some paradigmatic Afrikaner ethnic memories as part of my own. (That war was then as recent an event, in historical terms, as the Second World War is today). These grandparents had also had the experience of Afrikaans being treated as an inferior language, the use of which met with formal or informal sanctions.

Despite my liking and admiration for the Dutch, fifteen years in Holland could not quite make a Dutchman out of me (neither in my own eyes, nor in those of the host country). I took pleasure in fulminating against the less admirable sides of what I took to be Dutch national character, often only to discover that I shared in them as well.

On the one hand, Holland showed me an incomparably more inclusive society. It deserves its reputation for tolerance, and is far removed from the polarising, othering character of the Afrikaans culture of my youth. On the other hand, even here there were Others, who seemed to satisfy a deep need: members of other Dutch subcultures who were for ever disqualified from entering our subculture; migrant labourers from the Mediterranean; the Belgians, fair game for jokes and other expressions of contempt that, had they been about people of colour, would have been judged utterly unacceptable. The difference between tolerant Holland and its Other—apartheid South Africa—, though vast, was thus far smaller than most Dutch liked to believe.

I found the condescension or derision with which the Afrikaans language—as something infantile or primitive—was treated by otherwise tolerant and enlightened people especially stinging. (I spoke Dutch with a marked Afrikaans accent; I was as little able to change this as my skin colour). Back in South Africa after sixteen years abroad, because of the Dutch accent I had acquired in Holland, I was now often taken to be a Dutchman. I had thus gone from being an outsider in South Africa, to being an outsider in Holland, back to being an outsider in South Africa.

As a recipient of othering I was not exposed to even a fraction of the injustice and indignities suffered by my Black compatriots at the hands of apartheid. The extreme discomfort I

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3 Freud discusses the way people from adjoining countries ridicule each other in Group psychology (1921c—SE XVIII: 101) and in Civilization and its discontents (1930a—SE XXI: 114). His famous notion of “the narcissism of minor differences” stems from this context.
nevertheless experienced helped give me some idea of the suffering of the real victims—the Black victims of apartheid, who were exposed, on a daily basis, to indignities a thousand times worse than any I ever had to cope with.

Every step of the process of writing the preceding part of the Introduction has militated against the opening motto from Wittgenstein. Despite the qualifications I have added since my first draft, the indeterminacies and complexities of the life I recount are still far from being formulated correctly and without falsification. In fact, supplement after supplement could be added to any account I chose to give, without ever reaching a point where what stood on paper gave a correct and unfalsified account, not needing further supplementation.

In a thesis on psychoanalysis a few more supplements are minimally required, however: being an outsider was not only unpleasant; and my experience of being an outsider, whether pleasant or unpleasant, had many determinants in my personal temperament and life story—it was by no means simply determined by the nature of Afrikaans culture in apartheid South Africa, or by the objective facts of later being a White South African in Holland. Moreover, I never was, unambiguously, an outsider. The notion of an outsider partakes in the very scheme of inside and outside that this thesis ends up problematising (in the wake of Derrida (for instance 1987b)). I was often probably marginalised, often experienced myself as an outsider, often wished I were not marginal, or not an outsider; wished to be at the centre, an insider; and often wished I was a complete outsider. My life (a life) can be read as a whole series of identifications and disidentifications, with things that themselves are constituted through past and ongoing identifications and disidentifications: nation, country, family, country of adoption, adopted or wished for family (the “family romance”), and so on.

And let me further qualify. A completely monolithic Afrikanerdom never existed, of course. There were different Afrikaners, and different Afrikaans institutions—even if most of the latter tended to function in similar ways, and with similar goals. I got some recognition from the individuals and institutions I encountered, as well as a good deal of flack for not being what I should have been as a young White Afrikaans male. There was often a wish to belong unambiguously to the group I at other moments loathed. Similarly, no monolith called Holland exists.

However, let me abandon this never-ending process of qualification, and let this caricature stand as exactly that—a caricature.

Needless to say, the experiences described did not in themselves lead to a discursive understanding of othering—let alone a correct one. Let me mention a few steps on the road to a more theoretical interest in othering.
SOME THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS OF MY INTEREST IN THESE THEMES

An important first step was Ad Peperzak’s seminar on ‘intersubjectivity’ at the University of Utrecht, where I encountered the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, which immediately intrigued me—especially the idea that the dominant strand in Western philosophy had tended to locate the good in the autonomy of the Self, and to derive the bad from the Other’s disturbance of this autonomy. As the philosophy of Levinas was foreign to my previous training, mostly in analytic philosophy, I did not quite know what to make of it. Even today I have a sense that I have hardly even started integrating this “thought that makes one tremble” into my own thought, though it has retained its fascination for me.

A crucial next step was getting acquainted with Freud, Lacan, Derrida and the critique of the subject under the guidance of the philosopher-psychoanalyst Anton Mooij. This was very much at odds with the Rylean philosophy of mind with which I had previously been inculcated. (Ryle’s world is an essentially transparent one, in which we never run into alterity). Freud’s thought initially repelled me, but soon began to fascinate me, dealing as it does with the whole range of phenomena which my background denied, repressed or suppressed in the name of “a positive attitude to life”. With Derrida it was love at first (or perhaps second) sight. In my Master’s thesis on Freud and Wittgenstein, done under Mooij, I had a first skirmish with the theme of Section II of this thesis—Freud’s hermeneutics.

However, it was only later that questions of the other and alterity really became inescapable to me. I had been teaching philosophy to students of welfare work, and hoped that reading the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis’s (1980) best-selling Illichean critique of social work would stimulate them to reflect critically on their future profession. Though sympathetic to the writer’s critical stance to his subject, I soon became convinced that his fundamental assumptions were untenable: those regarding the nature of society, human needs, knowledge, technology, and so on. (At this stage I did not see any connection with questions of the other or othering).

Simultaneously I was surprised when my students were converted en masse to Achterhuis’s point of view, and then neither would, nor could, investigate it critically. (A process that mirrored the one occurring in Dutch public opinion, generally). Gradually I became convinced that all the author’s assumptions follow much the same pattern: leave the Self to itself, and everything is fine; in this condition of autonomy things spontaneously go right; autonomy guarantees every good. Let the Self become dependent on the Other, and everything goes wrong; in a condition of heteronomy everything is certain to get messed up. Self and Other are fleshed out as follows: the

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4 An interest in dirt—matter out of place—is closely related to an interest in psychoanalysis and the discourse of alterity.
Self is Man Himself\(^5\), Layman. The Other is, alternatively and interchangeably, welfare work, the professionalisation of care, the (welfare) state, and capitalism. These contents are surface phenomena; the underlying structure is that of othering. Achterhuis turned out to be a surprisingly clear exemplar of that narcissistic-paranoid pattern of thought against which Levinas’s philosophy is a protest. (“Surprisingly,” because I had not expected that Levinas would turn out to be directly relevant in such an applied, banal context).

In the condition of autonomy, people understand reality, their needs are fulfilled, society is harmonious, and man is in control of technology. In the condition of heteronomy, reality becomes opaque; old needs are “no longer” fulfilled, and unfulfillable new ones are created; there is an absolute, unresolvable conflict of interests between Self and Other, layman and professional, and so on. Technology starts leading a life of its own and becomes an alien force. From a situation of autonomy in which there was no other, no alterity whatsoever, we have moved to a situation where an Other manifests itself and immediately constitutes a lethal threat to the Self. To safeguard identity and all other possible good things, which are implicitly depicted as being but manifestations of the intact identity of the Self, a holy war must be waged against this Other.\(^6\)

Fortunately, given the nature of Dutch society and the relatively secure social position of those involved in professional care, though Achterhuis’s book was received with enthusiasm, welfare workers were not soon being strung from the nearest lamppost. However, what deeply disturbed me was the fundamental structural resemblance between the book’s conceptual scheme and lethal forms of othering such as apartheid and Nazism. Evidently, even in an admirably tolerant society like Holland it is possible to mobilise popular opinion by rhetorically invoking Them as the source of all Our ills. Get rid of the Other, and We will be whole again. Originally, in the Paradise of unrestricted autonomy, perfect solutions were not only possible, but the rule. The subsequent Fall was caused by the Other, who subjected the Self to heteronomy; redemption will be obtained by getting rid of the Other.\(^7\)

What to my mind inescapably permeates every part of human or social reality, in Achterhuis’s book is an unfortunate accident: plurality, conflict, the Self’s dependence on others, the limitation of autonomy, the opacity of reality. If otherness and plurality are omnipresent, the complete insight, complete control, complete harmony and perfect solutions that in Achterhuis’s account implicitly characterise autonomy, are chimeras. Human life, in its individual and social aspects,

\(^5\) In Dutch: *de mens zelf*, which is gender neutral; Achterhuis is systematically unclear as to whether this singular subject refers to an individual subject, or a collective one.

\(^6\) My critique of Achterhuis was worked out in more detail in a book. (Gouws 1988)

\(^7\) Cf. the role of Kundry, the archetype of the seductive Jewish woman in Wagner’s Parsifal. She represents the bodily other that the previously exclusively male and spiritual social body must rid itself of to become whole again. (Daniel Herwitz, personal communication, April 1997).
involves us in countless projects of understanding, control and social co-ordination that are bound to fail, to a greater or lesser extent.

My ongoing interest in Freud, Derrida, Wittgenstein and Levinas is linked to a sense that each in his own way undermines any schema that à la Achterhuis or other fundamentalisms promises a clear-cut partition of reality so that everything problematic is confined to a limited domain that falls safely “outside” of another, completely unproblematic domain. (The notion of the Other serves to map evil or the negative onto a circumscribed entity or ontological domain—a process for which scapegoating is the paradigmatic example). Each of these thinkers in his own way teaches us that the absolute separation of good and bad sought by such schemes will always fail. It is notable that the Self becomes thoroughly problematic in their thought. Each in his own way opposes the idea of a non-alienated, self-sufficient, foundational, self-present, (intrinsically, essentially or potentially) innocent, original Self. That is to say: opposes those notions which feed the Self’s narcissism—his dreams of perfection, omnipotence and autarky. The Self is always and in all respects already related to the Other.

Accordingly, I initially intended writing a thesis on Freud, Levinas, Derrida and othering. As it gradually dawned upon me that this topic was too broad, I decided to devote my thesis to the other, othering and alterity in Freud’s oeuvre. In the end, it has become a thesis about Freud, which uses Derrida, Wittgenstein, Freud himself and Levinas to read and, where necessary, deconstruct, Freud.

This project soon floundered on the alterity of Freud’s texts. Each of these texts is complex and elusive, resisting a consistent, stable and adequate summary or paraphrase. There it is, in its awesome materiality, the 24 volume Standard Edition, which Freud did not write—he wrote in German. There they are, thus, the 18 & 1 volumes of the Gesammelte Werke. Plus the countless texts that fall hors d’oeuvre: the letters, the early neurological and other pre-psychoanalytic writings, and so on. I decided to begin with what to me seemed foundational texts, those one would have to understand thoroughly before launching into the rest of Freud’s oeuvre: the “Project”, the Interpretation of dreams, and the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. These, in their complexity and alterity, turned out to be une mer à boire, so that this thesis in the end is little more than a reading of these three texts.

My thesis revolves around the metapsychology, hermeneutics and theory of sexuality in the three texts mentioned, especially inasmuch as issues of the other, alterity and othering are involved in them. It is my intention to follow it up with studies in which further texts of Freud’s, many of them prima facie of more relevance to our theme, will be discussed: some of his case studies;

8 For brevity’s sake, I will in future refer to this work (1900a—SE IV-V: 1-621) by its German title: (Die) Traumdeutung (GW 2/3: 1-642).
Schreber; the work on narcissism; the writings on society and culture; those about aggression and the death drive.

Writing this thesis would have been easier had alterity limited itself to a separate theme in Freud. However, this is not the case—the question of alterity permeates his writings. (While working on this thesis I became convinced that alterity is not a phenomenon which can be clearly localised in a particular domain of reality).

Discussing each of the three texts on which this thesis centres, I found myself unable to give a brief summary, and then launch into a discussion of alterity as a distinct theme. Alterity turned out to inhere in the basic conceptuality and textuality of each work. To me the text is a problematic weave of signifiers; it does not wear its signified on its sleeve. Freud’s texts are no exception. Each work resisted my attempts to glean a determinate signified behind the multiplicity, indeterminacy and materiality of its metaphors or other signifiers; each resisted being assimilated once and for all. My reading got slower and slower as I progressed. The signified of each text seemed harder to determine than that of the previous one. Perhaps the texts are progressively unclear; as I proceeded I probably also became more prone to seeing the textual aporias in Freud’s texts.9

I know of no account of these works that I could presuppose even in broad lines, so as circumvent the difficult task of exegesis each of them poses, and launch directly into a discussion of my theme. In each section I typically proceed by giving an account of the text as I understand it, and then showing the problems involved. I first take it apart, and then treat that which I cannot put together again consistently, as a problem. In this I can of course be mistaken. However, I find this approach more interesting than one which presupposes that there is consistency, a unitary meaning, a single signified lurking behind the plural and heterogeneous metaphors and other

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9 I was struck by the following similarities between Robinson’s (1997) conclusions regarding Plato and my own regarding Freud: 1) Freud and Plato both introduce ways of thinking that depart from those current in their environment, while themselves partly adhering to these; important inconsistencies in their thought can therefore be traced to such an “uneven development” whereby their thought partly incorporates old ways of thinking which their new way of thinking has actually made obsolete. 2) Both often stop at the brink; each often refuses to accept the consequences of his own argument. The argument pushes them one way, while their deeply held convictions push them in another. 3) The fundamental doctrines of each tend to be formulated in a lapidary or figurative way, so that they are left in a state of great indeterminacy. 4) Both use a multiplicity of fundamental metaphors, which are often difficult or impossible to reconcile with each other. 5) Both often criticise and reject their earlier views; often, however, views which have apparently been laid to rest in earlier works, resurface in later ones. (One of the factors leading to the phenomenon mentioned under (4)).
signifiers of the text. My apologies to the reader if my own text thereby at times becomes prolix; I was unable to find a better form for what I had to say.  

The textual approach into which I settled is the one I had in the past always also found most congenial. It is in marked contrast to even such excellent books as Wollheim (1985) and Macmillan (1991), which to all intents and purposes treat the content of Freud’s doctrines, the meaning of his texts, as if it were non-textual, and thus: eminently accessible. Despite my imperfect German, I had always preferred reading Freud in German rather than in the English translation. The more closely I read Strachey’s English Freud of the Standard Edition, the more it seemed to deviate from the German Freud. This not because it is a bad translation—it is generally a tour de force, despite its over-technical basic terminology, certain inconsistencies and occasional blunders—but because it is and remains a translation. Especially the indeterminacy and polysemy of Freud’s most-quoted pronouncements, that are often oracular, tends to be falsified by the translation. To what does the dream form the royal road? What is this thing about the dream’s navel? And so on. Having read Freud in German, and wanting to quote him in English, I was time and again surprised by the very different feel of the English. I often had the impression that, had I read only the English, it would never have occurred to me to have quoted this particular passage in this particular context. (Of course the English Freud can sometimes also lead one to see valid or useful connections that one would not have thought of in reading the original).

Be that as it may, that which sets me philosophising about a text is usually directly connected to its surface details in the original language. (I feel as if I have never read Plato, because I do not know ancient Greek). I have therefore profusely referred to Freud’s original German, because its

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10 What by some accounts can be seen as stylistically atrocious, or even neurotic, I would (retrospectively) like to defend as suited to the topic of alterity: the way I repeatedly qualify my theses, sometimes in the main text, and sometimes in footnotes. I am certain that these qualifications could have been expressed more elegantly. However, I think that it is preferable to qualify oneself repeatedly—barbarously, if no other way can be found—than to produce a smooth text which glosses over the complexities of the text being read and the hesitancies of the reader writing about it.

According to one intellectual ideal, a really good text is one in which everything leads seamlessly and utterly convincingly to the conclusion. Tainted by the discourse of alterity, I would rather make a virtue out of the necessity that seemed to impose itself on me while I was writing: that it would be intellectually dishonest, and a denial of the text's complexity and alterity, to write such a text. It is usually better if a text shows quite openly that the case being made is not watertight. (Of course, different criteria will apply for different situations.) Such a text would be inherently dialogic (or polylogic), whereas the former would aspire to the status of a pure monologue. (I have in the past found that monologic thinkers often do not find texts written in the form of a polylogue informative at all. For them a polylogue written by one person can apparently have none of the virtues of a set of intellectual exchanges between a number of different people.)
interconnections, indeterminacies, connotations or polysemy differ from those of the English
Freud. It is to be hoped that this will not frighten off more casual readers.

**THE SOURCES OF MY READING STRATEGY IN WITTGENSTEIN AND DERRIDA**

Having been trained as a philosopher, and lacking the experience and schooling practising
psychoanalysts have, I find that the most appropriate procedure for me is to approach Freud from
his most conceptual side, much as philosophical theories are generally read. An alternative line
of attack would be to read the Freudian corpus as mainly a set of empirical claims, to be evaluated
according to the methods and results of empirical (or experimental) psychology. (Macmillan
(1991) would be a good example of such an approach). Interesting and valid though such an
approach may be for the reader, or for a writer differently qualified than myself, this is not the
one followed in this thesis.

The main sources of inspiration for the roughly ‘deconstructive’ reading strategy followed in this
thesis are Derrida and Wittgenstein. (Deconstructive strategies here supplement the familiar tools
of scholarly research and philosophical analysis, rather than attempting to replace them). Where I
have also been inspired by Freud and, occasionally, Levinas, my reception of their work has
 tended in the same direction.11

Nevertheless, where possible I have tried to not simply assume the truth of a method which I
could then just apply. That is why I make a fairly conservative use of Derrida—a sort of Derrida
for analytic philosophers, as if I return to the moment when the 1960s vintage analytic
philosopher has to admit that there is more in the world than he has hitherto dreamt of.

I now first sketch the notions of language, speech and text that inform my reading strategy, and
then Derrida’s approach to the other and alterity. I will concentrate on those aspects of Derrida
(and Wittgenstein) that I have actually utilised for my reading of Freud in this thesis. However,
being an orthodox follower of either of these thinkers is not my aim; I reserve the right to be a
bricoleur and use any strategy which seems apt in a particular context. The reader will excuse me
if my description of Derrida and Wittgenstein in this subsection, which aims at striking a bridge
between their approach and mine, is very free, simplifying and general. This thesis will of course
inevitably fall short of the vigilance, self-reflexivity and general level of sophistication found in
their texts.

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11 Inasmuch as my strategies for reading Freud ultimately derive from, or parallel Freud’s own hermeneutic
strategies, this thesis becomes a sort of internal critique of Freud, which does not lead away from
psychoanalysis, but aims rather at a more consistent application of certain psychoanalytic principles.
If we think of language in terms of the expression of thought (typically with the assumption that the meaning of the speaker’s words is present to him), communication between persons, the mirroring of reality, or the representation of thoughts and reality, then these very terms lead us to approach language from the side of its—putative—successes. By comparison, Derrida and Wittgenstein are centrally concerned with the necessary failure of language to simply express, communicate, mirror or represent. Language is far more ambiguous and complicated than these metaphors suggest. Its intermittent and partial successes should surprise us far more than they generally do. Language does not always only work—it also plays, goes on holiday, or breaks down—phenomena which interest Derrida and Wittgenstein more than its putative successes.

Wittgenstein tells those inquiring into the meaning of words to look at the way they are used. To him meaning, that before was often taken to be a private entity, is neither private nor an entity, but the essentially public use of words in a context. Wittgenstein is highly sceptical regarding how much scope there is for theory in the domain of social, cultural and psychological phenomena. Theory produces generalisations, but in this domain both the meanings of the words used in formulating theories and the “classes” of phenomena they deal with are generally too complex, heterogeneous and open-ended for theory to have much success. Almost every social, cultural or psychological theory is already ‘falsified’ the moment it is formulated. Theory in this domain therefore tends to be linked to the suppression of counterexamples, which proliferate more rapidly here than they do in the natural sciences.

In this thesis my debt to Wittgenstein hopefully shows itself in the attention I pay to Freud’s use of words and in my use of examples to show how multifarious the phenomena falling under a particular term are, so as to undermine Freud’s generalisations regarding that term.

To me, Derridean deconstruction has always seemed to continue and radicalise Wittgenstein’s excavations, and as such to be something analytic philosophers should welcome. (Significantly, Derrida till now has not ventured to deconstruct any of Wittgenstein’s texts). Wittgenstein demonstrates that language and reality in general do not answer to philosophers’ need for sharp boundaries. Derrida’s (1992: 52) scepticism regarding “the simplicity and linearity of frontiers” combines well with Wittgenstein’s demonstration of the fuzziness of certain very common and useful concepts: if we insist on drawing lines around concepts or phenomena, any line we draw will turn out to be extremely capricious; if we limit ourselves to those moments when the boundary seems determinate, the result will be a plurality of discontinuous tracts of line which cannot be integrated into a single, continuous boundary in any compelling way.

Wittgenstein’s discussion of interpretation in the second part of the Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein 1968) demonstrates that it is often (or perhaps usually) undecidable whether an aspect of an object is something “subjective” or something “objective”; whether it is actively supplied or passively received by the subject. Derrida’s discussion of various interpretations of Van Gogh’s shoes (Derrida 1987b) similarly shows that it will never be possible to determine
what, in any painting or other text, is “really there, inside the boundaries of the work”, and what is “a matter of interpretation, brought to the work from outside”. Freud cannot determine to what extent his beliefs derive from the given, and to what extent from his interpretation of it. (Nor can we, in any definite way). In reading Freud we similarly cannot identify and delineate what he “really says”, what is “really there in the text”, as opposed to the interpretation we bring to it from outside. Empiricism is impossible; however well we look and observe, in questioning and describing experience we shall never be able to avoid drawing on, and being fundamentally conditioned by our language—those discourses which happen to be available to us, in all their historical and cultural contingency. Whereas Wittgenstein believes in a multiplicity of language games, many of them relatively independent of others, Derrida is convinced that certain patterns, which he links to “Western metaphysics”, exercise a hegemony across a wide variety of our discourses. The patterns of domination which we find in society are embodied and sustained by the structure of discourse.

We are not absolutely trapped “inside” Western metaphysics, however. There are countercurrents inside and outside it; moreover, this is not the sort of thing that can adequately be formulated in terms of the metaphors of “inside” and “outside”. Derrida’s philosophy can be seen as a sustained struggle against our bewitchment by spatial metaphors; as such metaphors are ubiquitous, it ends up placing “a bomb under every word”, to cite Levinas. By problematising the notions of absence and presence, Derrida simultaneously problematises the idea that phenomena can always be localised in space and time. Othering, with its characteristic territorial thinking, typically spatialises things in a simple way: otherness is mapped onto a separate, localisable entity or ontological domain, in such a way that the self can remain uncontaminated by it. However, if otherness cannot be localised in space and time there is nothing the self can do to remain free of it.

Our main recourse against the harmful effects of the philosophical tradition(s) to which we owe fealty, is a never-ending work of textual reflexivity and critique. The only means of thinking we have are the epistemologically and ethically flawed ones offered us by the tradition (including its

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12 We would therefore avoid triumphalist titles like Fact and fantasy in Freudian theory (Kline 1972) or A final accounting: philosophical and empirical issues in Freudian psychology (Erwin 1996).
13 As far as I am concerned, the jury is still out on this one; I do believe, though, that “language games” are far less independent of each other than Wittgenstein—or perhaps just a cursory reading of him—would make us think. Wittgenstein also seems to think that language only breaks down when philosophers start (mis)using it—a point on which I would rather take a Derridean than a Wittgensteinian position. Derrida argues, moreover, that there is no synchrony of language which would be free of the diachronic; the past is sedimented in language in such a way that it is still active in the present.
14 In fact, alterity, which itself cannot be located in space and time, attaches to the very fact that all sorts of phenomena—phenomena which we perhaps do not associate with alterity—cannot be localised in space and time.
latest innovations). We are in the position of Neurath’s seafarers who have to patch up and partly remake their vessel at full sea: there is nothing we can do but to reappropriate the means at hand. They cannot be jettisoned so as to start from scratch and develop concepts which would fully do justice to the situation in which we find ourselves. At most, we can use them “under erasure”. When Derrida celebrates a writer (such as Freud) this is not for inventing, de novo, a language which is innocent of the tradition, but exactly for using old concepts against the grain. Innovators necessarily use an old language to say new things that are not strictly compatible with it. (Cf. the Derrida quote in footnote 69). Every text is a makeshift affair, a piece of bricolage in which the signs used were not made with this purpose in mind at all. We thus constantly use words in the mode of catachresis: a strained metaphorical application to the present context of a word not deriving from it.

Time and again, Derrida’s readings demonstrate the multiplicity and centrifugal nature of the metaphors or terms used in a text, and the way in which they work against each other and the writer’s intention. The Wirkungsgeschichte of a text is determined not only by authorial intention (itself never fully conscious or determinate), but also by the chance associations it evokes. The writer necessarily fails to master language. He does not know what the words he uses are going to do, and cannot control them—they play with him. The notorious playfulness of some of Derrida’s texts can be seen as flowing from this: visible jokes in a text help make us aware that, unbeknownst to us, it is probably playing countless other tricks on us.

Derrida does not reject or downplay the importance of the traditional demands governing academic work in the humanities. He makes us aware that even the most skillful and sober academic use of language, which diligently seeks to obey all the generally accepted constraints on rational discourse, nevertheless necessarily fails to become a transparent medium for the expression and communication of (putatively supra-linguistic) thoughts. The aporias and other problems with which Derrida confronts the academic writer, generally have no solution; at most she can attempt to cultivate a sensitivity for the things words do with us, and then devise strategies whereby the words will hopefully do more of the things she wants them to, and less of the things she doesn’t. And if she is not too naive, she will make a stab at taking into account the impossibility of taking everything into account.

Derrida as a reader concentrates on moments of textual instability and collapse. As in psychoanalysis, these are often revealed by features that are usually considered too marginal to warrant serious attention. He finds the phenomena characterising the Freudian unconscious at work even in texts that are supposed to be the product of the most conscious, rational deliberation. We could call this the text’s unconscious, its unthought, what it is not aware of. Every text necessarily has such an unconscious, both because of the necessary incompleteness of any reflection, and because the specific strategies followed in it require the suppression of specific things with which they are incompatible.
Addressing the text’s unconscious does not open the door to irrationality. It is rather part of the general philosophical endeavour to make the irrational and the unthought accessible to rational scrutiny. The aim is to enlarge our degree of reflexivity, to add tools to our arsenal or rationality—many of them aimed at making us more cautious in our use of the other tools in the arsenal. Derrida has emphatically distanced himself from “postmodernist” celebrations of hermeneutic freedom, according to which, in the interpretation of texts, “anything goes”.

He pays special attention to conceptual dualisms or dichotomies, which he thematises as conceptual hierarchies: they are not cognitively or axiologically neutral, because one of the two terms is invariably presented as superior to the other. He shows how arbitrary and strained such ascriptions of superiority are, and how unstable and undecidable conceptual hierarchies become when scrutinised closely. The domination of the ‘lower’ term in a philosophical opposition by the ‘superior’ term is seen as intimately linked to real social domination: of Black by White, East by West, Female by Male, etc. The deconstruction of such conceptual hierarchies is thus, optimistically, taken to be part of a broader political strategy against domination.

Where he refers to the Other and alterity, this is generally in a positive sense (the influence of Levinas is unmistakably in evidence here): ‘openness’ to the Other, ‘waiting’ for the Other, ‘submitting’ to the Other, allowing oneself to be ‘called’ by the Other, ‘desiring’ the Other, allowing the ‘interruption’ by the Other. This (impossible) relation to the Other is to Derrida obviously a (or the) central site of value. Inasmuch as deconstruction involves affirmation, what is affirmed above all is, perhaps, the other. Derrida (in Kearney 1984: 124) insists on this moment of affirmation in deconstruction:

I totally refuse the label of nihilism … Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other.

A central feature of this positive other is that it cannot be located in either of the poles of a hierarchical opposition (between what are taken to be two simply available, manifest presences)—it resists such oppositions. This is a decisive difference from the way the other is conceived of in othering, where it is usually identified with the inferior term in a conceptual hierarchy. As such “the other” or “alterity” takes its place (a privileged place?) in the series of terms which Derrida introduces as part of his strategy to deconstruct oppositional thinking: trace, différence, archi-écriture, etc.

How does this link up with ethics in Derrida’s thinking? He does not wish to affirm everything that the term ‘ethics’ implies, due to its embeddedness in a metaphysical tradition which he distrusts. He sets himself the following task: how can we affirm the other, affirm the law and be responsible, without reverting to “forms of responsibility in which the subject, consciousness, the
ego, freedom, etc. are implicated”\(^{15}\) (Derrida and Labarrière 1986: 70)—that is, crudely put: without falling back into the humanist presuppositions of Western metaphysics? In the history of metaphysics, the subject has frequently been conceived of in terms of self-presence, self-possession and speech (rather than writing). Derrida subjects these notions to a critique, and with them any notion of the Self as a transcendental signified escaping the play of signs. Self and Other would therefore have to be reconceived in terms of traces rather than presence or absence.

Derrida sees the responsibility to the other as deeper than ethical responsibility. However, an openness to the singular other must be accompanied by a recognition of the value of the law in its generality.

The alterity of language is closely linked to the alterity of the world. If language is not what it is supposed to be, then what is represented by language can also not be what it is supposed to be. The very strategies of reading outlined above are intimately tied up with the discourse of alterity, because they undermine any appearance of absolute conceptual stability, and of sharp, simple and single boundaries dividing reality into clearly separate domains. Neither self nor other can then be localised and contained in a separate ontological domain. In the place of an other which would be a discrete, nameable entity or event, I would argue that we should see alterity as ubiquitous, something that can make itself felt in any place and at any moment.

ALTERITY, OTHER, OTHERING

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean different things.”

Lewis Carroll (1978: 168): Through the looking glass.

I now wish to say more about the theme of this thesis, which has already been indicated in my sketch of the route that led to it and the ‘deconstructive’ reading strategy I follow.

I use notions like “alterity” and “othering” with some trepidation. Let anybody come with an existing notion—like ‘autonomy’—and you can analyse its manifold uses. Devise a new notion, and you’re bound to ‘give’ it a meaning—but can you actually make it mean what you want it to? Can you actually know what you want it to mean? These are risks I have had to accept, given the insistence with which I keep on returning to a cluster of notions centring around these terms.

I do not give, and stick to, single definitions of terms like alterity, the other, othering, etc. Each of them has a cluster of senses that are different, but interrelated, many of which will be used in the

\(^{15}\) My translation. French: “des formes de responsabilité impliquant le sujet, la conscience, l’ego, la liberté, etc.”
course of this thesis. I trust that the context will generally sufficiently indicate which sense is intended.

“THE OTHER”

“Self” and “other” can refer to individuals, parts of individuals or groups, but also to something impersonal, such as the unconscious. As far as the other person is concerned, “the other” will sometimes name any other person, and sometimes a specific type of other person: the despised other, the enigmatic other, the uncontrollable other.

At the most elementary level, the other is that which is not the self. At a slightly more reflective level, it is that which is taken to be not the self. “Not the self” is itself a phrase with multiple meanings. It can mean: everything except the self. Or it can mean: that with which the self could be confused, but from which it emphatically wants to distance itself. Or: that which is taken to be so unlike, or separate from, the self, that the self takes this difference or separation to define its very essence.

In Freud’s picture of mental life, social life, and the human in general, everything constantly turns out to have an other which it can neither separate itself from completely, nor integrate itself with to form a perfect unity, a whole which is free of conflict and disorder—free of discord, in short. My thesis is centred around the theme of this other: the other for which perfect solutions are impossible, the other as necessarily a source of discord.

The other Freud talks about is, crucially and first of all, an internal other. There is no original unitary self which is free of discord, and which becomes plural, conflictual and disorderly only because of the appearance of the external other. Nevertheless, the external other, which can help the self regain its internal equilibrium, is in itself also a source of discord.

As a philosopher and as a human being, I find that a large part of the value of psychoanalysis lies in the fact that it presents us with a view of the human as essentially conflictual and disorderly. The human is always characterised by a plurality, in which everything is essentially related to what it is not, but in such a way that there are no perfect solutions to conflict and disorder; they can never be excluded. Psychoanalysis then also challenges us to stop seeing the good in terms of perfect solutions; the absence of discord. Accordingly, Freud tells us that he can offer us no consolation. Freud admits that psychoanalysis is one of those “impossible” professions in

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16 As far as I know, this is unobjectionable, inasmuch as any pronouncements I make can be translated into the hypothetical form “If ‘alterity’ is taken to mean x, then …” (…Freud does/do not acknowledge the existence of alterity, etc.).

17 Thus I have not the courage to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet, and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation: for at bottom that is what they are all demanding—the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers. (1930a—SE XXI: 145)
which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results” (1937c—SE XXIII: 248)\textsuperscript{18}, and that psychoanalysis already sees the transformation of “hysterical misery into common unhappiness” (1895d—SE II: 305) as a major gain.

In its attempts at finding perfect solutions to discord the self necessarily fails—both when it tries to perfectly separate itself from the other, and when it tries to become a perfect unity with the other. The paradigmatic figure of the other is: that from which the self can neither separate itself perfectly, nor integrate itself with, perfectly. To avoid the disturbing implications of the existence of such an other, we tend to deny it, and to construe its occurrences as either something from which we can wholly separate ourselves, or as something with which complete integration is possible.

As some degree of failure is inevitable, Freud’s theory makes clean hands impossible. Perhaps “respect for alterity” then is not linked to success in respecting it, but to integrity in negotiating this necessary failure.

The self/other distinction tends to be linked to evaluations. That from which one tries to radically dissociate oneself, is usually conceived of in extremely negative terms. (‘Positive’ and ‘negative’ are terms that themselves form an unstable dichotomy. One can also try to radically deny anything positive in oneself; admitting goodness in oneself has then obviously become a threat, that is: something negative). The distinction self/other is deeply intertwined with the distinction perfect/imperfect. According to Freud, at first the ego is loved because it is deemed to possess every perfection. Later the ego ideal is loved because it possesses every perfection. “The Self” in our terminology often boils down to such an ego ideal—an idealised perception of self. Othering can be seen as a necessary concomitant of the need to idealise the ego, so that it can be loved. The theory and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis form a threat to such idealisations of self, and in fact to any identity conceived in terms of unambiguous concepts and unambiguous distinctions between self and other.

When we try to separate ourselves from the other, we typically use terms which are supposed to be related to each other as dichotomous opposites. We separate ourselves from it by using terms which seem to be separated from each other to designate it and ourselves. Freud, in a sort of deconstruction avant la lettre, shows that the terms are not thus related. Apparent dichotomies become continua (normal/abnormal); both terms of apparent exclusive disjunctions can apply simultaneously (love does not exclude hate); les extrêmes se touchent: the poles which seem furthest removed from each other, are often indistinguishable (pleasure and unpleasure), and so

\textsuperscript{18} He adds: “The other two … are education and government.”
on. The instability of such self/other pairs, at a conceptual as well as an ontological level, is a recurrent theme of this thesis.

However we define “the other”, it becomes clear that self and other are mutually defined in terms of one another. The way in which this happens, can of course involve major illusions. For instance, one can be similar to that which one conceives of as totally different from oneself, and dependent on that which one conceives oneself as totally separate from and independent of. In fact, the more insistently the Self defines something as its Other, the more Self and Other end up forming a single system.

“OTHERING”

“Othering” is an exaggeration of the difference or separation between Self and Other, the creation of such a difference or separation where none in fact exists, or the construal of that which lies on the border of the self as that which is utterly outside the self. To other a person or group is to cast them out. Othering often involves shifting causality and responsibility away from oneself. This paradigmatically occurs for that which is negative and blameworthy—in the literature the term “othering” invariably indicates a negative evaluation of the other.

“Othering” is a concept which centres on the symbolic violence that replaces, accompanies or paves the way for physical and material violence and injustice. It refers to all the moves whereby individuals and groups treat other individuals or groups as of distinctly less value than themselves, and affords one way of approaching the phenomena otherwise discussed under the rubrics “prejudice” or “discrimination”. As such the term has become current in discussions of anti-Semitism, sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, etc. In the case of discrimination or prejudice the anti-Semitic others—the Jew, men other women, Whites other Blacks, and so on. The othering party generally claims full, unqualified humanity for itself, while denying it to the

19 The psychoanalytic concept of “projection” obviously denotes a form of othering. Conceptual considerations, as well as psychoanalytic theory, demand that we also acknowledge, next to othering, the existence of a complementary category, “selfing”. To “self” is to downplay or deny the difference or separation between Self and Other, or to construe that which lies (wholly or partly) outside the Self as an integral part of the Self. Causality, responsibility and credit are thus drawn to oneself. (In the paradigmatic case of selfing one identifies with something positive).

There is another set of phenomena …—what are known as ‘fausse reconnaissance’, ‘déjà vu’, ‘déjà raconté’ etc., illusions in which we seek to accept something as belonging to our ego, just as in the derealizations we are anxious to keep something out of us. (1936a—SE XXII: 245)

Among the “illusions in which we seek to accept something as belonging to our ego” that are recognised by psychoanalysis, are introjection and identification. Though the phenomenon of “selfing”, with its denial of difference and separation, thematically belongs to the cluster of phenomena we investigate, we will not further investigate it in this thesis.
othered party. When we disaggregate ‘othering’, we get a cluster of phenomena: the other is denigrated, ostracised, humiliated, stereotyped, scapegoated, stigmatised or demonised. As is the case with games in Wittgenstein’s (1968: §66-67) celebrated analysis, this cluster cannot be defined in any hard and fast way. Each of the terms in the cluster points to an attitude which will not resist the infliction of harm—or even destruction—upon those viewed in such a way, or even actively promotes the occurrence of such harm—either as a means to some other end, or as something that in itself is gratifying. The othering attitude can range from indifference (in the face of manifest, gross suffering, for instance) to aggression or hate. As such it is diametrically opposed to attitudes of respect, care, love and so on; and also to relations of equality or mutuality. (In speaking of ‘othering’, we typically indicate that the object of such othering is innocent, or exposed to a degree of hostility which is out of all proportion to any wrong that may have been committed.)

Obviously any account of why people ‘other,’ in the sense explained above, will also throw light on why they so often do not spontaneously behave in an ‘ethical’ way, and tend to behave in ‘unethical’ ways. With ‘ethical’ and ‘unethical’ we here refer not to some positive code of behaviour, but to what various major ethical doctrines have taken to be essential to the moral attitude, for instance:

- caring for the widow, the orphan, the stranger in your midst (Judaism)
- loving thy neighbour as thyself; forgiving him his trespasses (Christianity)
- compassion; not wishing suffering upon any sentient being; wishing the suffering of all sentient beings to cease (Buddhism)
- always treating human beings as ends in themselves, and never purely as means (Kant)
- experiencing the gaze of the other as an injunction: thou shalt not kill (Levinas).

Freud respects the complexity and tenacity of everything that resists ethical behaviour—the things most modern ethical theories have tended to pay very little attention to: irrationality, cruelty, the imperiousness of our desires, the limited extent of consciousness and self-knowledge. Compared to Freud’s patient investigation of these phenomena, idealistic and moralising conceptions of ethics seem to lack respect for the real complexity of human subjects and relations. Freud is against subjecting man to hypocritical codes of sexual conduct, or to unrealistic ideals of inner purity, not because he believes that we should stop trying to be ethical and rational, but rather because of his deep sense of the power of the forces resisting ethics and rationality; the amount of labour required to achieve anything approaching these goals. In his descent into the nether regions he remains a representative—albeit chastened—of Enlightenment ideals.

Let it immediately be remarked that Freud would not be Freud if denigrating the other were not closely related to what it is apparently most opposed to—firstly: denigrating the self; secondly:
Indeed, denigrating the other will as often as not function as a strategy against self-denigration (or against desiring the other). Moreover, denigration of the other easily veers into self-denigration or desire of the other, and back again.

“OTHERING” AND “ALTERITY”

How are the issues of ‘othering’ and ‘alterity’ related? Well, othering is frequently linked to overconfidence in one’s (ability to acquire reliable) beliefs about others: such overconfidence tends to go with a lack of circumspection regarding the way one should treat others. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some theorists take “the other” to be so radically other that every construal of it will be a misconstrual, and only the admission of its fundamental unknowability will be compatible with an ethically correct stance. Freud is sometimes read in this way—the unconscious is then said to represent “radical alterity” in the sense of something that remains forever both unknown and unknowable. (See p. 154, below).

However, the terms ‘alterity’, ‘the other’ or ‘otherness’ can also be glossed in a different way, so that they denote something more pervasive and everyday. They then do not name something that completely escapes our every attempt to understand, define, control, assimilate or do justice to it (epistemologically or morally), but rather come to stand as placeholders for the fact that in many spheres of life our attempts at understanding, definition, control and assimilation, and every attempt at doing justice, will necessarily fail, partly or completely. There will always be a “residue”, something that escapes or resists our consciousness or control, something not accounted for, somebody or something to which justice has not been done. Invoking alterity then is not linked to a recipe which will guarantee that justice is done to the other, but stands for a prophetic moment, a call for eternal vigilance, a preparedness to have one’s projects incessantly interrupted by the admission of one’s failures in this regard.

Such a gloss on alterity perhaps has more far-reaching implications than does the previous one, which can be criticised as giving us facile placeholders for the unknown—“enigma”, “mystery”, etc., instead of preparing us for the difficult work (and fascinating play) of negotiating that which we encounter, but cannot (or cannot quite) fit into our categories, theories and practices.

This other can be taken to be numinous, or a nuisance. “Alterity” is often used as a term for the numinous other—something one waits for expectantly, as one does for a beloved or for God. If it is taken as a nuisance, the tendency will be to other it: this is not me, I don’t want it, I don’t want to be associated with it, I will have none of it, cast it out. What is part of me, or ambiguously perched in a no-man’s land between me and the other, is then given the unambiguous status of the

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20 The formula “doing justice to the other” covers both these aspects (belief as well as behaviour) and can as such function as a useful way to “do justice to” their interconnectedness. “Alterity” is essentially a notion in which ethics and epistemology meet.
not-me. In othering the compulsion to be rid of the other is so strong that we often cannot acknowledge that it is part of us, or, in any case, something similar to us, or something we have dealings with, or something we are not separated from by a clear and impermeable boundary.

To recapitulate: Alterity is that other which, refusing to fall clearly on either side of the walls we erect, in othering is expelled to the far side, the outside. That which I do not see (am unable to see, do not wish to see) as forming a unity with myself, is made to be totally separate from myself, categorically and ontologically. Othering is the process whereby that which is part of us, continuous with us, or not clearly distinguishable from us, is separated from us to become non-self, separate from us, clearly bounded from us. In othering we passionately embrace (and foster) the belief that there is a vast empty space safely separating us from the other, so that there is not the slightest risk of our being tainted with its despised otherness. The central illusion or delusion of othering is to locate the other on the outside, rather than on the inside or the boundary. For othering “other” is a name for that which is entirely separated from the self, entirely absent in the self, entirely outside the self. Our use of the term “other” is as a name for that which is not, or not clearly, separate from, absent from or outside the self, which the self refuses to acknowledge as such, and therefore misconstrues as utterly, naturally and unproblematically non-self. Given this description of othering, the whole drift of Freud’s thought can be said to undermine othering.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL OTHER

Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort.
Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus;
und dieses heisst Hund und jenes heisst Haus;
und hier ist Beginn und das Ende dort.
… sie wissen alles was wird und war …
(Rilke 1927: 103)21

In this thesis we shall repeatedly address questions of epistemology and alterity. Here again, “the other”, “alterity” and “otherness” can have a variety of interrelated meanings. Such terms can variously denote that which cannot be named, defined, represented, formulated, theorised, predicted, known or understood. (Or: that which causes such attempts at knowledge to fail). This again need not be taken in an absolute sense. We can and do perhaps name, define, represent, theorise, interpret it; we can even be said to know and understand it. The point, however, is that

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21 People’s words fill me with dread.
They pronounce everything so clearly;
And this is called house and that is called hound;
And the beginning is here and the end is there. …
They know all that was and will be …
(my translation)
we would not be doing justice to the other if we thought that our names, definitions, representations, theories, understandings or knowledge are fully adequate to it, so that they can simply be applied. The other is that which, if we are not deaf and blind, surprises us by not conforming to our representations and expectations.

Every time I use the word ‘reality’—which is far too often—I blush. This is not because I am an epistemological subjectivist, but because it is such a big thing one pretends to be talking about. The genius of the later Wittgenstein partly lies in his ability to avoid big abstract terms like these. ‘Alterity’ may be seen as an alternative strategy to reach a similar objective as a careful, non-triumphalist use of ‘reality’ was supposed to: that against which you bump that shows you that the world is not the same as your map of it. This bumping can be painful. Reality is the Other of the pleasure principle. “Freud … maintains that neurotics turn away from reality because they find it unbearable.” (Ricoeur 1972: 263) Or, in Frederic Jameson’s words: “Reality is what hurts.”

In an epistemological context, the term “alterity” can be read as a shorthand for everything that indicates that one has not attained the success the empirical theorist longs for: the simple, unambiguous representation of the discovery, plain and simple of the truth, plain and simple, about reality, plain and simple. Alterity is something real of which the truth cannot (yet) be discovered. If alterity matters, it also matters that the truth has not been (or cannot be) discovered, as well as to acknowledge this fact.

To see the relevance of talking about alterity in an epistemological context, one need only recall what it is like to be treated as simply knowable. If somebody thinks they know everything about you because of what is easily or objectively ascertainable about you—your race, sex, sexual preferences, nationality, physique, clothing, the results of a questionnaire that took you ten minutes to complete, or something similar, you feel offended. Being treated as completely predictable is also offensive, even when this happens with some reason. (My wife can predict more than half my situation specific jokes). Something that is completely predictable can hardly appear as numinous other. However, the whole ideal of knowledge of persons could hardly avoid these negative effects, were it ever attained.

Knowing people is what we do to them when they are not there. (Phillips 1994: 82)

Face to face with the other, we have to admit that she is to a large extent unknown, unknowable, and unpredictable. And where we have to respond to the other, it is offensive to pretend otherwise.

Laymen fear that psychologists and psychiatrists “can see through you”. Freud himself, criticising physicians who think that quick and easy diagnoses and therapeutic successes are possible in the case of the neuroses, aptly refers to Hamlet:

I should not be surprised if a patient were injured rather than benefited by being treated in such a fashion. For it is not easy to play upon the instrument of the mind. I am reminded … of the words of a world-famous neurotic …—Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. The King
has ordered two courtiers, Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, to follow him, to question him and drag the secret of his depression out of him. He wards them off. Then some recorders are brought on the stage and Hamlet, taking one of them, begs one of his tormentors to play upon it, telling him that it is as easy as lying. The courtier excuses himself, for he knows no touch of the instrument, and when he cannot be persuaded to try it, Hamlet finally breaks out with these words: ‘Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; … you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet you cannot make it speak. ’Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.’ (Act III, Scene 2.) (1905a—SE VII: 262)

WHY NOT SIMPLY USE THE FAMILIAR TERM “PREJUDICE”, RATHER THAN “OTHERING”?

“Othering” is a term related to the term “prejudice”. Prejudice is usually taken to be a belief linked to devaluing and harming the other—a belief typically taken to have been reached in a sloppy or precipitous way.

Unfortunately, the word “prejudice” contains in its etymology and its articulation (pre-judice) the suggestion that wrong ideas about others are judgements—judicew— that are made before—pre—(sufficient) data has been collected. Prejudice is normally taken to contrast with knowledge as “justified true belief”. If sufficient methodological precautions are taken, we can attain beliefs that have the status of knowledge, and not of prejudice. A precipitous judgement would be a prejudice, but if judgement is suspended for long enough, it isn’t. Freud’s quote from Nestroy seems to reflect this view: “It will all become clear in the course of future developments.” (1937d—SE XXIII: 265)

Freud can be said to be “opposed to prejudice” because he emphasises how important it is that the analyst suspend judgment, i.e. not “jump to conclusions”. However, most judgements about people are premature, as becomes apparent when we imagine how shaky any of our judgements would appear if it turned out that the verdict in a murder trial depends on it.

In contrast to the way the discourse of alterity conceives of othering, the notion of prejudice does not in itself contain the idea that self and other are always defined in terms of one another, and that the facts leave considerable leeway for manoeuvring in this regard, if they are not simply ignored. (See n. 464).

A quote from Freud gives further food for thought:

An intimate friend and a hated enemy have always been indispensable to my mental life; I have always been able to create them anew, and not infrequently my childish ideal has been so closely approached that friend and enemy have coincided in the same person; but not simultaneously, of course, as was the case in my early childhood. (Jones 1977: 37. Cf. also 1901a—SE V: 483 [GW 2/3 487])
This reminds us that we can also have ‘prejudices’ regarding those we know intimately, and that ‘prejudice’—othering—can come after a previously ‘unprejudiced’ condition. (Moreover, prejudices can become stronger with time). Similarly, in Bosnia the genocidally warring “ethnic groups” had previously lived together as neighbours and friends, and “interethnic” marriages were even extremely common. For all these reasons the term ‘prejudice’ is unfortunate.

Freud’s quote shows that ‘prejudices’ can be motivated: we need the other. This also comes out beautifully in the following fragment from Cavafy’s (1975: 33) poem “Waiting for the barbarians”:

> Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly, everyone going home lost in thought?  
> Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven’t come.  
> And some of our men just in from the border say  
> there are no barbarians any longer.  
> Now what’s going to happen to us without barbarians?  
> Those people were a kind of solution.

The term ‘prejudice’ does not contain any hint of the fact that the othered other is “a kind of solution”. About this “solution”, Freud later will have the following to say in *Civilization and its discontents*:

> The advantage which a comparatively small cultural group offers of allowing this instinct [the inclination to aggression] an outlet in the form of hostility against intruders is not to be despised. It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. (1930a—SE XXI: 114)

Another tack, and one that is more often encountered in the discourse of alterity22, is to think that the alternative to ‘prejudice’ is not knowledge, but the admission of one’s (necessary) (degree of) ignorance. (Directly or indirectly, the pedigree of this approach goes back to Socrates, while the “prejudice” approach goes back to Plato and Aristotle, and via them perhaps also to Socrates).

Various grounds could be adduced for such a necessary ignorance: that the other remains unpredictable in principle (e.g. because of her intelligence or freedom), that the other is too

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22 In this thesis, I will often refer rather vaguely to ‘the discourse of alterity’. This phrase invokes that multifarious and ill-defined body of work that treats notions of the other, otherness, alterity, difference and so on, as crucial conceptual tools when it comes to asking structural and ethical questions about the ways (usually mediated by culture) in which individuals and groups relate to each other. Central figures in this discourse include Levinas, Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Foucault, Said, Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva and de Certeau. (Wittgenstein loved the words: “I will teach you differences”. I take his work as being in many ways fundamentally in accord with this discourse, though it is usually not seen as part of it).
complex\textsuperscript{23}, that the self is too limited (limited data, a limited intelligence, a limited time available for processing), the makeshift nature of our language or “concepts”, and so on.

Some of these grounds refer to the subject, and some to the object. What is formulated in terms of the subject’s necessary limitations can also be formulated in terms of features of the object. One such approach is to ascribe our necessary ignorance to the object’s alterity, which would then be the reason why it will forever remain other than our conception of it. What is at stake in shifting from the pole of the subject to the pole of the object? The following: sticking to the pole of the subject is linked to the epistemological project: overcoming prejudice so as to attain true knowledge; a modification of the subject is thus sufficient to overcome ignorance. But if the problem lies on the side of the object (as for example in the discourse of alterity, or in chaos theory—where it is the nature of the object itself that makes it unpredictable) then no modification of the subject of knowledge will change this.

**THE VALIDITY OF FREUD’S THOUGHT**

The question how valid Freud’s thought is, is constantly present in this thesis, sometimes in the foreground, but more often only in the background. Freud’s critics often treat him as somebody who has simply advanced a few flawed empirical hypotheses. All that is then needed to demolish him once and for all is to show up these flaws, drawing either on empirical work in psychology, or on the philosophy of science. For me Freud’s position in culture is a very different one. Psychoanalysis has a richness and power, and an imaginative appeal that rather make it comparable to the other rich secular or religious traditions on which people draw in trying to make sense of life, and live it in an enlightened way: traditions such as Taoism, Confucianism, liberalism and Marxism, or Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. I would not want any of these traditions destroyed; one can utterly reject Buddhist cosmology or the Biblical approach to homosexuality, without thereby rejecting the related traditions tout court. Conversely, as with Freud, these traditions themselves are too textual and too multiple to allow of orthodoxy: it is not clear what being an orthodox Christian (or Lutheran, or Catholic) would be—especially not what it would mean at present; it is equally unclear what orthodoxy would mean for a latter day Buddhist, Marxist, or Freudian. The orthodoxies defined by an nth International, an International Psychoanalytic Association or a Vatican council are obviously not forced upon us by the (sacred) texts themselves, which contradict themselves and leave many questions unanswered. Where it is clear what being orthodox means, even the orthodox often refuse to subscribe to it.

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\textsuperscript{23} Given a sufficient degree of complexity, an object becomes its own simplest adequate model, i.e. nothing will allow us to model (e.g. predict accurately) the object’s behaviour before it occurs. (Cilliers 1990)
OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS THESIS

Section I is devoted to Freud’s general model of the psychical apparatus in the “Project” (Part 1) and the *Traumdeutung* (Part 2). There we find a statement of, and rationale for, many of the fundamental metapsychological doctrines that were to determine or influence much of Freud’s later theory and hermeneutics. It is generally accepted that the “Project” (1950c) is a seminal document in the development of Freud’s thought. Following Cilliers (1990), we conclude that it is also a remarkably sophisticated work. Its conception of the mind-brain, which rejects the notion that what happens in the brain can be clearly localised in time and space, anticipates the notion of a distributed system embodied in recent developments in computing (“distributed processing” or “neural networks”), and in Derrida’s conception of systems characterised by *différance*. Although such systems are spatio-temporal, processes occurring in them cannot be pinpointed in time and space. Every part of such a system is constituted by its relation to the rest of it. Alterity is distributed throughout its variably interconnected elements.

*Différance* can’t be enclosed either within the same, or the idea of the radically other, about which nothing can be said. It’s an enigmatic relation of the same to the other.

(Derrida in Mortley 1991: 99)

This contrasts with simplistic notions of how sameness and difference are related to each other in the mind and the rest of reality: minds, things, ideas or other parts of the mind as self-contained entities, connected to other entities only *ex post facto*, and by only a limited number of relations, belonging to but a limited number of types. Specifically it contrasts with that form of dualistic thinking that reduces networks of differences to the single relation of polar opposition.

At a more concrete level, the “Project” also gives a model of basic intra- and interpsychic processes that are important for later sections of this thesis: pleasure, unpleasure, pain, satisfaction, wishing, repression, consciousness, the role of language, and so on.

The model of the psychical apparatus advanced in the *Traumdeutung* (1900a) is in many ways more linear than that in the “Project”. The two models can therefore form the basis of different readings of the rest of Freud, depending on whether one takes a network model of how signs are related to each other as central, or, ignoring this, simply makes the opposition conscious/unconscious central. To me the metaphor of censorship for the relation of the preconscious to the unconscious constitutes the major metapsychological innovation of the *Traumdeutung*. It is to be noted that there is a marked tension between this metaphor and others, for instance, that of the watchman. A generalisation of this metaphor in the end also erodes the sharpness of the distinction between the unconscious and the preconscious—to a greater extent than Freud himself probably intended. Instead of a domain of alterity (the system unconscious), opposed externally to a domain from which alterity is essentially absent (the system conscious/preconscious), alterity makes itself felt in all of mental life.
In section II Freud’s system of hermeneutics in the *Traumdeutung* is discussed. One strand in Freud’s account, adhering to his basic terminology and basic metaphors, seems to presuppose a rather simple relation between the genesis of dreams (the dream work) and their interpretation (the work of analysis): the latter *undoes* the former. According to such an account, the dream would completely lose its alterity during the work of analysis, which would then cease being an *interpretative* activity, as complete success in gaining a *knowledge* of the dream’s meaning would be possible.

However, another strand, which is already present, if inconspicuously, in the *Traumdeutung*, but is developed more clearly in the later writings on technique, suggests a very different picture. The product of the work of analysis will always diverge fundamentally from the raw material of the dream work. The work of analysis is endless; we never reach a point at which we know what the original raw material of the dream work was. According to this picture, our attempts at knowing the meaning of dreams will always fail: what we end up with, will never quite qualify for the epithet “knowledge”. Neither the dream nor the analysand will ever surrender their alterity to the gaze of the analyst.

In Section III I discuss the theory of sexuality in Freud’s *Three Essays* (1905d). Freud establishes his enlarged notion of sexuality by contrasting it with his description of “popular opinion”. However, he never defines sexuality, either explicitly or implicitly. Because of this, it is not a circumscribed phenomenon, allowing us to distinguish the sexual from the non-sexual. This does not change when Freud tries, unsuccessfully, to transform the cluster of open-ended analogies, transformations and substitutions constituting his enlarged notion of sexuality into a theory of *libido*.

The undermining of conceptual oppositions is next seen as a central feature and strength of the *Three Essays*. Examples are male and female, pleasure and unpleasure, biology and culture, and, crucially, normality and abnormality.

Freud relativises the notion of sexual normality, but does not abandon it; in his hands it still owes far too much to a view of reproduction as the function of sexuality. Though fairly catholic, it is by no means convincing as an attempt to establish a single norm for sexual behaviour.

The belief in the essentially auto-erotic character of infantile sexuality is generally taken to distinguish orthodox followers of Sigmund Freud from the object-relations school of psychoanalysis. I argue, however, that the grounds adduced by Freud for claiming that infantile sexuality is essentially auto-erotic are decidedly feeble, and moreover, that Freud himself makes countless explicit statements regarding the importance of the object during almost all phases of infantile sexual development. (The difference between adult and infantile sexuality thus becomes far smaller than Freud would have us believe).

Nevertheless, Freud’s picture of the nature of the subject’s relation to the sexual object gives little consolation to champions of alterity. For that this relation is too permeated by repetition, cruelty
and debasement. What is more, for Freud love and hate are so intertwined as at times to be indistinguishable.

Freud’s mixture of dogmatic, self-reflective, sceptical and relativising statements in the *Three Essays* makes it hard to decide where to put him on a scale from dogmatism—being closed to alterity—to total openness to alterity. Theorists seem to find it hard to admit the limited scope of their knowledge, and though Freud does make many such admissions, they apparently are not made easily. Freud seems to want unambiguous success in his sexual investigations, so as not to fall prey to the feelings of helplessness that, according to him, engulf the child when it fails to solve the riddle of sex.

To conclude Section III, Leo Bersani’s book *The Freudian body* is discussed. Bersani implicitly reads Freudian sexuality as a form of radical alterity, as becomes clear when his account of it is compared with Levinas’s notion of the other. Sexuality shatters the subject, and is too protean to be grasped by any conventional theory. Freud’s openness to the nature of sexuality does not show itself in the form of a coherent and stable theory of sexuality, but in the textual distress that occurs when he tries to construct such a theory. To Bersani Freud moreover shows us that the essence of sexuality and the essence of aggression coincide. Our two main objections to Bersani’s position are, firstly, that he too emphatically ascribes (and therefore limits) alterity to the sexual, and, secondly, that he introduces an extreme polarisation between what is radically other and inaccessible, on the one hand, and what is completely ordinary and accessible, on the other.

In the Conclusion the main conclusions reached regarding the texts investigated are recapitulated, and their implications for our themes—othering, the other and alterity—spelt out.
SECTION I: FREUD’S MODEL OF THE PSYCHICAL APPARATUS IN THE “PROJECT” AND CH. VII OF THE TRAUMDEUTUNG

PART 1: THE PSYCHICAL APPARATUS IN THE “PROJECT” (1895)

In this, the first part of Section I, I give an exposition and discussion of Freud’s 1895 “Project for a scientific psychology” (1950c). In the second part of this section I do the same for the metapsychological chapter (Chapter VII) of the Traumdeutung (1900a). In each of these two early texts Freud develops a comprehensive model of what he calls “the psychical (or: mental) apparatus” [psychischer (or: seelischer) Apparat].

The two models are clearly closely related; Wollheim (1985: 63) even thinks that we can plausibly read the second text as “an informal presentation of the ideas” in the first one. Nevertheless, I strongly prefer the model in the “Project” to that in the Traumdeutung. I have therefore chosen not to circumvent the formidable difficulties of the “Project” in favour of limiting myself to a discussion of the second text. I warn the reader that my discussion of the “Project” will at times be highly technical.

INTRODUCTION: THE STATUS OF THE “PROJECT”, AND ITS PLACE IN FREUD’S OEUVRE

No other document in the history of psychoanalysis has provoked such a large body of discussion with such a minimum of agreement as has Freud’s Project. (Sulloway 1992: 118)

The controversies Sulloway refers to include the following: 1) How great is the continuity between the model we find in the “Project” and the dominant paradigms of neurology and psychology in XIXth Century Vienna? 2) Is the “Project” a neurological document, or a psychological one? 3) Did Freud abandon the model he developed in the “Project” immediately after completing it, or did Freud’s later metapsychology actually conform to the main outlines laid down in this document? (One’s answer to these questions will depend on whether one believes that Freud’s metapsychology is basic to all of psychoanalysis, including its clinical/hermeneutic side, or, on the contrary, that the latter stands on its own, so that it can only benefit from being rid of the ‘alien’ metapsychological constructs with which it has historically been ‘burdened’ by Freud and most subsequent psychoanalysts).

The “Project” was never published during Freud’s lifetime. It is incomplete, difficult and condensed; nevertheless it is by no means confused or disjointed. It was among the letters and manuscripts Freud sent to Wilhelm Fliess (1858-1928) as his side of their correspondence in the years of their friendship (1887-1904). In the mid-1930s Fliess’s widow sold Freud’s side of the

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24 A more detailed exposition of my reasons for finding a discussion of the “Project” indispensable is given at the end of Part 1 of this section. (See p. 87, below).
correspondence to the Berlin writer and art dealer Stahl, from whom Marie Bonaparte acquired them in 1937. (Masson 1986) The “Project” was first published in 1950 under the title “Entwurf einer Psychologie” together with a number of other drafts and letters from Freud to Fliess. Freud had come to psychology from a background in neurology, in which he had already distinguished himself by the quantity and quality of his work. Solms and Saling (1990: xvii) note that he published more than a hundred works in neuroscience between 1877 and 1900, and then (20-21) give an overview of how widely the importance of his contribution to neuroscience, and especially: the study of aphasia, has been recognised and lauded. His 1888 dictionary entries ‘Gehirn’ and ‘Aphasie’ (translated and discussed in Solms and Saling 1990) had already shown that he was not only in complete command of the then existing literature on the brain and aphasia, but also highly critical of the accepted wisdom, and innovative in recognising and developing productive new approaches in these fields. This deserves special emphasis, as one frequently encounters the view that Freud came to psychology armed with (or rather: crippled by) the presuppositions of XIXth Century Viennese neuroscience, as exemplified by the work of Theodor Meynert (1833-92).

Amacher (1965; 1974) and Holt (1965) seem to be the main sources of the belief that in the “Project,” Freud basically adopted Meynert’s neuroscientific views, and that these views were incorporated into the metapsychology on which Freud’s whole subsequent development of psychoanalysis was premised. Psychoanalysis would then be essentially—and disastrously—contaminated with Meynertian views on the brain, which are completely incompatible with the findings of twentieth century neuroscience. (Solms and Saling 1990: 105ff). These claims have been embraced by any number of writers—notably by those from the ‘debunking Freud’ school, e.g. Webster (1995) and Isbister. (1985)

In the editorial material accompanying their translation of “Gehirn” and “Aphasie” (1888b), Solms and Saling (1990) have argued that these claims are wrong in substance. Even a cursory perusal of these works tends to confirm their claim that Freud had in 1888—seven years before the “Project”—already distanced himself radically from the Meynertian scheme in neuroscience. In “Gehirn”, after giving a summary of the Meynertian view of the brain, Freud

25 Freud had apparently destroyed Fliess’s side of the correspondence, some time after the definitive break between them in 1906.
26 First English edition: The origins of psycho-analysis. (Freud 1954). Freud had himself referred to it by various names, including ”Psychology for Neurologists”. (Freud 1954: 118)
27 If we accept this, any argument that psychoanalysis is a pseudo-science (e.g. Popper (1963: 33-65)) will then at the very least have to show that Freud the psychoanalyst differed fundamentally from Freud the neurologist.
28 A satisfactory scholarly investigation and attempted resolution of these controversies would require a book of its own, so that my conclusions on this score remain tentative.
(in Solms and Saling 1990: 57, 98) states explicitly: “In essential parts this conception of the construction of the brain has been shattered.” This explicit statement is borne out by the further content of “Gehirn”.30

Meynert had simplistic, cortico-centric views about the way the body was mapped onto the brain. (The body-image was taken to be projected onto the cortex in the same way the visual image is projected onto the retina). Against this, Freud “concluded that the relationship between the cortex and sub-cortex and between brain and periphery is far more complex than Meynert believed. In this respect Freud’s view had much in common with Jackson’s.” (Solms and Saling 1990: 99)

John Hughlings Jackson (1835-1911) was a British neurologist whose views are much closer to late twentieth century neuroscience than those of Freud’s Viennese teachers.

Meynert’s work assumed a direct relation between brain anatomy, brain function and mental function, whereas for Freud

psychology could not be reduced to anatomy (or physiology). Thus ideas could not be localised in nerve cells, discrete areas of nervous tissue could not be assigned complex psychological functions, and nerve tracts could not be differentiated in terms of the psychological processes they were presumed to subserv[e]. (Solms and Saling 1990: 142)

As opposed to Meynert, Freud did not think that there was any 1:1 correspondence between brain function and mental function, even though he did believe that they were intimately connected. (Ostow 1990: ix-x). In all these respects he was again close to Jackson.31

Solms and Saling admit that the “Project” still contains a residue of ideas that follow Meynert’s conception—notably, the notion that the energy the brain needs for its functioning is imparted to it from outside. However, this idea is revised in the letter and draft Freud sent Fliess on January

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29 To be sure, in this passage Freud does not mention Meynert by name, but there can be little doubt as to whose views are being referred to.

30 ‘Gehirn’ is in itself a fascinating text, quite apart from these controversies. The picture it gives us is one of extreme complexity: a brain involved in a vast number of ways and on countless levels with an ‘organism’ that itself has countless levels of functioning, e.g.: reflexes; sensations; kinaesthesia; voluntary and involuntary movement; breathing; a cardio-vascular system; temperature control mechanisms; language (itself further distinguished into speech and writing, both of which involve the very different aspects of perception, understanding and production). Each of these functions requires complex processes of co-ordination and integration, as does the complex, hierarchical whole formed by their combination. The complexity of each of these functions is made manifest in the numerous ways in which each of them can go wrong. (Freud’s use of normal and pathological phenomena to illuminate each other and to construct an overarching neurological model here prefigures his later procedure in constructing overarching psychological models).

31 It is not clear whether Freud was already influenced by Jackson in the early stages of his career, or whether he had arrived at very similar neurological views independently, before he encountered Jackson’s work.
1st, 1896—i.e. less than three months after the third (and last surviving) section of the “Project”. Solms and Saling (1990: 108-109) remark:

This theory is purged of all traces of Meynert’s sensory-motor, hydraulic reflex model. Energies from the external world have absolutely no quantitative effect upon the nervous system; all quantitative excitations are endogenous. … There can be no doubt that at the time that Freud was developing his fundamental psychoanalytic concepts, he had a model almost directly antithetical to the passive, hydraulic-reflex model in mind. … There seems to be little justification for the belief that any aspect of the metapsychology was founded upon the orthodox neurological assumptions of his teachers.

The upshot of all these considerations is that Freud’s neuroscientific views are still quite respectable, in the light of current neuroscience. “Freud’s aphasiology probably has more in common with modern neurodynamic formulations (Luria 1970) than it had with the sanctioned localisationist ‘mythology’ of its time.” (Solms and Saling 1990: 136) Like Freud, Luria rejects the localisationist model of cortical function, and presupposes that aphasia must be understood psychologically before we can hope to understand the nervous processes underlying it.

Pribram & Gill (1976) have a similarly positive judgment regarding Freud’s neuropsychological model. In the light of recent developments in cybernetics and neuropsychology, Freud’s theory of the psychical apparatus in the “Project” seems amazingly prescient in many ways. For a number of central psychological functions, Pribram and Gill, writing in the mid-70s, take it to be at least as sophisticated as any of the contemporary models available then. They are convinced that neuropsychologists and cognitive theorists can read the “Project” with the same expectation of enlightenment as they would the work of any of their leading contemporaries, and even envisage that—via their presentation—the “Project” can function as “a ‘Preface to Contemporary Cognitive Theory and Neuropsychology’.” (Pribram and Gill 1976: 17)

Below, I shall also discuss the remarkable parallels between Freud’s “Project” and the emergent transdisciplinary field of distributed processing, or “neural networks”, as pointed out by Cilliers (1990) Cilliers’s article has some bearing on our next problem: is the “Project” a neurological or a psychological text?

There is a remarkable twist in Solms and Saling’s—otherwise largely convincing—argument: after having argued at length that Freud’s neurology was already in 1888 quite advanced—even according to the standards of late XXth Century neuroscience—they then argue that the 1895 “Project” is not really a neurological document, but a psychological one expressed in quasi-neurological terms.32 If so, why worry about the correctness of Freud’s neurology, taken literally,

32 A position previously defended by Kanzer and Mancia (Kanzer 1973; Mancia 1983), and also found in Ricoeur (1972):
rather than as a metaphoric language for formulating psychological insights? Solms and Saling refer to a fairly limited number of points on which the “Project” differs from “Gehirn”, as argument why “the conceptual continuity between the “Project” and The Interpretation of Dreams [does not represent] a neurophysiological influence upon psychoanalysis”. They believe, instead (1990: 112), “that the former is a remarkably early statement of the psychological theories first published in chapter 7 of the latter.” They see the neurological terminology of the “Project” as simply provisional, citing the following passage from the Traumdeutung in support of their view: “Since at our first approach to something unknown all that we need is the assistance of provisional ideas, I shall give preference in the first instance to hypotheses of the crudest and most concrete description.” (1900; SE V: 536)

If we were to believe Solms and Salings’s argument, Pribram would have to be sorely deluded in presuming to find important contributions to current neuroscience in a book in which the language of neurology only serves as a vehicle for “the crudest and most concrete description” of psychological phenomena. This I find unconvincing. Solms & Saling, and Kanzer before them, seem to assume, mistakenly, that a theory in which psychological arguments are used, cannot belong primarily (or, if need be: equally) to neurology. They seem to assume (at this point of their argument, at any rate) that one either does psychology, or one does neurology, but never the twain shall meet. However, they do meet—in neuropsychology. Freud’s—neuropsychological—approach consists exactly in first giving a detailed psychological description of a phenomenon (aphasia, for instance), and only then trying to design a neurological model for it. Specifically, a

The “Project” stands as the greatest effort Freud ever made to force a mass of psychical facts within the framework of a quantitative theory, and as the demonstration by the way of the absurd that the content exceeds the frame … Nothing is more dated than the explanatory plan of the ‘Project,’ and nothing more inexhaustible than its program of description. As one enters more deeply into the “Project”, one has the impression that the quantitative framework and the neuronic support recede into the background, until they are no more than a given and convenient language of reference. (73) E.g.: It is clear that ‘the cathexis of y-neurones’ is simply a translation of psychology into a conventional technical language. (81) The tenor of the text is psychological, not neurological. (82)

I for one would not take the model in the “Project” as crude. The model in the Traumdeutung is far cruder as far as the main outlines of the apparatus are concerned. (Even if perhaps not for the specific functions discussed in more depth).

Against Kanzer, who stresses the psychological nature of Freud’s arguments in the “Project”, Pribram (1976: 14-15) had already pointed out that many of Freud’s other arguments in that work are purely neurological. Freud’s whole approach to neurology, moreover, would not preclude the use of arguments derived from psychological observation for the formulation of neurological theory—quite the contrary. Sulloway (1992: 122) makes more or less the same point. This is also recognised by Solms & Saling themselves elsewhere in their book (1990: 136), and by Ostow (1990: viii) in his “Foreword” to the same: “Freud observed [that] psychological considerations must be taken into
large part of what drove Freud to develop the ideas found in the “Project” was his wish to find neurological (“mechanical”) explanations for various observations and ideas regarding psychology and psychopathology that he had arrived at in the course of his clinical work.

Seeing the “Project” as (at least partly) a neurological document opens the possibility of criticizing Freud—and current psychoanalytic theory—with neuroscientific arguments, whereas seeing it as a purely psychological document can serve the aims of those who would like psychoanalysis to be a wholly autonomous discipline—autonomous because the clinical psychoanalytic context would form both the context of discovery and the context of justification for its theories.35

Sulloway’s judgment on this score seems to me more convincing:

The *Project* is neither a purely neurological document nor a projection of wholly psychological insights onto imagined neuro-anatomical structures; rather, it combines clinical insights and data, Freud’s most fundamental psychophysicalist assumptions, certain undeniably mechanical and neuroanatomical constructs, and a number of organismic, evolutionary, and biological ideas—all into one remarkably well-integrated psychobiological system. [T]he *Project* consisted of a mosaic of ideas, approaches, and highly ambitious scientific goals, some of which Freud continued to uphold and some of which he did not. (Sulloway 1992: 123)

Sulloway should have added, however, that such a mosaic is the norm in neuropsychology. In other words: what from one point of view is a mosaic, from another point of view is a ‘homogeneous’ neuropsychological text.

The problem this account leaves us with, is the following: how can such a mixed discourse be coherent, “remarkably well-integrated”? Did not Freud correctly agree with Hughlings Jackson consideration in [neuro-]anatomical and [neuro-]physiological theorizing”—for example in his work on aphasia.

35 *Can* serve, but need not. The claim that Freud’s metapsychology is based on defunct XIXth Century psychology can be as threatening to the intellectual respectability of psychoanalysis as the parallel claim regarding its basis in defunct neurological conceptions. According to Solms and Saling (1990: 112-113), Andersson (1965) and Amacher (1965) would have us think that Freud’s 1888 articles contain no “references to psychological processes other than those proposed by the associationists”. (Andersson acknowledges that Freud was indebted to Herbart, but regards Herbart’s psychology as essentially associationist. Solms and Saling argue that this is totally wrong). Solms and Saling see associationism as only one of the influences that Freud absorbed and reworked.

We can only conclude that Freud’s earliest psychological theories were influenced by the views of Brentano *and* Herbart *and* the associationists, that they were identical with *none* of them, and that they also included some entirely original ideas. (Solms and Saling 1990: 117)

This to me seems a fair assessment. For a view that attaches great weight to Herbart’s influence on Freud, see McGrath (1986).
that psychological and neurological discourses should not be mixed? Or, to use a fashionable term: are these discourses not incommensurable? This problem will only be addressed later. (p. 68ff.) For now, I will just state my conviction that Freud’s “Project” models both the brain and the mind in connectionist terms, i.e. as distributed systems. The neurology and the psychology that one finds in the “Project” are therefore, by and large, commensurable with each other. Wollheim (1985: 44), speaking of the “complex character” of the “Project”, similarly thinks that it can be seen both as a “neurological account of the brain and its functioning” and as a “theoretical model of the mind and mental processes, both normal and pathological … [T]he two levels on which the Project is conceived fit together.”

I am therefore convinced that there is an essential continuity between the “Project” and Freud’s neurology as it is reflected in the 1888 texts. What about the continuity between the “Project” and what came after it? Did Freud abandon the model developed in the “Project” directly after completing it? Two pieces of evidence have been adduced in favour of a positive answer to this question. Firstly, the fact that Freud never asked the manuscript back from Fliess. Even if it were to be proven that Freud did not have his own copy, it is not clear how decisive this argument would be. Secondly, Freud’s letter of 29 November 1895, in which he says: “I no longer understand the state of mind in which I concocted the psychology … it seems to me to have been a kind of aberration.” (Freud 1954: 134) But, as Sulloway (1992: 123) has pointed out, Freud was still refining his model long after this date, and in May 1896 reporting: “I am getting a higher and higher opinion of the chemical neurone theory”. (Freud 1954: 123) Moreover, when Freud in the Traumdeutung says that the contents of the mind must be localised between the neurones, this sounds as if only now is he taking his model of the cortex as a distributed system to its logical conclusion. (1900a: 611; GW 2/3: 615-616)

According to James Strachey, who was responsible for translating and editing the Standard Edition, “the Project … contains within itself the nucleus of a great part of Freud’s later psychological theories. In fact the Project, or rather its invisible ghost, haunts the whole series of Freud’s theoretical writings to the very end.” (SE I: 290)

To conclude: I do not see any major break, neither between the “Project” and the neurological articles of 1888, nor between the “Project” and the final chapter of the Traumdeutung. Throughout Freud’s career his theory was constantly being transformed; to my mind the shifts occurring between 1888 and 1895, and between 1895 and 1900 do not justify imposing a clear caesura in either of these periods. Whatever the weaknesses of Sulloway’s (1992) general

36 This would surprise me, given the similarity between many later formulations and formulations in the “Project”.
37 The phrase that I have left out at this point contains the following words with which I would disagree: “in spite of being ostensibly a neurological document”. (290)
argument may be, I agree with him that the arguments with which the “Project” has been isolated from both Freud’s later work and his previous neurological work are unconvincing.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE “PROJECT”

In my exposition of the “Project” I concentrate on its first part, the “General Scheme”, which contains, according to Freud, “what could be deduced from the basic hypotheses, more or less a priori, moulded and corrected in accordance with various factual experiences.” (347) I consider it essential to start by giving an exposition of the general model of the mind that Freud had reached at this time, as many of his other pronouncements, both at this time and later, either cannot be understood without reference to it, or get a very different complexion if they are seen against this model as backdrop. We here get perhaps the clearest statement of Freud’s psychological hedonism, the notion that the psychical apparatus is ultimately regulated by the avoidance of unpleasure and the striving for pleasure, which is central to his hermeneutics, his theory of sexuality, and his notion of interpersonal relations, generally. We will see how Freud repeatedly problematises his own psychological hedonism by problematising the very notions of pleasure and unpleasure (as well as the idea that they are always diametrically opposed to each other) on which his model of the psychical apparatus in the “Project” and the Traumdeutung is based.

Freud’s intention with the “Project” was “to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinable states of specifiable material particles”. (1950c: 295) His dream was evidently to describe a “machine which … would run of itself.” (Freud 1954: 129)

The basic building blocks of Freud’s model of the psychical apparatus are “neurones” and “Q”. The neurones are the material elements of the psychical apparatus, while Freud introduces Q (or Q± —for Quantity)—as follows: “What distinguishes activity from rest is to be regarded as Q, subject to the general laws of motion.” (295)

Freud says that “pathological clinical observations” lead him to view “neuronal excitation as quantity in a state of flow.” He then formulates his First Principal Theorem—“the principle of

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38 Or brain—it is not always clear how and to what extent the two should be distinguished.
39 In the weeks after sending Fliess the last of the surviving sections of the “Project”, he at least for a moment thought that he had attained this goal. Writing to Fliess on 20 October 1895, he enthuses: “Everything fell into place, the cogs meshed, and the thing really seemed to be a machine which in a moment would run of itself.” (Freud 1954: 129)
40 Strachey (294) gives this gloss on these terms:

\[
Q = \text{Quantity (in general, or of the order of magnitude in the external world)}
\]

\[
Q\pm = \text{Quantity (of the intercellular order of magnitude)}
\]
neuronal inertia: that neurones tend to divest themselves of $Q$ and adds: “On this basis the structure and development as well as the functions [of neurones] are to be understood.” (296)

A primitive neuronal system accordingly discharges any $Q$ acquired via sensory neurones directly through motor neurones leading to muscular mechanisms. “This discharge represents the primary function of the nervous system.” A secondary function develops when it transpires that some modes of discharges lead to a “cessation of the stimulus: flight from the stimulus”, so that they are retained and preferred. (296) Now follows a crucial paragraph, in which a number of important notions are introduced—the existence of endogenous stimuli; the role of “the exigencies of life” (to which Freud keeps on referring in later writings, often as Ananke), the constancy principle, and the distinction between the primary and the secondary function:

The principle of inertia is, however, broken through from the first owing to another circumstance. With an [increasing] complexity of the interior [of the organism], the nervous system receives stimuli from the somatic element itself—endogenous stimuli—which have equally to be discharged. These have their origin in the cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration, sexuality. From these the organism cannot withdraw as it does from external stimuli; it cannot employ their $Q$ for flight from the stimulus. They only cease subject to particular conditions, which must be realized in the external world. (Cf., for instance, the need for nourishment.) In order to accomplish such an action [specific action], an effort is required which is independent of endogenous $Q$ and in general greater, since the individual is being subjected to conditions which may be described as the exigencies of life. [Not des Lebens] In consequence, the nervous system is obliged to abandon its original trend to inertia (that is, to bringing the level [of $Q$] to zero). It must put up with [maintaining] a store of $Q$ sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action. Nevertheless, the manner in which it does this shows that the same trend persists, modified into an endeavour at least to keep the $Q$ as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it—that is, to keep it constant. All the functions [Leistungen] of the nervous system can be comprised either under the aspect of the primary function or of the secondary one imposed by the exigencies of life. (296-297; GW 389-390)

The Second Principle Theorem concerns Freud’s theory of the neurones. The nervous system consists of a network of neurones41, which “have contact with one another through the medium of

41 It is striking that Freud treats all neurones as basically similar; the differences between various classes of neurones—e.g. sensory and motor neurones—are a function of the context in which the neurones find themselves. (Cf. 304. In comparing $\phi$-neurones and $\psi$-neurones, Freud says: “A difference in their essence is replaced by a difference in the environment to which they are destined.”) Ostow (1990: xii) points out that Freud’s model of the psychical apparatus is practically independent of any reference to the macroscopic structure of the brain:

Freud, in the “Project”, ignored almost completely the complex gross structure of the nervous system, the knowledge of which he demonstrates so skilfully in ‘Gehirn’. He differentiates between sensory and motor nerves, between the superficial and deeper layers of the cortex, and among the
a foreign substance, which terminate upon one another as they do upon portions of foreign tissue". (298) A neurone may be filled with a greater or lesser $Q\pm$—in which case it is called *cathected* [besetzt]—or it may be empty. The principle of inertia leads to the hypothesis of a current that flows from the dendrites to the axon of the neurone. The dual structure of the nervous system—that it is geared toward both the reception and discharge of stimuli—is therefore replicated at the level of the single neurone. The postulated secondary function requires the possibility of an accumulation of $Q\pm$. To account for this, Freud assumes resistances that oppose discharge; he presumes that these are located in the contacts between neurones, which therefore function simultaneously as contacts and as barriers: contact-barriers.

Freud surmises that neurones become differentiated by acquiring a differential capacity for conduction, with "the process of conduction itself [creating] a differentiation in the protoplasm and consequently an improved conductive capacity for subsequent conduction." (298-299) This allows him to account for memory:

A main characteristic of nervous tissue is memory: that is, quite generally, a capacity for being permanently altered by single occurrences—which offers such a striking contrast to the behaviour of a material that permits the passage of a wave-movement and thereafter returns to its former condition. (299)

Freud here gives his oft-to-be-repeated formulation of the dual demand that must be met by the psychical apparatus: an ability to retain permanent traces of previous stimuli (memory), linked to an ability to be ever-open to new stimuli (perception). In accordance with the theory of contact-barriers he then postulates two classes of neurones:

permeable neurones (offering no resistance and retaining nothing) which serve for perception [these therefore act as if they have no contact-barriers] and impermeable ones (loaded with resistance, and holding back $Q\pm$), which are the vehicles of memory and so probably of psychical processes in general. [Note the key role assigned here to memory in psychical processes in general.] Henceforward I shall call the former system of neurones $\phi$ and the latter $\psi$. (300)

The passage of excitation leaves the permeable, $\phi$-neurones unchanged, while each passage of excitation modifies the impermeable, $\psi$-ones, which “thus afford a possibility of representing memory. [Möglichkeit, das Gedächtnis darzustellen—also translatable as possibility to

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various sensory reception areas … Otherwise he treats the brain as a homogeneous structure, composed of a collection of small objects, which he calls neurones, all of which have the same properties. He does not allow for variation among them in these properties ….

Current neuroscience does make a fundamental distinction between inhibitory and excitatory neurones.

42 The primary meaning of Freud’s expression “contact-barrier” [Kontaktschranke] was probably “a barrier to contact”, and not: “something that is both a contact and a barrier”. Nevertheless I take the latter reading of the concept as permissible and illuminating.
constitute memory” (299; GW 392) More precisely, what is permanently modified in the \( \psi \)-neurones are their contact-barriers. In learning they become more permeable—their degree of facilitation [Bahnung] increases. (300) Facilitations serve the primary function, because through them the nervous system can avoid being filled up with \( Q \pm \). (301) “Memory is represented by the facilitations existing between the \( \psi \)-neurones.” (300) Facilitation determines which path is to be taken by excitations; if it “were everywhere equal, it would not be possible to see why one pathway should be preferred.” It is therefore more correct to say that “memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the \( \psi \)-neurones. … Facilitation depends on the \( Q \pm \) which passes through the neurone … and on the number of repetitions of the process.” (300) Later on, discussing pain, Freud will add: “we may guess that facilitation depends entirely on the \( Q \pm \) reached; so that the facilitating effect of 3\( Q \pm \) [i.e. a single passage of 3 units of \( Q \pm \)] may be far superior to that of 3 X \( Q \pm \) [i.e. three passages of one unit of \( Q \pm \)].” (321) Or, in colloquial terms: once bitten, twice shy. What has been learnt in a painful experience will be very hard to unlearn later.

“The system \( \psi \) is out of contact with the external world; it only receives \( Q \) on the one hand from the \( \phi \) neurones themselves, and on the other from the cellular elements in the interior of the body”. (304) The \( \phi \) neurones may possibly be seen as \( \psi \) neurones that, in Wollheim’s phrase, have been “battered into total penetrability” (1985: 49) by the high order of \( Q \)s coming from outside. Freud points out that sensory nerves do not in fact terminate at the periphery freely [i.e. without coverings] but in cellular structures which receive the exogenous stimulus in their stead. These ‘nerve-ending apparatuses’ … might well have it as their purpose not to allow exogenous \( Q \)s to make an undiminished effect upon \( \phi \) but to damp them down. (306)

The trend that Freud describes in all this is the following:

an ever-increasing keeping off of \( Q \pm \) from the neurones. Thus the structure of the nervous system would serve the purpose of keeping off \( Q \pm \) from the neurones and its function would serve the purpose of discharging it. [Der Aufbau also des Nervensystems dürfte der Abhaltung, die Funktion der Abfuhr der \( Q \pm \) von den Neuronen dienen.]44 (306; GW 399)

43 In Beyond the pleasure principle (1920g) the “stimulus shield” fulfills a similar function as the nerve-ending apparatus does here.

44 Whereas their form already indicates that the following crucial terms form a series in Freud’s German original, this is not the case in the English translation: Abhaltung [keeping off], Abfuhr [discharge], and Abwehr[defence].
We have seen that the $\psi$ system is protected from large irruptions of $Q$ by the nerve-ending screens and by the fact that it is connected to the external world only indirectly. This protection fails in the case of pain, which is "characterized as an irruption of excessively large $Q$s [Hereinbrechen übergrosser $Q$] into $\phi$ and $\psi$, that is, of $Q$s which are of a still higher order than the $\phi$ stimuli." (307; GW 400) The mechanism that leads to the avoidance of pain and the mechanism that counters the raising of $Q$±tension then coincide. “Pain sets the $\phi$ as well as the $\psi$ system in motion, there is no obstacle to its conduction, it is the most imperative of all processes. Thus the $\psi$ neurones seem permeable to it; it therefore consists of $Q$s of a comparatively high order.” (307; Freud postulates that the permeability of a contact-barrier depends on the magnitude of the $Q$ involved; what is impermeable to a smaller $Q$ may be permeable to a larger one).

On our theory that $Q$ produces facilitations, pain no doubt leaves permanent facilitations behind in $\psi$—as though there had been a stroke of lightning—facilitations which possibly do away with the resistance of the contact-barrier entirely and establish a pathway of conduction there such as there are in $\phi$. (307)

Freud next addresses two interconnected problems which he says any psychological theory must explain: those of quality and consciousness. He notes that his exposition up to this point has been guided by the postulate that psychical processes are mostly unconscious. “We have been treating psychical processes as something that could dispense with this awareness through consciousness, as something that exists independently of such awareness [and has to be] inferred like other natural things.” (308) He therefore does not demand that each of his claims be confirmed by the evidence of consciousness. Specifically, neuronal processes will in the first instance not be conscious.

He has thus far only spoken of quantities. However:

Consciousness gives us what are called qualities—sensations which are different in a great multiplicity of ways and whose difference is distinguished according to its relations with the external world. Within this difference there are series, similarities and so on, but there are in fact no quantities in it. (308)

Previously, the neuronal basis for memory had been described in purely differential terms ("memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the $\psi$-neurones" (300)); now qualities receive a similar treatment ("difference"; "series"). Qualities cannot arise in the external world—where there are only quantities—nor in $\psi$—"reproducing or remembering …. speaking generally, is without quality." (308) He thus assumes $\omega$: “a third set of neurones … which is excited along with perception, but not along with reproduction, and whose states of excitation give rise to the various qualities—are, that is to say, conscious sensations.” (309) Freud argues that $\omega$ neurones must comply with two demands: that the order of quantities with which they deal is low, but that they nevertheless behave like $\phi$ neurones, i.e. as if they are completely permeable. Freud reconciles these apparently contradictory demands by assuming, first, “that the resistance of the contact-barriers applies only to the transference of $Q$", but not to
“another characteristic, of a temporal nature[,] the period of the neuronal motion [, which is] transmitted without inhibition in all directions” and, secondly, that “the \( \omega \) neurones are incapable of receiving \( Q \), but … instead they appropriate the period of the excitation and … this state of theirs of being affected by period while they are filled with the minimum of \( Q \) is the fundamental basis of consciousness.” (310) As Derrida (1978: 204-205) emphasises, time is introduced into the psychical apparatus here, again in a way that makes differentiality central.

Different qualities arise because the sense-organs function like sieves; “so that not every kind of stimulus can operate on the various terminal points.” (313) “This transmission of quality is not durable; it leaves no traces behind and cannot be reproduced.” (310) In this sense \( \omega \) is again like \( \phi \).

Consciousness not only exhibits “the series of sensory qualities [but also] the series of sensations of pleasure and unpleasure”. Freud now links the psychological trend to avoiding unpleasure with his “primary trend towards inertia”; unpleasure would coincide

with a raising of the level of \( Q \) or an increasing quantitative pressure: it would be the \( \omega \) sensation when there is an increase of \( Q \) in \( \psi \). Pleasure would be the sensation of discharge. … In this manner the quantitative processes in \( \psi \) too would reach consciousness, once more as qualities. (312)

The constancy principle— the tendency to keep \( Q \) as low as possible— would therefore coincide with something like an unpleasure principle— the tendency to avoid unpleasure as much as possible. Everything that the human nervous system has acquired in the course of evolution will be subjectively represented as unpleasure:

- Everything that I call a biological acquisition of the nervous system is in my opinion represented by a threat of unpleasure of this kind, the effect of which consists in the fact that those neurones which lead to a release of unpleasure are not cathected. This is primary defence, an understandable consequence of the original trend of the nervous system. Unpleasure remains the only means of education. (370)

Sensory qualities are perceived “in the zone of indifference between pleasure and unpleasure”. (312) At the two extremes the feelings of pleasure and unpleasure displace the perception of sensory qualities.

45 Ricoeur (1972: 77) objects that the equation of an increase in \( Q \) with unpleasure, and a discharge of \( Q \) with pleasure is “a mere postulate”. Freud could certainly have done more to argue for this equation. In his own work, this equation will later be undermined by admitting that there is a phenomenon such as masochism (Freud 1924c), where pleasure and unpleasure become hard to disentangle, and that sexual tension can in fact be experienced as pleasurable. (Freud 1905d)

46 This is very similar to the view that all feedback is negative feedback.

47 Freud had said, earlier on: “every sensory excitation … tends towards pain with an increase of the stimulus.” (307)
In describing the functioning of the apparatus, Freud indicates in various ways that the processes in the brain do not simply reflect processes in the external world: some complex, non-iconic transcription must take place between the point where a quantity in the external world impinges on the sense-organs and its psychic registration.\(^\text{48}\) This partly happens in the transition from external quantity to quantity in \(\phi\), and partly in the transition from \(\phi\) to \(\psi\). To begin with, mental \textit{qualities} do not have any analogue in the external world, where only \textit{quantity} is to be found. Furthermore, the magnitude of a stimulus is not proportional to the corresponding external quantity. So, for instance, only quantities between certain boundary values lead to the registration of stimuli; above and below these boundaries no stimuli are effected. Also:

\begin{quote}
\text{a stronger stimulus follows different [neuronal] pathways from a weaker one}^{49} \ldots \text{the larger quantity in } \phi \text{ will be expressed by the fact that it cathects several neurones in } \psi \text{ instead of a single one. … Thus quantity in } \phi \text{ is expressed by } \textit{complication in } \psi. \text{ By this means the } Q \text{ is held back [abgehalten: kept off] from } \psi, \text{ within certain limits at least. (314-315; GW 407)}
\end{quote}

\textit{“A direct pathway leads from the interior of the body to } \psi \text{ neurones.”} (315; Freud calls the \(\psi\) neurones into which these pathways issue, the \textit{nuclear neurones.} Nerve-endings in the internal periphery of the body are \textit{free}; here we find no equivalent to the “nerve-ending apparatuses” that protect sensory nerves against excessive \(Q\)s coming from outside. (306) This indicates that the general level of \(Q\)\textup{±} here is far lower than for \(Q\) coming from outside. On the other hand, it does have as a consequence that where large irruptions of \(Q\)\textup{±} from the interior of the body take place, there is no screen to damp this down; “\(\psi\) is exposed to \(Q\)s on this side without protection and in this fact lies the \textit{mainspring} [\textit{Triebfeder: also motivating force}] of the psychic mechanism.” (315-316; GW 408)

These pathways from the interior of the body (“\(\psi\) paths of conduction” [\textit{\(\psi\) Leitungen}]) are impermeable to \(Q\)s below a certain threshold. “Above a certain \(Q\), however, they [the endogenous excitations] act as a stimulus continuously, and every increase of \(Q\) is perceived as an increase of the \(\psi\) stimulus.” (316) As long as the aggregate of the accumulated stimuli remains below the

\^{48}\text{ Cf. the very similar tenor in the following quote from Nietzsche (in Kaufmann 1982): “A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor”. Thus the sort of radical absence of isomorphism between representans and representandum which is usually only seen as a feature of conventional relations (Saussure: the arbitrary nature of the sign) already inheres in the perceptual/neuronal apparatus in Freud (and analogously in Nietzsche). Cf. Wittgenstein:}

\begin{quote}
\text{If Freud’s theory on the interpretation of dreams has anything in it, it shows how \textit{complicated} is the way the human mind represents the facts in pictures.}

\text{So complicated, so irregular is the mode of representation that we can \textit{barely} [or \textit{hardly; kaum}] call it representation any longer. (Wittgenstein 1978: 44e—translation slightly modified.}
\end{quote}

\^{49}\text{ Freud later gives an extensive argument for this view (375).}
threshold value, there is no effect in \( \psi \). However, these stimuli undergo a process of \textit{summation}, and once summation has made the \( \psi \) paths of conduction permeable, the nuclear neurones fill up and “no further limit is set to this accumulation. Here \( \psi \) is at the mercy of \( Q \), and it is thus that in the interior of the system there arises the impulsion \( \text{[Antrieb]} \) which sustains all psychological activity. We know this power as the \textit{will}—the derivative of the \textit{instincts} \( \text{[Abkömmling der Triebe]} \).” (317; GW 470)

Freud even at this stage thus clearly sees human motivation—the energy that drives the psychical apparatus—as basically deriving from endogenous stimuli. (As pointed out above [p. 44], barely three months later, Freud modifies his model so that no quantity is imported into the psychical apparatus from external stimuli at all. (Freud 1954: 142)). The nature of these stimuli is indicated only sketchily in the “Project”—Freud mentions hunger, respiration and sex—but we can already discern the beginnings of Freud’s later theory of the drives \( \text{[Triebe]—consistently (mis)translated in the Standard Edition as “instincts”}. \)

“The filling of the nuclear neurones in \( \psi \) will have as its result an effort to discharge, an \textit{urgency} \( \text{[Abfuhrbestreben, einen Drang]} \) which is released along the motor pathway.” (317; GW 410)

The primary path taken here only leads to internal change (e.g. crying) which, however, does not stop the further reception and accumulation of endogenous stimuli. Only by changing the external world (e.g. obtaining food) can the unpleasurable release of \( Q \pm \) from within the body be temporarily checked. (318) This change will not be brought about by arbitrary motor movements, but only by “specific action”. At this point in the “Project” the other—significantly: in a \textit{helping} function—makes her first appearance, followed, one sentence later, by “communication” and “moral motives”. Moral motives ultimately derive from the help the helpless infant receives from outside:

At first, the human organism is incapable of bringing about the specific action. It takes place by \textit{extraneous help}, when the attention of an experienced person is drawn to the child’s state by discharge along the path of internal change. [E.g. by the child’s screaming.] In this way the path of discharge acquires a secondary function of the highest importance, that of \textit{communication} \( \text{[Verständigung: sich verstehen: also: come to mutual understanding]} \), and the initial helplessness of human beings is the primal source \( \text{[Urquelle]} \) of all \textit{moral motives}. (318; GW 410-411)

The processes inside the child’s body (e.g. ingestion and digestion) that are necessary to remove the distressing stimulus, then follow automatically, i.e., “by means of reflex contrivances”. “The total event then constitutes an \textit{experience of satisfaction}, which has the most radical results on \textit{sic} the development of the individual’s functions.” (318) Three events now occur in \( \psi \): 1) the accumulation of \( Q \) which had caused displeasure in \( \omega \) is discharged; 2) the neurones in the pallium (cerebral cortex) that correspond to a perception of the object are cathected; 3) some representation is formed linking the released reflex movements (e.g. those connected to drinking milk) to the specific action (e.g. moving the mouth to the mother’s nipple and securing it there).
All the $\psi$ neurones that are thus simultaneously cathected, become mutually facilitated according to a law of

association by simultaneity, … which is the foundation of all links between the $\psi$ neurones. [T]he quantitative cathexis of a $\psi$ neurone, $\alpha$, passes over to another, $\beta$, if $\alpha$ and $\beta$ have at some time been simultaneously cathected … A $Q^\pm$ in neurone $\alpha$ will go not only in the direction of the barrier which is the best facilitated, but also in the direction of the barrier which is cathected from the other side. (319)

Here we thus have a second principle governing the path taken by $Q^\pm$. “Now, when the state of urgency or wishing reappears, the cathexis will also pass over to the two memories and will activate them.” (319)50 This means that the experience of satisfaction is not solipsistic: it is linked to an external object immediately.

Of the two memories—that of the object and that of the internal movements linked with satisfaction—the former will probably be activated first: doubtless in the form of a hallucination. If the latter memory is then activated, so that the reflex action previously associated with satisfaction takes place, disappointment will inevitably occur. (319) Some mechanism preventing the recurrence of this abortive attempt at hallucinatory wish-fulfilment will therefore have to be developed.51

Freud introduces pain-causing objects directly after help-giving ones. His description of pain parallels his description of its positive counterpart, the experience of satisfaction:

Normally, $\psi$ is exposed to $Q$ from the endogenous paths of conduction, and abnormally, … in cases where excessively large $Q$s break through the screening contrivances in $\phi$—that is, in cases of pain. Pain gives rise in $\psi$ (1) to a large rise in level, which is felt as unpleasure by $\omega$, (2) to an inclination to discharge, which can be modified in certain directions, and (3) to a facilitation between the latter [the inclination to discharge] and a mnemic image of the object which excites the pain. (320)

(Note how close ‘exposure to endogenous stimuli’ and ‘exposure to pain’ are to each other in this quote: in both cases the organism is exposed to an unwelcome increase of $Q$.)

To this can be added the qualitative aspect of pain, which is not exhausted by the unpleasure with which it is typically accompanied. If the memory image of the pain-giving object is recathected—by a new perception, for instance—this gives rise to a state characterised by unpleasure—a rise in level of cathexis—and a tendency to discharge; a state that is analogous to pain without being pain. Freud assumes that the $Q^\pm$ causing the rise in level is released from inside the body thanks

50 This account agrees very closely to the account that Freud gives of the wish in the Traumdeutung. (1900a: 550-572)
51 Is bound to develop, we might say, in an apparatus governed by the pleasure principle and its lieutenant, the reality principle; but these two principles will only be introduced later (Freud 1911b).
to the action of special secretory neurones—“key neurones”—that trigger the production of internal $Q^\pm$ when they are excited.

As a result of the experience of pain the mnemonic image of the hostile object has acquired an excellent facilitation to these key neurones, in virtue of which [facilitation] unpleasure is now released in the affect. [P]ain leaves behind especially abundant facilitations. (321)

The experiences of pain and satisfaction leave behind them two sorts of residues: affects and wishful states, which both involve

- a raising of $Q^\pm$ tension in $\psi$—brought about in the case of an affect by sudden release and in that of a wish by summation. Both states are of the greatest importance for the passage [of quantity] in $\psi$, for they leave behind them motives for it which are of a compulsive kind. The wishful state results in a positive attraction towards the object wished-for, or, more precisely, towards its mnemonic image; the experience of pain leads to a repulsion, a disinclination to keeping the hostile mnemonic image cathected. Here we have primary wishful attraction and primary defence [fending-off]. (322)

Freud explains wishful attraction as follows: the experience of satisfaction has brought about a strong facilitation between the nuclear neurones where the conductive pathways issue, and the neurones in the pallium where the mnemonic image of the object now associated with the experience of satisfaction (of hunger, say) is stored. A summation of endogenous stimuli occurs, until a point is reached at which the nuclear neurones become permeable to the accumulated excitation. Because of the said strong facilitation, quantity flows directly from the nuclear neurones to the neurones harbouring the memory image of the object of satisfaction, so that the $Q^\pm$ tension in the latter is raised. This cathexis, that can and regularly does occur in the absence of the object, is actually larger than the cathexis that occurs when an object is simply perceived.

We have seen that Freud links defence to a previous experience of pain. Freud admits that

- It is harder to explain primary defence [Abwehr: fending-off] or repression [Verdrängung]—the fact that a hostile mnemonic image is regularly abandoned by its

52 The German reinforces the essentially bipolar nature of the forces involved here, according to Freud’s model—attraction vs. repulsion: Aus dem Schmerzerlebnis resultiert eine Abstossung, eine Abneigung, das feindliche Erinnerungsbild besetzt zu halten. Es sind dies die primäre Wunschzüge und die primäre Abwehr. (GW 415)

53 Note that Freud already here becomes tentative in his explanation. It was probably exactly because of the difficulties he encountered in trying to write the never-completed fourth part of the “Project”: “The Psychopathology of Repression” that Freud’s project foundered. Sulloway (1992: 113) argues that one of Freud’s main concerns in the “Project” was “to achieve a comprehensive physiological explanation of how pathological repression differs from its normal counterpart.” Freud’s lack of success on this one crucial point may explain why he never published the “Project”, and in later years apparently never again engaged on such sustained neurological theorising. To me it seems highly
The primary experiences of pain were brought to an end by reflex defence [Abwehr]. The emergence of another object in the place of the hostile one was the signal for the fact that the experience of pain was at an end, and the ψ system … seeks to reproduce the state in ψ which marked the cessation of the pain. [I]t may easily be the increase of $Q^\pm$, invariably occurring with the cathexis of a hostile memory, which forces an increased activity of discharge [Abfuhrätigkeit] and thus a flowing away [Abfluss] from the memory as well. (322; GW 415)

In the case of repression, the psychical apparatus tackles unpleasure simply by modifying its own internal state: the distribution of $Q^\pm$ over its neurones. This is in stark contrast to the way in which it, also taught by unpleasure, seeks satisfaction of needs by specific action that modifies the world.

Wishful attraction and repression however indicate that an organization has been formed in ψ whose presence interferes with passages [of quantity] which on the first occasion occurred in a particular way [i.e. accompanied by satisfaction or pain]. This organization is called the ‘ego’. (323).

The nuclear neurones that keep on receiving endogenous $Q^\pm$ will end up being constantly cathected. It is these neurones that function as bearers of the store of quantity that was postulated with the secondary function. Freud defines the ego as “the totality of the ψ cathexes, at the given time, in which a permanent component is distinguished from a changing one.” (323) The facilitations between ψ neurones obviously are directly related to possible permutations in the extent of the ego.

To be able to discharge its cathexes in experiences of satisfaction, the ego must exert control over the repetition of affects and experiences of pain. The method by which this occurs is inhibition. [Hemmung]. To prevent $Q^\pm$ from passing along a particular path, inhibition changes the balance of facilitations by setting up a side-cathexis. Thus a path is cathected that leads away from the neurones to which $Q^\pm$ would otherwise have flowed. “A side-cathexis thus acts as an inhibition of the course of $Q^\pm$.” Such a side-cathexis means that less $Q^\pm$—or even none at all—reaches its ‘original’ destination. By such means ψ can avoid the further damage that could be caused by an increase and discharge of $Q$. (324) The mechanism of attention enables the ego to foresee “the imminent fresh cathexis of the hostile mnemic image [and thereby to inhibit] the passage [of quantity] from a mnemic image to a release of unpleasure by a copious side-cathexis which can be strengthened according to need.” (324) We can picture the ego as obtaining the store of $Q^\pm$ needed for such side-cathexes from the release of unpleasure triggered by the secretory neurones. “In that case, the stronger the unpleasure, the stronger will be the primary defence.” (324)

likely, though, that Freud retained the basic picture of the psychical apparatus found in the “Project” as a heuristic model, in later years modifying it only gradually, and in part.
Freud now introduces the notion of “reality-testing”, which allows the psychical apparatus to distinguish between perceptions and other mental contents, especially wished for objects and objects of apprehension. Without such reality testing, any strong wish or apprehension could trigger the whole train of reactions which are (only) appropriate in the presence of a wished for object, or an object of apprehension—with biologically damaging results. (Discharge without satisfaction in the former case; excessive release of unpleasure in the latter). In other words, the distinction between perceptions and memories of objects is one that has to be acquired—in its primary mode of functioning, $\psi$ does not yet dispose of it. “$\psi$ is not in a position, to begin with, to make this distinction, since it can only work on the basis of the sequence of analogous states between its neurones. Thus it requires a criterion from elsewhere in order to distinguish between perception and idea.” (325) By what is this criterion supplied? Freud surmises that in the case of an external perception, $\omega$ is excited, this leads to a discharge, and a notification of this discharge then reaches $\psi$ from $\omega$. “The information of the discharge [Abfuhrnachricht] from $\omega$ is thus the indication of quality or reality [Qualitäts- oder Realitätszeichen] for $\psi$.” (325; GW 421) The significance of such a notification as indication of reality has to be learnt. However, any mnemonic image that is cathexed sufficiently strongly will lead to the same discharge from $\omega$ and thus be indistinguishable from a perception. “In this instance the criterion fails.” (325) To avoid such confusion, inhibition by the ego is necessary so that mnemonic images will not be excessively cathexed. The idea that wishes and fears will be confused with reality when they are sufficiently powerful (and that they are at first not even distinguished from reality at all) is highly significant for our topic. If there are powerful wishes and fears regarding the other, this will lead to their being projected onto the other: the other will be seen to objectively—perceptually—possess the features that the subjects wishes for (or fears).

Freud now introduces the distinction between the primary and secondary processes. The undifferentiated pursuit of pleasure under the primary process leads to unpleasure. Attempts to avoid unpleasure and secure pleasure are more likely to succeed under the sway of the secondary process, with its delays linked to reality testing and inhibition by the ego:

Wishful cathexis to the point of hallucination [and] complete generation of unpleasure which involves a complete expenditure of defence are described by us as psychical primary processes; by contrast, those processes which are only made possible by a good cathexis of the ego, and which represent a moderation of the foregoing, are described as psychical secondary processes. It will be seen that the necessary condition of the latter is a correct employment of the indications of reality [Realitätszeichen], which is only possible when there is inhibition by the ego [Ichhemmung]. (326-327; GW 422)

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54 The theme of deferral, delays and detours recurs constantly in the “Project”. Not surprisingly, Derrida (1978: 203) makes much of it: “The irreducibility of the “effect of deferral”—such, no doubt, is Freud’s discovery.”
secondary process is a repetition of the original $\psi$ passage [of quantity], at a lower level, with smaller quantities.\(^{55}\) (334)

This account raises two problems:

1) How can smaller quantities follow the same course as larger ones? Has Freud not specifically stated that pathways which are accessible to larger quantities are often inaccessible to smaller quantities, and that larger quantities generally follow a different course from smaller ones? (375) He solves this problem as follows: “when there is a side-cathexis small $Q\pm$s flow through the facilitations which would ordinarily be traversed only by large ones. The side-cathexis as it were binds a quota of the $Q\pm$ flowing through the neurone.” (334-335) “When the level [of cathexis] is high, small quantities can be displaced more easily than when it is low.” (372) This “bound state, which combines high cathexis with small current, would thus characterize processes of thought mechanically.” (368)

2) Will the process of thought (secondary process) not modify the previous facilitations, and thereby falsify the memory traces? On the other hand: will there be any way to preserve a memory of thought processes, instead of just an outcome in the form of modified facilitations? To solve this problem, “special traces are needed, signs of processes of thought, constituting a thought-memory”. (335). Language supplies the psychical apparatus with such traces.

**Language.** Freud only expands on this in the third section of the “Project”: “Normal $\psi$ Processes”. There he introduces language from the perspective of its role in securing attention. The mechanism of attention “presupposes … indications of quality [Qualitätszeichen].” (364; GW 455) Such indications (i.e. consciousness) are normally not attached to the passage of $Q\pm$ in $\psi$. “Indications of quality come about normally only from perceptions; it is thus a question of obtaining a perception from the passage of $Q\pm$.” (364) If a motor neurone can be cathected during the passage of $Q$, its discharge will supply an indication of quality. Obviously most cathexes during the process of thought are not motor cathexes, therefore they must be brought into a secure facilitation with motor neurones. … This purpose is fulfilled by speech association. This consists in the linking of $\psi$ neurones with neurones which serve sound-presentations [Klangvorstellungen] and themselves have the closest association with motor speech-images [Sprachbildern]. [F]rom the sound-image [Klangbild] the excitation reaches the [motor] word-image [Wortbild] and from it reaches discharge. Thus, if the mnemonic images [Erinnerungsbilder] are of such a kind that a part-current can go from them to the sound-images and motor word-images, then the cathexis of the mnemonic images is accompanied by information of discharge [Abfahrunachrichten], which is an indication of quality and also accordingly an indication of the consciousness of the memory [welche Qualitätszeichen, damit auch Bewusstseinszeichen der Erinnerung] sind]. If now the ego precathects these word-images as it earlier did the

\(^{55}\) Lack of space precludes a treatment of the fascinating theme of economy in the “Project”. Again, this is a theme that Derrida discusses in great depth. (1978: 196-231)
images of \( \omega \) discharge [\( \omega \) Abfuhrbilder], then it will have created for itself the mechanism which directs the \( \psi \) cathexis to the memories emerging during the passage of \( Q \pm \). This is conscious, observing thought. (364-365; GW 455-456)

“The indications of speech-discharge [Sprachabfuhrzeichen] … put thought-processes on a level with perceptual processes, lend them reality and make memory of them possible.”56 (366; GW 456) From a biological [i.e. evolutionary] point of view speech-innervation originally functioned as a safety-valve for the discharge of excess \( Q \pm \) via internal changes, as long as the subject was not yet capable of the specific action needed to change the world. Only in the second place, when it turns out to succeed in enlisting the help of another person, does it get a communicative function. The association of an object with one’s own scream (a sound associated with one’s own motor images) clearly marks that object as a hostile one. The notification of one’s own scream [eigene Schreinachricht] now provides the object with a quality, where otherwise none would have been registered, because of the pain. (366; GW 457) In this way unpleasant memories become “the first class of conscious memories”, capable of becoming the focus of one’s own attention. From here to speech is but a small step, according to Freud: “Not much is now needed in order to invent speech.”57 (367) The subject encounters other objects that keep on producing noises; in learning to imitate the sounds he learns which notification of movement [Bewegungsnachricht; SE 367: “information of movement”] belongs to each; consequently these notifications of movement also become susceptible to consciousness. If perceptions are subsequently associated with sounds, the memories of the perceptions become conscious (like the perceptions were) when indications of quality of speech [Klangabfuhrzeichen: indications of speech movements] are registered. The memories can then be cathected from \( \psi \).

Thus we have found that it is characteristic of the process of cognitive thought that during it attention is from the first directed to the indications of thought-discharge, to the indications of speech. [Wir haben also als charakteristisch für den Vorgang des erkennenden Denkens herausgefunden, dass dabei von vornherein die Aufmerksamkeit den Denkabfuhrzeichen, den Sprachzeichen [speech signs/signs of speech] zugewendet ist.] (367; GW 457; note Freud’s semiotic terminology)

Thanks to speech, associative paths that may otherwise have been traversed only unconsciously can become “conscious and capable of being reproduced.” (372) The indications of quality linked to speech intensify the cathexis of the associative chain and thereby ensure automatic attention.

56 Freud here introduces a distinction to which he will return in many subsequent writings: the distinction between thought-reality and external (or ‘material’) reality: “Indications of discharge through speech are also in a certain sense indications of reality—but of thought-reality not of external reality”. (373; see also 373n)

57 From what follows it becomes evident that Freud has in mind the acquisition of speech by the individual, not the genesis of language in the human race.
This cathexis can oppose the influence of wishful cathexes, which would otherwise undermine the impartiality of the course of association.

Thus thought accompanied by a cathexis of the indications of thought-reality or of the indications of speech is the highest, securest form of thought-process. [Das Denken mit Besetzung der Denkrealitätszeichen—signs of thought-reality—is also die höchste, sicherste Form des erkennenden Denkvorganges.] … Yet the attraction produced by the precathexis of the indications of thought has only a certain degree of force against other influences. Thus, for instance, every other cathexis in the neighbourhood of the passage [of association] (purposive cathexes, affective cathexes) will compete with it and make the passage [of association] unconscious. (374; GW 464)

So, although speech is the chief safeguard against the distortion of cognition by affect, success is by no means guaranteed.

The more intense the release of unpleasure the harder becomes the ego’s task; for it is only up to a certain limit that it is able, by means of its lateral cathexes, to provide a counterweight to the quantities (Q±) concerned, and accordingly it cannot wholly prevent the occurrence of a primary process. (Freud 1954: 415)58

With this picture of the function of language/speech for the individual, Freud is very far removed from a tradition that would see language purely as a means of communication between individuals, each of whom would already be conscious, and rational, in his pre-verbal solitude.59 Language is a precondition for critical thought. Because of speech, it becomes possible to retrace a chain of associations (a thought chain)—that is, to examine one’s own thought-processes critically.

*The ‘higher’ mental functions.* The whole third section of the “Project”: “Normal ψ Processes” is devoted to the description of the ‘higher’ intellectual functions that are only possible on the basis of the secondary process, or, what amounts to the same thing, on the basis of inhibition by the ego. Freud describes various thought processes in this way, under headings such as *attention, judging, conscious memories, practical thought* and *critical thought* (what cognitive psychology today would call ‘meta-cognition’).

*On the one hand,* Freud will stress the continuity of ‘higher’ mental functions with ‘lower’, more primitive ones. Freud emphasises the genealogical link of such ‘higher’ mental processes with more primitive or primary mental processes, the body, and sheer survival; the secondary function is seen as the result of delays and overlays in the primary process. In Freud, this

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58 I quote from the earlier translation here because I find that it more clearly conveys the sense of this passage than the later one.

59 For a critique of the idea that language (speech, writing, etc.) is essentially communication, see Derrida (1988).
characteristically involves a strong awareness of how susceptible these higher functions are to regression and other distorting influences:

It is very difficult for the ego to put itself into the situation of mere ‘investigation’. The ego almost always has purposive or wishful cathexes, whose presence during investigation … influences the passage of association and so produces a false knowledge of perceptions.

(374)

On the other hand, whereas such an emphasis in Nietzsche leads to a debunking of the higher functions—they are nothing but lower functions in disguise—in Freud this is not the case. What is striking is the ease with which Freud acknowledges the possibility of thought processes that are not (significantly) influenced by the primary process, affects, and so on:

Attention to the indications of quality ensures the impartiality of the passage [of association]. (373-374)

In theoretical thought unpleasure plays no part. (386)60

Practical thought lets itself be guided by the biological rule of defence. In theoretical (cognitive and testing) [thought] the rule is no longer observed. (383)

Freud’s account of mental processes again stresses the fundamental role of difference:

Judging is a ψ process … which is evoked by the dissimilarity between the wishful cathexis of a memory and a perceptual cathexis that is similar to it. It can be inferred from this that the coincidence between the two cathexes becomes a biological signal for ending the act of thought and for allowing discharge to begin. Their non-coincidence gives the impetus for the activity of thought, which is terminated once more with their coincidence.

(328)

Only because the world differs from our wishes do we think. Where it agrees with our wishes we simply carry out the actions needed to appropriate the wished for objects. The aim of our thought and actions in the world is, directly or indirectly, the (re-)establishment of an identity between our wishes and our perceptions. My attitude to the other will generally differ radically according to the measure in which the other does or does not conform to my wishes (or perhaps: can or cannot be seduced or forced to do so), however unreasonable these wishes may be, or however justified the other may be in not conforming to them. In discussions of alterity one often encounters the idea that the difference between self and other tends to be a major problem for people. However, Freud’s account here points in another direction, rather: if our main aim in life is the (re-)establishment of an identity between our wishes and reality, then the non-identity between

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60 The avoidance of unpleasure not only acts as a hindrance to practical thought, but also plays a constitutive role in it: practical thought automatically avoids those options that would involve unpleasure. In choosing a route to get somewhere, for instance, we generally don’t even consider a path which leads through fire.
the other and what I wish will be the problem, rather than the non-identity between the other and what I am.

“The aim and end of all thought-processes is … to bring about a state of identity” (332)—“the moment at which the displaced $\Phi$ cathexis finds its way into the wishful cathexis which has meanwhile been firmly maintained.” (Freud 1954: 435)61 “States of craving which have developed into states of wishing and states of expecting … contain the biological justification of all thought” (361), which is always concerned with “proceeding from the perceptual situation that is given in reality to the situation that is wished-for.” (332) Freud again states that this requires inhibition of the $\psi$ processes by the ego. “The eminently practical bearing of all thought-activity would in this way seem to be demonstrated.” (332)

The subject takes a special interest in perceptual objects that resemble itself—other human beings, as

an object like this was simultaneously the [subject’s] first satisfying object and further his first hostile object, as well as his sole helping power. For this reason it is in relation to a fellow human-being that a human-being learns to cognize. [Am Nebenmenschen lernt darum der Mensch erkennen.] (331; GW 426)

The other therefore is of primary importance in the development of the subject’s cognition. His or her interest to the subject is linked to the three elementary guises that Freud notes in this passage: satisfying object, hostile object and sole helping power.62

To the subject, part of the experience of the other will be new (e.g. the appearance of his features); another part however will be understandable by analogy with his experiences of his own body (e.g. the appearance of the movements of his hands), which will then be linked to memories of (apparently: the motor images of) the movement experienced.

Other perceptions of the object too—if, for instance, he screams—will awaken the memory of his [the subject’s] own screaming and at the same time of his own experiences of pain. Thus the complex of the fellow human-being falls apart into two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a thing, while the other can be understood by the activity of memory—that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject’s] own body. (331)

61 For the sake of clarity, I quote here from two widely separated passages in the “Project” (332 and 378), and use for the second passage Strachey’s earlier translation. It is to be noted that Freud is not consistent regarding the question whether identity is the “aim and end of all thought-processes” (as in the first passage quoted), or just the “aim of practical thought” (the words preceding the second passage quoted). [my italics]

62 This passage will no doubt please all those who, with Habermas, see an essential relation of Erkenntnis to Interesse.
In the passage just quoted, Freud still thematises the relation between the subject and the other along highly conventional—I would tend to say: essentially pre-psychoanalytic—lines. The existence of other minds is concluded on analogical grounds, from a knowledge of the correlation between one’s own bodily behaviour (here: screaming) and one’s own private mental content (pain). ‘I scream when I experience pain; he is screaming, therefore he is also experiencing pain.’ Only a shaky inductive or analogical argument separates the subject from the purely solipsistic predicament. This is in striking contrast to the emphasis on the priority of the other subject in Wittgenstein’s (1968) Philosophical Investigations and Lacan’s (1980) work, that both seem to me more in the spirit of Freud’s discoveries, on this point, than Freud himself in this passage. Is it not more convincing to think that the subject is constituted as a human being inasmuch as he is treated as such by others, rather than that he discovers, first, his own human features and, only subsequently, the fact that others resemble him?

In the phenomena of imitation and sympathy we see two primitive judging mechanisms at work. Initially, each is simply an associative process, and as such not a cognitive process yet: an identification by the organism between two types of cathexes: those from φ and those from within:

While one is perceiving the perception, one copies the movement oneself—that is, one innervates so strongly the motor image of one’s own which is aroused towards coinciding [with the perception], that the movement is carried out. Hence one can speak of a perception having an imitation-value. Or the perception may arouse the mnemonic image of a sensation of pain of one’s own, so that one feels the corresponding unpleasure and repeats the appropriate defensive movement. Here we have the sympathy-value of a perception.

In these two cases we must no doubt see the primary process in respect of judging, and we may assume that all secondary judging has come about through a mitigation of these purely associative processes. Thus judging, which is later a means for the cognition of an object … is originally an associative process […] an identification of information or cathexes from φ and from within. [eine Identifizierung von φ und Binnenwahrnehmungen oder Besetzungen.] … What we call things are residues which evade being judged. (333-334)

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63 If such a process of analogical reasoning were in fact to occur, it would be extremely weak, logically speaking. It would be equivalent to an induction on the basis of a single example: myself. Using Wittgensteinian and Derridean arguments, one can question the idea that it would ever be possible to first attain knowledge of one example, and then apply this knowledge to other examples. The—putative—“first x” cannot yet be “an x”. This in addition to all the reasons why language and knowledge cannot find their genesis in the first person situation. One can only learn to speak if one has first been spoken to.

64 As also occurs in Descartes’ (1984) Meditations, Husserl’s (1970a; 1970b) Cartesian Meditations and Paris Lectures, and various Anglo-Saxon philosophers’ account of “other minds” (Rollins 1967).
Imitation and sympathy are not yet cognitive processes; they function by means of identification. Cognition only becomes possible when it becomes clear that there are “residues which evade being judged”, that is, that the object partly cannot be grasped by means of identifications.

**DISCUSSION**

I have given a fairly detailed exposition of the “Project” because it is such a seminal document in the development of Freud’s thought. I now want to say more about the way the general relation between the subject and others is pictured in the “Project”. This involves questions such as: How does the (mis)cognition of the other by the self work, generally? How do self and other come to be differentiated in the first place?

Our topic must also be related to Freud’s general model of the structure and functioning of the mind. For that the “Project” is a locus classicus. The other will only sometimes comply with the general aims and exigencies of the psychical apparatus. These are, most generally, its tendency to divest itself of tension, or to keep the level of tension constant, and, what amounts to the same thing, the tendency to avoid unpleasure. If we accept this account, these aims and exigencies must have far-reaching implications for the relation of self to other.

In the points making up the rest of this subsection, I will partly systematise and summarise matters already discussed in preceding subsections, and partly introduce new perspectives.

1) We have seen that we must be wary of drawing conclusions from the “Project” too hastily. What, according to one argument, seems to be implied by it, according to another argument, is not. Are its premises basically identical to XIXth Century localisationist neuroscience (or, alternatively, associationist psychology)? Is the model of the mind in the “Project” essentially solipsistic? How simplistic or ‘mechanistic’ is Freud’s model in the “Project” really? Is the allowance Freud makes for goal-directed behaviour compatible with this fundamental model? Is this model able to account for higher order behaviour and mental processes? Can a psychology that gives a central place to relations of association account for logic, language and other forms of rule-following behaviour? Does Freud’s pleasure/unpleasure model allow for genuinely ethical behaviour? Does it allow for altruism? How great is the continuity between the “Project” and Freud’s later work? What limits does the model in the “Project” impose on Freud’s thought? To what extent are any limitations of what Freud did with this paradigm indicative of its a priori limitations? These questions are not simple to answer, and we can do no more than touch on most of them here. In my criticism of a number of answers to them that on the face of it could seem to be quite plausible, I have already indicated how tricky they are.
2) A model of the cortex as a distributed system. An elegant way to tackle many of these questions is offered by regarding the model of the cortex in Freud’s “Project” as essentially an example of a ‘distributed system’. Tools for doing so have basically been provided by Cilliers (1990), who builds bridges between Freud’s “Project”, Derrida (e.g. 1978: 200-205), Saussurean linguistics (Saussure 1974) and the research field in computing and artificial intelligence (‘AI’) known as ‘neural networks’ (Rumelhart and McClelland 1986). A neural network is a computer with an internal structure imitative of the human brain’s interconnected system of neurons. In a neural network, transistor circuits are the electronic analogue of neurons, and variable resistors represent the synapses between the neurons. [Cf. Freud: contact-barriers which can be more or less facilitated.] … Electric signals received by the transistor circuits are either inhibited or enhanced—depending upon the task the neural network is performing—when passed on to neighbouring circuits, in a fashion analogous to the way in which the brain’s neurons pass on electrochemical signals.

Neural networks do not follow rigidly programmed rules, as more conventional digital computers do. Rather, they build an information base through a trial-and-error method. A programmer, for instance, will digitally input a photographic image for a neural network to identify, and it will ‘guess’ which circuits to ‘fire’ (activate) to identify the photograph and output the correct answer. Pathways between individual circuits are ‘strengthened’ (resistance turned down) when a task is performed correctly and ‘weakened’ (resistance turned up) if performed incorrectly. In this way a neural network ‘learns’ from its mistakes and gives more accurate output with each repetition of a task. (Grolier 1993: ‘Neural networks’)

A re-reading of the “Project” may reveal that it would be more correct to say: ‘A model of ψ as a distributed system’. However, the detailed investigation that would probably be needed to resolve this exegetical issue falls outside the scope of this thesis.

The idea that AI should study the nervous system if it better wants to model its behaviour, can be seen as central to the engineering approach known as bionics. Bionics is the study of the properties of biologic systems that may be applied to the solution of engineering problems. Areas of study range from propulsion (in fish and birds especially) to energy conversion. Bionics, therefore, is closely linked to cybernetics, the comparative analysis of communication, control, and information systems in living organisms and machines. [Bionic studies are] related to so-called general-systems theory and owe … much to such scientists as Nicholas Rashevsky, who developed the first mathematical analyses of various functions of the central nervous system. The nervous systems of organisms have since been studied intensively by many physicists and engineers interested in bionics. (Grolier 1993: ‘Bionics’)

Cilliers (1990: 6) refers to an expression used by bionically oriented practitioners of AI for non-bionic modes of AI, which do not pay any attention to the actual structure of the nervous system in trying to model its behaviour: “Good Old Fashioned Artificial Intelligence”.

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65 A re-reading of the “Project” may reveal that it would be more correct to say: ‘A model of ψ as a distributed system’. However, the detailed investigation that would probably be needed to resolve this exegetical issue falls outside the scope of this thesis.

66 The idea that AI should study the nervous system if it better wants to model its behaviour, can be seen as central to the engineering approach known as bionics.
The parallel between this description and Freud’s description of the psychical apparatus is striking, as are the parallels with Freud in the following description by Fodor (1995: 5-6): networks don’t exhibit the distinction between program and memory that is characteristic of the more familiar computational devices. Rather, both the current computational proclivities of a network, and the residual effects of its computational history, are encoded by connections among … elements.

In Freud’s model of the psychical apparatus, too, memory and processing do not belong to different parts of the apparatus.

In what follows I make use of certain parts of Cilliers’s admirably clear account; his discussion of neural networks can be taken as paradigmatic of distributed systems generally.

A network consists of a number of ‘neurons’ or units that are richly interconnected. Some of the units may be taken as input units, and some as output units. This ‘status’ of certain units is not fixed. There is no difference between normal units and input or output units, and if circumstances demand it, roles can be reversed. (Cilliers 1990: 6)

Compare Freud here, who treats all neurones as basically the same; differences between them are due to differences in their environment. (1950c: 304; see p. 50, n. 41.) Each unit has a number of units connected to it, and is connected in turn to a number of other units that may include those that provided the input, and the unit itself. … The connection between any two units is associated with a certain ‘weight’ that determines the strength of influence that the active unit will have on the units to which it is connected. … The characteristics of the network are determined by the pattern of weights between the various units. A special weight, or a specific unit has no significance, it is always the pattern of activity over the whole system that bears meaning. (Cilliers 1990: 6)

Derrida and Saussure immediately spring to mind here. Compare Freud here on the differential degree of facilitation between various neurones: “memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the Ψ-neurones.” (300) Following Derrida I have in the course of our exposition of the “Project” pointed out the many other ways in which Freud pictures

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67 Fodor does not share Cilliers’s enthusiasm for neural networks; on the contrary.
68 Cilliers would object to Fodor’s use of the term ‘computation’ as far as neural networks are concerned.
69 E.g.: “The rest of the Project will depend in its entirety upon an incessant and increasingly radical invocation of the principle of difference.” (Derrida 1978: 205) To Derrida the ‘good’, differential Freud is inextricably entwined with the ‘bad’, ‘logocentric’ Freud: all Freudian concepts … without exception, belong to the history of metaphysics, that is, to the system of logocentric repression … Certainly, Freudian discourse—in its syntax, or, if you will, in its labor—is not to be confused with these necessarily metaphysical and traditional concepts. Certainly it is not exhausted by belonging to them. … And a conception of difference is attached less to concepts than to discourse. (Derrida 1978: 197-198)
consciousness and the psychical apparatus as essentially differential in their structure and function.

Cilliers quotes Saussure’s (1974) famous formula: “In language [langue] there are only differences without positive terms.” This formula says as much as: in langue (language as a system), the terms between which differential relations obtain, are themselves purely differential. At no point does this differential system abut upon terms that are themselves simply positive, that is, constituted non-differentially. In Saussure’s conception, language is differential both at the level of the signifier and at the level of the signified. Each letter of the alphabet functions not through its intrinsic nature, but by virtue of differing from other letters. In fact it can be realised in totally different materials (ink, wood, images on a computer screen, television or film)—and take utterly different shapes. The following divergent versions of the ‘same’ letter a:

are not identical with each other, but they (usually) differ sufficiently from the numerous variants of other letters, such as g:

so as not to be confused with them. Phonemes, too, do not function through having a fixed acoustic nature (in fact the ‘same’ phoneme can show enormous acoustic variation), but through their differences from each other. The same principle applies to signifieds (concepts, meanings): ‘pretty’ acquires meaning through differing from similar words like ‘beautiful’, ‘handsome’, ‘sexy’, ‘perfect’, as well as from dissimilar words like ‘red’, ‘kitchen’, ‘walk’, ‘but’, ‘than’, ‘understanding’ etc. 70 In the end each element in language depends for its value on its differential relations to all the other elements in language.

Derrida’s notion of différence extends and radicalises Saussure’s notion of différence: 71

Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without relating to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each ‘element’—phoneme or grapheme—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. … Nothing, neither among the

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70 The fact that when talking about concepts we have to give words: signs that supposedly consist of both signifiers and signifieds, indicates that there is something problematic about the concept of a ‘concept’, i.e. about the word ‘concept’.

71 This is not the place to go into the differences between Derrida’s notion of différence and Saussure’s notion of différence; suffice it to say that whereas Saussure believes in the possibility of a purely synchronic study of the differences in language, Derrida doesn’t. Any putative synchronic difference in language will on closer inspection turn out to contain references to a past and a future, that is, to involve différence.
elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida 1981: 26)

Neither what is represented in such a system (contents), nor what happens in such a system (function) can be equated with the state of, or events in, a particular part of that system at any particular moment. Cilliers argues that the cortex, the mind and language can all be conceived of as such distributed systems and profitably described using similar vocabularies. Neural networks are a useful exemplar of such distributed systems:

[An] important characteristic of neural networks is that knowledge is not represented locally in an iconic fashion ..., but that it is distributed over the whole system ...

Information concerning a specific object is also not identified with the connection strengths associated with a particular unit but is distributed over the connections between many units. Every aspect of the functioning of a neural net is purely relational. ‘All the knowledge is in the connections’. (Rumelhart and McClelland 1986, vol. I: 75, quoted in Cilliers 1990: 7)

Freud only reaches similar conclusions gradually. For simplicity’s sake, he initially speaks as if mental contents are located in single neurones. Eventually he introduces a first correction: “Perceptual cathexes are never cathexes of single neurones but always of complexes. So far we have neglected this feature”. (327) He realises that thereby the whole process becomes far harder to represent:

If we put complexes instead of the neurones and complexes instead of the ideas, we come up against a complication of practical thought which it is no longer possible to describe [stößt man auf eine nicht mehr darstellbare Komplexität des praktischen Denkens]. (378; GW 468)

Freud only draws the logical conclusion (on this point) from his model of the psychical apparatus as a distributed system in Ch. VII of the Traumdeutung, when he says: “ideas, thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localised in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, between them, where resistances and facilitations provide the corresponding correlates.” (1900a: 611; GW 2/3: 615-616)

This passage may offer an essential clue as to why Freud refrained from formulating his theories in neurological terms after the “Project”: the translation of psychological processes to neurological ones in the “Project” assumed that mental contents could be localised in specific neurones or groups of neurones. It is then fairly easy to picture the relations between contents in fairly straightforward spatial terms. The moment the neurological correlate of mental contents becomes something wholly relational, that cannot be clearly located or represented spatially,

72 Nevertheless, Freud does not deny the spatiality of the psychical apparatus, as (for instance) Descartes would have done. Derrida (1978: 204) says that Freud’s topographical description is one

footnote ctd. on next page—
becomes impossible to find neural equivalents (in terms of cathexes of neurones or neurone complexes and facilitation of contact-barriers) for semantic relations between mental contents. The language of the “Project” still contains important vestiges of the localisationist neuropsychology that Freud had elsewhere rejected long before. If we accept this argument, it is possible that Freud in later years both maintained the general model of the cortex as a distributed system, and was convinced that no detailed neurological account of specific psychological processes could be given in terms of such a model. When dealing with neural networks we are in much the same position: we do not really know or understand what steps occur where, when, and in what sequence when such networks generate their results. “There is no Programmer, no Scientist that can uncover the full Truth and the final significance of each element.” (Cilliers 1990: 7)

Freud’s model of the psychical apparatus is a developmental model—the apparatus can learn. Again neural networks offer a parallel. Whereas conventional computers learn through being programmed, neural networks learn through being trained.

The network can also be implemented in such a way that weights can be changed automatically. In this way, the network can learn. If a certain input and the desired output is provided, the network will shuffle the weights in such a way that the two are matched. (Cilliers 1990: 6)

Freud makes much the same point as the last sentence, but speaks of (a sort of random) experimental displacement instead of shuffling: “The aim … is reached by means of an experimental displacement of $Q\pm$ along every pathway”. (329) His way of saying that the “desired output” is provided, is to speak of the cathexis of an aim—and aims are always intimately connected with the effects of previous experiences of satisfaction, unpleasure or pain. When the wishful idea is cathected, “travelling is dominated not by the facilitation but by an aim.” (329) This quote, incidentally, shows that according to Freud the psychical apparatus is teleological—aim-directed—even if its operations are ultimately reducible to mechanistic principles.

which external space, that is, familiar and constituted space … cannot contain. [Freud’s descriptions deal in] pure differences, differences of situation, of connection, of localization, of structural relations more important than their supporting terms; and they are differences for which the relativity of outside and inside is always to be determined. The thinking of difference can neither dispense with topography nor accept the current models of spacing.

Compare this with Freud’s comparison, in the Traumdeutung, of the objects of internal perception with virtual images in an optical instrument: “Everything that can be an object of our internal perception is virtual, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light-rays.” (1900a: 611)

73 Or, supposing such correlates could be provided, e.g. by machines that give a detailed and sophisticated imaging of neural events, to make the relation between such neurological events and the conscious or unconscious mental processes with which they are correlated perspicuous.
If neural networks function in a purely relational way:

the system cannot be rule-based on a first level … The network may appear to follow rules, but these are emergent properties that are abstracted from the functioning of the network, and not principles that determine the functioning. (Rumelhart and McClelland 1986, vol. I: 24, quoted in Cilliers 1990: 7)

Such a system is self-organising. Here we have a “machine which … run[s] of itself.” (Freud 1954: 129).

If the system is not rule-based, it is of course non-algorithmic. No external agent has to design a programme that must be followed. … The method of calculation itself can be seen as a process of ‘relaxation’. Instead of following a series of logical steps, a solution is reached by finding the optimal compromise between a number of constraints. ‘The system should be thought of more as settling into a solution than calculating a solution’.74

(Rumelhart and McClelland 1986, vol. I: 135) This provides a strong reminder of Freud’s model of the mental apparatus where the neurones are perpetually striving to divest themselves of energy. Distributed systems obey that principle of thermodynamics that maintains that the state of lowest energy is the most stable.75

Given all these features of what in computing is called “neural networks”, it is clear that Freud in the “Project” describes something very similar. It is fascinating that computers built on this principle can duplicate the results of rule-based computers. This fact belies the apparently unbridgeable gap between a biological description of the cortex and the higher intellectual capacities like logic and rationality. Cilliers, again referring to Rumelhart and McClelland (1986, vol. I: 74 & 119) points out that a distributed net is

an extremely general form of ‘calculator’. Virtually any computing device, serial or parallel can be described in terms of the basic model of a neural network, including a Turing machine. There is therefore a mathematical argument for saying that a distributed system is always more general than a rule-based one. (Cilliers 1990: 7)

There is therefore no reason to think that if the brain really were structured according to the broad principles guiding the “Project”, it would be incapable of intellectual functions that require the manipulation of formal systems (or that can typically be modelled on formal systems such as conventional computer programmes).76 If Freud’s “Project”, and neural networks, for that matter,

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74 Cf. the remarkable parallel between this description, and Freud’s description of the functioning of the psychical apparatus quoted in note 97, below.
75 According to current neurological insights, the actual functioning of the brain on a neuronal level does not conform with this model: “The nervous system does not transfer energy; the nerve impulse is propagated”. (Solms and Saling 1990: 105; paraphrasing Holt 1965)
76 In Freud the cortex is seen as consisting in essence of a huge network of similar, richly interconnected neurones. His detailed knowledge of the gross anatomy of the brain does not seduce him into imposing further structure in this network. If the brain can rightly be regarded as a form of distributed system, this footnote ctd. on next page—
hark back to associationist psychology in many ways, this does not imply that they are incapable of accounting for rule-following behaviour—a charge often levelled against associationist psychology.

Conversely,

There is no computer system that can hold a normal conversation, understand a joke, devise a new recipe or distinguish between a Burgundy and a claret. (Cilliers 1990: 6)

Admittedly, there is as yet no proof that neural networks will be any more successful than conventional computers in modelling these behaviours. But these and many other forms of intelligent behaviour (or typically human forms of behaviour, including irrational ones) to my mind require the integration of a vast amount of experiences or pieces of knowledge, rather than the application of rules. Rules probably form only a subset of what is involved in human mental processes, even those of the most intellectual sort; if intelligence would stop where rules end, the possibilities of intelligent behaviour would be very limited indeed. Connectionism seems to offer more hope of modelling forms of intelligence that apparently are not reducible to the application of rules.

How could Freud have been so prescient? Are we not reading our XXth Century views back into XIXth Century texts? I think not. Perhaps Freud’s prescience is less enigmatic than one would think. Being innocent of Chomskyan linguistics and XXth Century paradigms in computer science and AI, and not being mathematically oriented, he was less inclined to take operations in formal systems (rule-based systems) as the paradigm for mental processes. Conversely, his whole Bildung in basically non-mathematical science: biology, medicine, neurology, psychopathology—in all of which observation and description play a different sort of role—inclined him in a very different direction, in which it is very natural to take seriously the micro-structure of nervous tissue, as that could be empirically ascertained in his day: richly interconnected neurones. Given his materialism, this had to be, in some way, wholly or in part, the material substrate of mental functions. Moreover, the functions that interest him form a variegated collection, much of which had received scant attention in models of mind to whom man the scientist and logician was paradigmatic: perception, memory, pleasure and unpleasure, wishes, dreams, language, jokes, defence and psychopathological phenomena. The manipulation of formal systems, such as we find in mathematics and symbolic logic, to him therefore was neither the essential mental explanandum (phenomenon needing to be explained) nor the paradigmatic explanans (phenomenon from which other mental phenomena would in some way derive).

Of course, the striking parallels between the features Freud ascribes to the mental apparatus in his “Project”, and the features exhibited by neural networks by no means prove the validity of

lack of structure—paradoxically—makes the mental apparatus more powerful rather than less so: “The less structured the network is, the more powerful it becomes.” (Cilliers 1990: 7)
Freud’s model. However, they do show at least three things. Firstly, they show how close to some of the most recent developments in AI and computing Freud’s approach is. This is a far cry from the charge that the limits of Freud’s “Project” are basically identical to those of outdated XIXth Century paradigms such as associationist psychology or mainstream Viennese neurology. Secondly, they underline the non-atomistic nature of Freud’s network model of the mental apparatus in the “Project”. Thirdly, they confirm that Freud was highly perspicacious in seeing “what can be deduced from [his] basic hypotheses”. (347; see p. 49)

3) Is the “Project” a neurological document, or a psychological one? Are neurology and psychology incommensurable?.

Above (p. 48), we posed the question whether neurological and psychological discourses should not be seen as incommensurable, and said that connectionist models of the mind and the brain can offer a way out of their professed incommensurability. We remarked that Freud’s “Project” models both the brain and the mind in connectionist terms, i.e. as distributed systems.

In Descartes’ account mind and body were indeed two totally different orders. Importantly, the body was spatial, while the mind was not. In contrast, XIXth Century neuroscience typically thought that mental contents and functions could be mapped onto the brain in a simple and direct way: they could be localised in the brain. This attempt to relate mind and brain was built on atomistic, overly simplistic spatial notions. The notion of distributed systems, however, offers a different avenue of approach. Although a distributed system is always realised spatially, this is not space as conceived of by a philosophy of presence. We said that Derrida’s words (1981: 26) were especially relevant here; in such a system “nothing … is ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.” We remarked that neither what is represented in such a system (contents), nor what happens in such a system (function) can be equated with the state or the events in a particular part of that system at any particular moment. The brain, the mind and language can all be conceived of as such distributed systems, which can be described using similar vocabularies. As such, it is less obvious that mind-descriptions and brain-descriptions must be incommensurable in principle. (This is not to say that there is any simple way to translate specific mental descriptions into specific brain descriptions—but then the point is: it is notoriously difficult to describe exactly what happens in a distributed system, anyway). In the place of Descartes’ division between a sui generis non-distributed mental substance and a sui generis non-distributed bodily substance (which he admitted to be mysteriously interrelated), we now have minds and brains (cortices), both conceived of as distributed systems, so that a text (especially one concerned with the most general features of the system) can simultaneously be a ‘literal’ neurological description and a ‘metaphoric’ psychological description—and in a piece of theorising like the “Project” it will be hard, and perhaps not even very crucial, to say exactly when a description is ‘neurological’ and when it is ‘psychological’. If we can accept the desirability, or even inevitability, of metaphor for cognition generally, and for science, specifically, should it surprise us that certain informed neurological
descriptions can offer us a powerful language for talking about the mind? Is the *prima facie* likelihood of a parallelism not greater here than between minds and clocks, minds and machines, or minds and conventional computers? (Of course we would have to know at what level such a parallelism is to be discerned, so as not to fall back into the naïve habits of XIXth Century localisationism). Wollheim (1985: 44) is probably right in attributing to Freud the conviction that “psychological phenomena exhibit many of the same characteristics and characteristic patterns as the neuro-physiological phenomena on which they are causally dependent.” If so, Freud was entirely reasonable in having this conviction.

4) Is the “Project” basically ‘solipsistic’? I. The role of the other in the “Project”.

According to Ricoeur the Freudian ‘topography’ is

abstract … in the sense that it does not account for the intersubjective nature of the dramas forming its main theme [e.g. *the parental relation and the therapeutic relation*] …

what nourishes analysis is always a debate between consciousnesses. [I]n the Freudian topography that debate is projected onto a representation of the psychical apparatus in which only the ‘vicissitudes of the instincts’ within an isolated system are thematized. *Stated bluntly, the Freudian systematization is solipsistic, whereas the situations and relations analysis speaks of and which speak in analysis are intersubjective,*[77]

(Ricoeur 1972: 61 — my italics)

Is this charge justified, as far as the “Project” is concerned?

To be sure, most of Freud’s descriptions in the “Project” do indeed refer (or seem to refer) to a *single* mental apparatus, which *could* therefore sound like an “isolated system”. The other person does however explicitly make her or his appearance, albeit in a limited number of guises:

i) the other as (first) *helping* object (331)—extraneous help in obtaining satisfaction (318), who thereby simultaneously promotes the subject’s expressions of distress to acts of communication (p. 56)

ii) the *attractive* other—the other as *identical* with my wish; (first) *satisfying* object (331)[78]

iii) the *frustrating* other—the other who does not agree with my wishes, and thereby

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[77] Rollins (1967: 487) has distinguished between three forms of solipsism: ‘reality solipsism’—“the notion of the self as the supposed totality of existence”; ‘knowledge solipsism’—“the notion of the self and its states as the only object of real knowledge and the origin of any problematic knowledge of other existence”; and ‘ethical solipsism’—an ethical doctrine favouring self-seeking or egoism. Ricoeur seems to be using the term ‘solipsism’ in a far looser sense, to indicate an approach in which the psychical apparatus is treated as an “isolated system”, without regard to its relations to other psychical apparatuses. We argue that Freud is not a solipsist in any of Rollins’s three senses, nor in Ricoeur’s sense.

[78] Cf. also p. 328-329: on the mother’s breast. Freud presumably intends this to be read as an attractive object that is still not really linked to a notion of the mother as *person*.
becomes

iv) the other as occasion for thought; object on whom the subject learns to cognise (p. 56 & 65)

v) the repulsive other—the other as pain-causing object (320); (first) hostile object (331)

vi) the speaking other—the other as producer of speech sounds (367); through imitation the subject also acquires language, so that

vii) the other also functions as source of language.

viii) the other as object of moral sentiments:

a) helplessness—the experience of needing the help of the other—is the “primal source of all moral motives”. (p. 56)

b) remorse.

Experience shows … that the most distressing memories, which must necessarily arouse the greatest unpleasure (the memory of remorse over bad actions), cannot be repressed and replaced by symbols. (352; my italics)

One could argue that this passage is isolated and insignificant; however for a system functioning according to pleasure and unpleasure, the nature of those memories that “necessarily arouse the greatest unpleasure” cannot but be highly significant. (Especially in combination with the statement about moral motives). If the memory of remorse gives such great unpleasure, it is unlikely that the psychical apparatus, geared as it is to avoiding unpleasure, will leave it at that. If repression is not possible, it must be tackled via some other defence mechanism, such as projection. (This is obviously a very important defence mechanism if one wants to understand othering. Whereas repression always decathects painful thoughts, such other defence mechanisms will allow thoughts that are painful to remain cathected, but will modify them, e.g. by substituting other for self.) However, Freud only later develops a systematic conception of defence in which repression is but one of many defence mechanisms.

79 If we remember that in Freud the avoidance of unpleasure gets far more emphasis than the striving for other, more ‘positive’ forms of pleasure, this passage is telling. Freud is frequently thought to attach supreme value to sexual motivation. Ethical motives, especially, would have little weight compared to sexual ones. However, the quoted passage is soon followed by the words:

It is quite impossible to suppose that distressing sexual affects so greatly exceed all other unpleasurable affects in intensity. It must be another characteristic of sexual ideas that can explain how it is that sexual ideas are alone subjected to repression. (352)

Repression is limited to (painful) sexual ideas for other reasons than that these would be the most painful ones: remorse over bad actions is far more painful. In the “Project”, moral sentiments are therefore not presented, à la Nietzsche, as necessarily a facade that hides the deeper, real motivation.
c) sympathy: we have seen that Freud conceives of sympathy as a perception arousing a memory of one’s pain, linked to unpleasure and a repetition of “the appropriate defensive movement”. (p. 66)

ix) the other as object of imitation: in imitation one carries out the motor movement that will lead to the same action one is perceiving. (p. 66)

Sympathy and imitation (at least in their most primitive form—as species of “primary judgment”) are treated by Freud as mental acts in which the non-identity of self and other is not yet recognised. If solipsism is the idea that the own existence is evident, but not that of the (human or non-human) other, then the situation of “primary judgment” is rightly not solipsistic, but rather symbiotic. The problem confronting Freud’s model is not: ‘how does the isolated, lone subject overcome solipsism?’, but rather: ‘how does an organism that initially does not distinguish between self and non-self develop into one that has a sense of itself as different and separate from the non-self?’ (Let us for the moment remark that illusion and delusion can attach to both positions: in identifying with the other, differences and non-identity are denied, whereas similarity and non-separation can be denied by a subject who sees himself as different and separate). Sympathy for the pain of another is initially not distinguished from (the memory of) one’s own pain, and it therefore cannot yet be called ‘sympathy for the other’; similarly the imitation Freud here describes is not yet conscious of its own status of imitation. (Note that identification and imitation also play a large role in points i) - viii), above).

x) the other as “thing”. In the terminology of the “Project” this does not mean something like a “dehumanised other”, but rather: the other as what evades judgment; what transcends my understanding. This means: the other as what cannot be understood by analogy with myself. The other as “thing” is thus something like the radically other, the other inasmuch as (s)he is not an alter ego.80

The complex of the fellow human-being falls apart into two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a thing, while the other can be understood by the activity of memory [Erinnerungsarbeit]—that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject’s] own body. (331; GW 426)

[The basis of judging] is obviously the presence of bodily experiences, sensations and motor images of one’s own. So long as these [that is: the relevant ones] are absent, the variable portion of the perceptual complex remains

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80 With the caveat that ‘alter ego’ suggests that separation has already occurred, whereas ‘the other as thing’ also contrasts with a symbiotic state. I find Freud’s remarks about the other as ‘thing’ rather obscure, so my reading of them must remain tentative. The “Ding” he refers to seems to be rather like a Kantian Ding an sich, an unknowable noumenon = x underlying knowable phenomena.
ununderstood. (333) What we call things are residues which evade being judged. (334)

The question as to whether the subject, or Freud, recognises the alterity of the other is linked to whether anything in the other evades judgement. We will return to it repeatedly in this thesis. One can ask whether it is not central to the notion of what is real (cf. “things”) that it always partly evades being judged, and central to the reality principle that this is acknowledged.

Two more guises of the other may be added to this list, although they seem to have a rather lower level of generality than those previously mentioned, linked as they are to a specific example (352-356):

xi) The other as sexual aggressor or predator. In the example of the sexual aetiology of hysteria, Emma’s current hysteria can be traced back to an incident in which a grinning shopkeeper grabbed at the then twelve year old girl’s genitals through her clothes.

xii) The other as object of sexual desire. Via unconscious links—in the nature of “false connections”—with the previous incident Emma feels sexually attracted to a laughing shop assistant at a later date. Note how far this example already departs from the paradigmatic example of a wish directly and ‘understandably’ following from “an experience of satisfaction”.

5) Is the “Project” basically ‘solipsistic’? II. Is the psychical apparatus ipso facto solipsistic? Contact-barriers as an alternative to a dichotomy between self and other.

Having investigated the explicit guises taken by the other in the “Project”, we can also enquire whether the basic model of the mental apparatus as a distributed system dooms the subject to solipsism. Fair enough: in the “Project” Freud does not devote much space to the relation with other people; the role of language is indicated only sketchily; we hear nothing about the role of groups, society, culture, institutions, rules, and so on. Any neurological model of the psychical apparatus or brain, however unsolipsistic in its intention, is likely to have a solipsistic ring to it, because its (inescapably technical) language will not be the everyday language in which the existence of others is axiomatic.81

The problem of solipsism and its Siamese twin—the problem of other minds—are usually premised on an imagined ontological gulf between self and outer world (social or material): one

81 An exception could be a neurology that takes its point of departure in the premise that the nervous system of an individual is in itself too limited a system to understand in its own terms. Such a neurology would hold that we must always investigate brains as parts of larger systems: networks of human beings (embodied nervous systems), possibly seen in conjunction with some language or other, and some culture or other. AI models of the mind—modelled on the lines of neural networks or of conventional computers—could take a similar route.
has continuity on the one side of the gulf, and continuity on the other side of the gulf, but the gulf itself represents a radical discontinuity. The self is sufficiently homogeneous that all its parts have contact with each other, or free access to each other. But this continuity is interrupted going to the outside world.

Freud’s model could in many ways not be further from classical solipsism. The problem is not how some sort of tenuous contact could be established across the ontological gulf separating the internal space of the subject from the outer space of the social and material world, but rather the reverse. Impulses coming from the outside world have a far greater magnitude than the internal impulses by which the psychical apparatus functions, and therefore in the rule have to be damped down. To ascribe a solipsistic position to an apparatus that is constantly battling so as not to be overwhelmed by impulses from outside would be rather perverse. Far from the subject being a lone intelligence having to scan the heavens with radio telescopes in the hope of discovering that it is not alone in the universe, and by dint of endless inventiveness communicating with other intelligences, the other constantly and insistently bears down upon him, bearing the threat of pain (qualitative) and disruption (quantitative overload).  

But neither does Freud’s alternative replace absolute discontinuity with a unity between everything and everything. Freud’s alternative to a radical discontinuity between subject and world, subject and subject, is neither purely continuist, nor purely discontinuist: neurones, the microscopic elements of the psychical apparatus, are divided from, and connected to each other by ‘contact-barriers’.

Freud’s model of the mental apparatus makes the very substance of the psychical apparatus consist of barrier-apertures, instead of working with a dichotomy between boundaries and that which is separated by boundaries, and a dichotomy between barriers and apertures. This forms a marked contrast with Breuer’s dichotomy between “complete internal connections” and “[total] severance of connections between the psychical elements” in the Studies on Hysteria.  

Neurones “have contact with one another through the medium of a foreign substance, [and] terminate upon one another as they do upon portions of foreign tissue”. (298; cf. p. 51) Instead of

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82 If one subscribes to Freud’s model, the doctrine of solipsism appears in a very different light. It can be seen as a piece of wishful thinking in which an organism constantly in danger of being engulfed by his environment, imagines itself to be essentially insulated from it.

83 Breuer there postulates a dichotomy between the waking state, in which

the brain functions as a unit with complete internal connections [and] deepest sleep, [where the]

severance of connections between the psychical elements … becomes total. [I]n sleep the paths of connection and conduction in the brain are not traversable by excitations of the psychical elements (? cortical cells), whereas in waking life they are completely so traversable. (1895d: 193)
a homogeneous mind only abutting on alterity at its outer limits, we find a microscopic, fractal-like distribution of alterity throughout the very fabric of the psychical apparatus.

In the “Project” the ‘inner nature’ of the psychical apparatus is very similar to its ‘outer surface’: something differentially allowing the passage of Q, and resisting it. Everything in the psychical apparatus has the status of interface.\(^8\) The mind-substance is microscopically traversed by discontinuities (the contact-barriers), and also traversed by discontinuities at a more macroscopic level (e.g. between systems such as φ, ψ and ω, or between what is repressed and the rest of the psyche). These discontinuities are not absolute breaks: they simultaneously connect (“contact”) and separate (“barriers”). Everything is interconnected, but partially and differentially. Nothing is totally separate (or, in Derrida’s phrase: totally absent). Instead of a dichotomy: interconnected/separate, there are differences in degree—of facilitation—that determine the degree or ease of interaction. These differential resistances are not obstacles to thought, but constitute the very mechanism and content of memory, and thereby, indirectly, of thought. Freud finds a way to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of ‘monism’ and ‘pluralism’, absolute continuity and absolute discontinuity.

The impulses by which neurones “communicate” with each other do not differ essentially from the impulses whereby the nuclear neurones communicate with the interior of the body, and ψ/φ communication takes place; the only significant difference with impulses coming to φ from the external world is one of magnitude. It is even possible for the nerve-ending apparatuses to be bypassed, so that ψ is exposed unprotected to quantities of far greater magnitude than the intra-ψ order of magnitude. Pain then occurs.

In the “Project” the pleasure and unpleasure (to the point of pain) that go with the appearance of the other are depicted as such elementary, Ur- psychic realities that it would again sound perverse to say that in this model the reality of the other is anywhere ever in question for the subject. An organism that has the avoidance of pain as its most pressing concern (“pain … is the most imperative of all processes” (307)) can hardly be a solipsistic creature.

6) Is the “Project” basically ‘solipsistic’? III. The role of language.

A solipsistic fate for the psychical apparatus is further avoided because of the role Freud ascribes to language. There is nothing to indicate that the psychical apparatus is closer to “its own words” than to those of the other. Because the importance of consciousness is sorely reduced, a consciousness accompanying the own words cannot privilege these above the words of others. (In

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\(^8\) In Freud this tendency to think as a surface what might otherwise be conceived as an entity, goes very deep. We find it back much later in his conception of the ego in The ego and the id:

The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface. (1923b—SE XIX: 26)
fact words are the medium of consciousness—this is not a model in which consciousness may or may not be added to words). If we may suspect that language is ‘distorted’, transformed or processed when it passes the boundary between the subject and the outside world, we should also bear in mind that the same will happen constantly as it passes barriers in the interior of the mental apparatus. Language is always being processed, whether intrasubjectively or intersubjectively.

For the Freud of the “Project”, the self is neither an atom nor composed of atoms. In Derridean terms we could put it as follows: in a differential field the boundaries of selves, units, entities or systems are not pre-given. Both the subject and the outside world are pieces of ‘writing’, texts, networks, in which nothing is ever entirely present of absent, and in which past, present and future are paradoxically intertwined. If the psychical apparatus is in itself a network, there is nothing in Freud’s model in the “Project” preventing us from seeing it as part of a larger network, on the model of a network of neural networks. If the solipsistic psyche is a stand-alone PC, the Freudian psyche is networked from scratch. For such an enlarged neural network, the impossibility of localisation will repeat itself in an even more pregnant form: it will again be hard or impossible to say what happens where. Social and cultural phenomena cannot be reduced to localisable events in specific individuals—not even large numbers of specific individuals. (The general notion of distributed systems thus gives one a rationale for rejecting methodological individualism in social science). If we accept Freud’s materialist stance, and maintain that there is no second world next to the material world of space and time, we are forced into very strange, complex or complicated notions of space and time.

Even if we were to think in terms of a barrier between subject and object, barriers are not impermeable or uncircumventable. (A barrier, generally, does not absolutely prevent the passage of what it is a barrier to, rather the barrier only allows it passage in a transmogrified form, or once a certain threshold of force has been exceeded). We shall see later that in Freud’s conception, barriers are not an obstacle to thought/cognition, but the very medium of thought/cognition.

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85 The very functioning of the apparatus—the flow of Q±—consists in such a passing of barriers.
86 Although Freud does not here work out this possibility, I see no a priori reason why parts of the psychical apparatus may not be more intimately connected with—and dependent on—parts of other psychical apparatuses than with other parts of themselves. (Cf. Freud’s later remark: “The Ucs. of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs.” (1915e—SE XIV: 194)). An implication of this would be that ‘wishes’ and ‘memories’ will not necessarily derive from ‘the subject’s own experience’, as assumed in the “Project”.
87 When Freud sees a resistance as simultaneously a facilitation, this move is not unique to the “Project”. In his technical writings he similarly presents apparent obstacles to analysis as the very medium of analysis. As Strachey remarks in his Introduction to the Studies (1895d—SE I: xvi): “What it tells us is not simply the story of the overcoming of a series of obstacles; it is the story of the discovery of obstacles that have to be overcome.” These obstacles are linked to the following: the fact
many different levels of the Freudian text, the duality of ‘paths’ and ‘barriers’ is replaced by what amounts to a middle term: path/barriers.\textsuperscript{88}

Solipsism is premised on the self being an immediate evidence to itself, as unified and separate (it is evident that certain ideas are \textit{the property of the self}, and of no-one else). In the “Project”, far from the self being a discrete unit trying to find its way back to the world, social and otherwise, there is very little indication that there is a self having a spontaneous sense of itself as unified and separate.

\textbf{7) Continuities}

The notion of ‘contact-barriers’ could be said to apply metaphorically to more in Freud than just his theory of the connection between neurones. Generally, and in conformity to ever-present biological metaphors in his writings, every barrier works as a contact-barrier, or interface. To readers who come to Freud from monistic models, Freud may well appear to shatter reality into a shower of isolated fragments. Conversely, where others draw absolute dichotomies, Freud sees continuities.\textsuperscript{89}

On what sorts of continuities is Freud’s model explicitly or implicitly based? (Most of these points are applicable to Freud right to the end of his life).

\begin{itemize}
    \item of amnesia; the fact that not everybody is hypnotisable; the fact that Freud was not very good at hypnosis; the patient’s resistance to treatment; and the phenomenon of transference.
\end{itemize}

In Wittgenstein and Kant the fact of friction is similarly seen as \textit{enabling} that which it at first sight may seem to \textit{hinder}:

\begin{quote}
We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground! (Wittgenstein 1968: § 107)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. [Plato] did not observe that with all his efforts he made no advance—meeting no resistance that might, as it were, serve as a support upon which he could take a stand, to which he could apply his powers, and so set his understanding in motion. (Kant 1982: 47 [A5])
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{88} We can make this notion less counter-intuitive by remembering that every road is in some sense a barrier, because there is bound to be something to which it will be an obstacle, however broad it may be. And, conversely: however narrow it is, there is bound to be something for which it will be a path.

\textsuperscript{89} This need not imply a denial of differences: to posit continuity between \textit{a} and \textit{b} is not the same as claiming that they are \textit{identical or not differentiated from each other}. On the contrary, like Darwin’s evolutionary model, Freud’s model of continuity is in large measure a model of \textit{differentiation}. Freud would be the last to deny the fundamental qualitative differences arising in a process of continuous development; think for instance of the huge changes wrought when the mental apparatus acquires language.
a) The mind cannot be disentangled from the body, especially the brain. In the “Project”, the driving needs are originally bodily ones: hunger, respiration, sex. (Cf. p. 50). This means, simultaneously, that man is utterly exposed to her environment, that may or may not offer her the opportunity to satisfy her needs and wishes.
b) There is a continuity between man and other animals (even the simplest monacellular ones); man is a product of evolution.
c) Mind, man and animals are part of the physical universe, subject to the laws of physics.
d) The child is father to the man; the man is but a differentiated version of the child; somewhere inside the man, the child still lurks.
e) The secondary function is but a modification of the primary function. (Cf. p. 60)
f) Mental health and mental pathology obey the same laws; what differentiates them are quantitative differences, stemming from hereditary and environmental factors.
g) There is a continuity between dreams and psychical life in general.
h) The “Project” is premised on a continuity between neurology and psychology; inasmuch as Freud later emphasised their current divergence, he simultaneously foresaw a day when their roads would meet again.
i) Memory is not a separate faculty; the neuronal network that stores memory is simultaneously the site of thought, emotions and motivation. (p. 51). No part of the neuronal network is completely isolated from the rest; however, as a result of painful experiences or the ego’s use of its store of cathexis to alter the balance of forces, some idea complexes are relatively isolated from the rest of the mental apparatus.

8) A developmental model of the mind.

Freud’s model also lays stress on developmental continuities (which, again do not exclude qualitative shifts which can become quite radical). His default mode of explanation, as it were, is genetic or historical in nature. He continuously resorts to such explanations, which in his hands are sometimes phylogenetic (that is, relate to the evolution of the species) and sometimes ontogenetic (that is, relate to the genesis of the individual organism; part of ontogenesis is everything we would call learning). The achievements of each step in the developmental process are partial and precarious. The variable residues of previous modes of functioning remain more or less active and powerful. External obstacles to later modes of functioning can provoke a wholesale regression to previous modes of functioning.

a) Internal and external reality are only gradually distinguished. Wishes and perceptions are initially confused, as are memories and perceptions. Inasmuch as they are ever distinguished, this only happens later, when the organism learns to damp down memories and wishes.
b) The mental is based in, or a development out of, the non-mental. For instance, the psychical apparatus starts out by functioning in the mode of a reflex arc linking perceptual stimuli and
motor discharge. Only gradually does its functioning become more differentiated.90
c) Consciousness develops out of the unconscious; initially the mental apparatus has no self-
knowledge and cannot remember the sequence of thoughts whereby a particular conclusion was
reached, so as to be able to re-examine it critically.
d) Language develops out of primitive expressions of affect. (p. 62)
e) Intellectual functions develop out of primary functions. Man does not have a separate, pure
faculty of “reason”, either practical or theoretical. Such reason as he may have, comes into being
in the course of a development that is subject to the influence of countless contingencies.
Theoretical thought develops out of practical thought. Cognitive functions can remain intertwined
with affective ones; elements that are apparently manipulated according to theoretical functions,
can in fact remain under the sway of the primary function (or return to it). Thoughts that gain
access to consciousness may still be “excluded from processes of thought.” (351)

9) **Rational thought** is possible, but has to contend with powerful counter-forces. If these counter-
forces (unpleasure, wishes, other affects) are too strong, rationality goes by the board.

10) **Morality.** We would argue that Freud’s emphasis on the compelling nature of the avoidance
of unpleasure in the “Project” does not imply that all behaviour is ultimately egoistically
motivated, or that truly moral motives are excluded. The “Project” gives us little reason to see a
sense of self as primitive; before self and other are distinguished, neither egoism nor altruism is
possible. Egoism only becomes possible at a later stage of development.91

11) **The imperious nature of the subject’s inner needs.** However, any moral motives have to
content with other, very powerful motives, and in the end quantitative factors decide the outcome
of conflicting motives. ‘Pure altruism’ would thus seem to be excluded by Freud’s model in the
“Project”, as would be any unbiased perception of the nature and needs of the other. Moral
motives can only play a role to the extent that they are incorporated into the general economy
of the psychical apparatus; in other words, that non-compliance with these motives raises the level
of Q or unpleasure. Only when they are translated into this currency can they affect the outcome
of processes in the apparatus.92 The mental apparatus, governed as it is by the principle of

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90 Freud only states this explicitly in Ch. VII of the *Traumdeutung* (538), but as he refers to it as “a
requirement with which we have long been familiar”, we may assume that he already held this view at the
time of the “Project”.

91 Later, in the *Traumdeutung* and elsewhere, Freud will however often represent the subject as basically
egoistic. I would nevertheless still maintain that egoism is not part and parcel of the model of the psychical
apparatus found in the “Project” where, it is to be remembered, “the memory of remorse over bad
actions”(352) is presented as the most intense unpleasure.

92 On the one hand Freud’s model of needs here is thus more abstract than in later models. On the other
hand, the needs he names explicitly—hunger, breathing, sex—are more concrete and have a more somatic
ring than those on which his late models centre. (p. 50).
neuronal inertia (p. 50), is and remains an apparatus for avoiding unpleasure, or, what amounts to the same thing, avoiding the increase of $Q$.

The subject’s inner needs force him or her to be geared to the environment—social and material. Nevertheless, this is not primarily in the name of ethics, but primarily in the service of (other, more primitive) needs. Culture and language do introduce countless complications and overlays over more primitive mechanisms; however, these are later, and therefore more vulnerable, acquisitions. When something goes wrong at the level of more sophisticated mechanisms, a regression to more primitive mechanisms usually takes place.

12) The ego and unpleasure. The ego is entirely bound up with unpleasure—its very aim is the avoidance of unpleasure. (Whereas the primary process can only deal with actual unpleasure, the secondary process—which is constitutive for the ego, “taught by unpleasure”—aims to foresee and forestall the recurrence of unpleasure.) Its “first class of conscious memories” are unpleasant ones. (367; cf. p. 62) Its energy derives from unpleasure. (p. 59). And finally, its nemesis occurs when unpleasure becomes too intense, so that a primary process cannot be prevented. (p. 63). The ego deals with unpleasure both ‘realistically’—through flight or other specific action that modifies the external world—or ‘solipsistically’, by modifying the internal state of the mental apparatus, without modifying the external world—for instance, through repression. Unpleasure avoidance is at the root of both rational and irrational behaviour. “Unpleasure remains the only means of education.” (370)

It is to be noted that the ego is by no means primarily Freud’s name for a cognitive entity that would be based on a (correct or even incorrect) cognition by the subject of his own attributes, dispositions or ‘personality’. It is primarily a collection (or perhaps system) of strategies for the avoidance of unpleasure, inasmuch as these exceed the scope of the primary process, that is, manipulate the flow of $Q$ by means of side-cathexes. The material form taken by these strategies is a particular, variable distribution of cathectis over the network of neurones, which alters the preferred path along which $Q\pm$ flows. (This preferred path is therefore no longer simply determined by the facilitations that constitute memory).

But why call this the “ego”? As the ego in the “Project” coincides neither with the subject, nor with the psychical apparatus, it must probably in some way be linked with what we could call ‘the self-concept’. The answer to our question should perhaps be sought along the following lines: When a complex of neurones is simultaneously cathected the effect is equivalent to the neurones in question being interfacilitated, and thereby functioning like an integrated unit to a certain extent (p. 57). The ego is thus like a ‘territory’ in the mental apparatus within which associative processes typically take place. This both serves rationality—as one set of ways of avoiding unpleasure—and irrationality—as another. The extent of the ego is dictated by both sorts of factors, ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’. (The “ego” in the “Project” is thus something very different from the “ego” beloved of ego psychologists: the seat of the reality principle). When words
become attached to the processes of association—that will tend to follow the paths facilitated by the intervention of the ego—the ‘known’ thought-processes will tend to coincide with the boundaries of the ego.

For our purposes the non-coincidence of the ego and the subject (or, alternatively, the psychical apparatus) deserves note. The non-ego must therefore refer not only to the non-subject, but also to part of the subject. Everything causing unpleasure or intimately associated with unpleasure will tend to the status of non-ego.

**WHY I DEVOTE SO MUCH SPACE TO THE “PROJECT”, RATHER THAN JUST INVESTIGATING CH. VII OF THE TRAUMDEUTUNG**

The model presented in the “Project” is that of the mental apparatus as a network: simultaneously a network of neurones, and a network of ideas. In Part 2 of this section we shall see that, compared to this, the account given in Ch. VII of the *Traumdeutung* is much more linear: the mental apparatus as a series of more or less simple, more or less discrete and internally homogeneous systems. One could argue that Freud here gives a modular rather than a distributed, holistic model of the mind’s structure. (Or, alternatively, pictures its functioning as the passage of excitations through a series of vicissitudes that typically display a fixed temporal sequence).

Scattered remarks indicate that Freud still imagines the neural basis of this apparatus to be a network of neurones—now with the explicit proviso that ideas cannot be clearly located in neurones or groups of neurones. However, the model is itself presented in simple spatial terms. (Again with a proviso: that this is just a scaffolding, a model that should not be interpreted literally).

I find the model presented in the “Project” more attractive than the one found in the *Traumdeutung* for the following reasons:

- It emphasises a multiplicity of elements, of differences, and of heterogeneous relations, far more than does the model presented in the *Traumdeutung*.

- It is more consistent with the network model found in Freud’s hermeneutics and semiotics—a network of ideas related to each other through complex non-linear associative webs. (This non-linearity is expressed in concepts like ‘condensation’, ‘displacement’, ‘secondary elaboration’, and so on). It therefore allows the integration of Freudian hermeneutics and semiotics with Freudian metapsychology.

- It is more consistent with a differential semiotics (and, I would add: a differential ontology) à la Saussure and Derrida, and simultaneously

- more consistent with a neural network computer model (which gives an independent confirmation—from the hard-nosed world of information science—that the type of model
found in Freud’s “Project”, Saussurean linguistics and Derridean deconstruction is coherent and convincingly describes real-world complex systems).

- Being non-dualistic, non-atomistic and non-solipsistic in its basic assumptions, it provides a basis for a non-Cartesian approach to questions of intersubjectivity; it helps us not to read Cartesian presuppositions back into Freud, so that subjects again become discrete, monolithic, internally undifferentiated entities, that are closed in upon themselves. (Inasmuch as Freud’s discourse is still a mix of differential and older, substantialistic notions, the “Project” can help us more clearly identify where Freud represents an advance over the tradition, and where he still lags behind the implications of his own discoveries).\footnote{Cf. note 69 for Derrida’s diagnosis on this score.}

Freud’s notions regarding the most general, constitutive relations between the subject and others, and his understanding of the nature of (and motives for) othering get a very different complexion if we take the network model as essential to his view of the psychical apparatus. The individual subject is a network that is part of a network of networks. Language and culture are themselves networks that help to network individual subjects together. The question is not how isolated individuals can overcome their isolation to make contact with other individuals and external reality, but rather how some parts of an interconnected network can constitute themselves as relatively independent units vis à vis the rest of the network. The distinction self/other is not a clear and unproblematic given, but something that has to be constituted, and reconstituted from moment to moment. It is a minefield of illusions and delusions, in which it is highly unlikely that the true interconnectedness between various subjects will be acknowledged and correctly perceived, and as unlikely that merit and blame will be apportioned correctly or impartially to the various subjects distinguished.
PART 2: THE PSYCHICAL APPARATUS IN THE METAPSYCHOLOGICAL CHAPTER OF THE TRAUMDEUTUNG. (1900)

THE RELATION BETWEEN THIS TEXT AND THE “PROJECT”

As said before, the model developed in this text (1900a) is in many respects compatible with that found in the “Project”. Nevertheless, the overall flavour of the two texts is very different. The linear path generally followed by excitations according to the later text is very far removed from the dominant impression given in the earlier text. In the “Project”, excitations can follow a tremendous variety of meandering paths through the network, and pass through the same node repeatedly.94

Moreover, whereas the “Project” was formulated in largely neuro(psycho)logical terms, the model of the mental apparatus found in the Traumdeutung is purely psychological. The model is not formulated in terms of neurones, contact-barriers, facilitations and the flow of Q. In many respects the same terms that were given a neurological content in the earlier model now get a psychological one: Freud still speaks of cathexis, but here ideas are cathected, instead of neurones. Similarly, we still have a differentially facilitated network, but of ideas, not of neurones.95 Some concepts that were prominent in the “Project” play only a minor role in the Traumdeutung (e.g. attention, ego). Certain new concepts are also introduced in the latter work (e.g. censorship, preconscious).

THE GENERAL FEATURES OF THE PSYCHICAL APPARATUS

In the Traumdeutung, Freud latches onto one of Fechner’s conjectures: “that the scene of action of dreams is different from that of waking ideational life. [dass der Schauplatz der Träume ein anderer sei als der des wachen Vorstellungslebens]” (536; GW 541) He also conceives of the dream in terms of regression. To account for regression, and to give more substance to this idea of a “psychical locality” (536), he gives a new description of the mental apparatus. It is accompanied by the following schematic representation of its various component systems (or agencies: Instanzen) in their typical sequence:

94 Freud does not state this explicitly, but it follows from his description of how the psychical apparatus functions.

95 Although this network hardly features in Ch. VII, the hermeneutics presented in the other chapters of the Traumdeutung is completely built on the assumption that the psyche is characterised by such a network of ideas. These are richly interconnected with each other via an—almost endless—variety of ‘relations of association’. This last phrase (‘relations of association’) may suggest a subclass of all possible relations. It should, however, not be read in this way. On the contrary, the expression underlines the fact that any possible relation between the terms can be relevant. Most importantly, it underlines the fact that the relations which obtain need not be limited to standard logical or conceptual relations, or relations that are obviously relevant or important.
Freud tries to get a handle on the complexity of the psychical apparatus by analyzing its functions into component functions; each of these will then be assigned to one of the component systems of the apparatus. He compares the psyche with an optical apparatus, such as a camera or compound microscope. Then psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope … these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated. (536)

He has however hardly introduced his diagram before he reminds the reader that he does not want its spatiality to be taken literally. Especially, he undertakes to carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion. (536) … Strictly speaking, there is no need for the hypothesis that the psychical systems are actually arranged in a spatial order. It would be sufficient if a fixed order were

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96 Derrida takes the metaphor of the psychical apparatus as an optical apparatus to be the guiding one for Ch. VII of the Traumdeutung:

In the Traumdeutung, the metaphoric machine is not yet adapted to the scriptural analogy which already governs … Freud’s entire descriptive presentation. It is an optical machine. (Derrida 1978: 215)

I do not agree that this optical metaphor is sustained throughout the whole of Ch. VII (or sustains the whole of that chapter). To me, it rather seems to function as one model among others. For instance, economic (capitalist/entrepreneur (561); not wasting energy, etc.) and political metaphors (censorship) play a more important role.
established by the fact that in a given psychical process the excitation passes through the systems in a particular temporal sequence. (537)

But whether we read this diagram spatially or temporally, the impression it gives remains predominantly linear—which does not mean that it is strictly incompatible with a network model of the microstructure of the apparatus (“Project”) or of the mental contents with which the apparatus deals (Traumdeutung). “Psychical processes advance in general from the perceptual end to the motor end.” (537) (Cf. the arrow at the bottom of our diagram). The psychical apparatus is “constructed like a reflex apparatus. Reflex processes remain the model of every psychical function.” (538)

At the front of the apparatus (the left side of our diagram) we have the perceptual system, “which provides our consciousness with the whole multiplicity of sensory qualities”. (539) As in the 1895 “Project” and the 1925 “Mystic writing pad” (1925a), perception and memory are ascribed to separate systems. The perceptual system “receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory”. Memory does retain such traces, and must therefore form a separate system “which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces.” (538) Memory not only retains traces of perceptual contents, but also of their relations to each other—in Freud’s language: of the way they were associated with each other. Freud postulates an extended series of component elements—Mnem, Mnem’, Mnem”, etc.—making up the memory system (in our diagram this series is represented pars pro toto by its first two members); each element retains just one type of association: e.g. simultaneity in time, similarity,

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97 In discussing the genesis of dreams, Freud further qualifies this qualification. There is as little of a fixed temporal sequence as there is a fixed spatial order between psychical systems:

it seems to me unnecessary to suppose that dream-processes really maintain … the chronological order in which I have described them [W]hat happens in reality is no doubt a simultaneous exploring of one path and another, a swinging of the excitation now this way and now that, until at last it accumulates in the direction that is most opportune and one particular grouping becomes the permanent one. (576)

This again sounds much more like the functioning of a neural network than the linear execution of a computer programme. (Cf. p. 72)

98 The general impression of linearity in Ch. VII of the Traumdeutung may be partly linked to the expository devices Freud feels himself compelled to use. “I have set myself a hard task,” he laments,

and one to which my powers of exposition are scarcely equal. Elements in this complicated whole which are in fact simultaneous can only be represented successively in my description of them …; difficulties such as these it is beyond my strength to master. (593)

99 If we look at the diagram, memory and thought (whether unconscious or preconscious) seem to be ascribed to different systems, in contrast to the “Project”. On this point the “Project” is again closer to the neural network model than the Traumdeutung.
etc. One and the same excitation will therefore leave traces in more than one Mnem element. As in the “Project”, our memories are “in themselves unconscious. They can be made conscious; but there is no doubt that they can produce all their effects while in an unconscious condition.” (539) Our character depends on our memory-traces, especially those that have made the greatest impression on us.

At the other, motor end of the apparatus (the right side of our diagram), we find the preconscious system. Freud identifies it with the critical, censoring agency he has postulated earlier in the chapter. (See p. 94, below). This system also “directs our waking life and determines our voluntary, conscious actions.” (540) Behind it lies another system, the unconscious. While processes occurring in the preconscious have relatively unimpeded access to consciousness, the unconscious “has no access to consciousness except via the preconscious, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications.” (541) The criticising agency, the preconscious, is closer to consciousness than the agency that it criticises, the unconscious—“it stands like a screen between the latter and consciousness.” (540) Freud states that all thought-structures strive to gain access to consciousness by advancing to the preconscious; this also applies to the motor behind the formation of dreams, viz. the dream-wish (which is supplied by the unconscious). (541)

Both systems—the Pcs. and the Ucs.—are ‘unconscious’ in the descriptive sense in which the term was already current in psychology in Freud’s time.

There are two kinds of unconscious … Both of them are unconscious in the sense used by psychology; but in our sense one of them, which we term the Ucs., is also inadmissible to consciousness [bewusstseinsunfähig], while we term the other the Pcs. because its excitations—after observing certain rules, it is true, and perhaps only after passing a fresh censorship, though nonetheless without regard to the Ucs.—are able to reach consciousness. (614-615; GW 619-620)

Freud maintains that “the most complicated achievements of thought are possible without the assistance of consciousness” (593), and that we “are probably inclined greatly to over-estimate the conscious character of intellectual and artistic production”. (613)

**REGRESSION**

In this model hallucination and the hallucinatory character of dreams are seen as the result of regression: the excitation follows a reverse path, leading back to the perceptual system, and becomes as vivid as a perception. Such regression is the effect of two simultaneous forces; a repulsive force, exerted by resistance on the part of the preconscious, and an attractive force,  

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100 Echoing the “Project”, Freud indicates that the actual mechanism of memory will depend on the degree of facilitation between the elements.
exerted by a wishful memory having the intensity of a perception. Regression is as important in
the formation of neurotic symptoms as in the formation of dreams. Freud distinguishes three
kinds of regression, that are “at bottom one”:

(a) topographical regression, in the sense of the schematic picture [our p. 90] …; (b)
temporal regression, in so far as what is in question is a harking back to older psychical
structures; and (c) formal regression, where primitive methods of expression and
representation take the place of the usual ones.101 All these three kinds of regression are,
however, one at bottom and occur together as a rule; for what is older in time is more
primitive in form and in psychical topography lies nearer to the perceptual end. (548)

Dreams show us all these forms of regression (which are characteristic of the unconscious).
Dreams not only resuscitate the dreamer’s own childhood, the impulses (drives) by which it was
dominated, and the modes of expression available to it at the time; they also promise us
a picture of [Einblick in: view of, or insight into] a phylogenetic childhood — … of the
development of the human race, of which the individual’s development is in fact an
abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life. (548; GW 554)

This quote indicates that Freud saw individual development as the result of an interaction
between an inherited set of predispositions — what is “psychically innate” [das seelisch
Angeborene] (549; GW 554) in man — and a contingent series of environmental factors.102

THE UNCONSCIOUS; UNCONSCIOUS WISHES

In the course of this chapter, Freud determines the system unconscious (Ucs.) in a number of
ways:

a) It forms the “core of our being [Kern unseres Wesens]” and “consist[s] of unconscious wishful
impulses”. (603; GW 609). Its “activity knows no other aim than the fulfilment of wishes and [it
has] at its command no other forces than wishful impulses.” (568) “It is unable to do anything but
wish.” (600)

b) Its contents are said to be “immortal” (553), or “indestructible” (577).103 Unconscious wishes
represent paths which can always be traversed (577 [.] which have been laid down once
and for all, which never fall into disuse and which, whenever an unconscious excitation re-

101 The reversion to pictorial representations of ideas in dreams and hallucinations is an example of formal
regression. “Hallucinations … are in fact regressions—that is, thoughts transformed into images[. T]he only
thoughts that undergo this transformation are those which are intimately linked with memories that have
been suppressed or have remained unconscious.” (544)

102 The specific form given to this insight by Freud is, to say the least, controversial: ontogenesis
recapitulates phylogensis.

103 Freud elsewhere frequently refers to the “timelessness of the unconscious” (e.g. 1913c: 130 & 1915e:
187).
cathects them, are always ready to conduct the excitatory process to discharge. (553n)
Indeed it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible. In
the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten. (577)104

The fading of memories with time only occurs thanks to “laborious work” on the part of the
preconscious. (578)
c) Unconscious wishes are of an infantile nature. (553) The mode of functioning of the
unconscious—for which dreams are paradigmatic—is also infantile. “Dreaming is a piece of
infantile mental life that has been superseded.” (567)
d) Unconscious wishes “always remain active” (577), they are “always on the alert [immer rege]”
(553; GW 558); they strive constantly to gain access to consciousness and motility. Usually,
however, the censorship between the unconscious and the preconscious intervenes before this
happens. This censorship therefore “deserves to be recognised and respected [ehren: honoured] as
the watchman of our mental health.” (567)105 Note that the metaphor of the watchman differs
significantly from the general metaphor of censorship that it is supposed to supplement.

CENSORSHIP

The censorship has the vital function of preventing unconscious wishes from gaining access to
consciousness and motility. If the watchman is less vigilant during sleep, this need cause no harm,
because the access to motility is then blocked, so that unconscious impulses do not lead to
modifications of the external world. Without such a block, however, a change in the balance of
power between the unconscious forces and the censorship (because of a strengthening of the
former or a weakening of the latter) will be less innocent:

When this is so, the watchman is overpowered, the unconscious excitations overwhelm the
Pcs., and thence obtain control over our speech and actions; or they forcibly bring about
hallucinatory regression and direct the course of the apparatus (which was not designed for
their use) by virtue of the attraction exercised by perceptions on the distribution of our
psychical energy. To this state of things we give the name of psychosis. (568)106

But we cannot understand the nature of censorship and its place in Freud’s model, without
consulting Ch. IV of the Traumdeutung, where he introduces this concept into his theory of
dreams. After discussing a dream in which “distortion was shown … to be deliberate and to be a

104 The indestructible unconscious impulses are thus in some sense a present reality through which the
subject’s past shapes the subject’s present behaviour.
105 The celebratory tone of this passage is rare in Freud; it is similar to that found in his subsequent
reference to the mind as “that most marvellous and most mysterious of all instruments”. [dieses
allerwunderbarsten und allergeheimnisvollen Instruments] (608; GW 614)
106 For motives that are quite opposed to Freud’s own, this comparison of psychosis with an overthrow of
law and order will perhaps appeal to certain adherents of anti-psychiatry.
means of dissimulation” [die Entstellung [sich] erweist … als absichtlich, als ein Mittel der Verstellung] (1900a: 141; GW 2/3 147), Freud sketches a general model of how censorship functions in dreaming. (This model is also supposed to be valid for psychopathological processes and the functioning of the mental apparatus, generally):

In cases where the wish-fulfilment is unrecognizable, where it has been disguised [verkleidet], there must have existed some inclination to put up a defence against the wish; and owing to this defence the wish was unable to express itself except in a distorted shape [entstellt]. I will try to seek a social parallel to this internal event in the mind. Where can we find a similar distortion of a psychical act in social life? Only where two persons are concerned, one of whom possesses a certain degree of power which the second is obliged to take into account. In such a case the second person will distort [entstellt] his psychical acts or, as we might put it, will dissimulate [sie versteilt sich]. The politeness which I practice every day is to a large extent dissimulation of this kind. (141-142; GW 147)

It is remarkable that Freud cannot account for censorship, one of the central functions in the psychical apparatus, purely in terms of physical, biological or intrapsychic mechanisms. Instead, he has recourse to a metaphor that is anthropomorphic (persons), social (two persons playing two different roles) and political (power is involved and of the essence). This is a far cry from the language used in the “Project”, with its dream of “a psychology that shall be a natural science” (1950c: 295), and even from the comparison, elsewhere in the *Traumdeutung*, of “the censorship between two systems to the refraction that takes place when a ray of light passes into a new medium.” (611) The cultural-political phenomenon of politeness to which Freud also refers, can be read as an alternative metaphor to that of censorship. As such it is as foreign to any conception of the apparatus that takes it to be non-social or pre-social. Any charge of solipsism becomes utterly unfounded—the social and political have penetrated to the very heart of the psychical apparatus. (If such it may still be called).

Notably, what Freud describes here is to a large extent strategic, pre-emptive self-censorship by the first party, as a way of taking account of the second party’s power to censor. What this self-censorship consists in is indicated by a morphologically and semantically related pair of terms

107 The notion of power found here is the more interesting because it is not a model of absolute power. Absolute power would not have to negotiate (or enter into a strategic contest) with that which it tries to censor.

108 This anthropomorphic metaphor alternates with others: instead of persons, Freud then talks of powers [Mächte], currents [Strömungen], systems, agencies [Instanzen].

109 Cf. the metaphor of censorship with that of the watchman, which also has an economic dimension: property is part of what the watchman defends.

110 Political because the power of the other is the only motive for politeness Freud mentions here.
(distortion and dissimulation in English; Entstellung and Verstellung in German). Freud continues:

A similar difficulty confronts the political writer who has disagreeable truths to tell those in authority.\footnote{The German can also be translated as: “truths to tell which are disagreeable to those in power”. [\textit{den Machthabern unangenehme Wahrheiten zu sagen hat}] (GW 147) Contrary to what the SE suggests, Freud’s German does not specify that the \textit{Machthabern} are the addressee of the political writer’s “disagreeable truths”. I prefer translating \textit{Machthabern} with “those in power”, “rulers” or “powers-that-be”, rather than with “authorities”, as does the SE, because “authorities” has a suggestion of legitimacy which is absent in the German original. The conflict between the two parties then becomes less sharp (I am tempted to say: less \textit{Nietzschean}) than in Freud’s original German. Freud’s model here is compatible with the second party’s exercise of power being completely arbitrary. In contrast to the metaphor of the watchman—the watchman we should honour—this metaphor seems to mobilise our sympathy for the party opposing the status quo.} If he presents them undisguised, the authorities will suppress his words—after they have been spoken \textit{nachträglich}: retroactively], if his pronouncement was an oral one, but beforehand, if he had intended to make it in print. A writer must beware of the censorship, and on its account he must soften \textit{ermässigt} and distort the expression of his opinion. According to the strength and sensitiveness \textit{Empfindlichkeit: touchiness} of the censorship he finds himself compelled either merely to refrain from certain forms of attack, or to speak in allusions in place of direct references, or he must conceal his objectionable pronouncement beneath some apparently innocent disguise: for instance, he may describe a dispute between two Mandarins in the Middle Kingdom, when the people he really has in mind are officials in his own country. The stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious \textit{witziger} too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent \textit{Spur} of the true meaning.\footnote{I must admit that I am completely unable to resist the extended metaphor Freud elaborates on these pages. Even were it to be definitively proven that Freud is a fraud (Israëls 1995), completely unscientific (Grünbaum 1984; Popper 1963) or in some other way completely disreputable, this metaphor would still haunt me. Having accepted this metaphor, who will be able to wash his hands of the rest of Freud’s theory? The whole of psychoanalysis seems to be implicated in this metaphor. Cf. Freud’s imagery of disguise here with the similarly Nietzschean sustained metaphor in the \textit{Five Lectures}:}

Note that Freud emphasises the means used to \textit{circumvent} the censorship, rather than the idea that the censorship simply \textit{prohibits} or prevents the expression of some unvarnished truth. (Although...
that can be one of its effects). The paradigmatic effect of censorship is devious speech (or writing), rather than total silence. In fact, Freud even explicitly mentions the case where thoughts are expressed without disguise, only to be suppressed retroactively. Direct references to what is intended are replaced by allusions.

The fact that the phenomena of censorship and of dream-distortion correspond down to their smallest details justifies us in presuming that they are similarly determined. We may therefore suppose that dreams are given their shape in individual human beings by the operation of two psychical forces (or we may describe them as currents or systems) [Mächte—powers—(Strömungen, Systeme)]; and that one of these constructs [bildet: fashions, shapes] the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish and, by the use of that censorship, forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish.

Anticipating the second topography, I would go further: the strict parallelism between the two series of phenomena indicates that censorship in the psychical apparatus is the result of the internalisation (or ‘introjection’) of the social phenomena of censorship (in a very broad sense that includes the phenomena of ‘politeness’). This is confirmed by a number of later statements by Freud, which indicate that in the small child—i.e. before this internalisation/socialisation—the unconscious and the preconscious are as yet hardly distinguished.

113 An effect which gets more stress in the metaphor of the watchman preventing access than in that of censorship.

114 How must we imagine this suppression of words that have already been spoken? The imposition of sanctions on the person who spoke them, or on anybody repeating them or alluding to them? The production of more words to deny the disagreeable words or to cast suspicion on the person uttering them? Strategies to isolate what has been said? All these options make sense, metaphorically. This question points to the whole issue of retroactivity [Nachträglichkeit—usually rendered in the SE rather infelicitously with “deferred action”] whereby what happens does not have a fixed meaning or identity; subsequent events ([pleasant or unpleasant] repetitions, additions, denials, etc.) can completely alter its complexion.

115 “Während die andere eine Zensur an diesem Traumwunsch übt und durch diese Zensur eine Entstellung seiner Äusserung erzwingt: … and through this censorship dictates a distortion in the expression of the wish.” (GW 149)

I would say that it is mostly the threat of this censorship—not its use—that forces the dream wish to assume a disguise. My reading of this passage allows the threat of censorship to evoke a teleologically motivated distortion in the expression of the wish; the SE translation (“use of that censorship … forcibly brings about a distortion”) is biased towards one particular effect of the censorship, where it directly distorts the expression of the wish, without the wish-producing agency being in any way involved.

116 E.g.: In the psychology of adults we have fortunately reached the point of being able to divide mental processes into conscious and unconscious and of being able to give a clearly-worded description of both. With children this distinction leaves us almost completely in the lurch. It is often embarrassing to decide what one would choose to call consciousness and what unconscious. Processes which have

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footnote ctd. on next page—
It seems plausible to suppose that the privilege enjoyed by the second agency is that of permitting thoughts to reach consciousness. [das Vorrecht der zweiten Instanz sei eben die Zulassung zum Bewusstsein] Nothing, it would seem, can reach consciousness from the first system without passing through the second agency; and the second agency allows nothing to pass without exercising its rights and making such modifications as it thinks fit in the thought which is seeking admission to consciousness. [und die ihr genehmen Abänderungen am Bewusstseinswerber durchzusetzen] (144; GW 2/3: 149)

We may well ask whether in these pages (141-144) Freud is not en passant undermining a simple referential, communicative model of language, according to which the function of language would be to make manifest and communicate truths about the way things really are. In a truly Nietzschean way, Verstellung (feigning, disguise) seems to be put at the heart of language:117 The use of language is a compromise between the truth—the truth about unconscious wishes, which is often or mostly opposed to the truth about how things actually are—and the demands of the powers that be (or their intrapsychic representatives). Against this backdrop, ‘othering’ will not appear as an eccentric departure from the general and true function of language: the enunciation of impartial truths about the way things are, so as to render them accessible to all and sundry. Rather, it will be one more form of the strategic use of language to express or advance unconscious wishes against and around the censure of the powers that be.118

Let us summarise the various effects of censorship (a few of which will only be mentioned here for the first time).

117 Why take these phenomena as central to language, rather than peripheral? If all thoughts start out by being unconscious, then they must all pass a censorship to be expressed. Besides, a similar censorship is at work whenever we take account of the power of others in social life—and this could be said to be the rule, rather than the exception.

118 Such a generalisation of the place of Verstellung in language has problematic consequences for Freud’s distinction between latent and manifest truth. If language is as a rule a question of Verstellung, Verstellung can no longer serve to distinguish (inter alia) the manifest dream content (disguised/verstellt) from the latent dream-thoughts (which express the undisguised truth) in any simple, unproblematic way. Whereas Freud, as it were, tends to treat unconcealment as the default option, with concealment as the problematic deviation, this other view of language—drawn from Freud’s own metaphor of censorship—seems to take Verstellung as the default option, with “complete concealment” and “complete lack of concealment” as a problematic deviation.
Censorship partly acts on words directly, without influencing the behaviour of those whose words are being censored, and partly indirectly, by inducing a pre-emptive self-censorship in those who fear censorship. One way or the other, in Freud’s description, it can lead to

- the use of euphemisms—the “softening” of expressions (142)
- allusions to what is intended taking the place of direct reference (for instance: the here and now will be alluded to via a reference to another time and place)
- meaning being disguised (the concealment of a disagreeable message beneath an innocent disguise—“a wolf in sheep’s clothing”)
- deliberate distortions of a text (so that the intended meaning is misrepresented through alterations and disfigurements)
- the erasure, cutting out or blackening of words
- “interpolations and additions” to a text (489)
- the prohibition or silencing of speech; preventing the publication of a text
- the retroactive “suppression” of a text.\textsuperscript{119}

In the cited passages (141-144) censorship is generally not linked to the silencing of speech, but to the becoming strategic of speech, so as to circumvent censorship.\textsuperscript{120} The stricter and touchier the censorship, the more far-fetched and ingenious the disguise. (Rather than that the silence then is more complete). “Disguise” has the interesting ambivalence that it both shows and hides the intended meaning. The disguise is a compromise between saying what is intended and not saying it. In Freud’s paradigmatic case both the censorship and its evasion are—partially—successful. Both are active, and strategic in their activity.\textsuperscript{121} The power of the censoring agency can best be resisted by partially submitting to its censorship. In contrast to Freud’s watchman metaphor, his presentation of the metaphor of censorship suggests that the unconscious as a rule does succeed in gaining access to consciousness in some form or other.

\textsuperscript{119} The various points mentioned, on the basis of Freud’s text, are not meant to be mutually exclusive.

\textsuperscript{120} Or comply with the demands of politeness.

\textsuperscript{121} Freud’s account of the relation between the wish-constructing agency and the censoring agency in the \textit{Traumdeutung} is perhaps insufficiently dialectical. A truly dialectical account would have to explicitly take account of the fact that the disguise which fools the censorship on one occasion frequently turns out to be insufficient the next time round and also take account of the fact that the wiliness and flexibility of the censoring agency seldom lags far behind that of the disguising agency. Think of the way in which the analysand’s dreams tend to become more and more opaque, on average, as an analysis progresses:

The very first dreams that … patients bring, before they have learnt anything of the technique of translating dreams … may be described as unsophisticated: they betray a great deal to the listener, like the dreams of so-called healthy people. (1911e—SE XII: 95)

For an example of such a dream, see note 169, below.
INTERACTION BETWEEN THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE PRECONSCIOUS

Unconscious wishes are always on the alert [inner rege], ready at any time to find their way to expression when an opportunity arises for allying themselves with an impulse [Regung] from the conscious and for transferring their own great intensity on to the latter’s lesser one. (553; GW 558)

Such an alliance is usually the only way in which unconscious impulses can gain access to the preconscious.

We learn from [the psychology of the neuroses] that an unconscious idea is as such quite incapable of entering the preconscious and that it can only exercise any effect there by establishing a connection with an [harmlosen: innocuous] idea which already belongs to the preconscious, by transferring its intensity on to it and by getting itself ‘covered’ by it. [T]he preconscious idea, which thus acquires an undeserved degree of intensity, may either be left unaltered by the transference, or it may have a modification forced upon it, derived from the content of the [unconscious] idea (562-563; GW 568).

When the two impulses, conscious and unconscious, coincide, it will appear as if only the conscious impulse has been active. (The “undeserved degree of intensity” of the impulse will then be the only indication of its partly unconscious derivation). If they do not coincide, a compromise will be formed. This is often seen in dreams.

According to Freud, “The dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish”. (160). Does the occurrence of anxiety dreams not disprove this formula? Freud’s riposte is that anxiety dreams are dreams in which an unconscious wish that is repugnant to the preconscious is satisfied by the dream—and recognised as such because it is insufficiently disguised. What is a source of pleasure to the unconscious is then a source of unpleasure to the preconscious.

There is no longer anything contradictory to us in the notion that a psychical process which develops anxiety can nevertheless be the fulfilment of a wish. We know that it can be explained by the fact that the wish belongs to one system, the Ucs., while it has been repudiated and suppressed by the other system, the Pcs. (580)

In a footnote added in 1919, Freud remarks:

A dreamer’s relation to his wishes is a quite peculiar one. He repudiates them and censors them—he has no liking for them, in short. So that their fulfilment will give him no pleasure, but just the opposite[,] … in the form of anxiety. Thus a dreamer in his relation to his dream-wishes can only be compared to an amalgamation of two separate people who are linked by some important common element. [I]f two people are not at one with each other the fulfilment of a wish of one of them may bring nothing but unpleasure to the other. (580-581n; note that the individual psyche is here again approached in terms of a social metaphor)

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122 This word is not accounted for in the English translation.
In ‘punishment-dreams’ something similar occurs, though they need not generate anxiety. Freud uses the opportunity to qualify the conscious/unconscious scheme—in such dreams what is fulfilled is a wish

that the dreamer may be punished for a repressed and forbidden wishful impulse. … The mechanism of dream-formation would … be greatly clarified if instead of the opposition between ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ we were to speak of that between the ‘ego’ and the ‘repressed’. (557-558)

(To avoid a detour into the psycho-neuroses, Freud only indicates this line of thought in a cursory way).

[Punishment-dreams] occur most easily … where the day’s residues are thoughts of a satisfying nature but the satisfaction which they express is a forbidden one. … The essential characteristic of punishment-dreams would thus be that in their case the dream-constructing wish is not an unconscious wish derived from the repressed (from the system Ucs.), but a punitive one reacting against it and belonging to the ego, though at the same time an unconscious (that is to say, preconscious) one.123 (558)

Similarly, neurotic symptoms are a compromise between wishes from the Ucs. and the demands of the Pcs., that lead to the repudiation of the former. In his example, Freud stays with the theme of self-punishment:

A hysterical symptom develops only where the fulfilments of two opposing wishes, arising each from a different psychical system, are able to converge in a single expression. (569) The determinant which does not arise from the Ucs. is invariably … a train of thought reacting against the unconscious wish—a self-punishment, for instance. (569)

However, some degree of conflict between the two systems is normal: “Even where psychical health is perfect, the subjugation [Unterwerfung] of the Ucs. by the Pcs. is not complete; the measure of suppression [Unterdrückung] indicates the degree of our psychical normality.” (580-581; GW 587)124

123 In 1930, Freud adds the following footnote: “This would be the appropriate point for a reference to the ‘super-ego’, one of the later findings of psycho-analysis.” (558; GW 563)

124 Freud also refers to the subjugation of the unconscious by the preconscious at other points in Ch. VII of the Traumdeutung:

Psychotherapy can pursue no other course than to bring the Ucs. under the domination of the Pcs. [der Herrschaft … zu unterwerfen: subjugate to the domination] (578; GW 584)

The function of dreaming is to bring

back under the control of the preconscious the excitation in the Ucs. which has been left free; in so doing, it discharges the Ucs. excitation, serves it as a safety valve and at the same time preserves the sleep of the preconscious in return for a small expenditure of waking activity. (579)
To the extent that the psychical apparatus is regulated by unpleasure, this complicates its functioning considerably. For our theme it is significant that the subject can be seen as a plurality that relates to itself as to another. (Or: a plurality of which each part relates to every other part as to another). The repudiation and censoring of parts of oneself and the repudiation and censoring of others will thus be closely related to each other—and to anxiety. It is to be expected that when others manifest impulses that the subject has repudiated and censored in himself, this will lead to particularly intense reactions, in which the relation to the external other will not be separable from the relation to the internal other. The frequency with which the contribution from the Pcs. is a reaction-formation against the wish from the Ucs. further compounds the already immense hermeneutical complexity of human expressions and actions: “the lady doth protest too much, methinks”. (Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, III.ii)

We have seen (p. 100) that unconscious wishes are always “on the alert”, always looking for opportunities to ally themselves with preconscious contents. Preconscious thoughts that are in themselves quite correctly formed are especially likely to be catherine from unconscious wishes [Zielvorstellungen: purposive ideas] when “left to their own devices”, i.e. when not catherine from (pre)conscious wishes. (This can occur, for example, when a preconscious idea has been suppressed or repudiated—that is, when it is first catherine and then decatherine; or when it has simply been neglected—that is, when it never was catherine from the preconscious in the first place.) The train of thought in question will then persist but lose its “right of entry into consciousness” because of its link with the unconscious wish. “What has hitherto been a preconscious train of thought has now been ‘drawn into the unconscious’.” (594) Whether a train of thought belongs to the preconscious or the unconscious therefore depends on whether the wishes from which its energy derives belong to the preconscious or the unconscious. Even a train of thought that in itself is completely correct and admissible to consciousness can be drawn into the unconscious when energy is transferred to it from an unconscious wish. It now serves as a cover behind which the unconscious wish can strive for satisfaction without being detected. As far as the theme of othering is concerned, this again underlines that an unconscious motivation for othering is completely compatible with the use of truths, arguments and so on that in themselves seem perfectly rational.125

**THE PRIMARY AND THE SECONDARY PROCESS**

Being “drawn into the unconscious” means far more than simply that the thoughts are now inaccessible to consciousness. On the contrary, “these normal thoughts are submitted to abnormal

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125 Righteous indignation would be a good example: who has not experienced the satisfaction of being able to vent his far from innocent anger freely because of some real misdemeanour on the part of his adversary? And if the anger seems disproportionate to the misdemeanour—well, that only goes to prove one’s righteousness, one’s steadfast refusal to tolerate injustice.
treatment” (597); they are subjected to “a series of transformations which we can no longer recognise as normal psychical processes and which lead to a result that bewilders us—a psychopathological structure.” (595) (Such a transformation of a completely “correct” (SE: “irrational”) train of preconscious thought into the “incorrect” (SE: “irrational”) form that is typical of the unconscious, takes place in the formation of both dreams and neurotic symptoms.)

Freud enumerates a few of these transformations as follows:

- **condensation**: the unhindered transference of the intensity of one idea or set of ideas onto another; through repetition of this process “the intensity of a whole train of thought may eventually be concentrated in a single ideational element” (595) which, thanks to this intensity, may then be able to force its way into consciousness;

- the formation of “intermediate ideas” [Mittelvorstellungen] (596; GW 601);

- the elements between which intensities are transferred seem to be linked to each other not by relevant conceptual links, but only by far-fetched, apparently irrelevant associations, particularly those pertaining to the sound and shape of words (596);

- ideas that—in thought, if not in action—would otherwise have been treated as incompatible with each other, continue to exist side by side, “combine to form condensations, just as though there were no contradiction between them, or arrive at [absurd] compromises”. (596).

Freud describes what these processes share as follows:

It will be seen that the chief characteristic of these processes is that the whole stress is laid upon making the cathecting energy mobile and capable of discharge; the content and the proper meaning of the psychical elements to which the cathexes are attached are treated as of little consequence. (597)

That is to say: they are all examples of what Freud calls the **primary process**. In discussing the formation of dreams, Freud gives a global characterisation of the primary and the secondary process:

Two fundamentally different kinds of psychical processes are concerned in the formation of dreams. One of these [the secondary process] produces perfectly rational [correct] dream-thoughts, of no less validity than normal thinking, while the other [the primary process] treats these thoughts in a manner which is in the highest degree bewildering and irrational [incorrect]. [zweierlei wesensverschiedene psychische Vorgänge beteiligt sind; der eine schafft vollkommen korrekte, dem normalen Denken gleichwertige Traumgedanken; der andere verfährt mit denselben auf eine höchst befremdende, inkorrekte Weise.] (597; GW 602)

Freud immediately adds that hysterical symptoms arise in an exactly analogous way. Here, too, normal thoughts have been submitted to abnormal treatment: they have been transformed into the symptom by means of condensation and the formation of compromises, by way of superficial associations and in disregard of contradictions, and also, it may be, along the path of regression. (597)
On the basis of his findings regarding hysteria, Freud posits the following thesis:

\[ a \text{ normal train of thought is only submitted to [such] abnormal treatment … if an unconscious wish, derived from infancy, and in a state of repression, has been transferred to it. } \quad \text{(598)} \]

However, the term “repression” [Verdrängung] requires explanation.\(^{126}\) Freud introduces this term in the context of a model that often recapitulates in psychological terms what the “Project” had presented in neurological terms. Freud’s argument covers familiar ground; we again encounter, successively: the constancy principle, the equation of an increase of tension with unpleasure and a decrease of tension with pleasure, and “the experience of satisfaction” (p. 56) that leaves behind as residue something that Freud henceforth calls a wish. In the regulation of the activities of the apparatus, unpleasure is again given priority over pleasure:

\[ \text{A current of this kind in the apparatus, starting from unpleasure and aiming at pleasure, we have termed a ‘wish’; and we have asserted that only a wish is able to set the apparatus in motion and that the course of the excitation in it is automatically regulated by feelings of pleasure and unpleasure. } \quad \text{(598)} \]

As in the “Project”, wishing initially consists in a hallucinated repetition of the experience of satisfaction. Because this mechanism turns out to be futile, a more complex mode of functioning gradually evolves. This is the secondary process, which strives for satisfaction along the roundabout path of an attempted modification of the external world.

**FREE AND BOUND ENERGY**

The secondary process poses two exigencies. Firstly, the existence of a freely accessible store of detailed, interconnected memories of experiences in the world, as these relate to the satisfaction of wishes. Secondly, an economic use of energy; the experimental “sending out and withdrawal of cathexes” must not use up the energy needed to alter the external world. Under the sway of the

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\(^{126}\) Lest we read Verdrängung as a term with no resonances beyond “repression” as a—supposedly non-metaphorical—technical term in (Freudian) psychology, compare some of the possible translations of its verbal root, verdrängen: to drive out, to oust, to supersede, to replace, to displace, to drive away. (Collins 1991). (Note that most of these translations are singularly apt as glosses on the verb “to other” as well). It is also instructive that Freud on occasion describes repression as an “ostrich policy” [Taktik des Vogels Straus] (600; GW 606). Contrary to the everyday connotations of “repression” or “suppression” [Unterdrückung, a term Freud also uses occasionally], what is “pushed underground” here is not what one does not want to perceive, but that with which it would have been perceived. (A further relativisation of the usual ways of representing the psychical apparatus spatially). In another passage, repression seems to be equated to isolation, rather than suppression: “They are left to themselves—‘repressed’”. (604)
secondary process the flow of energy in the apparatus is therefore small, while the level of quiescent energy is kept high.  

Freud identifies the primary process as the activity typical of a first $\psi$-system—the unconscious—and the secondary process as that typical of a second one—the preconscious. As in the “Project”, he presents their essential difference as that between free and bound energy:

the activity of the first $\psi$-system is directed towards securing the free discharge of the quantities of excitation, while the second system, by means of the cathexes emanating from it, succeeds in inhibiting this discharge and in transforming the cathexis into a quiescent one, no doubt with a simultaneous raising of its level. Under the dominion of the second system the discharge of excitation is governed by quite different mechanical conditions from those in force under the dominion of the first system. (599)

Note that the inhibiting function that the “Project” ascribed to the ego, is here ascribed to the preconscious: “The system Pcs. … has at its disposal for distribution a mobile cathectic energy, a part of which is familiar to us in the form of attention.” (615)

The function of the secondary process is not to prevent discharge, but to delay it until reality-testing shows that the correct conditions obtain in the external world; the accumulated excitations then discharge themselves in the movement needed to secure the longed-for satisfaction.

Freud’s description of the pain/avoidance pair (the “negative” counterpart of the satisfaction/wish pair) in the Traumdeutung is far more condensed than it was in the “Project”. If random movements following upon a sensation of pain succeed in removing (us from) the painful stimulus, they will become linked to the painful memory, and will be reactivated whenever it is. Far from there being any tendency to recathect the memory image in a hallucinatory way, “there will be an inclination in the primitive apparatus to drop [it] immediately” when it is reactivated. (600)

This effortless and regular avoidance by the psychical process of the memory of anything that had once been distressing [is no more than the repetition of the previous flight from

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127 In the “Project” a high cathexis was said to enable small quantities to flow along paths that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. Freud seems to assume this principle (or something similar) in the Traumdeutung as well, without, however, stating or justifying it.

128 Just before this passage, Freud had admitted:

The mechanics of these processes are quite unknown to me; anyone who wished to take these ideas seriously would have to look for physical analogies to them and find a means of picturing the movements that accompany excitation of the neurones. (599)

Although Freud’s account here does not presuppose the neurological account given in the “Project”, to me it seems entirely compatible with the basic presuppositions of the latter—the brain as a distributed system (which we can today see as analogous to what in computing is called a “neural network”).
the perception] [and] affords us the prototype and first example of psychical repression.

[M]uch of this … ostrich policy … is still to be seen in the normal mental life of adults.

(600)

If this were the last word, the whole apparatus would be “incapable of bringing anything disagreeable into the context of its thoughts”; as it is, this is only true of the first \( \psi \)-system, that is “unable to do anything but wish.” (600) But the second \( \psi \)-system works differently, despite the fact that

the unpleasure principle … regulates the course of excitation in [it] as much as in the first.

(601) [T]he key to the whole theory of repression [is that] the second system can only cathect an idea if it is in a position to inhibit any development of unpleasure that may proceed from it. (601)

This inhibition need not be complete, however: if a beginning of unpleasure is allowed, this acts as a signal that what is remembered should be avoided when trying to achieve the desired goal.

(601)

Whereas the primary process seeks to re-establish a “perceptual identity” [Wahrnehmungsidentität] with the experience of satisfaction by means of hallucination and related phenomena, the secondary process does not; it seeks rather to establish a “thought identity” [Denkidentität] with it. (602; GW 607) Such a Denkidentität is the goal of all thinking: thinking is never more than a detour from the memory of a satisfaction (a memory which has been adopted as a purposive idea) to an identical cathexis of the same memory which it is hoped to attain once more through an intermediate stage of motor experiences. Thinking must concern itself with the connecting path between ideas, without being led astray by the intensity of those ideas.

(602)

The typical products of the primary process: condensations, intermediate ideas and so on, will lead away from this connecting path, and so thwart the establishment of the desired identity.

“Processes of this kind are therefore scrupulously avoided in secondary thinking.” (602) Because “thinking must aim at freeing itself more and more from exclusive regulation by the unpleasure principle” and excessive intensities of pleasure and unpleasure would similarly lead it astray, “the development of affect in thought-activity [must be restricted] to the minimum required for acting as a signal.” (602) Thanks to the mediation by consciousness, this is achieved by a hypercathectic [Überbesetzung]—a further raising of the level of cathexis.

However, that aim is seldom attained completely, even in normal mental life, and our thinking always remains exposed to falsification by interference from the unpleasure principle. (603)
REPRESSION

But the main threat to the sound functioning of the mental apparatus does not come from its submission to the unpleasure principle. Rather, this threat is expressed in the formula that “thoughts … which represent themselves as the product of secondary thought-activity [Denkarbeit], … become subject to the primary psychical process” (603; GW 608)—the very process [Arbeit: labour, work] found in the genesis of dreams and hysterical symptoms. (As at many other crucial points in the Traumdeutung, Freud here imports conclusions derived from his theory of the psychoneuroses into his theory of dreams).

Freud’s argument concerning the nature of repression commences with a passage full of pregnant statements:

When I described one of the psychical processes occurring in the mental apparatus as the ‘primary’ one, what I had in mind was not merely considerations of relative importance and efficiency [Leistungsfähigkeit—proper functioning]; I intended also to … give an indication of its chronological priority. It is true that, so far as we know, no psychical apparatus exists which possesses a primary process only and that such an apparatus is to that extent a theoretical fiction. But this much is a fact: the primary processes are present in the mental apparatus from the first, while it is only during the course of life that the secondary processes unfold, and come to inhibit and overlay the primary ones …. In consequence of the belated appearance [verspäteten Eintreffens] of the secondary processes, the core of our being, consisting of unconscious wishful impulses, remains inaccessible to the understanding and inhibition of the preconscious [unfassbar129 und unhemmbar für das Vorbewusste]; the part played by the latter is restricted once and for all to directing along the most expedient paths the wishful impulses that arise from the unconscious. These unconscious wishes exercise a compelling force [Zwang] upon all later mental trends, a force which those trends are obliged to fall in with or which they may perhaps endeavour to divert and direct to higher aims. A further result of the belated appearance [Verspätung] of the secondary process is that a wide sphere of mnemic material is inaccessible to preconscious cathexis. (603-604; GW 608-609)

So the primary process not only comes first as far as importance and power are concerned, but also temporally: it does not have to be developed—it is active in the psychical apparatus from the very beginning. Although the secondary process is never absent in the apparatus (an apparatus from which it is totally absent is only a “theoretical fiction”), its later extent and its ability to inhibit and overlay the primary process only develop gradually. This passage suggests that the preconscious sits upon the “core of our being, … the unconscious wishful impulses” as upon the

129 Unfassbar can also mean: what cannot even be imagined or represented. However we translate this word, it presents the unconscious as other to the preconscious.
back of a tiger\textsuperscript{130} whose nature it cannot comprehend and whose movement it cannot check; it can only fall in with this movement or perhaps deflect it in the direction of aims that count as “higher”. (What Freud calls “sublimation”).

Among the infantile “unconscious wishful impulses” that in their indestructibility constitute “the core of our being”, there are some whose fulfilment would generate unpleasure rather than pleasure. This happens when the unconscious wishes are incompatible with the “purposive ideas of secondary thinking” that have arisen at later stages of development. This “transformation of affect” [Affektverwandlung] (from pleasure to unpleasure) forms the essence of repression, while the why and how of this transformation forms the problem of repression. (604) Such a transformation of affect does in fact occur in childhood (witness the emergence of disgust where previously it was absent) and is due to the activity of the secondary system. The Pcs. can only inhibit the discharge of affect from memories that are accessible to it. Memories are not accessible to the preconscious when they belong to the Ucs., nor where they were preconscious but have become the bearers of an affect that actually derives from the unconscious. Not being able to inhibit the discharge of the affect, and under the sway of the unpleasure principle as it is, the Pcs. now turns away from the “transference thoughts” (the preconscious thoughts that have become the bearer of the affect which rightfully belongs to other—unconscious—thoughts).

They are left to themselves—‘repressed’—and thus it is that the presence of a store of infantile memories, which has from the first been held back from the Pcs., becomes a sine qua non of repression. (604)

From the perspective of the unpleasure principle, this repression is successful in those cases where unpleasure ceases when the Pcs. withdraws its cathexis from the transference thoughts. It is unsuccessful when the withdrawal of preconscious cathexis is insufficient to stop the generation of unpleasure, as happens when “the repressed unconscious wish receives an organic reinforcement, which it passes on to its transference thoughts”. (604) (This organic reinforcement presumably derives from the somatic side of the sexual drives). A next step in the defensive struggle is that the Pcs. “produces an ‘anticathexis’ [Gegenbesetzung]”, i.e. reinforces ideas that are contrary to the unacceptable wish. (For instance, the subject can try to neutralise the unacceptable wish “I desire him” by strongly cathecting an opposing idea such as “I loathe him” or “He desires me”. Othering will therefore sometimes be traceable to a repudiated desire that has

\textsuperscript{130} Several tigers, actually—our “wishful impulses” generally show no unity. If the image of the tiger or tigers sounds too Platonic—or Buddhist—to apply to Freud, compare the following passage:

The respect paid to dreams in antiquity is, however, based upon correct psychological insight and is the homage paid to the uncontrolled and indestructible forces in the human mind, to the ‘daemonic’ power [auf richtige psychologische Ahnung gegründete Huldigung vor dem Ungebändigten und unzerstörbaren in der Menschenseele, dem Dämonischen] which produces the dream-wish and which we find at work in our unconscious. (614; GW 619)
been repressed by anticathecting its opposite). The transference thoughts will now “force their way through in some form of compromise which is reached by the production of a symptom.”

(605) If the unconscious wishes were already hard to recognise behind the disguise offered by the preconscious thoughts onto which their affect was transferred, they are even more so in the symptom, where the disguise has been compounded by entering a compromise with ideas that are directly opposed to it.

Repression means that ideas are simultaneously strongly cathected from the unconscious and not cathected from the preconscious. As soon as this happens, the ideas in question “become subject to the primary psychical process and their one aim is motor discharge or … hallucinatory revival of the desired perceptual identity.” (605)

If the processes that now occur are bizarre, this must not be attributed to a simple lack or absence (of intelligence or attention, for instance). Rather, they reveal the trace of something positive: “the uninhibited energy from the unconscious which is striving to find an outlet” with which the transference ideas are charged. The default processes occurring in the psychical apparatus are exactly these ‘incorrect’, “primary” ones:

these processes which [we] described as irrational [inkorrektien Vorgänge] are not in fact falsifications of normal processes—intellectual errors—but are [the]\(^{131}\) modes of activity of the psychical apparatus that have been freed from inhibition. (605; GW 611)

In support of this view, one could maintain that the phenomenology of stupidity and inattention is indeed very different from that of dreams, the neuroses and other products of the unconscious.

At this point in his argument, Freud again has recourse to a conclusion form his theory of the psychoneuroses. The main threat to the soundness of the mental apparatus derives from the revival of repressed sexual wishes from infancy in later developmental stages—only they can supply a motive for the formation of psychoneurotic symptoms.

Only sexual wishful impulses from infancy, which have undergone repression … during the developmental period of childhood … are capable of being revived during later developmental periods (whether as a result of the subject’s sexual constitution, which is derived from an initial bisexuality, or as a result of unfavourable influences acting upon the course of his sexual life) and are thus able to furnish the motive force for the formation of psycho-neurotic symptoms of every kind. It is only by reference to these sexual forces that we can close the gaps that are still patent in the theory of repression. (605-606)

Freud does not expand on the nature of the repressed sexual impulses here, but his later remarks in *Three Essays on Sexuality* are probably also applicable here. Neurosis is the negative of perversion. (1905d—SE VII: 165) The unsuccessfully repressed sexual impulses leading to psychoneurosis are the same as those consciously acted upon in the case of the perversions, e.g.

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\(^{131}\) The German definite article [*die*] is not accounted for in the SE translation.
fetishism, sadism, masochism, coprophilia, homosexuality, bestiality—those forms of sexuality that depart from the norm of adult heterosexual genital coitus.

THE NORMALITY OF THE ABNORMAL

An essential feature of Freud’s model is that the strange, apparently ‘abnormal’, psychic processes which we find in dreams and in psychopathology are permanent features of a core system found in every person, be he ever so normal: the unconscious. Let us begin with dreams, as

> [t]he interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind. [Kenntnis des Unbewussten im Seelenleben: knowledge of what is unconscious in the mind] (608; GW 613)

Dreams have proved that

> what is suppressed continues to exist in normal people as well as in abnormal, and remains capable of psychical functioning. [psychischer Leistungen fähig bleiben] (608; GW 613)\(^\text{132}\)

He sees no reason to suppose that sleep produces any modifications other than secondary ones … in the Ucs. 

> [T]he psychological characteristics of sleep are to be looked for essentially in modifications in the catheasis of this … system. (555)

Similarly, psychopathology does not alter the basic structure of the psychical apparatus. The dreams of normal people, whose mental functioning is in no way impaired, already demonstrate the self-same factors involved in the neuroses. Freud can thus conclude that

> the psychical mechanism employed by neuroses is not created by the impact of a pathological disturbance upon the mind but is present already in the normal structure of the mental apparatus. The two psychical systems, the censorship upon the passage from one of them to the other, the inhibition and overlaying of one activity by the other, the relations of both of them to the unconscious …—all of these form part of the normal structure of our mental instrument (607)

\(^{132}\) Contrast this with Breuer in the third, “Theoretical” section of the Studies:

> The existence of ideas of this kind that are inadmissible to consciousness is pathological. In normal people all ideas that can become current at all enter consciousness as well if they are sufficiently intense. (1895d: 225)

\(^{133}\) Cf. also:

> what characterises the state of sleep is not the disintegration of mental bonds [Zusammenhänge: connections; interrelations] but the concentration [Einstellung: focus, directedness] of the psychical system which is in command during the day upon the wish to sleep. (590; GW 596)
[‘Functional’] illnesses … do not presuppose the disintegration of the apparatus or the production of fresh splits in its interior. They are to be explained on a dynamic basis—by the strengthening and weakening of the various components in the interplay of forces, so many of whose effects are hidden from view while functions are normal. (608)

Freud therefore uses dreams and psychopathology to elucidate each other and hence to draw general conclusions about the psychical apparatus, especially in its unconscious functioning.

THE SPATIAL MODEL OF THE PSYCHE QUALIFIED

In section F, Freud qualifies the spatial representation of the psychical apparatus as exemplified in his diagram, (p. 90) for the second time. According to Freud this representation, in which the two systems were seen “in the most literal and crudest sense as two localities in the mental apparatus”, should be treated as “conceptual scaffolding” [Hilfsvorstellungen—auxiliary representations (GW 614)], to be replaced if something can be found “that approximates more closely to the unknown reality.” (610)

It will be seen on closer consideration that what the psychological discussion in the preceding sections invites us to assume is not the existence of two systems near the motor end of the apparatus but the existence of two kinds of processes of excitation or modes of its discharge. (610)

Here Freud seems intent on replacing his “topographical”, military/territorial metaphors—which he admits suggest a struggle for territory [Terrain]—with “dynamic” ones:

What we have in mind here is not the forming of a second thought situated in a new place, like a transcription which continues to exist alongside the original; and the notion of forcing a way through into consciousness must be kept carefully free from any idea of a change of locality. [L]et us say instead that some particular mental grouping has had a cathexis of energy attached to it or withdrawn from it, so that the structure in question has come under the sway of a particular agency or been withdrawn from it. … What we regard as mobile is not the psychical structure itself but its innervation. (610-611; GW 615)

(The “particular agency” is the ego (=the preconscious?); Freud has consistently described cathexis by the ego as the sine qua non of the secondary process).

Immediately after this, however, it becomes clear that the dynamic point of view is supplementing the topographical one, not replacing it, in the same way as a wave model of light can be supplemented by a corpuscular model. “Nevertheless, I consider it expedient and justifiable to

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134 In his first qualification (itself soon qualified further) he had already pointed out that what was essential was the temporal sequence of a mental process, not the spatial arrangement of an apparatus. (p. 90).

135 Freud will later define the essence of his metapsychology in terms of a demand for parallel accounts of mental function in topographical, dynamic and economic terms:
continue to make use of the figurative image of the two systems.” (611) This is possible as long as we do not take the topography literally, but indeed only as “scaffolding”. In Derridean terms: we then continue to use these terms, but “under erasure” [sous rature].

THE RELATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS TO THE UNCONSCIOUS: LANGUAGE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

After Descartes, consciousness had in the philosophical tradition usually been equated with the self-transparency of the psyche to itself. In Freud this is obviously not the case. In line with his formulation according to which “the core of our being” consists of “unconscious wishful impulses”, Freud supports Lipps’s idea137 that:

The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. … The unconscious is the true psychical reality [das eigentlich reale Psychische]; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world [das Reale der Aussenwelt; what is real in the external world], and it is as incompletely represented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications [Angaben] of our sense organs. (612-613; GW 617-618)138

The second sentence, with its decidedly Kantian ring, comes close to saying that the unconscious is the psyche as Ding an sich. (In “The unconscious” Freud will explicitly relate his view of the unconscious to Kant).139 That consciousness perceives the psychical apparatus just as the latter

I propose that when we have succeeded in describing a psychical process in its dynamic, topographical and economic aspects, we should speak of it as a metapsychological presentation. (1915e—SE XIV: 181)

136 In the subsequent passage, that we have already quoted on p. 90, Freud points out that whether we think of the brain as a system of neurones, or according to the metaphor of an optical apparatus, the entities we are dealing with (ideas, virtual images) are virtual: they cannot be identified with any of the material components of the apparatus.

137 While nevertheless subscribing to a very different notion of the unconscious. Lipps would not have made or accepted Freud’s distinction between the preconscious and the unconscious.

138 It is therefore not in the least surprising that

The physician must feel at liberty to proceed by inference from the conscious effect to the unconscious psychical process. [Der Arzt muss sich das Recht wahren, durch einen Schlussprozess…] (612; GW 617)

139 He uses the following words:

The psycho-analytic assumption of unconscious mental activity appears to us … as an extension of the corrections undertaken by Kant of our views on external perception. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their

footnote ctd. on next page—
perceives “the external world” accentuates that the psyche as Ding an sich is radically other to consciousness:

The psychical apparatus, which is turned towards the external world with its sense-organ of the Pcept. systems, is itself the external world in relation to the sense-organ of the Cs., whose teleological justification resides in this circumstance. (615-616)

Expectations play as much of a constitutive role in how consciousness perceives “true psychical reality”, the unconscious, as they do in external perception. More tellingly, concealment is also explicitly mentioned as one of the central effects of consciousness:

It is the much-abused privilege of conscious activity, wherever it plays a part, to conceal every other activity from us. (613-614—my emphases)

Consciousness, which was once so omnipotent and hid all else from view (615—my emphases).

Freud gives the following view of

the ‘essential nature’ of consciousness: we see the process of a thing becoming conscious as a specific psychical act, distinct from and independent of the process of the formation of a presentation or idea; and we regard consciousness as a sense organ which perceives data that arise elsewhere. [das Bewusstwerden ist für uns ein besonderer psychischer Akt, verschieden und unabhängig von dem Vorgang des Gesetz- oder Vorgestelltwerdens, und das Bewusstsein erscheint uns als ein Sinnesorgan, welches einen anderwärts gegeben Inhalt wahrnimmt.] (144; GW 149-150)

Mental contents are thus not produced or posited by consciousness, but only perceived by it. (Consciousness does not think; at most it perceives a thinking that has taken place elsewhere.) However, Freud rejects an epiphenomenalist view of consciousness. To him it is clearly “more than a superfluous reflected picture of the completed psychical process” because it has a definite function: “that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities.” Like the perceptual systems, this sense-organ “is susceptible to excitations by qualities” but has “no memory”. Consciousness is therefore the function of a system that is distinct from those responsible for thought and memory.

One and the same “Cs. sense-organ” receives excitatory material “from two directions: from the Pcept. system … and from the interior of the apparatus, whose quantitative processes are felt

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140 Cf.: The dream is treated by it [the Pcs.] just like any other perceptual content; it is met by the same anticipatory ideas [Erwartungsvorstellungen], in so far as its subject-matter allows. (575; GW 581)

141 In a 1919 footnote to his schematic diagram of the psychical apparatus, Freud goes even further—he explicitly equates perception and consciousness: “Pcept. = Cs.” (541n)
qually in the pleasure-unpleasure series.” (616) Excitations from both directions undergo modifications before they become conscious.

Without consciousness, the regulation of processes in the psychical apparatus occurs automatically, and entirely on the basis of quantitative factors. With the appearance of consciousness, a finer regulation, based on the perception of qualities, becomes possible. Consciousness regulates processes in the psychical apparatus in much the same way as perception, which regulates them by cathecting certain paths along which the in-coming sensory excitation is spreading. ... By the help of its perception of pleasure and unpleasure it [consciousness] influences the discharge of the cathexes within what is otherwise an unconscious apparatus operating by means of the displacement of quantities. (616)

Freud surmises that the unpleasure principle works differently when the psychical apparatus is purely unconscious than when consciousness—consciousness of qualities—enters the scene. In the latter case a “second and more discriminating regulation” is introduced, which is even able to oppose the former one, and which perfects the efficiency of the apparatus by enabling it, in contradiction to its original plan, to cathect and work over even what is associated with the release of unpleasure. (616)

Consciousness makes such a finer regulation possible partly because perceptions are less susceptible than preconscious memories to repression. But the really crucial difference only occurs when preconscious thought-processes acquire quality through being attached to words, and thereby become conscious as a rule. (Previously, preconscious thoughts only became conscious sporadically, when they involved pleasure or unpleasure, which initially were the only qualities attaching to preconscious thought. Now the sensuous qualities associated with written and spoken language are added to these). Freud designates language [Sprachzeichen: speech signs] as a “mnemic system” [Erinnerungssystem]. (574; GW 580) Language introduces a new cathexis that überlagert (overlays) the previous cathexes, thereby modifying the processes in the psychical apparatus.

In order that thought-processes may acquire quality, they are associated in human beings with verbal memories, whose residues of quality are sufficient to draw the attention of consciousness to them and to endow the process of thinking with a new mobile cathexis from consciousness. (617)

142 To me Freud’s meaning here is rather obscure, as in many places in Ch. VII of the Traumdeutung. Presumably an unconsciously operating pleasure principle would work something like the constancy principle does. If the introduction of consciousness does not leave things unchanged, this suggests that an increase in tension will not always be experienced as unpleasure, and a decrease as pleasure. In fact Freud admits as much in the Three Essays. (1905d—SE VII: 209)
Language allows for “more delicately adjusted performances” in which “the course of ideas [is] less dependent upon” the indications of unpleasure [Unlustzeichen], (574; GW 580) “More delicate”, and “less dependent”, that is, than in the case of those performances leading to repression.

**DISCUSSION: WILL THE REAL FREUD PLEASE STAND UP?**

In the final subsection, I address two main issues:

- Obscurities, vacillations and possible contradictions in Freud’s text, especially regarding the distinction between the unconscious and the preconscious, as well as the relative power and influence of these two systems.

- Whether Freud can be said to ascribe alterity to one particular part of the psychical apparatus (e.g. the unconscious).

**Obscurities, ambiguities and (possibly:) contradictions regarding the relative efficacy of the preconscious and the unconscious**

In the interest of my broader aims I have generally glossed over the hermeneutic complexity of Chapter VII of the *Traumdeutung*. Wollheim (1985: 63) sees it as “an informal presentation of the ideas in the now abandoned MS”—the “Project”. Given all the respects in which the two texts differ from each other in tone and substance, this is already questionable. Be that as it may, I find that the later text presents far more hermeneutic aporias than the earlier one. Because of obscurities, ambiguities and possible contradictions in the *Traumdeutung* it is harder to reconstruct a complete and coherent model of the psychical apparatus from it than from the “Project”. Freud uses such a variety of terms (often identifiable as clearly metaphorical), which embody such diverse tendencies, that it would be unwise to identify the text with any unambiguous, clearly defined model.

The parallel with the exegetical difficulties regarding Marx’s “doctrine of base and superstructure” is striking here. Does Marx think that base determines superstructure? Does it do so simply, or only ‘in the last instance’? How great or marginal a role is to be attributed to the causal efficacy of the superstructure? If we read the relevant sections of *The German Ideology* (Marx 1971) closely, it becomes clear that it is impossible to ascribe to Marx clear answers to such questions, that is, a single, unitary doctrine regarding ‘the’ relationship of base to superstructure (and even regarding the nature of each of the terms of the relationship). Similarly, Freud in the *Traumdeutung* uses a wide variety of divergent terms to characterise the Pcs., the Ucs., and their various possible relations, with the suggested or stated relative efficacy of each varying greatly in different passages. In neither writer should we believe that a unitary, unambiguous signified lurks between the diversity of the signifiers they use.
A telling example of the ambiguities in the text is Freud’s use of the word *überlagern*—to overlay—to describe the relation of the secondary process to the primary process. We saw that, although the secondary process is never absent in the apparatus, its later extent and its ability to inhibit and overlay the primary process only develop gradually. (603–604) The term *überlagern* can have various senses, including: *blot out, eclipse, overlap, disturb, disrupt, interfere with* [Überlagerung: interference, as of two radio channels]. The various translations suggest various degrees of predominance or lack of it. What *überlagert* something else, can be anything from a thin veneer disguising the underlying substance while leaving it intact, to something essentially replacing that which is *überlagert*.

At many other points in Freud’s text the reader is left with as much interpretative freedom. Freud is by no means consistent regarding the degree of power that the unconscious has over the preconscious. According to our predilections, ego-psychological or otherwise, we can make the unconscious as docile or as ferocious, and the preconscious as powerful or impotent, as we choose.\(^{143}\)

To illustrate our point, we here assemble two opposing clusters of remarks\(^{144}\) from the text we have been discussing, suggesting, respectively, that

- the *Pcs.* is dominant, or that
- the *Ucs.* is dominant

as well as a third, intermediate cluster, suggesting that:

- paradigmatically, neither is in control; the situation is rather one of *interaction* between the *Pcs.* and the *Ucs.*, leading to *compromise formations*.

A careful evaluation of the relative weight of the three tendencies, the degree to which they can or cannot be consistently reconciled with each other, whether what Freud says later is supposed to supplement or to supplant what he says earlier, and so on, would require a book of its own. I here limit myself to a schematic (and therefore somewhat caricatured) overview of the *prima facie* tensions in Freud’s text.

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\(^{143}\) I doubt that this indeterminacy lies wholly in the eye of that postmodern beholder who gleefully professes that every reading is a misreading, and without any trepidation proceeds to read into Freud whatever he wants to. (Thereby robbing Freud’s text of every alterity). This indeterminacy is probably rather the result of deep vacillations in Freud’s own thinking. (Which perhaps indicate that Freud was aware that he had not yet satisfactorily resolved the issues he addresses here).

\(^{144}\) Or of interpretations of polyvalent passages in Freud.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The reassuring, dichotomising Freud:</strong> the <em>Ucs.</em> can basically be kept out of the <em>Pcs.</em> (Emphasis on efficacy of <em>Pcs.</em>)</td>
<td>Intermediate (or indeterminate) position relative to A &amp; C. Emphasis on - essential permeability of boundary between <em>Ucs.</em> and <em>Pcs.</em>; - interference of <em>Ucs.</em> with <em>Pcs.</em>; - compromises between <em>Pcs.</em> and <em>Ucs.</em>—neither seems to have hegemony.</td>
<td><strong>The disquieting Freud:</strong> the <em>Pcs.</em> is no match for the <em>Ucs.</em> (Emphasis on efficacy of <em>Ucs.</em>)</td>
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</table>

*Intermediate (or indeterminate) position relative to A & C. Emphasis on* - essential permeability of boundary between *Ucs.* and *Pcs.*; - interference of *Ucs.* with *Pcs.*; - compromises between *Pcs.* and *Ucs.*—neither seems to have hegemony.

**What the censorship does: it prevents unconscious impulses from gaining access to the preconscious**

The censorship between the *Ucs.* and the *Pcs.* is like a watchman who prevents the unconscious impulses from obtaining control over our speech and actions (567-568). That it allows these impulses expression in dreams is harmless. “The state of sleep guarantees the security of the citadel that must be guarded.” (568) The censorship between the *Ucs.* and the *Pcs.*, unconscious impulses must assume disguises to be able to express themselves. (Cf. the deflection of light passing from one optical medium to another with a different diffraction index). This partly happens in dreams, and partly in …

**What the censorship does: it only allows unconscious impulses to gain access to the preconscious in a disguised form**

Because of the censorship between the *Ucs.* and the *Pcs.*, unconscious impulses expression in dreams is harmless. "The state of sleep guarantees the security of the citadel that must be guarded." (568) The censorship between the *Ucs.* and the *Pcs.*, unconscious impulses must assume disguises to be able to express themselves. (Cf. the deflection of light passing from one optical medium to another with a different diffraction index). This partly happens in dreams, and partly in …
unconscious impulses exhibited by dreams are generally stopped “before they can mature into deeds”. (621)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(The alternative to prevention of access: psychosis) When the watchman is overpowered, the result is psychosis: the unconscious impulses gain control over our speech and actions.</th>
<th>(The alternative to prevention of access: neurosis) … neurosis (as well as in parapraxes, although Freud does not discuss them here). Neurotic symptoms: speech and action express a compromise between the unconscious wishes and the demands of the preconscious.</th>
<th>(In psychosis the unconscious impulses gain control over our speech and actions).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Three cheers for the censorship—who wants psychosis?) The watchman should therefore be honoured.</td>
<td>(Three cheers for the evasion of censorship—who wants to be silenced by the whims of the powers that be?) In the general metaphor of censorship Freud’s sympathy seems to lie with the “political writer”, not with those in power (the Machthaber) as would be more consistent with his injunction to honour the watchman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Speech under conditions of censorship is a product of an active censorship imposing itself upon a passive unconscious) Censorship is exercised by the preconscious.</td>
<td>(Speech under conditions of censorship is a product of the activity of both the censorship and the unconscious) The confrontation between unconscious impulses and the censorship usually leads to compromise formations in which both are partly satisfied.</td>
<td>(Speech under conditions of censorship is largely a product of an active circumvention of the censorship by the unconscious) Censorship works largely by pre-emptive self-censorship (presumably on the part of the unconscious?).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(In repression the preconscious gets the upper hand)</td>
<td>(In repression neither the preconscious nor the unconscious gets the upper hand)</td>
<td>(In repression the unconscious gets the upper hand)</td>
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</tbody>
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145 Here the censor has not yet been identified with the superego or conscience (see note 123)—as remarked previously, the censoring Machthaber seems to be amoral. Freud’s ambivalence towards the censor/watchman will be continued in his ambivalence regarding the superego. The superego is on the one hand a necessary internalisation of morality, but on the other hand it tends to be primitive, punitive and cruel—generally much more so than the real (parental and other) figures on which it is modelled.

146 Or should we rather simply say that the censorship is “satisfied” (rather than “partly satisfied” - it is not clear that the censorship demands more than a disguise).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>verdrängen (to replace)</strong></th>
<th><strong>verdrängen (to displace); verdrängen—to leave to itself (604)</strong></th>
<th><strong>In repression a preconscious ideas comes under the sway of the unconscious.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(The secondary processes more or less neutralise the primary ones)</em></td>
<td><em>(The secondary processes interfere with the primary ones)</em></td>
<td><em>(The secondary processes only marginally influence the outcome of the primary ones)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The secondary processes … come to inhibit [that is, to prevent] and to overlay [that is, to eclipse] the primary ones” (603)</td>
<td>“The secondary processes … come to inhibit [hemmen, that is, to slow down] and to overlay [that is, to disturb] the primary ones” (603)</td>
<td>“The core of our being, consisting of unconscious wishful impulses, remains inaccessible to the … inhibition of the preconscious” (603)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(It is not unusual for the unconscious to be under the control of the preconscious)</em></td>
<td><em>(Incomplete control of the unconscious by the preconscious is normal)</em></td>
<td><em>(Even in the ideal case the role of the preconscious remains limited, compared to that of the unconscious)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The function of dreaming is to bring “back under the control of the preconscious the excitation in the Ucs. which has been left free”. (579)</td>
<td>“Even where psychical health is perfect, the subjugation of the Ucs. by the Pcs. is not complete; the measure of suppression indicates the degree of our psychical normality.” (580-581)</td>
<td>“The part played by the latter [the preconscious] is restricted once and for all to directing along the most expedient paths the wishful impulses that arise from the unconscious. These unconscious wishes exercise a compelling force [Zwang] upon all later mental trends, a force which those trends are obliged to fall in with or which they may perhaps endeavour to divert and direct to higher aims. A further result … is that a wide sphere of mnemic material is inaccessible to preconscious cathexis.” (603-604)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(A relatively large degree of freedom from the unpleasure principle is possible and generally available)</em></td>
<td><em>(The psychical apparatus is not exclusively regulated by the unpleasure principle; some degree of freedom from it is possible)</em></td>
<td><em>(The psychical apparatus is simply regulated by the unpleasure principle)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language allows for “more delicately adjusted performances” in which “the</td>
<td>“Thinking must aim at freeing itself more and more from exclusive regulation by the</td>
<td>“The course of the excitation in [the psychical apparatus] is automatically regulated by feelings of pleasure and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Various strands in Freud’s text thus suggest very different relations between the unconscious and the preconscious. According to some passages (or interpretations), the preconscious is puny in comparison with the overpowering unconscious even at the best of times; according to others, the preconscious usually has the unconscious firmly under control; while others again suggest that neither has the upper hand, so that mental processes tend to be a compromise between them.

**Freud’s vacillations regarding the distinction between the preconscious and the unconscious**

Freud’s vacillations are not limited to the relative efficacy of Ucs. and Pcs. The reader who has worked her way through the *Traumdeutung* ends up without any clear and consistent account of the distinction between the preconscious and the unconscious, or between the secondary and primary process. Freud vacillates on a number of points:

a) **Spatial representations of the mental agencies as (quasi-) entities, vs. processual approaches to the same phenomena.** Having given a linear spatial representation, Freud immediately qualifies it: it should simply be seen as a graphic representation of a linear temporal sequence. Subsequently Freud qualifies this as well: the temporal processes in question need not be linear. Elsewhere Freud introduces another qualification: what happens is not really that contents move from one psychic locality to another, but that their innervation changes; a mental grouping is either innervated from the preconscious, or it isn’t. (610-611)

b) **The preconscious and censorship.** We are first told that the preconscious is the censoring agency Freud has spoken of previously in the *Traumdeutung*; then we hear that it is separated from the unconscious by a censorship; finally we are told that there is also a censorship between the preconscious and consciousness. As the preconscious was previously distinguished from the unconscious by its unimpeded access to consciousness, and Freud does not clarify the difference between the two censorships, the distinction between the preconscious and the unconscious becomes blurred. In fact the other criteria that Freud introduces to distinguish the preconscious from the unconscious are also problematic, as will become clear from the following two points.

c) **Free and mobile energy.** In the unconscious, energy is ‘free’ or ‘mobile’, while in the preconscious it is ‘bound’ or ‘quiescent’. Whereas this sounds like a digital distinction, there is nothing to indicate that Freud actually uses it in this way, rather than as a continuum. The textual
evidence rather suggests the opposite. A cathected idea can for instance receive a further cathexis (‘hypercathexis’).

d) Words and the preconscious. In the preconscious we have word presentations, whereas they are absent in the unconscious. At the end of Ch. VII of the *Traumdeutung*, Freud however says that words can also be subjected to the primary process. Later Freud will modify the claim made in the first sentence: in the unconscious words are treated as things. (547, 611n, 617).

The upshot of this is that Freud’s distinction between the unconscious and the preconscious becomes problematic. This is confirmed by some of Freud’s later remarks regarding the unconscious:

- Study of the derivatives of the Ucs. will completely disappoint our expectations of a schematically clear-cut distinction between the two systems. [*Ucs. and Pcs.*] (1915e—SE XIV: 190)
- [In the Pcs.] [d]isplacements and condensations such as happen in the primary process are excluded or very much restricted. (1915e—SE XIV: 188—my emphases)

The drift of these remarks is confirmed by other ones:

- In the system Pcs. the *secondary process* is dominant. (1915e—SE XIV: 186)

If it is dominant, this means that it does not exclude the primary process. In *The ego and the id*, Freud also uses formulations that undermine the idea of a hard distinction between conscious and unconscious:

- Thinking in pictures is … only a very incomplete form of becoming conscious. In some way, too, it stands nearer to unconscious processes than does thinking in words. (1923b—SE XIX: 21)

Must we then not conclude that there is at most a gradient or continuum between the unconscious and the preconscious, rather than a dichotomy? (This need not exclude a difference—even a *radical* difference—between paradigmatic representatives of what Freud would on the one hand call “the unconscious” and on the other “the preconscious”. The two terms would then refer to ideal types, rather than empirical givens). However, if that is so, can we then still speak of two systems? Or is the transition from the one to the other, from the primary process to the secondary one, utterly fluid and *ad hoc*?

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147 He continues:

- When a primary process is allowed to take its course in connection with elements belonging to the system Pcs., it appears ‘comic’ and excites laughter. (186)

That this does occur to some extent is not so surprising, because Freud sees the secondary process as a modification of the primary one.
Freud’s spatial representations of the various systems tend to suggest that there is a domain where the primary process reigns, and another where the secondary process reigns. But perhaps Freud’s real discovery is that the unconscious (the primary process) can make itself felt at any moment. (Cf. the countless types of interaction which he specifies, his words on the “main threat”, and his supplements to his spatial model). This is the case inter alia because the unconscious and the preconscious can never be clearly distinguished and separated in the first place. The primary and the secondary process do not each have their own separate domain.

**Alterity 1: Where should alterity be situated according to Freud’s scheme?**

One frequently hears that in Freud the unconscious is conceived of as radical alterity. I do not think that a close reading of the present text bears this out. In it, Freud repeatedly represents the psychical apparatus as a plurality. However, he either does not present any of the elements in this plurality as ‘the self’ or ‘the same’, or he wavers on this point.

An example of the first alternative is Freud’s discussion of self-punishment in symptoms and dreams in terms of “an amalgamation of two people”. (580) In this phrase Freud does not identify either of the parties involved as other (or self). It suggests, rather, that the two parties are other to each other.

However, in the same paragraph he also identifies the dreamer with the censor: “A dreamer’s relation to his wishes is a quite peculiar one. He repudiates them and censors them …”. (580) In substituting the “ego”/“repressed” pair for the “conscious”/“unconscious” pair (558), Freud also seems to be making the repressed into the other, and the repressing agency into the “I” [Ich]. However, the strange wavering of Freud’s sympathies regarding the censorship/watchman metaphor pair shows that Freud is not consistent on this score. In the metaphor of the watchman the other against whom we must be protected—and generally are, the watchman be praised!—is the unconscious. In the censorship analogy the other that tries to impose itself on us is the censorship itself, and, thank God!, we are usually witzig enough to evade it. Here the identification seems to be with the “political writer”—the unconscious.\(^\text{148}\) If the unconscious forms “the core of our being”, need it surprise us that Freud does not consistently identify himself (or the self) with the preconscious, but sometimes opts for the unconscious?

In Part 1 we were able to point out a whole variety of ways in which the other as autrui—the other person—features in the “Project”. In the metapsychological sections of the *Traumdeutung* this other hardly features as such. The other—or rather: a plurality of persons—here rather functions as metaphor for an intra-psychic plurality, as can be seen in Freud’s discussion of censorship and of self-punishment.

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\(^\text{148}\) As a young man, Freud had considerable sympathy for revolutionary causes (which is echoed in the ‘Count Thun’ dream and his associations to it). (209ff).
Alterity 2: Freud does not (generally or consistently) treat the unconscious as “that which is hidden”

Freud’s theory seems to be constantly involved in a move away from a dichotomy between ‘what shows itself’ and ‘what hides itself’, towards what amounts to a middle term: ‘showing/hiding’. We are reminded of the Delphic oracle: “The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but gives a sign [signifies].” (Heraclitus in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983: 209) The watchman who prevents access or is alternatively overwhelmed (correlating with unconscious contents that either remain hidden or burst through undisguised) seems to be superseded by the metaphor of the censorship that allows access, but only in disguised form. The paradigm case here seems to be a single one: a disguise that realises both the aim of the unconscious impulse (to gain access to consciousness), and the aim of the censorship (not to allow unconscious impulses to parade themselves in the preconscious naked). If (radical) alterity means that something hides itself completely, Freud does not seem to be talking about (radical) alterity. However, if we take alterity to refer to that which only shows itself in a disguised form, Freud’s theory is all about alterity.

In Freud’s presentation the relation between “showing” and “hiding” is a complex one. This complexity is, however, expressible in a simple formula: “The relation between showing and hiding is not an exclusive disjunction”.

An exclusive disjunction would be: “either showing or hiding but not both”. Denying that an exclusive disjunction obtains between these two terms opens a host of other possibilities, all of which seem relevant in the present context:

• “both showing and hiding”. Something can be both a hiding and a showing. Think of a bikini, or a skin-tight suit. Furthermore, “both showing and hiding” includes “showing, because hiding” and “hiding, because showing”. In Poe’s (1962) Purloined Letter the sought for letter is unfindable because it is so manifestly displayed. When a lady protests too loudly, this feeds the very suspicion she is so energetically trying to forestall. (This goes some way to clarifying the logic behind Freud’s notorious injunction that the analyst should read a vehement “no” as a “yes”).

• “neither showing nor hiding”. (The words of the Delphic oracle would be an example). “Neither showing nor hiding” can be glossed in various ways, with the context playing a major role in deciding on which gloss to opt for. The phrase can mean: “not showing at all, nor hiding at all”. It can also mean: “not exclusively showing, and not exclusively hiding, either”, or “something intermediate—not quite showing, but not quite hiding either”. A particular shade of greenish blue could for instance be described as “neither green nor blue”. However, it could also be described as “both green and blue”. The example shows that the

149 Greek: “οὗτε λέγει οὗτε κραπτείν ἱ λάμαζειν”.
meaning of “neither showing nor hiding” can come surprisingly close to that of “both showing and hiding”.

• An inclusive disjunction: “showing and/or hiding”. To show need not simultaneously be to hide, but it can be, and vice versa. I would argue that although this option is possible, it is not paradigmatic of Freud’s semiotics.
CONCLUSIONS

We have reached the following main conclusions regarding the metapsychology in the *Traumdeutung*:

1. Freud’s central metaphors for understanding the relations between the preconscious and the unconscious are those of the watchman and the censor. These two metaphors have very different implications:
   
a. The metaphor of the watchman suggests that *either* the unconscious is completely prevented access to the preconscious by the watchman, *or* that it completely overpowers the watchman, and gains access to the preconscious in naked form. The metaphor of the censor, on the other hand, suggests that the standard case is that of a *compromise*, in which the contents of the unconscious gain access to the preconscious, but in a *disguised* form. Neither party thus triumphs, and each is (partly) satisfied. The unconscious, the other of the preconscious, thus makes itself felt in mental processes in a far more insidious way than would have been the case if it had been possible to simply *exclude* the unconscious from the realm of the preconscious.

b. In the watchman metaphor, Freud identifies with the watchman: the unconscious is the Other against which the watchman fortunately protects us. In the censorship metaphor, on the other hand, Freud identifies with the political writer: the censor is the Other who forces us to assume disguises.

2. When it comes to the relative strength of the unconscious and the preconscious, Freud makes statements that are sometimes incompatible with each other, and sometimes open to conflicting interpretations. Whether the unconscious is our Self or our Other is not clear; nor is the extent to which the preconscious is its master. He seems to vacillate between the following three positions, none of which can thus unambiguously be ascribed to him:
   
a. The preconscious is no match for the unconscious; who we are, is basically determined by the unconscious.

b. Who we are, is determined by a compromise between the preconscious and the unconscious; neither has the upper hand.

c. In normal people (at the very least) the preconscious is firmly in control, and keeps the unconscious in check.

3. A close reading of Freud’s text does not reveal any (clear or simple) boundary between the unconscious and the preconscious; they thus cannot be conceived of as a dichotomy. The preconscious is never safe from the unconscious as its Other. If alterity is that which cannot be unambiguously ascribed either to the self or to the other, this non-dichotomous reading of the relation between the unconscious and the preconscious gives more scope for alterity than dichotomous conceptions of their relations do.
4. It is tempting to conceive of the unconscious as something hidden, and the conscious as something manifest. However, Freud in effect opts for a middle term, showing/hiding. His model suggests that in mental life the relation between showing and hiding must not be conceived of as an exclusive disjunction: “Either showing or hiding, but not both”. Instead, the following options present themselves: “Both showing and hiding”; “showing and/or hiding”; “neither showing nor hiding”; “not quite showing, but not quite hiding, either”; “not exclusively showing, nor exclusively hiding”. If alterity is simply what is hidden, this is usually not what he is speaking about. If, on the other hand, and more interestingly, alterity is that which transcends the conceptual opposition ‘hidden/manifest’, alterity is central to Freud’s model.
SECTION II: HERMENEUTICS AND ALTERITY IN FREUD’S THEORY OF DREAMS

INTRODUCTION

In this section I first give an exposition of Freud’s theory of dreams in the *Traumdeutung*, with special emphasis on its complexity and heterogeneity, as well as the complexity and heterogeneity it ascribes to dreams.

I subsequently investigate the implicit or explicit stance to alterity in Freud’s hermeneutics as embodied in his theory of dreams. This is the central topic of this section. Various strands are to be found here, which suggest different stances towards alterity.

1) *The dream as enigma.* One, rather marginal, strand suggest that the dream, wholly or in part, utterly resists our attempts at explanation and understanding. This strand would suggest that we cannot even begin to grasp it. Its alterity remains absolute. If this were the truth and the whole truth, the appropriate way to express respect for its alterity would arguably be to remain silent in the face of its irreducible enigma. Its truth then would be something that is “not to be had”, to quote Freud’s discouraging words in a letter (31.5.1936) to his would-be biographer, Arnold Zweig:

> Whoever turns biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to embellishments, and even to dissembling his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and even if one had it, one could not use it. (German in Freud and Zweig 1968e (1984): 137; quoted in Gay 1988: xiii-xiv)

2) *The dream as decodable message.* Another strand, and probably the most prominent one, suggests that the meaning of the dream can essentially be known—that the dream surrenders all its initial alterity to psychoanalytic explanation and interpretation. We cannot only begin to understand it; the process of understanding can be brought to a successful completion. At some point the secret of the dream is revealed, so that its alterity ceases. This is more in line with another, celebrated utterance of Freud’s:

> He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. (1905e—SE VII: 77-78)

3) *The dream as site of deferral and retroactivity.* A third strand stresses the endless deferral at work in psychoanalysis. The dream’s alterity is not so radical that we cannot even begin to understand it. We can always begin to understand it. However, the process that is thus begun can never be completed. But this still says too little: our understanding of any dream will not only always remain incomplete—as new associative material is
produced and new interpretative options occur to the analyst, the picture that has previously arisen in analysis becomes part of a bigger picture, and can as a result completely change its aspect. What comes later is not only added to what comes before, but changes it, retroactively. The dream therefore never surrenders its alterity. Respect for this alterity is expressed by listening and knowing that listening will never become redundant, because neither the whole nor the essence will at any point have been revealed to the listener. The dream is neither completely unknown, nor completely understood.

This third strand is only sketchily indicated by Freud, and then mainly in his writings on psychoanalytic technique, to which I devote an excursus in this section. It is nevertheless the most comprehensive, most durable one, which best accords with the general drift of psychoanalysis. What Freud formulates in terms of the other two strands will therefore have to be rethought. This is especially the case with central notions such as the twin pair of “the dream-work” and “the work of analysis,” as well as the very notions in which this account is framed, such as “analysis”, “latent dream-thoughts,” etc. This is what I attempt to do in the next subsection: “An attempt to synthesise Freud’s various supplements to his basic model of the dream-work”.

In the concluding subsection, I argue that Freud’s conception of dreams asks for a contextualisation of the dream, in a variety of contexts that are constitutive for the dream. Some of these contexts are fairly circumscribed, while others are extremely comprehensive.

1) The dream does not belong to, or employ, a closed sign system. The dream is open to alterity—contains “an inmixing of otherness”—because the dream-work is what I call “the ultimate bricoleur”, employing signs, pieces of writing, or references from the most divergent sources.

2) The dream is not (part of) a closed part of the psyche, cut off from the rest of the psyche. The dream is open to alterity—contains “an inmixing of otherness”—because it belongs to (or derives from) a network of ideas that ultimately expands to the whole psyche as a network.

3) The psyche—the primary context of the dream—is not a closed system. If it were (completely) closed to alterity, it would not be the psyche. Intentionality—a directedness to what it is not—is essential to the psyche. (What does not belong to its intentional field

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150 Perhaps the analyst’s respect for the alterity of the analysand (or the analysand’s dream) is partly expressed by accepting the responsibility to respond, despite the analyst’s incomplete understanding (based as it is on a listening that is neither complete nor completable), in a way that does justice to the provisionality of this understanding. But it is unclear to what extent this almost Levinasian position is found or prefigured in Freud’s own texts.

151 I derive this phrase from the title of a paper by Lacan: “Of structure as an inmixing of otherness prerequisite to any subject whatever.” (Lacan 1977b)
can of course also impinge causally on the psyche). Among the others of the psyche we can for instance mention:

a) the body. Freud emphasises the somatic bases of the psyche, both in the sense that mind has a neurological basis, and in the sense that the mind/brain is functionally (and dysfunctionally) related to the rest of the body. The psyche is not closed to the body as its other. (If such an understatement is not misleading when applied to psychoanalysis).

b) the social, both in the sense of significant others in intimate relations (family, lovers, friends) and in the sense of a collectivity; the social presents the subject with both demands (i.e. constraints) and opportunities. The social of course crucially involves

c) culture and language, as well as
d) the economy, the political, etc. Although these do not play a central role in Freud’s theory, they do feature in the interpretation of several dreams.

If the dream, the psyche, the individual, etc. are thus open to an unbounded “outside”, “other” or “context”, the interpretation of dreams must take this into account. Later in this section we will argue that no temporal cross-section of the psychic process can be understood in itself; that understanding is endlessly deferred; what has not yet been said will always be as essential as what has been said.

The various ways in which the various others of the dream that we have just listed are inmixed into it, make it even more inevitable that the dream will never cease being other to our understanding of it. The analyst must remain ignorant of these others to a considerable extent, both for their contribution to the semiotic contexts to which the analysand’s utterances must be related—the jargon, films, reading, foreign languages, etc. that to the analysand are crucial or accessible; and for their causal role in the genesis of his current situation—the contribution of constitutional factors, (disturbances regarding) hormones (1933a—SE XXII: 154) and other chemical factors (1940a—SE XXIII: 182) in neurological functioning; the de facto treatment the analysand receives or received in his family, school, at work, etc. And of course even “the contents of the analysand’s psyche”, if we may speak in such terms, will only partly and perspectively be expressed in the course of an analysis.

If the meaning of the dream is its relation to what it is not, the meaning of the dream is a relation to something unbounded, so that it becomes impossible to know exhaustively; the process that would or could have led to a complete change of aspect in the meanings already divined, then always has to stop prematurely. (“Prematurely” from a cognitive, rather than a therapeutic point of view).
Conversely, anything said by the analyst (and by the analysand) will be premature. “The whole” is never achieved. The only way to approximate it is to start speaking prematurely, without any guarantee of the truth, validity or relevance of what is said. One of the functions of the fundamental rule is exactly to enjoin speaking despite the necessary imperfection of anything said. For psychoanalysis the truest, most valid, most relevant and most responsible speech that the analysand is capable of is exactly this ‘irresponsible’ speech, in which “he … tell[s] us too what he does not know”. (1940a—SE XXIII: 174; cf. also 1926e—SE XX: 189)
FREUD’S THEORY OF DREAMS

INTRODUCTION

Freud regarded the Interpretation of dreams as his most important work. In 1931 he could still say “It contains, even according to my present-day judgement, the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make.” (xxxii) Others also widely regard it as Freud’s magnum opus, the central work in the psychoanalytic canon. This is not surprising, given the importance he attached to dreams:

The interpretation of dreams, however, is the royal road to becoming acquainted with what is unconscious in mental life. (GW 613; my translation)\(^{152}\)

The Traumdeutung is central to an understanding of Freud’s general model of the working of the unconscious, as well as his hermeneutics. In this section we are chiefly interested in the various stances to alterity that we find in the hermeneutics of dreams.

In giving an exposition and discussion of Freud’s theory of dreams, we will occasionally refer to other sources, such as On dreams (1901a), his own short account of the material covered in the Traumdeutung, as well as his various writings on psychoanalytic technique.

THE FUNDAMENTAL RULE

Freud’s theory of dreams is essentially based on his investigation of dreams (mostly his own) via the method of free association—the same technique he uses to analyse and treat neurotic patients. The analysand undertakes to comply with the fundamental rule [Grundregel] of psychoanalysis, that is, to communicate whatever thoughts enter his mind, with as little criticism and selection as possible:

With the neurotics, then, we make our pact: complete candour on one side and strict discretion on the other. This looks as though we were only aiming at the post of a secular father confessor. But there is a great difference, for what we want to hear from our patient is not only what he knows and conceals from other people; he is to tell us too what he does not know. With this end in view we give him a more detailed definition of what we mean by candour. We pledge him to obey the fundamental rule of analysis, which is henceforward to govern his behaviour towards us. He is to tell us not only what he can say intentionally and willingly, what will give him relief like a confession, but everything else as well that his self-observation yields him, everything that comes into his head, even if it

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\(^{152}\) The German reads

Die Traumdeutung aber ist die Via regia zur Kenntnis des Unbewussten im Seelenleben. [SE: The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind. (608)]
is disagreeable for him to say it, even if it seems to him unimportant or actually nonsensical. (1940a—SE XXIII: 174)\textsuperscript{153}

In the analysis of dreams, the analysand is not asked for his associations to the dream as a whole, but to each element of the dream, separately. (100-104)

**THE DREAM AS WISH-FULFILMENT**

According to Freud’s formula “a dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish.” (160; GW 166) In children dreams are often still undisguised wish-fulfilments, in which case the words between brackets can be omitted. In adults, the wishes that are fulfilled in dreams are generally unacceptable to the censorship, and must thus be disguised. The less acceptable the wishes are, the greater the disguise will tend to be. Although the censorship is relaxed during sleep, it continues to operate, albeit at a lower level. Thus as a rule only thoughts that seem acceptable because of a suitable disguise will make themselves known to the dreamer.

That all dreams are wish-fulfilments does not seem very plausible unless we follow Freud in distinguishing between the manifest content of the dream—the dream as it is retained in memory, and told in analysis—and the latent dream-thoughts—the thoughts and wishful impulses that arise in association with the dream. In interpreting the dream, the analyst interprets the manifest content of the dream by relating it to the latent dream-thoughts. Whereas the manifest content is often trivial, obscure and illogical, the latent dream-thoughts are coherent and understandable, and always revolve around important, emotionally charged issues.

The interpretation of dreams, the work of analysis [Deutungsarbeit], is the process whereby we move from the manifest content of the dream to the latent dream-thoughts. Freud usually describes the work of analysis as the reverse of the dream-work [Traumarbeit], which transforms the latent dream-thoughts into the manifest dream-content.\textsuperscript{154}

**THE DREAM-WORK**

The dream-work is not simply more careless, more irrational [inkorrekt], more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable to it. It does not think, calculate or judge

\textsuperscript{153} I select this quote from a late work—the 1939 Abriss (1940a)—for its succinctness; Freud’s various formulations of the fundamental rule, starting in 1903 (1904a—SE VII: 251), show remarkably little substantial development.

\textsuperscript{154} Though the work of analysis follows a direction opposite to that of the dream-work, the path of each will not pass through exactly the same points. (532) The work of analysis can for instance incorporate (or be influenced by) material that had not yet occurred at the time of the dream. (311) However, such material will generally have much the same tendency as the older material that it supplements.
in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form [sie beschränkt sich darauf umzuformen]. (507; GW 511)

The dream-work is characterised by a number of processes: condensation, displacement, dramatisation, secondary elaboration, and the use of symbols. Each of these serves to disguise the latent dream-thoughts, by obscuring the links between the manifest dream elements and the latent dream-thoughts.

**Condensation [Verdichtung]**

In moving from the latent dream-thoughts to the manifest dream, compression or condensation [Kompression oder Verdichtung]¹⁵⁵ (595; GW 600) occurs, so that several dream-thoughts are represented in one and the same dream element. In analysis each separate element of the manifest dream usually gives rise to multiple associations, i.e., multiple dream-thoughts. Freud calls such a dream element ‘overdetermined’. (283)

An example: In On dreams Freud recounts a dream in which a woman turns to him and says: “But you’ve always had such beautiful eyes”. (1901a—SE V: 638) On analysis, these words turn out to be connected to a French idiom that gives the key to a (or the) cluster of central themes in this dream: giving and receiving, paying and being repaid, being in debt, and so on. The question “Do you suppose I’m going to do this or that for the sake of your beaux yeux [beautiful eyes]” (1901a—SE V: 638) can be paraphrased as “Do you think I’m going to go to a lot of trouble or expense for you if there’s nothing in it for me?” The “eyes” (which return elsewhere in the manifest content of the dream) turn out to refer to various other memories that are also connected to the theme of debt, such as an antique bowl painted with eyes—an occhiale—which he had given to a friend who is an eye surgeon—the very person to whom he had sent one of his patients for spectacles the previous day.

Condensation explains why the manifest dream is so much more compact than the latent dream-thoughts. (Thus Freud can recount his beaux yeux dream in six lines, as against the pages and pages he needs for the dream-thoughts). It also accounts for the composite structures that are

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¹⁵⁵ Freud often uses geological metaphors for Kompression or Verdichtung: a violent process that involves an “internal fragmentation” of the material, so that “new surfaces” are created, and the original position, orientation and relation to the surroundings are lost. The same sense is captured in the following quote:

> When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together—almost like pack-ice—the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. (312)

These connotations of a violent mangling of something that is itself solid, not gaseous, are absent or marginal in the translation ‘condensation’, that does not do justice to the violence of the process of Verdichtung/compression.
typical of dreams—for instance, a character having one person’s face, another person’s name, while performing a third person’s actions. Because the dream treats words “as though they were things, … they are apt to be combined in just the same way as are presentations of things.” (295-296) Thus, for instance, the non-existent word “norekdal” in a dream turns out, on analysis, to be a condensation of “Nora” and “Ekdal”—the names of two famous Ibsen characters—on the model of adjectives such as “colossal”. (296)

Because of condensation, we can never be sure that the interpretation of any dream is complete.

Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have another meaning. Strictly speaking, then, it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation. [Verdichtungsquote: condensation coefficient] (279; GW 285)

As a rule, the ‘opposite’ of condensation also occurs in dreams:

Not only are the elements of a dream determined by the dream-thoughts many times over, but the individual dream-thoughts are represented in the dream by several elements. (284)

Thus in our example (1901a—SE V: 637) various dream-thoughts that are connected to the element of the beaux yeux are also connected to another element: an indistinct image of two eyes or a pair of spectacles. Let us schematise the relation of the manifest dream to the latent dream-thoughts in the simplest possible way, by ranging the elements of the manifest dream in a line, and the dream-thoughts in a line parallel to this. We then see how complex this relation is. An isomorphic, point-for-point projection of the latent dream-thoughts (circles—top line) onto the manifest dream elements (squares—bottom line) would have looked as follows:

However, the dream is by no means “a faithful translation or point-for-point projection of the dream-thoughts” (281); instead, the actual relations tend to have the following form:
The elements of the manifest dream and the latent dream-thoughts are related to each other in a complex network in which the value of each item is determined not by one other item for which it stands, but by its multifarious relations to a host of other items.\(^{156}\) We see that the lines connecting manifest elements and the latent elements to which they are related criss-cross.

**Displacement [Verschiebung]**

“Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form assumed by dreams.” (308) However, Freud immediately makes displacement the *primus inter pares* in this partnership: it is said to contribute more to the disguise of the latent dream-thoughts than any other; “it is nothing less than the essential portion of the dream-work”. (308) The two processes are not mutually exclusive—condensation often involves displacement, and vice versa. (294, 339)

Displacement means “the dream is … differently centred from the dream-thoughts” (305)—there is no correlation between the importance of an element in the manifest dream and the importance of a corresponding element in the dream-thoughts.

The intensity of elements in the one has no relation to the intensity of the elements in the other: the fact is that a complete ‘transvaluation of all psychical values’ [Umwertung aller psychischen Wertigkeiten] takes place between the material of the dream-thoughts and the dream. (330: GW 335)

What is most important in the dream-thoughts may be represented in the dream-content only obscurely, if at all.\(^{157}\) It is significant that an initially forgotten fragment of a dream which is only recalled at a later date will “regularly … provide the key to the dream’s interpretation.” (155n).

It thus seems plausible to suppose that in the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, a *transference and displacement of psychical intensities* occurs in the process of dream-formation, and it is as a result of these that the difference between the text of the dream-content and that of the dream-thoughts comes about. (307-308)

\(^{156}\) Cf. Saussure’s differential model of language, as well as the quote from Wittgenstein on p. 145.

\(^{157}\) Although the *apparent importance* of an element in the manifest dream-content gives no indication of which dream-thoughts are important, according to Freud this is not the case for its *sensory intensity*:

In most dreams it is possible to detect a central point which is marked by peculiar sensory intensity … This central point is as a rule the direct representation of the wish-fulfilment, for, if we undo the displacements brought about by the dream-work, we find that the *psychical intensity* of the elements in the dream-thoughts has been replaced by the *sensory intensity* of the elements in the content of the actual dream. (561-562)

To me it is not clear that “sensory intensity” and “apparent importance” are as independent as this.
Dramatisation—consideration of representability [Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit]

The manifest content of dreams consists for the most part in pictorial situations; and the dream-thoughts must accordingly be submitted in the first place to a treatment which will make them suitable for a representation of this kind. (1901a—SE V: 659)

The treatment in question is dramatisation, which puts a concrete image in the place of an abstract (i.e. linguistic) expression in the dream-thoughts. “Jokes, quotations, songs and proverbs” (345) often supply a verbal intermediary between the dream-thought and the pictorial rendition.

Expressing abstract thoughts in the form of images poses daunting challenges to the inventiveness of the dream-work, similar to those facing a newspaper cartoonist illustrating a political leading article. (340; cf. also 312 & 314) It is easy to demonstrate that linguistic phrases do not have anything like exact pictorial equivalents.158 We may confidently assume that many relations which are capable of verbal expression will be lost in the pictorial representation; nevertheless we should not underestimate the inventiveness of the dream-work on this score. (Cf. 310-338)

The actual meaning of a dream image can differ completely from its ostensible meaning. Some examples may illuminate this. A dreamer’s associations can reveal that in a particular dream

- ‘the rapist’ is a (contentious) way of writing ‘therapist’; or
- pulling down a branch from a tree stands for masturbation, via the intermediary of ‘herunterreißen’, which means ‘to pull down’, but is also part of the expression ‘sich einen herunterreißen’—‘to masturbate’ (348); or
- ‘“spucken [spitting] on the stairs’” refers to ‘“esprit d’escalier’ … lack of ready repartee, [s]ince ‘spuken [haunting]’ is an activity of spirits” (248n)—an example that also demonstrates Freud’s observation that, as in rhyme, “for the purpose of representation in dreams … the spelling of words is far less important than their sound”. (406)

Freud compares the dream to a rebus, in which the visual images need not stand for words that correspond to the images. Rather, each image should be read as a piece of pictographic writing, sometimes standing for a whole word, sometimes for several, and sometimes for just part of a word:

The dream-content … is expressed as it were in a pictographic script [Bilderschrift], the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead

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158 For example, a picture of a cat sitting on a mat could be the transcription of: “The cat is sitting on a mat”, “A cat is sitting on a mat”, “A cat is sitting on the mat”, “Only one cat is sitting on the mat”, “I wish my cat were still sitting on the mat”, “John’s cat doesn’t look like this one”, “A view of Carlyle’s bedroom”, “Magritte’s painting This is not a cat”, “This is not an elephant”, etc. (Gombrich 1972)
of according to their symbolic relation [Zeichenbeziehung], we should clearly be led into error. Suppose I have a picture-puzzle, a rebus, in front of me. It depicts a house with a boat on its roof, a single letter of the alphabet, the figure of a running man whose head has been conjured away, and so on. Now I might be misled into raising objections and declaring that the picture as a whole and its component parts are nonsensical. A boat has no business to be on the roof of a house, and a headless man cannot run. Moreover, the man is bigger than the house; and if the whole picture is intended to represent a landscape, letters of the alphabet are out of place in it since such objects do not occur in nature. But obviously we can only form a proper judgment of the rebus if we put aside criticisms [as always, criticism is identified as an obstacle to psychoanalytic understanding] such as these of the whole composition and its parts and if, instead, we try to replace each separate element by a syllable or word that can be represented by that element in some way or other. The words which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical … A dream is a picture-puzzle of this sort. (277-278; GW 283-284)

A ball in a rebus can stand for the sound (bɔːl) (as in “bawl”, for instance) or the letters “b-a-l-l” or for the word “ball”, meaning, inter alia, dance, shot or sphere. In the latter case it can also stand for a ball—for ‘itself’—because the word refers to the same object as the picture. (Of course, if the dream is a rebus this image need not be read in terms of the word “ball”, it could also be attached to very different words, such as “marble”, “sphere”, “toy”, “planet”, or related words in other languages with which the dreamer is acquainted).

To find a suitable visual representation for a dream-thought, the dream-work often has to juggle with different verbal renditions. This is one of the most crucial ways in which the dream must take account of the means of representation which are available to it:

Of the various subsidiary thoughts attached to the essential dream-thoughts, those will be preferred which admit of visual representation; and the dream-work does not shrink from the effort of recasting unadaptable thoughts into a new verbal form—even into a less usual one—provided that that process facilitates representation. (344)

Freud’s rebus metaphor can be read as an elegant way of representing many aspects of the complexity he ascribes to dreams.¹⁵⁹ (See pt. i-v, on p. 147, below). For example, the rebus

¹⁵⁹ But not all. For instance: a rebus is a (picture) puzzle that generally has a unique solution. (p. 158)
to be read as “Women head heart deaths table for first time—Chicago Times”, combines disparate elements, functioning in different ways. Sound, image, writing (alphabetic and non-alphabetic) and printing enter into the reading of this rebus in complex, unpredictable ways:

- “Women” are represented by a sign hovering somewhere between being iconic and being conventional (the sign indicating the women’s bathroom, as opposed to that for men);
- the verb “head” is represented by a picture of a (horse’s) head;
- the object (or word, or concept) heart is represented by a conventional representation of a heart;\(^{160}\)
- “deaths” is represented by a stylised depiction of “death the reaper”, followed by an alphabetic/phonetic fragment, the letter “s”;
- “table” is represented by a schematic image of its homonym, table;
- “for” by the homophonic “4”—a non-alphabetic and non-phonetic piece of writing;
- “first” is represented by “1st”, like “deaths” a combination of alphabetic and non-alphabetic, phonetic and non-phonetic elements;
- the mathematical symbol “X”, a non-alphabetic, non-phonetic element, read as “times”, fulfils two functions: once to refer to the word “time” (the “S” sign should here be read as “delete the ‘s’”), and once as the second word in “Chicago Times”.

(In many of these cases the means employed by the rebus has itself become conventional, e.g. “4” as a way of writing “for”).

In the more typical case of overdetermination, a single image will simultaneously refer to a number of different dream-thoughts. The elements of the dream-content are invariably

\(^{160}\) This element, like the ball in the previous example, can either be taken to be a kind of writing: a picture referring to a word and thereby to an object (like the picture of the table), or as a pure icon—referring directly to an object or concept—introduced as a heterogeneous element into a series of images that otherwise function as a kind of writing. The rebus metaphor remains valid whichever of the two options we choose.
ambiguous. The polysemy that makes a dream harder to interpret at the same time helps to disguise it so as the better to circumvent censorship. The rebus metaphor can be misleading, because in standard examples of rebus the element of overdetermination will usually be missing; however, in our example the large “X” is overdetermined.

**Secondary revision [Sekundäre Bearbeitung]**

Secondary revision augments and rearranges the products of the rest of the dream-work to form an ‘approximately connected whole’.

As a result of its efforts, the dream loses its appearance of absurdity and disconnectedness and approximates to the model of an intelligible experience. (490)

It draws up a facade in front of the already disguised dream-content, making this content even harder to recognise. Its contribution to dreams is variable, ranging from **nothing to a complete revision**. The more successfully the dream is revised, the more ‘rational’ it appears to be—but the more its actual meaning is disguised. The dream now seems to be more coherently ‘about’ the manifest content. We are as misled as someone who thinks that hieroglyphics are ‘about’ birds and beetles because images of these are used to write syllables.

Freud tells us that secondary revision works essentially just like interpretation in waking life. He identifies “the psychical function which carries out … the secondary revision” (499) with “our normal thinking” which tries to make sense of any perceptual content it encounters, often completely falsifying it in the process. (499-500)161 It “approaches the content of dreams with a demand that it must be intelligible, … subjects it to a first interpretation and … consequently produces a complete misunderstanding of it.” (500) Accordingly, the first imperative of dream interpretation is to avoid being taken in by any appearance of coherence and intelligibility in the dream.

It is fascinating that misunderstanding—apparently: an essential misunderstanding—is here ascribed to our normal, waking “thinking” or “interpretation”. Rushing in where angels fear to tread, it falsifies alterity by trying to make it “intelligible” in terms of what it thinks it already knows about what it deems familiar. (This calls to mind Vico’s words: “The human mind, because of its indefinite nature, makes itself the rule of the universe in respect of everything it does not know.” (quoted in Fiumara 1990)). Here Freud’s concerns tie in directly with those of the current discourse of alterity, which, deeply aware of the massive role of prejudice (and preconceptions generally) in experience and knowledge, now aims to do justice to that to which our preconceptions cannot do justice, because they make it invisible, distort it or violate it in some other sense. The impossibility of empiricism—the impossibility of shedding our ‘paradigms’ or ‘conceptual schemes’ so as to view reality with an innocent eye—which tended to

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161 In Ch. VII of the *Traumdeutung* (575) this function will be identified as the *Pcs*. 
be calmly accepted in post-war epistemology, in the current discourse of alterity has again become a problem: we worry about what this non-innocent gaze inflicts upon ‘the other’.

Freud compares secondary revision with phantasies or day dreams. Phantasies constitute relatively coherent stereotypical scenarios that can recur in a variety of productions of the unconscious. Where dreams seem “specially coherent” this is often a sign that phantasies are incorporated in them.

Phantasies are “psychical facades” that are “erected on the basis of memories” exactly so as to “bar the way to these memories [of primal scenes].” (491 & 491n) Pre-existing unconscious phantasies can be incorporated into a dream in very different ways. At one extreme they offer a ready-made veneer that can be glued onto the dream without modification, at the other they simply form part of the latent dream material to be “compressed [zusammengeschoben], condensed [verdichtet], superimposed on one another and so on.” (493; GW 497) The phantasy in question can also range from being a direct derivative of the core dream-thoughts to being completely unrelated to them.

Freud’s remarks concerning secondary revision loop back on themselves like an ouroboros, a snake swallowing its own tail. Initially, phantasy seems to be linked squarely with secondary revision; while both seem to be linked fairly unambiguously to waking life and our (pre)conscious interpretations of reality. The rest of the dream seems to be the polar opposite of the phantasy/secondary revision duo. The study of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious (608)—that mode of functioning which is so utterly alien or “bewildering” (597) to our waking life. But then the left and right edges of this two-dimensional picture start curling, detach themselves from their two-dimensional mount, meet and fuse:
The two-dimensional picture becomes a seamless tube when Freud in effect tells us that the investigation of day dreams is the royal road to the study of dreams: the investigation of day dreams “might, in fact, have served as the shortest and best approach to an understanding of night dreams.” (492) The essence of secondary revision—waking interpretation—is the opposite of the essence of dreams. To get the essence of secondary revision, look at phantasy. But to get the essence of dreams, look at phantasy as well. Phantasies turn out to be at work in both the most ‘preconscious’ part of the dream—the secondary revision—and in its most ‘unconscious’ part—the core wishes. The essential distinctions of Freud’s text-ouroboros dissolve in its own digestive juices, as it progresses.
The use of symbols

Certain recurrent elements in dreams and other productions of the unconscious have a—relatively—fixed meaning, which is universal or shared by a particular linguistic or cultural community. (Freud emphasises that symbols are often linguistically mediated). In psychoanalysis such elements are called symbols. Typical examples of symbols are: the king and queen for the father and mother; oblong objects for the male genitals; hollow objects for the female genitals; wood or rooms for women.

Symbols generally “serve to represent persons, parts of the body and activities invested with erotic interest” (683) The domain of symbolism seems to be defined by its proximity to the domain of T.S. Eliot’s trinity of “birth, and copulation, and death”:

Whereas the symbols discovered by psycho-analysis are very numerous, the range of the things they symbolise is very narrow: the body, parents and blood-relations, birth, death, nudity and above all sexuality (sexual organs, the sexual act). (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 444-445)

The relation of a symbol (in Freud’s narrow sense) to what it symbolises is usually not completely arbitrary. Symbols replace what they refer to “by hints, allusions and similar forms of

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162 Almost everything in Ch. VI, section E: “Representation by symbols in dreams …” (350-404), on which our current subsection is based, was only added piecemeal in later editions of the Traumdeutung. (Those of 1909, 1911, 1914, 1919, 1925.) In discussing it here, I therefore depart from the chronological approach I have hitherto mostly followed in this thesis.

163 Note that this use of the term is much more specific than two other, wider uses of the word ‘symbol’: firstly, as a term for any sign or signifying element, and, secondly, as a term for any sign that signifies in an indirect, disguised way.

164 I do not want to withhold the following gem from my readers. One of my students once wrote in an exam: “To Freud, anything that is longer than it is wide is a phallic symbol.”

165 In “Fragment of an Agon”:

SWEENEY: Well that’s life on a crocodile isle

…

Nothing at all but three things

DORIS: What things?

SWEENEY: Birth, and copulation, and death.

That’s all, that’s all, that’s all, Birth, and copulation, and death.

…

That’s all the facts when you come to brass tacks:

Birth, and copulation, and death.(Eliot 1983: 130-131)

166 Interestingly enough, this demarcation of the scope of symbolism seems to suggest an essential relationship between sexuality and reproduction—exactly the view that Freud’s theory of sexuality is usually intent on dislodging.
indirect representation.” (683; my italics) Between symbol and symbolised there will typically be an analogy (of form, function, etc.) or an allusion based on contiguity or contrast. (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 444) But in some cases, like a woman’s hat as a symbol for male genitals (355-356), the relation between the symbol and what it symbolises seems wholly arbitrary.

Symbols are typically the point at which the technique of free association reaches its limits—the analysand’s associations dry up when they are encountered. Nevertheless, Freud says they can be correctly interpreted, given a knowledge of the symbolism of the unconscious, in combination with a sensitivity to the context in which they appear. In rare cases whole dreams can even be interpreted in this way. As a rule, however, only some elements have the status of symbols, while the larger part of the dream will require the dreamer’s associations before it can be interpreted. Thus, although there are points of resemblance between Freud’s approach to symbols and conventional books that attempt to decipher dream symbolism according to a fixed key, there are also crucial differences. Freud does not assume that every part of the dream can be read symbolically. Although symbols are often the most easily read parts of the dream “one can never tell whether any particular element in the content of a dream is to be interpreted symbolically or in its proper sense.” (Freud 1901—a—SE V: 684). “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.” (Kerr 1994: 514)

Moreover, even if an element is a symbol, symbols “frequently have more than one or even several meanings,” and, as with Chinese script, the correct interpretation can only be arrived at on each occasion from the context.” (353) Therefore, apart from the context one never knows how an element is to be interpreted.

Symbols are only utilised by the dream-work, not created by it. They are also “to be found in folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes,

167 For example of shape—a cigar as phallic symbol; function—passing through narrow spaces as a symbol of being born; or valuation—vermin as a symbol for the nuisance of unwanted siblings.

168 For example, clothes as symbol for nudity; public gatherings as symbol for secrecy.

169 An example: N, a professional in her late twenties, recounts the following dream: “Tonight I had a really weird dream. I dreamt that I slid down a mountain side on a tree trunk with my father. We sat face to face and slid down a path that had been cleared among the pines. We kept on going faster and faster; my father pushed with his feet so that we would go even faster. Because he found it such fun, he said. And it was fun, but I became frightened because it kept on going faster and faster. How on earth does one manage to dream such strange dreams? Do you know, I am convinced that dreams have a meaning.”

170 Kerr adds: “This remark, so well known, is probably apocryphal; it cannot be found in any primary source dealing with Freud.” Meltzer (1987: 125), who gives no reference, (ostensibly) quotes it as “Sometimes a good cigar is just a good cigar.”

171 For instance: many symbols for the genitals are bisexual. (358)
to a more complete extent than in dreams." Their value to the dream-work is that they serve its double aim of showing and hiding the dream-thoughts, i.e. making them capable of representation while nevertheless evading the censorship. (349)

**AFFECTS**

Any affect attached to the dream-thoughts undergoes less modification than their ideational content. Such affects are as a rule suppressed; when they are retained, they are detached from the ideas that properly belong to them, affects of a similar character being brought together. (507)

Freud takes the affects in dreams as a particularly important, reliable aid to interpretation. In a domain otherwise characterised by uncertainty on all sides, they serve as crucial indications of psychic reality. Thus, in a case where there are various actors in one of my dreams, a rule of thumb is that my ego is concealed behind the actor who has the feeling I, as dreamer, experience. (323n)

In psychoanalysis we **first** assume that the affect is justified, and **then** seek out the idea which belongs to it but has been repressed and replaced by a substitute. A necessary premise to all this is that the release of affect and the ideational content do not constitute the indissoluble organic unity as which we are in the habit of treating them, but that these two separate entities may be merely **soldered** together and can thus be detached from each other by analysis. (461-462)

Dreams puzzle us because what is represented in them is not accompanied by appropriate feelings—the sort of feelings that similar situations would ‘naturally’ have evoked in waking life: horror, disgust, grief, and so on. We find it confusing that in dreams affect and content each go their separate ways because we usually only assess affects in conjunction with representational contents. According to Freud our confusion ceases once we stop being fixated on the manifest dream and move to the latent dream-thoughts. “Analysis shows us that the ideational material has undergone displacements and substitutions, whereas the affects have remained unaltered.” (460; GW 463) This is why they can serve as fulcrum for our interpretations.

Freud, does, however, acknowledge three ways in which affects can be altered, which supposedly nevertheless do not militate against the foregoing. Firstly, they can be **diminished**. Secondly, like other elements, they can be **turned into their opposite** by the dream-work.173 Thirdly, whether an

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172 As Freud says something very similar about dramatisation—it is mediated by “jokes, quotations, songs and proverbs” (345)—the boundary between symbolism and (other forms of?) dramatisation is not clear.  
173 One could argue that Freud’s indecision—does he want to say that affects can be altered or that they can’t? is perhaps only apparent. In his way of thinking, opposites have essentially the same content, which is preceded by a plus sign in the one case, and a minus sign in the other. As the unconscious does not know

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*footnote ctd. on next page*
When affect is experienced as pleasurable or unpleasurable, it can also alter—when repression occurs, pleasure will become unpleasure (582): this is the essential mechanism underlying repression.

Dreams are usually far less charged with affect than the material from which they derive. The inhibition of affect is a result of the dream-work. It results from both the conflict between the dream material and the censorship, and the conflict between contrasting affects in the dream material. But instead of conflict, co-operation can also occur, so that the different sources reinforce each other: “sources of affect which are capable of producing the same affect come together in generating it” (480).

Freud elucidates this with an analogy from the domain of othering. Transgressions by members of a discriminated minority tend to be punished more harshly than those by the majority. “Their punishment does not as a rule correspond to their wrong-doing but to their wrong-doing plus the ill-feeling directed against them”. (479). Because they are guilty, the harshness of their punishment can easily be rationalised as just.

**THE COMPLEXITY AND HETEROGENEITY OF FREUD’S THEORY OF DREAMS—AND OF DREAMS, ACCORDING TO FREUD’S THEORY.**

If Freud’s theory on the interpretation of dreams has anything in it, it shows how complicated is the way the human mind represents the facts in pictures. So complicated, so irregular is the mode of representation that we can barely call it representation any longer.¹⁷⁴ (Wittgenstein 1978: 44e)

The more I study Freud, the more deeply Wittgenstein’s words seem to resonate. The dream is such a complicated, irregular mode of representation, that it can hardly be called a representation; Freud’s theory is such a complicated, irregular mode of representation, that it can hardly be called a representation.

The rise in fortunes of the thematics of ‘alterity’, ‘the other’, etc. in current theory is probably directly related to what has been called ‘the crisis of representation’. We argued in the “Introduction” that the notions of ‘alterity’, ‘otherness’ and “the other” can have various any negation (318; seen note 178, below), according to this argument this distinction would dissolve, so that the two affects would have the same content.

¹⁷⁴ I have slightly modified Winch’s translation. The German (44) reads:

Wenn etwas an der Freudschen Lehre von der Traumdeutung ist; so zeigt sie, in wie komplizierter Weise der menschliche Geist Bilder der Tatsachen macht.

So kompliziert, so unregelmässig ist die Art der Abbildung, dass man sie kaum mehr eine Abbildung nennen kann.

The “kaum” could be translated as “just barely” or as “not quite”. “Abbildung” can also be translated in a variety of ways, which approach or deviate from a picture theory of representation to greater or lesser extent.
meanings, which tend to be interconnected by a network of family resemblances. (In Wittgenstein’s (1968) sense). In one of its senses “alterity” can be equated with “that which resists representation”. The more regular a mode of representation is, the less problematic the term ‘representation’ seems, and the more available representations will be that we can unproblematically treat as reliable. Conversely, the more irregular a mode of representation is, the more problematic the term ‘representation’ will seem, and the less obviously reliable representations in that mode will be.

Wittgenstein (1985) gave a simple representational model of language in the *Tractatus*. By the time of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1968) he had come to believe that the model offered in his earlier book was fundamentally flawed. We can read our opening quote for this subsection as saying: Freud demonstrates that representational models such as the one given in the *Tractatus* are far too simple for either dreams (as representation) or his theory (as representation).

A simple representational model would in principle be fairly easy to summarise with the elegance and universality of a formal system. We would then have *rules* of projection or translation that were so exact that they would link each state of the source representation with a *unique* state of the target representation.¹⁷⁵ (Cf. top diagram on p. 134). This is clearly not what Freud offers the reader of the *Traumdeutung*. As he puts it, years later: “this work of interpretation was not to be brought under strict rules and left a great deal of play to the physician’s tact and skill” (1923a—SE XVIII: 239). Any rule that he gives us is at most a rule of thumb, unlike the rules of a formal system which *exclude* countless possibilities.¹⁷⁶ Every pronouncement he makes is provisional;

¹⁷⁵ One can have a formal system without knowing how it maps onto reality. Where one thinks in terms of (unambiguous) rules of projection, the way in which a formal system relates to reality, is itself constituted by a formal system.

¹⁷⁶ For example, the phonetic rules of English permit ltr, lsl and lstr as the opening consonants of a word, but not lzdll, ldl, lbdl, lsr, lxml, lpsl, lpt and a host of other combinations of consonants. The *essence* of a (say, Chomskyan) rule-based description (i.e.: computational model) of language is that the rules *exclude* all sorts of possibilities, usually far more than they include. The only thing excluded by the “rules” of the dream-work is that which itself only functions by grace of exclusion, e.g. series of operations in formal systems such as logic, mathematics, chess, etc. This is in itself enough to exclude many forms of the secondary process. In my (unpublished) Master’s thesis (Gouws 1979) I argued that if the dreamer could correctly apply the rules of the dream-work in the essentially private situation he finds himself in during sleep, this would in effect constitute an example of the private language that Wittgenstein had argued was an impossibility. Roughly the same point can be made in another way: it could be argued that the (relative?) absence of feedback mechanisms is what distinguishes the primary from the secondary process. (Klein 1965; Noy 1969; Spanjaard 1976) In analysis, the neutrality and abstinence of the analyst cause the secondary process to diminish in favour of the primary process because the analysand cannot regulate his utterances in the light of feedback by the other, as in normal social relations. The same goes, but to an even

everything depends on context—again in contradistinction to the rules of a formal system, which are context-independent. In a way this is only to be expected, if for no other reason than the way the dialectic between the censorship and the unconscious works: every advance in the interpretation of the derivatives of the unconscious leads to advances in their disguise. This is one of the reasons why the meaning of manifest elements is not at all predictable. For any suggested reading of such an element we can therefore say, like Pooh Bear: “Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn’t; one can never tell with the unconscious.” In Freud’s approach, dreams are immensely complex and heterogeneous in a variety of ways, and on a variety of levels, that defy any neat summary in rules (i.e.: the sort of explicit, unambiguous rules found in formal systems) as well as, usually, any simple schematic representation. This complexity can partly, but only partly, be attributed to the complexity of the dream-thoughts.177 (Whereas in the dream-thoughts this complexity is expressed in a fairly regular discursive way, the manifest dream uses the most varied, irregular means to express it—inasmuch as it is not lost, which is in fact what happens to a large extent).

We cannot here go into all these forms of complexity and heterogeneity in any depth, so we will just recapitulate or mention them in a summary fashion. We start with points that apply only or mainly to dreams, and then move on to points that apply only or mainly to Freud’s theory (the two are intimately related). Each of these points contributes to showing that as far as Freud is concerned, a simple representational model is not applicable. The object and its ‘representation’ do not have such a neat dyadic, isomorphic relation to each other; it is often hard or impossible to separate the representation from the object, and from its re-representations. We cannot picture this situation as a relation between two entities (possibly mediated by a third term, taking the form of something as simple or unitary as ‘a system of projection’). Instead, ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are themselves indissoluble from a huge differential web, without any clear boundaries, and containing a host of heterogeneous parts or regions.

i. The dream is an amalgam, in varying proportions, of scenes (visually represented or “hallucinated” situations), words, affects and other elements (e.g. bodily sensations). Sometimes the visual content of a dream can be taken at face value (a priest dreamt of can refer, inter alia, to the same person in real life); sometimes not (the priest in the

greater extent, for dreaming.

177 The complexity of the dream-thoughts comes out in the following quote:

The essential dream-thoughts … usually emerge as a complex of thoughts and memories of the most intricate possible structure, with all the attributes of the trains of thought familiar to us in waking life. … Each train of thought is invariably accompanied by its contradictory counterpart … The different portions of this complicated structure stand, of course, in the most manifold logical relations to one another. They can represent foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter-arguments. (311-312)
dream, *Father N*, can refer to the dreamer’s own *father*). Even at this level we can see that the elements of the dream do not all function in a single representational mode (e.g. iconic, conventional or allusion by association).

ii. The elements of the dream-content are invariably ambiguous; “the peculiar plasticity of the psychical material [in dreams] must never be forgotten” (352):

In interpreting any dream-element it is in general doubtful

(a) whether it is to be taken in a positive or negative sense (as an antithetic relation),

(b) whether it is to be interpreted historically (as a recollection),

(c) whether it is to be interpreted symbolically, or

(d) whether its interpretation is to depend on its wording. (341)

iii. To ii (c) we may add that even when an element is to be read symbolically, it is ambiguous. No hard and fast rules can be given for determining its meaning; everything depends on the context. (353)

iv. Sometimes the relation between the symbol and what it symbolises is arbitrary, and sometimes it isn’t.

v. The dream-work is the ultimate *bricoleur*. In contrast to a simple mode of representation, the dream can ransack any imaginable source, private or public, ranging through the personal history of the dreamer, language, writing systems, diverse forms of imaginative narrative (legend, myth, fairy tales, novels, plays, poems, operas, films), common or specialised knowledge, etc., for ready-made associative relations with which to represent a thought or allude to it. This activity of radical *bricolage* may become less puzzling if we remember that cryptograms and mnemonic

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178 Freud had developed this point earlier in the same chapter:

‘No’ seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned. … Dreams feel themselves at liberty, moreover, to represent any element by its wishful contrary; so that there is no way of deciding at first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or a negative. (318)

Following Abel, Freud believed “that the most ancient language behave like dreams in this respect.” (318n)

179 This term was introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962), and discussed by Derrida (1978: 285):

The *bricoleur*, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses “the means at hand,” that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous—and so forth.

Lévi-Strauss contrasts him with the *engineer*, one who makes things from scratch according to a virgin concept, instead of assembling them in a makeshift way from ready-made parts that originally had another purpose. Derrida says that the opposition between the *bricoleur* and the engineer is ultimately highly problematic—“that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*.” (285)
devices in everyday life, as well as the huge variety of figures of speech in everyday language work in a similar way. To put it in Wittgensteinian terms: dreaming is not a *sui generis* language game next to, and relatively independent of, other language games. Rather, dreaming is something in which means derived from any (and many) of a wide variety of other heterogeneous (or even incompatible) language games can be used.

vi. There is sometimes a direct relation, and sometimes *little or no* relation, between the facade erected in front of the dream-content by secondary revision and the essential dream-thoughts.

vii. The dream and its interpretation cannot be clearly separated. The secondary revision, which seems to be part of the dream, in a certain sense is already a first interpretation of it. On the other hand, it is a rule of thumb that what seems to be external to the dream—comments like “here there’s a gap in it”—should be read as part of it. (332-333)

viii. Freud tells us that dreams are wish-fulfilments. Dreams cover the whole range from undisguised fulfilments of unrepressed wishes to disguised fulfilments of repressed wishes.

ix. The wishes to be fulfilled in the dream can lie at very different levels. The wish that Freud treats as a constant in dreaming—the wish to sleep—is usually not represented in the *content* of the dream, like other dream-constructing wishes. And if we investigate the content of the dream, the wishes represented there are also varied. Besides the paradigmatic sensuous wishes, for instances, Freud also discusses dreams in which the wish is to be proven wrong, or even, to show the falsity of Freud’s theory of dreams. (The fulfilment of the latter wish typically serves to show that the analyst is wrong on another, more crucial matter, where it would be most unwelcome if he were right).

x. The previous point shows that dreams and their interpretation interact with each other; another reason why a neat theory that specifies in advance the means of representation to which the dream will limit itself, is not to be had. (Cf. *Condition 2*, p. 169, below). This interaction can lead to a far-reaching intertwining of explanans and explanandum: in an insertion dating from 1911, Freud quotes Rank extensively quoting a colleague who extensively quotes Freud, in analyzing a dream he had after reading a passage in the *Traumdeutung*. The dream is read as the fulfilment of the dreamer’s wish to convince himself of the scope and validity of Freud’s theory of dreams.

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180 On one occasion, Freud discusses a dream “which seems to be composed of two different and opposing phantasies … of which one is superficial while the second is, as it were, an interpretation of the first.” (493-494)
dreams. (388-392) Here it is not clear what contains what: the theory refers to a dream that refers to the theory. We are about as far as we can possibly get from a conception of social science in which it is of the essence that the observed be in the dark about the observer’s theory, so that the order of representation and the order of object (the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge) remain neatly separated.

xi. In later writings Freud (1910d, 1912b, 1915a, 1937c) will introduce the concepts of “transference” and “counter-transference” to underline the fact that the interaction between analyst and analysand irrevocably permeates everything that happens in analysis (and therefore also the dreams dreamt or recounted during analysis).181

xii. Simple models of ‘representation’ tend to be linked to fairly simple subject/object schemes. Does psychoanalytic knowledge have a subject, and if so, who? The analyst or the analysand? Whereas psychoanalytic knowledge as pure theory or as discursively articulated case study may perhaps be seen as “knowledge without a subject” which, according to Popper (1972: Ch. 3 & 4) characterises World III, the case is different where we take the analysand or the analyst as each the subject of a personal, not yet formulated—or imperfectly formulated/formulable—knowledge. (In

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181 Wouldn’t self-analysis—for example, as exemplified by Freud’s self-analysis—be a way to obviate this objection or problem? Surprisingly (from a pre-analytic perspective), Freud does not see interpreting others as more difficult than interpreting oneself; the opposite is rather the case: “self-analysis sensu strictu is impossible”. (Freud 1985c (1986): 305)

Although it is true that it is very hard to understand another person’s unconscious when one is limited to everyday forms of interaction (professional or informal), one’s own unconscious similarly resists understanding by everyday means (such as introspection or self-observation). In both cases a sustained interpretation only becomes possible thanks to unusual means, such as the technique of psychoanalysis in conjunction with Freud’s theory of the unconscious. In both cases the wish to remember dreams and interpret them is countered by the wish to forget them and to avoid interpretation; even where there is a wish for analysis, the forces resisting the analysis continue to subsist. In self-analysis the very unconscious forces that led the person (as analysand) to disguise the contents of his unconscious in strange forms of expression, such as dreams, will hinder him (as analyst) when he tries to make these contents conscious. In a standard analysis, where analyst and analysand do not coincide, and the analyst has undergone a suitable training, the analyst will not be as blind to material that is highly unacceptable to the analysand as the latter (though the analyst’s unanalysed counter-transference will tend to lead to selective blindness on his part as well, which in places may coincide with that of the analysand). The likelihood that such resistances will be detected and overcome is greater than in the case of self-analysis.

All this is overfamiliar to anybody who has had some exposure to psychoanalytic theory. We rehearse it here at some length just as a reminder of how much Freud’s approach differs from certain very familiar approaches to the question of ‘other minds’: in Freud’s model the own unconscious functions very much as an ‘other mind’ in relation to the preconscious. One’s resistances, the major obstacle to (or better: force opposing) a knowledge of one’s own unconscious are absent—or, at any rate, weaker—where others are concerned.
psychoanalysis the operative word should often perhaps be “understanding”, rather than “knowledge”).

xiii. If we take the analysand as the subject of psychoanalytic knowledge, we see another reason why the notion of representation is problematised in Freud: the extent to which the analysand’s “self-knowledge” differs from the sort of knowledge that is paradigmatic of the natural sciences. Firstly, the “knowledge” obtained in psychoanalysis is only something gained in a process—a change in the subject. In this process the analysand learns as much from hearing and (re-)experiencing his own associations as from the analyst’s interpretations. If the analysand could be presented with the result of his analysis on day one, it would be useless to him, because he hasn’t been through the process, hasn’t worked through the material and the resistances.182

It is quite hopeless to try to penetrate directly to the nucleus of the pathogenic organization. Even if we ourselves could guess it, the patient would not know what to do with the explanation offered to him and he would not be psychologically changed by it. (Freud 1895d—SE II: 292)

Secondly, an analysand precisely formulating wonderful insights into his own situation, could be intellectualising. Because his emotions are not involved, it is as if knowledge and ignorance co-exist in him—the truths he himself enunciates are not arriving at the “deep” level where they would really make a difference.183 Thirdly, much of what the analysand learns explicitly in psychoanalysis is quickly or gradually forgotten (without thereby necessarily nullifying its therapeutic impact).184

The foregoing should be enough to demonstrate the tremendous complexity of Freud on dreams. One can see the complications discussed above as sure signs that Freud’s theory is not what any

182 It is significant that Freud’s terminology draws interpretation into the domain of labour, the world of labouring bodies, rather than that of knowing minds. Freud uses the term “Arbeit”; translated in the SE as “work”. However, “work of interpretation” [Deutungsarbeit] and “dream-work” [Traumarbeit] could perhaps better be translated as “labour of interpretation” and “dream-labour”. (The SE translation with “work” does have the virtue, however, of maintaining the link with “work” [Arbeit] in physics, where work is linked to force, resistance and the expenditure of energy).

183 Accepting that a particular statement is true is quite compatible with drawing only very limited conclusions from it. To take an example that is more typically Buddhist, Tolstoyan or Heideggerian than psychoanalytic: Everybody knows that “All men are mortal” is true. Nevertheless, I tend to forget that death will also take me and my loved ones, that it can strike at any moment, and so on. Our shock and outrage at death regularly shows how little we really understood, knew or believed the proposition “All men are mortal”. Abstract verities like “All men are mortal” can typically be used to shield us from the concrete realisation “I will die”, even if the former by rights contains or directly implies the latter.

184 For more on this, see the final pages of my “Conclusion”.
self-respecting theory should be: elegant, non-self-referential, restricting interaction between observer and observed to an absolute minimum so as to ensure controlled experimental conditions. (And so as to stick as closely as possible to natural science, where reality is—supposedly—not influenced by observing it). On the other hand, one could say that such complications become inevitable as soon as one accepts, firstly, the therapeutic interaction with the client as the focus of psychoanalysis, and, secondly, Freud’s dialectical model of the censorship and the evasion of censorship—two intelligences engaged in a strategic battle to outwit each other, and constantly responding to each other’s latest innovations.

In passing, please note how different psychoanalysis is from a discipline like physics where, when multi-dimensional models are used, we may expect that each dimension is also in fact a single dimension. Each variable that is important for a particular function—say mass, acceleration, volume—typically takes a definite numerical value. In Newtonian physics, for instance, ‘kilogram’ means the same, regardless of whether we have 1 kg. of iron or 1 kg. of water; 1 kg. of iron or 2.000.000 kg. of it. Different variables—such as mass, resistance, volume or temperature—typically do not have fuzzy edges where they run into each other.

Freud’s basic terms, like those of folk psychology, behave very differently. The metaphors and other terms he uses usually have fuzzy boundaries, and often stand in for a whole family of heterogeneous phenomena. (An example would be ‘wish-fulfilment’). Alternative metaphors for the same thing generally do not quite coincide. (Here we can think of the watchman and the censor; the topological, dynamic and economic conceptions of the unconscious; the work of analysis vs. analysis as a contest or struggle [Kampf]). Terms and metaphors for ostensibly different things are not sharply delineated from each other at the edges. (Symbolism and dramatisation; phantasies and screen memories). Uncertainty may even extend to the core of concepts. (For instance, should we read phantasy as (or in terms of) the paradigm for the unconscious, or the paradigm for the preconscious?) This also means that Freud’s texts leave the reader with considerable interpretative leeway, however orthodox we may want to be.

Freud’s network of metaphors, concepts, formulae and statements does not prescribe uniform, unambiguous empirical results. Nevertheless, they are not empty. The cloud of interpretations emanating from this network will typically be very differently centred from the one typically associated with a Christian, Muslim, Jungian, anthroposophic, behaviourist or Gestalt writer.

185 Quantum mechanics demonstrates that what is supposed to be the case need not always be the case.
186 Cf. the quote from Freud in n. 121 and the dream recounted in n. 169.
187 It goes without saying that Freud’s metaphors are generally constitutive, that is, they do not belong to that rare class of metaphors that are simply a didactic or decorative addition to a formalism that can function as well without them.
The complexity and heterogeneity of dreams, according to Freud, again point to a network model of the mind and psychical functioning. It is not plausible that the mind functions like a formal system, hierarchically ordered in terms of axioms and what can be deduced from them. It seems unlikely that the mind is programmed with rules that can cater for any possible form of heterogeneity in contents, types of contents, and types of relations between contents. If, for argument’s sake, a particular rule-based description of the system at a particular moment were to be valid, the strategic game of the imposition and evasion of censorship (the censorship outwitting the agency that would evade it, this agency in turn outwitting the censorship’s new strategy, and so on \textit{ad infinitum}) would immediately lead to the evolution of behaviour that was not rule-governed in the way a formal system is. There is no move we (as theorists) could think of as a counterexample to any particular attempt to formulate the rules followed in dreaming that could not equally be used in dreaming—both by the agency seeking to evade censorship and by the agency seeking to impose it.

\textbf{THE ALTERITY OF DREAMS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF ALTERITY}

In this subsection we want to address the following general exegetical question: Where should Freud be placed on a continuum ranging from “The dream is completely and simply knowable (transparent; the bearer of a signified that is—or can be rendered—fully present)” to “The dream is radically unknowable (opaque; not the bearer of a signified that can at all be rendered present)”?

\footnote{And to a larger network in which the psyche is taken up. Much of this network has the status of a sign, and thereby the whole of this network does. From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. … Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign (Derrida 1976: 50).}

\footnote{It could be argued that the only formulation that this argument strictly supports is the following: “that was not governed by the rules formulated previously.” However, I would not agree. Any sophisticated strategy will seek to avoid predictability and transparency, and thus: any rule-governed behaviour which would be predictable or transparent. One is reminded of the Jewish anecdote about the two rival merchants encountering each other on a railway station on the line between Minsk and Plinsk. “So, where are you off to?” asks the one. “To Plinsk,” replies the other. “Liar!” roars the first, “you just say that so I’ll think you’re going to \textit{Minsk}!”}

\footnote{Where Freud analyses a psychological function into component functions that can be ascribed to component agencies, his model tends to the “daemonological”—each agency tends to become (much like) a full subject, possessing sophisticated knowledge, acting intelligently, striving to fulfil goals (but doesn’t every “system” in a “component system” model have goals it strives to fulfil?), etc. It is unclear how well this tendency in Freud’s thought chimes with his statements concerning the limitations of the primary process, that dream-work is not creative, that it does not think, etc. It does, however, chime with another notion we sometimes encounter in his thought: how well-aimed the unconscious can be. (Cf. for instance his analysis of how his slipper ‘accidentally’ hit a little marble Venus and broke it (1901b—SE VI: 169)).}
What is at stake here, for our topic: the other, othering and alterity? How are the issues of ‘othering’ and ‘alterity’ related? Well, othering is frequently linked to overconfidence in one’s (ability to acquire reliable) beliefs about others: such overconfidence tends to be linked to a lack of circumspection regarding the way one should treat others. To cite a crude example—under apartheid my fellow-Afrikaners could often be heard to say: “The Afrikaner knows the Black man”. “The Afrikaner” knew, for instance, that “the Black man” essentially did not see people like Mandela as his leaders; this belief did not have to be tested at the ballot box. Knowing “the Black man”, the Afrikaner could act on his behalf. Blacks were othered, while their alterity was denied. (To use two terms that have very different connotations, though stemming from semantically almost identical roots).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, “the other” is sometimes conceived of as so radically other that every construal of it will be a misconstrual, and only the admission of its fundamental unknowability will be compatible with an ethically correct stance. Freud is sometimes read in this sense—the unconscious is then said to represent “radical alterity”, i.e. something that remains forever both unknown and unknowable. If this is correct, it would deserve to be grouped with such other avatars of radical alterity as Levinas’s “other” [l’autre; autrui], the God of mysticism and negative theology, Kant’s noumenal self, and the early Wittgenstein’s “unspeakable”. (Wittgenstein’s Tractatus (1985: 189, §7) issues in the prescriptive: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” He saw the central message or drift [Sinn] of this work as ethical in nature. (Wittgenstein 1969a: 35)). In this tradition, the worst mistake one can make regarding such a radical alterity is to think one does know or understand it. This calls to mind the saying about quantum mechanics: if you aren’t perplexed, you haven’t understood it.

Where must we place Freud’s conception of dreams and the unconscious on this continuum? This is not a simple question to answer.

Freud makes many remarks that, in themselves, could have led us to think that dreams and the unconscious—at least in parts, or at times—are so strange as to utterly resist our attempts at understanding. He speaks of “the strangeness and obscurity of dreams” (1); says that “[t]he question whether it is possible to interpret every dream must be answered in the negative” (524;

191 I would regret it if this example were to reinforce the myth that apartheid was created and maintained solely by Afrikaners and by all Afrikaners, and that the majority of other Whites opposed it or was innocent of it. In thus othering “the” Afrikaner (and absolving from blame all those who were co-responsible for apartheid or its underpinnings in the ideology of segregationism), this myth repeats the structure of the racism it is supposed to deplore.

192 An example: a few years ago I presented a paper (Gouws 1995) in which I—perhaps one-sidedly—foregrounded and criticised those of Freud’s metaphors and remarks which suggest that the work of analysis is capable of undoing the distortion of the dream-work. A number of people expressed criticism to the effect that in Freud the dream and the unconscious stand for radical alterity.
GW 529); admits that “[t]here is at least one spot in every dream in which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown” (111n); tells us that the unconscious “in its innermost nature … is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world” (613); even says that “[t]here is no possibility of explaining dreams as a psychical process, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known.” (511)

Now, clearly Freud believes that the dream in general can be explained—and particular dreams interpreted—in a reasonably satisfactory manner. It is therefore prima facie unlikely that he should be read as saying that the dream is radically other in the sense we have been discussing. We shall presently see that, in context, these quotes do not mean what they (could) seem to mean, taken in isolation. Closer inspection reveals that every passage which seems to proclaim the dream’s radical alterity (at least in part or at times)—in the sense of its being “utterly resistant to knowledge or representation”—is directly linked to remarks which neutralise this impression, partly or completely.

**Strands in Freud which suggest that the dream completely loses its alterity at the hands of the analyst**

In fact, there is much in Freud that makes the impression that the dream yields its essence to his gaze, so that it loses all its initial alterity. The more unqualifiedly successful his theory (or hermeneutics) is presented as being, the stronger this impression is.

In this Freud is by no means alone; he is obeying a general exigency of theoretical writing. One may on a meta-level think that one is entirely aware of the interpretative nature of all theory, of the impossibility of an empiricist justification of any theory (especially when it comes to the concepts it uses), and of the unavoidability of constructs or postulates that go beyond anything one could claim is simply empirically given or testable … Nevertheless, the moment one goes over to expressing one’s substantive beliefs—especially with a view to having others accept them—such an _epoché_ invariably gives way to an affirmation of truth, in which empiricism returns (through the back door, if need be, when epistemological reflection has closed the front one, by making it it impossible to be openly empiricist). Except if we explicitly adopt, and consistently maintain, a coherence or pragmatist view of truth (which seldom or never happens)\(^{193}\), we invariably end up by claiming or assuming that we “tell it like it really is” (or

\(^{193}\) Compare Bernard Williams’s criticism of Richard Rorty: if pragmatism’s basic point of departure is right, scientists will reject Rorty’s “pragmatist” view of science, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* (Rorty 1979) often claims that we have merely found it overwhelmingly ‘convenient’ to say that physics describes a world which is already there, rather than, for instance, that the world changes in relation to our descriptions. But if that is overwhelmingly convenient, then what everyone should be saying is

footnote ctd. on next page—
was: Ranke’s *wie es wirklich gewesen*). The text which at one point has perhaps admitted its own interpretative character, at another point simply presents itself as an unproblematic piece of knowledge, and Freud’s texts are no exception.

Freud’s sophisticated methodological self-reflections present themselves as qualifications of (or, in Derrida’s sense, “supplements to”⁹⁴) an underlying schema that gives an empiricist justification for the fundamental features of the theory. This underlying schema is the following: *interpretation, the work of analysis, reverses the dream-work, i.e. retraces the steps that were traversed in the genesis of the dream.* To say that according to Freud the result of analysis thus is isomorphic with the raw material of the dream-work would be too weak. Freud *does not even distinguish between the two in his terminology.* The result of the dream-analysis and the raw material of the dream-work are treated as *identical.* Both go under the same name: the latent dream-thoughts. If this is so, then Freud has achieved a resounding success of theory: What more could be asked of an interpretation, than that it should be so successful as to cease being an interpretation, and simply become a restoration of an undistorted original? There were latent dream-thoughts; they were distorted by the dream-work; the work of analysis undoes the distortions and gives us back the undistorted originals.

Here we have the classical move of the theoretical text⁹⁵, in which it presents itself as (essentially) *successful*, a statement of *truths* that have been *discovered*. (We would argue that to speak of *interpretation* and its unavoidability is to admit the *necessary failure*—compared to this classical claim of success—of theory).

To this basic claim of success, truth, and simple representation Freud then (sooner or later) adds a series of qualifications: the work of analysis need not go through the same points as the dream-work (cf. note 154); in analysis meaning is deferred—infinitely deferred, because analysis has no natural end; it is not really clear which parts of an ongoing analysis belong to a dream as its “latent dream-thoughts”; the analyst is not the ideal objective observer, but is engaged in interaction with the analysand and counter-transference; Freud admits that his theory contains postulates (533, 599); admits that there is many a dream of which he has not been able to give a satisfactory interpretation, etc. At no point do such qualifications lead to a rejection of the fundamental terminology and model of dream-work and work of analysis as mirror images of each other, and of “latent dream-thoughts” as *both* raw material of the one *and* end-product of the

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⁹⁴ In Derrida’s (1976: 141-164) view, the supplement always has an uneasy relation to what it supplements.

⁹⁵ I should probably make an exception for texts from formal disciplines such as logic and mathematics.
other. The deconstruction of Freud’s theory, started by Freud himself, is thus aborted before its term.

Because Freud’s “failure” to achieve the classical ideal of “knowledge” reflects a necessary failure relative to the success theoretical texts qua theoretical texts invariably claim, these remarks (in themselves) do not disqualify Freud. One could admit this failure and yet claim, without any self-contradiction, that Freud’s thought is still an essential resource for anybody wanting to reflect on humankind. The point is exactly that though there may be “a lot in it”, there is no simple criterion to distinguish between what is valid, true, given in Freud, and what is invalid, false, the result of (incorrect, falsifying) prejudice.196 The absence of such simple criteria by no means excludes the possibility of rational debate on these questions. Such a debate will, however, be complex and drawn-out. It could hardly be otherwise: in it interpretation has to be pitted against interpretation; there are few, if any, points commanding universal assent that could afford an escape from this situation.

When we speak of “alterity” in this epistemological context, it should be read as a shorthand for everything indicating that Freud has not attained the success the theorist longs for: the simple, unambiguous representation of his discovery, plain and simple of the truth, plain and simple, about reality, plain and simple. Alterity is something real of which the truth cannot (yet) be discovered. If alterity matters, it also matters that the truth has not (or cannot) be discovered, as well as to acknowledge this fact.

His general schema, in which the work of analysis is the inverse of the dream-work, suggests that—given his theory and hermeneutic technique—the dream ceases being strange, other, opaque, enigmatic.

Very many other concepts and metaphors in Freud, implicit or explicit, harbour the same empiricist or naturalistic implications as his specular coupling of the dream-work and the work of analysis. These suggest that the type of knowledge Freud attains is not of a (radically) interpretative nature at all. Examples are the metaphors of deciphering, the rebus, and translation. Such metaphors suggest that Freud’s interpretation is valid because it allows the restoration of an original, or the reconstruction of the true genesis of the dream—how it really was—all without significantly modifying the original.

• **Deciphering.** Very often the implicit metaphor governing Freud’s account of the analysis of dreams seems to be something like “deciphering”.197 To claim that one has

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196 The problem that presents itself in Freud repeats itself in any other theory we could use in assessing Freud (be it [ostensibly] a philosophical/methodological metatheory, or a psychological theory competing with Freud on his own terrain).

197 I use the term “implicit” advisedly. Except for one comparison between the interpretation of dreams and the decoding [Entzifferung] of Babylonian-Assyrian inscriptions (1916-17a—SE XV, Lecture 15), I cannot footnoted on next page—
deciphered a message is to claim that one has discovered the one and only correct key to the message. The context-independent (atomistic) and digital nature of enciphering does actually allow such unmistakably and uniquely correct decipherings to be made. (The rules for deciphering can be formulated as the rules of a formal system; we have argued that this is exactly not what Freud gives us, so that the metaphor of deciphering is not all that appropriate). Because Freud describes the work of analysis as taking us back to the raw material of the dream-work, the dream-work sounds like a process of encoding, according to unambiguous rules, while the work of analysis sounds like a process of decoding, according to unambiguous rules.

The rebus metaphor (277-278) has much the same tenor—although most elements could in themselves, out of context, have been read in very many different ways, the paradigm for a rebus is the case where the whole has only one correct solution, as the alternative name “picture-puzzle” already indicates. In fact, Freud will later, in “Remarks on the theory and practice of dream interpretation”, explicitly compare dream interpretation to the solution of a jigsaw puzzle, where it is reasonable to assume that the puzzle has a unique solution.

What makes [the analyst] certain in the end is precisely the complication of the problem before him, which is like the solution of a jigsaw puzzle. A coloured picture, pasted upon a thin sheet of wood and fitting exactly into a wooden frame, is cut into a large number of pieces of the most irregular and crooked shapes. If one succeeds in arranging the confused heap of fragments, each of which bears upon it an unintelligible piece of drawing, so that the picture acquires a meaning, so that there is no gap anywhere in the design, and so that the whole fits into the frame—if all these conditions are fulfilled, then one knows that one has solved the puzzle and that there is no alternative solution. (1923c—SE XIX: 116)

Translation. Throughout his oeuvre, Freud returns to the metaphor of translation for psychoanalytic interpretation. He often, but by no means exclusively, uses it when discussing the interpretation of symbols. We start with examples from the Traumdeutung:

recall ever encountering “encoding/decoding” as an explicit description of (or even metaphor for) the dream-work/work of analysis in Freud. (The Index to the Standard Edition contains no entries on “code”, “encode” or “decode”; neither does the index to the Gesammelte Werke have any entries on “verschlüsseln”, “chiffrieren”, “entziffern”, “Entzifferung”, “dechiffrieren”). In fact, Freud explicitly rejects the idea of decoding or translating the meaning of the dream according to a fixed code supplied by a dream work. However, Freud’s assumption that the result of the analysis is identical to the raw material of the dream-work, presupposes that something of this kind is taking place.

198 Freud uses translation not only as a metaphor for the work of analysis (which takes us from the manifest dream content to the latent dream-thoughts), but also for the dream-work itself (which takes us from the latent dream-thoughts to the manifest dream content):
Thus it seems possible to give a complete translation of the dream: ‘It’s about time for something more amusing than this perpetual sick-nursing.’ (126)

Nevertheless it was a masochistic wishful dream, and might be translated thus: ‘It would serve me right if my brother were to confront me with this sale as a punishment, for all the torments he had to put up with from me.’ (159)

I have translated into conscious terms what was bound to remain unconscious in Hamlet’s mind. (265)

When translated, therefore, the sentence in the dream ran quite logically: “My talk … was intended to have an educational … influence on the emotional life of our governess …; but I fear it may at the same time have had a poisonous effect.” (303)

In spite of all this ambiguity, … the productions of the dream-work, which, it must be remembered, are not made with the intention of being understood, present no greater difficulties to their translators than do the ancient hieroglyphic scripts to those who seek to read them. (341)

I should like to utter an express warning against … restricting the work of translating dreams merely to translating symbols and against abandoning the technique of making use of the dreamer’s associations. (359-360)

We may translate the Rotunda as the bottom (habitually regarded by children as part of the genitals) and the small annex in front of it as the scrotum. (364)

“Popular” symbolism made it possible for me to translate the dream unaided. (374)

The dream must be translated: ‘Give (or show) me your breast again, Mother, that I used to drink from in the past.’ (372-373)

Anyone … who has had a little experience in translating dreams will at once reflect that penetrating into narrow spaces and opening closed doors are among the commonest sexual symbols. (396)

The dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. (277)

[The dream-work] carries out no other function than the translation of dream-thoughts in accordance with the four conditions to which it is subject. (445)

A dream of this kind … is sometimes equivalent to a translation into dream-language of the whole content of the neurosis. (1911e—SE XII: 93)

It is of course only as something conscious that we know it [= the unconscious], after it has undergone transformation or translation into something conscious. (Freud 1915e—SE XIV: 166)

Repression … denies to the presentation [a] translation into words which shall remain attached to the object. (1915e—SE XIV: 202)
The fact of a dream referring to childhood may also be expressed in another way, namely by a translation of time into space. (408)

Similar locutions are to be found in Freud’s later works:

An ‘either—or’ used in recording a dream is to be translated by ‘and’. (1901a—SE V: 661)

… the technique of translating dreams. (1911e—SE XII: 95)

Their translation [the translation of corroborative dreams] merely presents what the treatment has inferred during the last few days from the material of the daily associations. (1911e—SE XII: 96)

… put before him a few translations of symbols that seem probable. (1923c—SE XIX: 110)

… correctly translated dream[s] … (1923c—SE XIX: 112, 113)

It may be asked whether it is possible to give a complete and assured translation into the language of waking life (that is, an interpretation) of every product of dream-life. (1925i—SE XIX: 127)

The metaphor of translation is slightly less rigid than the metaphor of deciphering and the rebus metaphor, without however being able to do justice to the marked asymmetry that typically exists in analysis between interpretandum and interpretans. The equivalence of meaning between a fairly competent translation and an original is invariably far less debatable than the purported equivalence between a symptom or dream and even its most brilliant interpretation. (Translating a manifest dream from German into English remains a different thing from giving a Freudian interpretation of it—even if the two are comparable in many respects. Those who are followers of Freud on the basis of two different translations of Freud are typically a lot closer to each other than those who subscribe to Freudian and (say) Jungian dream interpretations. In fact Freud implicitly acknowledges that the metaphor of “translation” makes the dream relate to its meaning in too simple a fashion, when he also describes the interpretation of dreams using a fixed code, the method which he is otherwise at pains to distance himself from, as a method of “translation” (or “deciphering”). (98, 105)

• Undoing, unravelling and restoring. Countless other remarks suggest something similar to the metaphors of deciphering, a picture puzzle, or translation. Compare for example the terms Freud uses in describing what we do in the psychoanalysis of the dream. In the Traumdeutung and elsewhere he repeatedly speaks of the work of analysis “undoing the distortions [Entstellungen rückgängig machen]” caused by the dream-work. (1925i: 127; GW 1: 561; see also “we undo the displacements brought about by the dream-work” (561-2; cf. also 1901a:—SE V: 655); we “unravel what the
dream-work has woven” (1901a—SE V: 686); our task is the “restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed” ” (1901a—SE V: 660).\footnote{199}

- \textit{The correctness of individual dream interpretations.} In line with these formulations is the fact that Freud frequently expresses confidence about the correctness of his interpretation of individual dreams (even if overdetermination means that they can never be [known to be] complete).\footnote{200} Today, Freud’s theory and interpretations of specific cases, dreams, etc. present themselves as one interpretation or set of interpretations among many others. Writing before our time, in which multiple competing psychotherapies (Jungian, Gestalt, etc.) offer alternative interpretations along psychological (rather than physiological lines) and a comparable therapeutic efficacy, he could fairly gracefully avoid the question that today seems unavoidable: why should a Freudian interpretation be seen as compelling; why should it be ultimately valid and competing interpretations invalid? Had he lived to be a lucid 142, one can imagine that the interpretative nature of his own enterprise would today, in 1998, have confronted him differently and more insistently.

We next investigate more closely some of Freud’s remarks which could be read as ascribing radical alterity to the dream, to see where we should place him regarding the knowability or alterity of the dream.

\textbf{Does Freud not—sometimes—attribute radical alterity to the dream?}

Freud repeatedly emphasises “the strangeness and obscurity of dreams”, (1) which of course is part and parcel of the strangeness and obscurity of the unconscious. Having recounted the dream of Irma’s injection, for instance, he comments

\begin{quote}
no one who had only read the preamble and the content of the dream itself could have the slightest notion of what the dream meant. I myself had no notion. I was astonished [Ich wundere mich] at [the difference between the state of affairs in the dream and in reality] … I smiled at the senseless idea of … (108; GW 113)
\end{quote}

This strangeness that astonishes and amuses is the result of a process of disguise and distortion.\footnote{201} It is clear that Freud sees the dream and the unconscious as something about which our everyday

\footnote{199 That this represents a persistent strand in Freud’s thought is shown by his use of similar terminology fifteen years later, in \textit{The unconscious}: “restore the true connection … restore affects … undo the work of repression”. (1915e—SE XIV: 178).

200 There are also numerous points on which Freud admits that he is not certain of the correctness of his interpretation of a certain dream, or the correctness of his theory on some point or other. (E.g. 431; 387-388) However, such remarks hardly ever amount to an admission by Freud that he has or could have the dream—basically—wrong, instead of—basically—right.

201 When we are fooled by the surface appearance of the dream (its strangeness or lack of strangeness), this}
impressions and conceptions are utterly misleading. Is this strangeness just relative to everyday views, or does it persist into even our most sophisticated theories, interpretations and interpretative strategies?

Let us first examine a few of the quotes that seem to proclaim that the dream is radically other; utterly resists our attempts to know or represent it:

a. Is an adequate theory of dreams possible? Can dreams be explained?

There is no possibility of explaining dreams as a psychical process, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known, and there is at the present time no established psychological knowledge under which we could subsume what the psychological examination of dreams allows us to infer as a basis for their explanation.

(511)

This seems to suggest that dreams are radically other to all present knowledge. However, from what Freud then goes on to say, it becomes clear that this was only true before his own theory appeared. He admits that as long as we base ourselves only on the study of dreams, his hypotheses remain tentative. However, the corroboration of his findings concerning dreams by those concerning other phenomena, such as neuroses, serves to establish, by a kind of triangulation, the reliability of the theory of dreams.

So, although before Freud it was impossible to relate dreams to any already existing knowledge—they were thus something radically other to existing scientific thought—the situation is now changed. Armed with Freud’s theory, we now understand what dreams basically are.

This is confirmed by remarks Freud makes elsewhere. When he bemoans the fact that “many thousands of years of effort” have produced “little or nothing that touches upon the essential nature of dreams [was das Wesen des Traumes träfe—treffen: not miss its target] or that offers a final solution to any of their enigmas [Rätsel]” (1; GW 2), the suggestion is clearly that his theory does touch upon the essential nature of dreams—does score a bull’s eye on this matter—and does offer a final solution to their enigmas (or some of them). This is confirmed by his fantasy, in a

is exactly a sign that the disguise aiming to fool the unwary has been successful. If the dream is intended to fool the unwary, we must arm ourselves against this by being suspicious and wary (in the appropriate way and to an appropriate degree); in this way the alterity of the dream will be nullified. In the Traumdeutung Freud will indeed frequently describe or show himself as suspicious, distrusting the facade, wanting to unmask appearances, show that behind what presents itself as A, B is concealed, and so on. An example: “Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious [misstrauisch]. One of its rules is that whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance.” (517; GW 521) Cf. also his frequent use of the term entlarven—to unmask (e.g. GW 407, GW 521).

202 In the Traumdeutung Freud does acknowledge predecessors for almost every one of his major theses regarding the dream, separately. However, he presents his theory as a whole as being without precedent.
letter to Fliess dated 12 June 1900 (Freud 1954: 322), that some day a marble tablet would be put on the house where his theory had come to him after the dream of Irma’s injection:

In this house on July 24th, 1895, the Secret of Dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigmund Freud

This imagined inscription would doubtless refer both to his theory which purports to explain the dream in general, and to his hermeneutics, which allows him to interpret individual dreams.

b. Does the unconscious show itself in consciousness?

Freud repeatedly states that the unconscious is not able to enter into consciousness as such:

The conscious effect is only a remote psychical result of the unconscious process … [T]he latter has not become conscious as such … [M]oreover … the latter was present and operative even without betraying its existence in any way to consciousness. (612—my emphases)

Moreover, this passage is immediately followed by the already quoted passage (p. 112) in which Freud, citing Lipps, says

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense-organs. (613)

Nevertheless, the epistemological conclusion which Freud attaches to this is not that the unconscious will forever slip through our fingers, but that the physician must feel at liberty [muss sich das Recht wahren] to proceed by inference from the conscious effect to the unconscious psychical process. (612; GW 617)

Where one feels at liberty to proceed by inference, one is not in the hallowed presence of radical alterity à la Kant, Levinas or the early Wittgenstein. We are by no means treating the unconscious as something unspeakable, demanding silence.

c. The dream’s navel.

But perhaps Freud’s celebrated reference to the “navel” of a dream as the point at which it issues into the unknown, and interpretation stops, does imply that according to him the dream contains an irreducible alterity? Freud’s first use of this image in the Traumdeutung occurs in an early footnote:

There is at least one spot in every dream in which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown. [Jeder Traum hat mindestens eine Stelle, an welcher er unergründlich ist, gleichsam einen Nabel, durch den er mit dem Unerkannten zusammenhängt.] (111n; GW 116n)

Only much later in the book does he develop this image further (note the network metaphor):
There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted [bestgedeuteten] dream which has to be left obscure [im Dunkel]; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled [entwirren] and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream [auch zum Trauminhalt keine weiteren Beiträge geliefert hat—has not made any further contributions to the dream-content, or: is not represented in the dream-content in any other way]. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown [die Stelle, an der er dem Unerkannten aufsitzt—runs aground on the unknown]. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings [müssen ja ganz allgemein ohne Abschluss bleiben]; they are bound to branch out [auslaufen—run out] in every direction into the intricate network [netzartige Verstrickung—netlike entanglement] of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up [Aus einer dichteren Stelle dieses Geflechts erhebt sich dann der Traumwunsch], like a mushroom out of its mycelium. (525: GW 530)

However, it seems that the unknown Freud here refers to will not, like Kant’s noumenon, remain forever equally unknown and unknowable. This unknown can progressively become known.

A much later supplement (1925i) to the Traumdeutung confirms this reading of the two “navel” passages. In it Freud states that although every dream is interpretable in principle, a dream analysis is subject to the same resistances as an analysis generally (of which it typically forms a part). Because of these resistances

It is … not to be wondered at that only a certain portion of the patient’s dream products can be translated and made use of [übersetzen und verwerten kann], and even at that, most often incompletely. (1925i—SE XIX: 128-129; GW 1: 563)

He then adds that dreams which initially resist interpretation may yield to interpretation at a later stage of the patient’s analysis.

When Freud thus says

The question whether it is possible to interpret every dream [ob jeder Traum zur Deutung gebracht werden kann] must be answered in the negative. (524; GW 529)

this must not be read as applying in principle. It is rather that certain dreams will be uninterpretable, given the state of play at a particular moment in a particular analysis. This unknown is thus the not yet known, that which lies on the far side of an ever shifting frontier.203

203 This reading is confirmed by a paragraph in an earlier text (1911e). After saying that some dreams are not fully analysable in principle, it soon becomes clear that Freud with these words only wants to say that the full analysis of some dreams will have to wait for the completion of the patient’s whole analysis. (1911e—SE XII: 93) However, Freud will later deny that we can speak of ‘completing a whole analysis’. (See p. 168, below).
To the man of science, alterity is typically just a passing phase—science operates on the boundary between the known and the unknown. While alterity may belong to the unknown, the very success of science leads to a loss of this alterity, as the boundary between the known and the unknown shifts and the unknown becomes known. In Aristotle’s (1972: 982b-983a) terms: a sense of wonder forms the source of science (“philosophy”), but where science succeeds, wonder ceases.

**Alterity and deferral**

Is this the position that we should ascribe to Freud regarding the alterity of dreams? Does the dream move, in analysis, from begin utterly puzzling (“radically other”) to being utterly evident in its meaning, i.e.: losing its alterity completely? No, because, firstly, neither the dream nor any of its parts is ever completely interpreted:

> The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. (525)

This means that in tracking down the dream, we will never quite catch up with it. Even though our understanding of it may keep on increasing, an infinite deferral is also at work, so that the analysis of the dream remains forever incomplete. Our present inadequate understanding is not the final word, but there will never be a final word—what is “not yet understood” will never become fully understood. What such formulations leave open, is any sense of the relative weight of the known and the unknown. Does a competent analysis lasting five or ten years typically just ‘scratch the surface’, or does it typically ‘reveal the essence of the analysand’? Those who think the latter will be far less inclined to query Freud’s simpler self-interpretations than those who think the former.

Secondly, even the meaning of what has already been interpreted is never fixed; it can change radically in the light of later material. A dream is typically part of a series of dreams, and a dream analysis part of a larger analysis. Consecutive dreams tend to deal with the same material. As they do so, however, the material keeps on changing its aspect, so that what was central in one dream, becomes peripheral a few dreams down the line. (1923c—SE XIX: 111)204 As new dreams are dreamt, or new associations are produced, the context of an earlier dream changes, and with that, its meaning. Where a dream appears in an analysis it is impossible to demarcate the boundaries of its analysis: we can never safely say that certain associations which appear at a later stage of a psychoanalysis are not part of the “latent dream-thoughts” belonging to it. (It is significant that Freud recounts the cases of both Dora (1905e) and the Wolfman (1918b) in such a way that the

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204 I believe that Freud also says this somewhere in the *Traumdeutung*, but I was unable to trace the relevant passage.
whole analysis of each is simultaneously the analysis of one (or a few) of the analysand’s central dreams—cf. note 203). That is part of the reason why every analysis—as a cognitive rather than a therapeutic enterprise—can be prolonged indefinitely. This is more or less equivalent to that other statement of Freud’s, that the condensation coefficient cannot be determined. (279; GW 285) As a result of this fact, we never know whether further analysis will not perhaps lead to a complete change of aspect. In Dora’s analysis, for instance, everything gets a different complexion once Freud becomes aware—retrospectively—of the deep current of homosexual feelings for Frau K in Dora. The feelings for her father, Herr K, and Freud himself then appear in a very different light.

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“Blinded by prejudice, Freud does violence to the alterity of dreams”

To many of Freud’s critics, this will of course not be enough. One class of critics will see the dream as a form of radical alterity about which one should remain silent. Another category of critics will not demand silence, but still find it restrictive, a denial of alterity, that the type of meanings discovered in analysis always tend to revolve around the same things: mama, papa, poo-poo and pee. Though an infinite number of permutations is possible within this domain, such critics would say that the domain itself remains utterly limited. Even if it is granted that the sorts of meanings Freud typically discovers are valid and relevant, it could be argued that a radically different form of overdetermination is possible, and even crucial, over and above the typically “psychoanalytic” meanings admitted by Freud. E.g. one that is problem-solving, not wish-fulfilling; future-directed in a realistic way, rather than just a hallucinated fulfilment of a wish out of the past; or: one in which erotic wishes do not play a role; or: one that is religiously motivated; or: one that is ethically/altruistically motivated. Furthermore, critics could then also

205 Freud later discusses this at length in “Analysis terminable and interminable” (1937c).
206 We assume here that Freud’s ideas about Dora’s feelings for her father and Herr K are not completely invalidated when her feelings for Frau K are acknowledged.
207 In Dutch psychoanalytic circles, this is a common way of formulating, in deliberately infantile language, the stereotypical nature of the infantile themes to which analysands (or is it analysts?) constantly revert: “pappa, mamma, pies en poep”. Freud refers to “inter urinas et faeces (nascimur)” three times. (1905e—SE VII: 31; 1912d—SE XI: 189; 1928b—SE XXI: 106). Deleuze and Guattari speak (disparagingly) of the “mama-papa matrix” in psychoanalysis. (Ingleby 1984: 49)
208 A position already advanced by Silberer and rejected by Freud in a 1919 interpolation to the Traumdeutung. (523-524) Many critics would of course not even grant such a limited validity to the types of meanings Freud claims to discover in dreams.
209 In a later supplement to the Traumdeutung (1925i) Freud will say: “When a dream deals with a problem of actual life, it solves it in the manner of an irrational wish and not in the manner of a reasonable reflection.” (1925i—SE XIX: 127)
210 Freud recounts a prima facie example of such a dream in the Studies in hysteria. (1895d—SE II: 277-278)
debate the relative weight or significance of the “Freudian” and “non-Freudian” layers in such an overdetermination. Addressing such disputes between psychoanalysis and its critics falls outside the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that

- I cannot imagine what compelling evidence or other arguments one way or the other would look like.

- I am convinced that the thoughts which in an analysis arise associatively in connection with a dream usually show a huge overlap with the thoughts which were actually involved in the genesis of the dream. This implies that there is also some non-overlap. The partial overlap means that the analysis does say something about \textit{wie es eigentlich gewesen}.

- I have yet to encounter a critic of Freud who can present an alternative that comes anywhere near being as systematic and coherent as Freud’s.

- Many of the criticisms mentioned above concern the nature of the desires Freud typically sees at work in dreams. However, in accepting Freud’s \textit{hermeneutics}—that which we have been reconstructing in this section—we do not yet accept any substantive position regarding the nature of such desires, or fundamental drives underlying desires. According to me, seeing dreams as wish-fulfilments is by no means as restrictive as some critics find it. In our everyday interpretations of others—or “folk psychology”, as it has been called—we interpret their actions as guided by a combinations of beliefs and desires. (Dennett 1987). As far as I can discern, what Freud does here is basically to extend this “intentional stance”, the stance from which we interpret people’s words and actions in everyday life, so that much more becomes a “vollgültiger psychischer Akt”—a fully valid mental act—than is normally the case.

\footnote{167} See note 154.

\footnote{168} Against this we could cite Freud’s own reservations regarding the parallels between systematic thought, on the one hand, and neurosis and psychosis on the other. Various commentators have seen in Freud a compulsion to overgeneralise. Here is Breuer (quoted in Sulloway 1992: 85):

Freud is a man given to absolute and exclusive formulations: this is a psychical need which … leads to excessive generalization.

And Wittgenstein (1970: 47)—one quote out of many we could have given:

Some dreams obviously are wish-fulfilments … But it seems muddled to say that \textit{all} dreams are hallucinated wish-fulfilments.

Storr (1989: 3-9) ascribes this “compulsion to overgeneralise” to Freud’s (self-admittedly) obsessional character.

\footnote{169} See for instance the Wittgenstein quote in note 212.

\footnote{170} But isn’t Freud thereby disregarding the normal criteria for whether or not the intentional stance is indicated? To this we could reply that in everyday life there are in any case no clear criteria defining how
Freud’s description of the dream-work in fact could hardly have imposed less limitations on what the meaning could be of what the other—the dream, and by implication the other person—is saying. Far from describing a language with strict, exclusive rules, which would enable a process of encoding, to be mirrored by a process of interpretative decoding, they tell us that the dream-work can employ any means, any language game, association, etc. to express meaning. Freud therefore gives us the very opposite of a context-independent, fixed key; on the contrary, everything depends on context.

How then are dreams to be read? Well, by the analyst endlessly listening to the analysand. Freud’s “rules” of dream interpretation can be read as simply prohibiting us to narrow the possible meanings of the analysand’s words by expecting them to display a more regular pattern, i.e. to belong to any one particular language game. (Such an expectation would have made us blind to their actual semiotic heterogeneity). Freud’s “rules” in themselves by no means narrow down the possible meanings of the dream. What is excluded is only that which requires the application of exclusive rules to function—that is, language games like formal logic, mathematics, bookkeeping, etc.

On this score, I can hardly imagine any approach that could be more receptive to alterity. At most critics could claim that Freud is falsifying the words of the dreamer because in dreams they have their everyday meaning—a criticism that to me does not seem to merit serious consideration. (The question whether Freud’s substantive notion of the drives, human development, the infantile nature of dream wishes, etc. changes all this falls outside the scope of this thesis).

EXCURSUS: IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR THE UTTER SUCCESS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATIONS, AND WHY FREUD’S WRITINGS ON ANALYTIC TECHNIQUE SHOW THAT THESE CONDITIONS DO NOT OBTAIN.

After having considered devoting a whole section to Freud’s writings on psychoanalytic technique, I decided to limit myself to this short excursus. The format I have chosen for the excursus is as follows: I list a number of conditions, each of which would have had to be met if the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams had wanted to lay claim to being utterly, unambiguously and demonstrably successful—and, concomitantly, capable of completely
abolishing the alterity of the dream. For each of these conditions I argue that Freud’s own writings on psychoanalytic technique show, explicitly or implicitly, that it does not obtain.\footnote{In this excursion I will ignore issues of chronology. Basically the idea is to find in Freud remarks that reflect or suggest the sort of comment I myself would on other grounds have wanted to make, thereby presenting my critique of Freud as an implicit or explicit self-critique by Freud. Freud’s own remarks demand that his central categories be rethought.\footnote{An example:}

Here once again God is on the side of the big \textit{stärkeren}—stronger battles. It is true that we do not always succeed in winning, but at least we can usually recognize why we have not won. (1940\textit{a}—XXIII: 182; GW 108)

The image of warfare dominating Freud’s account seems to be that of a fairly gentlemanly war; not that this precludes a reading which thoroughly investigates the disturbing features of this imagery. We are reminded of his words in a 1900 letter to Fliess:}

\textbf{Condition 1. \textit{It is possible to give a complete analysis of a dream.}}

The cases of Dora and the Wolf Man show that a dream may require ‘a whole analysis’ for its interpretation. The question then becomes: when is an analysis complete? Freud (1937\textit{d}—SE XXIII: 265) quotes one of Nestroy’s characters: “It will all become clear in the course of future developments.” When “in the course of future developments” does it all become \textit{clear}?

In “Analysis terminable and interminable” (1937\textit{c}), Freud opposes the notion that an analysis could have “a natural ending”, or that a patient could ever be “fully analysed”. The criteria for deciding that an analysis is complete, are purely pragmatic.

\begin{displayquote}
Whatever one’s theoretical attitude to the question may be, the termination of an analysis is a purely practical matter. (1937\textit{c}—SE XXIII: 249)
\end{displayquote}

This points in a very different direction than the Nestroy quote.

\textbf{Condition 2. \textit{Analysis is a purely cognitive matter, or if it isn’t, its cognitive dimension remains unaffected by its other dimensions.}}

According to Freud, mastering “the delicate technique of psychoanalysis” involves mastering “the art of interpretation, of fighting resistances and handling the transference”. (1926\textit{e}—SE XX: 228)

Only the first of these three aspects sounds familiarly cognitive (but even here Freud speaks of an “art” [\textit{Deutungskunst} (GW 260)], rather than a “science”). In his writings on technique, Freud more often than not stresses the latter two aspects, which sound far more active, far less determined by anything \textit{given}, than “interpretation” tends to. On rereading Freud’s writings on technique, what I found most striking was the prominence in them of martial terms—the term “Kampf” (struggle, battle, contest) and related agonistic or military metaphors.\footnote{Such terms are}
quite surprising in a cognitive context. However, they can perhaps be justified by appealing to the patient’s resistance to analysis:

It is a long superseded idea … that the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes this ignorance by giving him information … he is bound to recover. The pathological factor is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of this ignorance in his inner resistances; it was they that first called this ignorance into being, and they still maintain it now. The task of the treatment lies in combating these resistances. (1910k—SE XI: 225)

Another way of looking at the non-cognitive aspects of what happens in analysis, is to investigate the performative, rather than constative dimension of speech, with the performative dimension invariably having the status of transference; repetition and acting out, all of which take the place of remembering. (Cf. Forrester 1992: 141-167) How, in this merry-go-round of begging, threatening, demanding, commanding, promising, punishing, complimenting, praising, charming, deceiving, scolding, etc., is the analyst to retain a cool head? How can she prevent her own speech acts from becoming *eo ipso* examples of counter-transference? And especially: how can she maintain a performative abstinence, avoid playing the role ascribed to her by the patient’s performatives? Needless to say, Freud has a highly sophisticated awareness of all these problems, which is part of why he continues to be important for psychotherapy in general. Psychoanalysis nevertheless remains one of “those ‘impossible’ professions in which one can be sure of achieving unsatisfying results” (1937c—SE XXIII: 248), so that the analyst’s handling of these problems will invariably be less than fully satisfactory, and her reflexive insight into what happens less than complete. How is psychoanalysis to address the charge that the interaction between analyst and analysand brings about such uncontrolled changes in the analysand that it is

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I am not a man of science at all, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker. I am nothing but a conquistador by temperament, an adventurer if you want to translate this term, with all the inquisitiveness, daring, and tenacity of such a man. (quoted in Gay 1988: xiv)

According to my doubtlessly incomplete tally, there are 34 passages in the writings on technique in which martial terms feature, often in extended metaphors. These tie up with such overfamiliar Freudian terms such as “resistance”, “defence” [abwehren—repulse] “conflict”, of which one easily forgets that they originally derive from situations which are not at all intrapsychic. In the writings on technique these extended agonistic and military metaphors completely eclipse any talk of analysis as a “work” or “labour” [Arbeit], the terminology that predominates in the *Traumdeutung* and in *On dreams*. The language of “force” and “forces” gains quite a different set of connotations if “Kampf” rather than “Arbeit” becomes the central metaphor. (“Arbeit” can itself be glossed very differently: 1) as a term coming from the world of physics—this gloss reinforces the stock image of the “mechanistic” Freud; 2) as a term coming from the social world—this gloss would for instance be congenial to a Marxist reappropriation of Freud). A topic for future research is the extent to which the centrality of the term “Kampf” indicates that we should stop approaching psychoanalysis as an epistemological issue, and the extent to which it indicates the need for a reconceptualisation of epistemology.
not clear whether the “self-knowledge” of the analysand reflects a discovery regarding a state of affairs that preceded the analysis?  

**Condition 3. Psychoanalytic interpretations are ultimately confirmed as true when the analysand recalls his repressed memories; what happens in psychoanalysis is the reproduction or the reconstruction of historical truth.**

a. Freud repeatedly describes the patient’s recollection of what had been forgotten as a central aim of psychoanalysis. However, he also qualifies these statements to such a degree that they become seriously undermined. An example: For the analyst the patient’s remembering in the old manner—reproduction in the psychical field—is the aim to which he adheres, even though he knows that such an aim cannot be achieved in the new technique. (1914—SE XII: 153)

“Recollection”—something that reproduces or represents an original without distorting it—becomes something like an ideal type which is never fully realised in analysis. (Nor perhaps in life).

b. The path that starts from the analyst’s construction ought to end in the patient’s recollection; but it does not always lead so far. Quite often we do not succeed in bringing the patient to recollect what has been repressed. Instead of that, if the analysis is carried out correctly, we produce in him an assured conviction of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory. (1937d—SE XXIII: 265-266)

This especially tends to happen with the reconstruction of infantile memories. (1914g—SE XII: 149)

c. Forgetting impressions, scenes or experiences nearly always reduces itself to shutting them off. When the patient talks about these ‘forgotten’ things he seldom fails to add: ‘As a matter of fact I’ve always known it; only I’ve never thought of it.’ He often expresses disappointment at the fact that not enough things come into his head that he can call ‘forgotten’—that he has never thought of since they happened. Nevertheless, even this desire is fulfilled, especially in the case of conversion hysterias. (1914g—SE XII: 148)

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217 In a way, the questions posed to psychoanalysis here are the very questions that arise every time we describe a human activity in Wittgensteinian terms—as a form of life or a language game, rather than as a case in which knowledge is applied (or generated). Once we decide to redescribe something in terms according to which it does not appear as knowledge (knowledge, as normally conceived of), the route back to a description of the same activity in terms of the notion of “knowledge” seems to be cut off. (Similar considerations apply to a Foucauldian approach).

218 Freud says that he uses the term *Konstruktion* for comprehensive interpretations, and *Deutung* [interpretation] for piecemeal interpretations. (1937d—SE XXIII: 261)
Such memories that are “shut off” are not in themselves unconscious; their unconscious character derives from their isolation from their context. The last sentence presents truly unconscious memories as the exception rather than the rule, and also as being typical of one particular form of hysteria, and not for the neuroses in general. If the actual achievement of psychoanalysis can hardly be described as the restoration of lost memories (*wie es wirklich gewesen*), in what can it then be said to consist?

d. On the one hand, memories are *contrasted* with screen memories, on the other these two categories are presented as *overlapping*, because screen memories can contain an element of historical truth.219 “Not only *some* but *all* of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories.” (1914g—SE XII: 148) We will see in a moment that even delusions are said to contain historical truth.

e. Similarly, acting out and repetition are partly *contrasted* with remembering:

> [One type of] patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it. (1914g—SE XII: 150)

and partly treated as a *form* of remembering: the compulsion to repeat … is [the patient’s] way of remembering. (1914g—SE XII: 150)

f. What Freud in effect does here, is to dissolve the dichotomy between remembering and non-remembering, and between the latent and the manifest. Extremely distorted memories are still memories. We could also reach this conclusion via the following argument: the moment we admit, next to memories and non-memories, a third category, that of distorted memories, drawing a line between our initial two categories becomes extremely problematic.

g. Logically this would also involve dissolving the dichotomy between correct and incorrect interpretations or analyses. And Freud does in fact, implicitly, admit as much:

> The more exactly the construction coincides with the details of what has been forgotten the easier will it be for him to assent. (1940a—SE XXIII: 178)

A construction can coincide more or less closely with the details of what has been forgotten. There is a grey area lying between utter success, demonstrable correctness, and utter failure, demonstrable error. Freud, not “able to resist the seduction of an analogy” applies some further touches of grey on grey when he says:

219 To me it is not clear that there is any systematic distinction between what Freud calls “screen memories” and what he calls “phantasies”. In the *Traumdeutung* phantasies are described as “psychical facades” that are “erected on the basis of memories” so as to “bar the way to the memories.” (1900a—SE V: 491 & 491n) My remarks here therefore probably also apply to phantasies.
The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment … Just as our construction is only effective because it recovers a fragment of lost experience, so the delusion owes its convincing power to the element of historical truth which it inserts in the place of the rejected reality. (1937d—SE XXIII: 268)

The analogy of course also works in the opposite direction: if the enormous distortions owing to which we call delusions “delusions” are not sufficient to remove their “convincing power”, then even a highly distorted construction could be convincing.

h. According to Freud, in analysis an artificial neurosis — the “transference neurosis” — is produced, in which the historical neurosis is repeated and thereby made current. Subsequently this current neurosis is analysed and overcome. (1914g) As with transference, generally, he is not quite consistent regarding how exactly this transference neurosis repeats an original from the past. In his “Postscript” to the Dora case, he explicitly acknowledges that a considerable degree of variation is possible regarding the strictness with which the transference repeats its models; it can vary from a fairly mechanical, unmodified repetition of past experiences, so that we merely get “new impressions or reprints”, to a situation in which what we get “will no longer be new impressions, but revised editions.” (1905e—SE VII: 116) When Freud indicates (e.g. 1912b—SE XII: 100) that what is repeated is not a single prototype, but a whole series of them, this already precludes a strict reproduction. The more varied one imagines such a series to be (mother, father, nursemaid, siblings, teachers, etc.), the further what happens in analysis will be from a close reproduction of the historical truth (of even the psychical reality) of any particular relation. 220 Freud also explicitly admits that

We can draw no direct conclusion from the distribution of the libido during and resulting from the treatment as to how it was distributed during the illness. (1916-17a—SE XVI: 454)

Given the crucial importance of quantitative factors — for instance, the difference between health and pathology is basically quantitative, not qualitative — this admission has far-reaching consequences.

i) When Freud later (1937c) says that the aim of analysis is the undoing of an Ichveränderung (alteration of the ego), this initially also suggests the refunding of a temps perdu, an undoing of a historical process of change. However, it soon transpires that this Ichveränderung is defined not relative to an actual past state of the ego which serves as benchmark, but relative to the fiction of a normal ego.

220 Cf. the passage where Freud says that one’s love life is governed by “a stereotype plate (or several such)”. (1912b—SE XII: 100—my italics)
The effect brought about in the ego by the defences can rightly be described as an ‘alteration of the ego’ [Ichveränderung], if by that we understand a deviation [den Abstand] from the fiction of a normal ego [Normal-Ich]. (1937c—SE XXIII: 239; GW 85)

What the analyst thus attempts to undo is the difference between the current ego and an ideally normal ego, not some historical change that has really befallen an actual ego. In this case the hackneyed charge that psychoanalysis aims to “normalise” people for once seems germane, even if Freud does seem aware of this danger. (Cf. p. 247, below).

**Condition 4. The spectacular success of psychoanalytic therapy is a powerful argument in favour of the truth of psychoanalytic theory and interpretations.**

Had psychoanalysis been able to claim a consistent and radical therapeutic efficacy, completely eclipsing that of any therapy based on a rival theory, it could have been argued that this counts, as (at least *prima facie*) evidence in favour of the correctness of psychoanalytic therapy. It is well known that such a picture is not borne out by empirical research.\(^ {221} \) In this subsection I want to attach special weight to those passages in which Freud himself refuses any claims of spectacular success for his “impossible profession”.

Late in life, Freud claimed that he had “never been a therapeutic enthusiast”. (1933a—SE XXII: 151) Be that as it may, one sees his assessment of the power of psychoanalytic therapy decline in the final decade of his life. By the time of “Analysis terminable and interminable” he warns that one ought not to be surprised if it should turn out in the end that the difference between a person who has not been analysed and the behaviour of a person after he has been analysed is not so thorough-going as we aim at making it and as we expect and maintain it to be.

(1937c—SE XXIII: 228)

In the same work we see him underscoring the limits on analysis placed by constitutional factors and the death instinct, and backing down on his former conviction regarding the prophylactic power of psychoanalysis. “His doubts extend to the prospects of preventing not merely the occurrence of a fresh and different neurosis but even a return of a neurosis that has already been treated.” (Strachey, SE XXIII: 213) Only current neuroses are susceptible to psychoanalytic treatment; even if the analyst could be clear about the existence of a latent neurosis (which is usually not the case), practical and moral obstacles would stand in the way of transforming such a

\(^ {221} \) I do not want to suggest that it is easy—or perhaps even possible—to determine the value of (a) psychoanalytic therapy empirically. Would one lose the right to say of another experience—say a two year stay in a Zen monastery—that it was the most formative experience in your life, or that one learnt more (of value) there than anywhere else, if attempts at demonstrating this by the use of statistics and techniques of empirical measurement were to remain inconclusive? My point is that the status of psychoanalysis would have been different if its success had been (the sort of thing that could have been) demonstrated empirically.
latent neurosis into a current one. In marked contrast with his earlier pronouncements, he does not here claim that psychoanalysis can strengthen the ego in a general way, so as to safeguard it against neurosis in general.  

In line with these more modest claims for the efficacy of psychoanalysis, Freud now only claims for it the place of primus inter pares among therapeutic techniques. (1933a—SE XXII: 157)

Condition 5. There is an utter asymmetry between the neurotic analysand’s cognitions of the analyst, and the analyst’s cognitions of the analysand.

Freud’s has a very jaundiced view, to say the least, of the neurotic patient’s cognitive ability in the analytic setting. The patient’s perception utterly denies the analyst’s alterity—it has almost nothing to do with reality and is purely a matter of repetition, a transference driven by the patient’s “libidinal anticipatory ideas” [libidinöse Erwartungsvorstellungen] (1912b—SE XII: 100; GW 8: 365), his unfulfilled love needs. In this the patient is following infantile prototypes—all of us “[o]riginally … knew only sexual objects”. (1912b—SE XII: 105) One’s love life is governed by “a stereotype plate (or several such), which is constantly repeated—constantly reprinted afresh—in the course of the person’s life”. (100) If we next investigate the patient’s transference love closely, we see that it

exhibits not a single new feature arising from the present situation, but is entirely composed of repetitions and copies [Abklatschen: simulacra] of earlier reactions, including infantile ones. (1915a—SE XII: 167; GW 316)

Now, if the analyst were to reciprocate this mis(re)cognition, the patient’s alterity would be as completely falsified by the analyst, whose interpretation of the analysand would accordingly be totally unreliable. For his interpretations to be utterly successful or reliable, he would ideally have to be totally unlike his patients in this respect. At the very least we would expect a radical asymmetry between them on this point.

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222 But see 1940a—SE XXIII: 179, in which Freud seems to revert to his earlier, more optimistic position.

223 In the subsequent paragraphs Freud however reminds us that falling in love outside the analytical situation is as prone to eliding the discrepancy between the real other and the imagined love object.

It is true that the [transference] love consists of new editions of old traits and that it repeats infantile reactions. But this is the essential character of every state of being in love. There is no such state which does not reproduce infantile prototypes. It is precisely from this infantile determination that it receives its compulsive character, verging as it does on the pathological. Transference-love has perhaps a degree less of freedom than the love which appears in ordinary life and is called normal; it displays its dependence on the infantile pattern more clearly and is less adaptable and capable of modification; but that is all, and not what is essential. (1915a—SE XII: 168)

The blind repetition which in many places had been treated as characteristic of pathology (neurosis) (1912b—SE XII: 101) thus now becomes a feature of normal love life, i.e. something to which even the most normal analyst is presumably also prone.
Though Freud often talks in such terms\(^{224}\), there are also passages in which he explicitly acknowledges that this is not the case; any difference is at most quantitative in nature. To begin with, we must admit that a normal ego is but a fiction.

A normal ego \([\text{Normal-Ich}]\) … is, like normality in general, an ideal fiction. … Every normal person, in fact, is only normal on the average. His ego approximates to that of the psychotic \([\text{this goes much further than an emphasis on the continuity between normality and neurosis!}]\) in some part or other and to a greater or lesser extent. (1937\(c\)—SE XXIII: 235; GW 80)

A healthy person, too, is a virtual neurotic … The distinction between nervous health and neurosis … is of a quantitative, not a qualitative nature. (1916-17\(a\)—SE XVI: 457)

Although we may expect from analysts “a considerable degree of mental normality” (1937\(c\)—SE XXIII: 248), they nevertheless deviate from the ideal of normality: “It cannot be disputed that analysts in their own personalities have not invariably come up to the standard of psychical normality to which they wish to educate their patients.” (247) The analyst should beware of thinking of himself as a superman, in complete control of himself.\(^{225}\)

In the analyst an analogue of the analysand’s transference therefore exists; Freud calls this the counter-transference. He had initially described transference as specifically a neurotic phenomenon:

> These characteristics of transference are therefore to be attributed not to psycho-analysis but to neurosis itself. (1912\(b\)—SE XII: 101)

Later, however, the neurotic’s transference is seen as but an intensification of a phenomenon also found in normal people:

> A capacity for directing libidinal object-cathexes on to people must of course be attributed to every normal person. The tendency to transference of the neurotics I have spoken of is only an extraordinary increase of this universal characteristic. (1916-17\(a\)—SE XVI: 446)

Regarding the counter-transference Freud is almost inclined to insist that \([\text{the physician}]\) shall recognize \([\text{it}]\) in himself and overcome it. … \([\text{No}]\) psychoanalyst goes further than his own complexes and internal resistances permit. (1910\(d\)—SE XI: 144-145)

Initially he thought that a self-analysis could remedy this. (145) Later he came to demand that every analyst should undergo a training analysis. (1912\(e\)) Finally, he thought that a periodic re-

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\(^{224}\) An example of a text in which Freud describes the physician in terms that are radically opposed to those in which he describes the patient, is “Recommendations”. (1912\(e\)—SE XII, e.g. p. 113)

\(^{225}\) Freud warns against the analyst thinking he can go along with the patient’s infatuation up to a certain point, only to hold back when things threaten to go too far: “Our control over ourselves is not so complete that we may not suddenly one day go further than we had intended.” (1915\(a\)—SE XII: 164)
analysis—once every five years or so—would even be necessary. (1937c—SE XXIII: 249) This reflects his growing scepticism concerning the depth and permanence of the results of psychoanalytic therapy. The previous subsection already showed us that an analysis is no guarantee of normality, and a training analysis will be no exception. Like a conventional analysis, a training analysis will never be complete. Besides, if the difference between somebody who has been analysed and somebody who hasn’t is smaller than we would have wished, this will also apply to training analyses. Furthermore, an analysis only helps against a current neurosis, not against a latent one, that may be activated by subsequent events. Moreover, the same neurosis may even recur. It therefore becomes understandable that Freud came to think that every analyst needs a periodic re-analysis. All this points to a conclusion that in 1998 sounds fairly commonsensical: that the analyst’s interpretations will be somewhere between receptivity and projection, objectivity and subjectivity, etc. This in itself need not be particularly worrying as a fact about therapeutic practice. It can, however, lead to a questioning of the truth-value or scientific status of psychoanalytic interpretations and, ultimately, theory. Can something so impure still make claim to the title of knowledge?

Here I would like to turn the argument around: if impurity had meant the absence of knowledge, then we would have had to conclude that knowledge must be absent from everyday social life, a conclusion I find absurd. However, to the extent that the impurity of the cognitive situation tends to rub off on its result, we have to acknowledge that the knowledge is impure.

The classical modernist response to the discovery of such an impurity is: “then consign it to the flames”. All impure knowledge is equal; all impure knowledge is equally bad; all impure knowledge is to be rejected out of hand. An alternative to this approach is to admit the impurity, but to read the impure results both from the perspective of the hermeneutics of suspicion (looking for their defects) and from that of a kerygmatic hermeneutics (looking for the valuable “message” they may contain). The impure knowledge is then subjected to an ongoing process of alternative exegeses, criticism, comparison with rival interpretations, revisions, etc.

We could call such an alternative approach “postmodern”, but it is already to be found in any allegiance (including the ‘ethnocentric’ allegiances from which no one can radically escape) to a tradition that is admitted to be imperfect, or even deeply flawed (e.g. liberalism, Marxism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, empiricism, analytic philosophy).

As (long as) experimental methods are incapable of showing how psychic contents are interrelated, i.e. organised, in an individual, it should not surprise us if scores of intelligent students of the human mind continue to find that the richness and power of psychoanalysis...
outweighs its methodological drawbacks. When so much interest attaches to a particular domain, it is rational to attempt to garner knowledge, even in everyday situations where there is no control over the interactions between subject and object (including the case of self-knowledge). If this were not the case, lovers, parents, businessmen, politicians and combat generals would not even have to try to understand their situation, because it is characterised by uncontrolled and uncontrollable interactions; experimental conditions are nowhere to be had. And in fact most of us manage to extract a surprising amount of reliable information from such impure data. (Think of how well children divine their parents’ taboos, wishes, moods, boundaries and weak spots). Furthermore, some people are masters at this, as can be seen from their high success rates—objectively verifiable—in actions based on information gleaned in such a way. (Think of consistently successful businessmen, con men and pathological liars). The unavoidable interactions that occur in psychoanalysis are typically far more controlled than those in everyday life, even if they remain incomparably less controlled than the paradigmatic experiment in the physics or psychology laboratory. Furthermore, I would hardly want to accuse psychoanalysis of being naive on this score: thematising transference and counter-transference is central to it, both as theory and as practice. Accepting that the ‘subject’ is unable not to interact with the ‘object’, the aim becomes to set up a controlled interaction between them (inter alia by means of the various rules constituting the analytic situation), so as to be able to interpret and discount it as far as possible.

If Freud is anywhere near right about how psychic contents are organised in a person, the statistical approach will necessarily be powerless to illuminate those aspects of this organisation that are idiosyncratic, and indicative of the idiosyncrasies of individual motivation. It seems unlikely that we could obtain statistics about a suitable sample of people without a preceding in-depth interpretation of each individual involved. However, assuming we could do so, a statistical approach would as little provide us with a general map of the human mind, which each individual mind would but instantiate, as a statistical average of the maps of (a suitable sample of) the cities of the world would provide us with a map of the city in general, which each individual city would simply instantiate.

My point is not that knowledge is the only ingredient of such success, nor that success is impossible without reliable knowledge; it is rather that consistent success in such endeavours will usually require a fairly reliable, complex understanding of the actors involved and their social situation.

Critics will object that what nevertheless remains uncontrolled and not understood by the analyst is so crucial and powerful that it completely invalidates the findings of psychoanalysis. For instance, it is said that the clients of every school of psychotherapy produce material which confirms that school’s doctrines. The charge would then be that psychoanalysts are naive about the extent and nature of their interactions with their clients during analysis. But suppose this interaction could be completely controlled, or avoided. The subject would still have countless uncontrolled interactions, some of them emotionally highly charged, with many significant others, most of them quite categorical in how they interpret the subject in terms of their (counter-)transferences, and quite unrestrained or unscrupulous in the energy and means employed to...
It is ironic that the very features which show how admirably self-reflexive Freud is, undermine any classical claim to the simple truth of his theory and interpretations. Most of the major doubts and queries that one hears concerning psychoanalysis have already been aired and addressed by Freud.\textsuperscript{229} To me Freud’s excellence as a thinker lies partly in the way he offers a model of self-reflexivity in an impure and tremendously complex context, from which anybody else trying to theorise other human phenomena in complex, impure situations can learn. To many Freud debunkers, on the other hand, this lack of purity and simplicity is in itself enough to demonstrate Freud’s lack of excellence as a thinker or scientist.\textsuperscript{230}

\textbf{CONCLUSIONS TO SECTION II: WHAT REMAINS OF FREUD’S DREAM-THEORY WHEN WE TRY TO OVERCOME THE EMPIRICIST STRANDS IN IT}

\textbf{An attempt to synthesise Freud’s various supplements to his basic model of the dream-work}

In this subsection I critically review Freud’s general model of what happens in the dream-work and the work of analysis, especially in the light of his own later remarks concerning interpretation and the analytic process, and to some extent in the light of my own experiences as an analysand.

We have seen that much of Freud’s basic terminology, many of his metaphors, and many of his pronouncements suggest a particular model that is rather too simple to accommodate all the complexities he ascribes, with time, to the dream and its interpretation. This model is simultaneously one in which, once the dream is subjected to psychoanalysis, it loses any alterity it may once have had, or seemed to have. (This simple model is more clearly present in \textit{On dreams} than in the \textit{Traumdeutung}).

If we take deferral, retroactivity and contextualism seriously, the dream can never surrender its alterity to interpretation in the way suggested by Freud’s simple scheme in which the work of analysis mirrors the dream-work.

\textbf{A reconstruction of the ‘simple’ strand in Freud’s model of interpretation}

convince the subject of their particular interpretation.
I simply cannot believe that the analyst, however open-minded, however careful, however well analysed, however neutral, will always categorically change uncontaminated, reliable data into contaminated, suspect psychological data. The subject’s life already consists of a concatenation of contaminations, before the analyst’s contamination is added to them.

\textsuperscript{229} Including the charge that, to put it crudely, psychoanalysis is all a matter of ‘suggestion’. (Grübaum 1984)

\textsuperscript{230} The crucial question that remains, however, is to what extent Freud’s self-reflection just remains a \textit{supplement} to the rest of his thought, and to what extent this thought is thereby \textit{fundamentally transformed}. 
In our reconstruction of Freud’s texts into a simple model and a series of supplements to it, the simple model looks as follows:

a. The unit of analysis is circumscribed: the manifest dream(-content).

b. The dreamer’s associations, combined with the analyst’s interpretations\(^{231}\), lead to another circumscribed unit: the latent dream(-thoughts). The work of analysis replaces one object, the manifest content, with another object, the latent content.

   The latent content means the *complete* and genuine translation of the dreamer’s discourse, the adequate formulation of his desire; as such it stands in opposition to the manifest content, which is both *incomplete* and mendacious. (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 235—my emphases)\(^{232}\)

c. When we compare these two circumscribed objects (or series), the latent dream is incomparably larger than the manifest dream.

d. In one central metaphor the manifest dream is presented as the product of a production process, the dream-work. The dream-work takes the latent dream-thoughts and transforms them into the manifest dream.

e. Paradigmatically, there are two classes of signifiers in psychoanalysis—transparent and opaque. An opaque signifier would either be one that seems to be without (any non-trivial) signified, or one that misleadingly suggests a signified other than its actual one. A transparent signifier would communicate a signified in a direct, unproblematic way, as if the signified was transmitted without a signifier as intermediary. (The mediating signifier would therefore efface itself completely). Manifest dreams, symptoms, etc. are opaque, while latent dream-thoughts, etc. are transparent: “The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them [sobald wir sie erfahren haben].” (277; GW 283) The aim of analysis is to replace opaque signifiers by transparent ones.

f. The direction of the work of analysis is the reverse of that of the dream-work, so that the work of analysis *undoes* the dream-work. (p. 160)

g. The analysis leads to a translation *replacing* the manifest dream, because the latter is framed in a language that is *completely* unknown to the addressee of the translation.

(Each of these points is qualified by Freud, sooner or later).

\(^{231}\) Freud underplays the contribution of the analyst to the “latent dream-thoughts”, thereby strengthening the case for his naturalistic or empiricist self-interpretation.

\(^{232}\) Laplanche and Pontalis do not show their customary circumspection in the entry on “Latent Content” from which this quote is taken; on the next page (236) they deny “that the analyst can rediscover everything” or “that a definitive interpretation of a dream can ever be made”, without noting any contradiction or tension between these statements and the one we quote above.
A more finely tuned model of interpretation

A more adequate description would be something like the following:

re e: What are produced by the analysand and the analyst during analysis are signifiers that are neither devoid of meaning nor saturated with meaning. (Perhaps “signs” is a good word for them). They can be more opaque or more transparent, depending on the context, the experience and perspective of the analyst or observer and the phase the analysis is in. But they are usually somewhere in between: they both show and hide their (relevant psychoanalytic) meaning. (Cf. the dream recounted in footnote 169).

The content of the analysis cannot be separated into two strands: the opaque and the transparent, the “manifest” (i.e. that of which the meaning is not evident), and the “latent” (that of which the meaning is evident).

re b: While sections of the analysand’s narrative can be identified as being or not being (manifest) dreams, and other parts can plausibly be identified as belonging to the latent dream-thoughts of a particular dream, we cannot reliably identify any piece of narrative in psychoanalysis as not belonging to the latent dream-thoughts of any particular dreams previously told in analysis. Nor can we say how deeply a continuation of analysis would alter the interpretation of any particular dream.

The upshot of this is that it becomes unclear where the “latent dream-thoughts” that correlate with any particular manifest dream, end.

Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have another meaning. Strictly speaking, then, it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation. (279)

The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. (525)

This last quote already prefigures the conviction that Freud only later stated explicitly: that analysis can go on indefinitely.

re d: However, if we accept the foregoing, the picture of the dream-work becomes problematic: if the dream-thoughts are so indeterminate and in-finite, how can they be made present so as to gather them together and transform/condense/compress them into the manifest dream?233 We cannot solve this problem by saying that although the material of the latent dream-thoughts is very heterogeneous and dispersed, their meaning is unitary. The material need not share such a unitary meaning, because not everything in the latent dream need belong to a single theme or set of themes—in

233 We do not want to make too much of the argument that some of the material which arises in association with the manifest dream cannot have played a role in the formation of the dream, because it refers to events that only occurred after the dream. Even if we disregard material of this nature, our problem remains.
psychoanalysis associations that are mediated by the *signifier*—e.g. the shape, spelling or sound of words—typically play a major role.

To get a better picture of the dream-work—or of what takes its place—we perhaps need a better picture of the *work of analysis*.

**Ref:** The work of analysis consists of a dialectic between (typically: very many) associations on the part of the analysand and (typically: a limited amount of) interpretations on the part of analyst. (Of course, the analysand’s associations are themselves never free of interpretation). What happens in the work of analysis is not only or mainly the replacement of (relatively) opaque by (relatively) transparent signs, but, more importantly, the supplementation of (relatively) isolated signs by more and more other signs, so that the signs become more and more richly interconnected in a variety of ways. (For instance: instead of “a, b” we get: “first a, then b”; or “a because of b”; or “a, because of b, via the intermediary of c”, etc.) Continuation of analysis leads partly to new, unsuspected materials (remembering what was forgotten), partly to the substitution of one sign (or series of signs) by another, but, most importantly, it leads to the meshwork of relations interconnecting various elements becoming denser and denser, and more and more specific. As this happens, elements that were initially “opaque” (usually) become more “transparent”.

Ideally, the network of elements is progressively transformed into a field that can be traversed to its full extent and in all directions. If we insist on using translation metaphors, analysis gives us the original text, supplemented by translations of, and annotations to, those of its parts or aspects that the “reader” is likely to overlook or find obscure. The *contribution of the analyst* is not a second, self-contained narrative,

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234 It is unlikely that one can really maintain the dichotomy between ‘elements’ and ‘relations’. The dream-work transforms elements *and* ‘shifts’ them, so that their relations to each other change. Many ‘elements’ can themselves be seen as composed of relations between other elements. How would one handle the transition from seeing the duck-rabbit figure as a duck to seeing it as a rabbit in terms of a dichotomy between “elements” and “relations”? *Nothing seems to be the same before and after such a transition.*

235 The ideal of full traversability will always remain—infinitely?—far from being realised. (In contrast to Breuer’s notion, discussed on p. 80, above, that complete accessibility is possible, and even the ‘normal’ condition of mental contents). Obviously, an analysis does not even *tendentially* lead to the demise of the unconscious. (If it did, the difference between someone who had been analysed and someone who hadn’t, would be enormous, which Freud denies). I would also suspect that a considerable part of the repressed material that is worked through during analysis is afterwards again walled off by resistances, without the analysis thereby necessarily being any less successful. I lack a comprehensive and coherent picture of which forms of repression Freud finds unavoidable (primary repression, for instance, but what else?), and which desirable (cf. the watchman whom we should honour as the guardian of our mental health). I even doubt that Freud himself had such a picture.
separate from the first (the analysand’s narrative) but a supplement to it that attempts to nestle in its folds without ever quite succeeding.\textsuperscript{236} “Supplement” in the Derridean sense, therefore: what aspires to do no more than fill the gap in the first narrative, turns out, firstly, to not quite fill the gap, and, secondly, to add something more than what is missing, so that it extends beyond the dimensions of the original gap. (Not that we can ever take a secure, outside, non-partisan view—a view beyond interpretation, a view which is not itself an interpretation—that will allow us to say exactly which is which). The supplement hovers somewhere between being no more than an explication of what is (“contained in” or “implied by” what is) already there, and a construct that speculatively goes beyond what is already given. Sometimes it is closer to one pole (“you used the same phrase yesterday to describe your mother”), and sometimes to the other (“when you were n and a half years old you woke up from your afternoon nap, and witnessed a coitus a tergo, three times repeated; you were able to see your mother’s genitals as well as your father’s organ; and you understood the process as well as its significance. Etc.”). (Cf. 1918b—SE XVII: 37) Even where the contribution of the analyst consists in a factual statement that is completely correct, it is always tendentious, and never neutral, in the sense that the analyst could also have focused on something else that was equally true. Need I say that with these words I am not accusing Freud or psychoanalysis of a misdemeanour, but only pointing out the necessary failure of practitioners of this “impossible profession” to meet classical epistemological demands for objective knowledge: the analyst can never completely efface herself or her contribution, even when she is as untendentious and neutral as one can possibly be. The supplement can be more empiricist (less arbitrary, “closer to the facts”) than what epistemological constructivism typically takes to be possible, but even at its best it is always less empiricist (less determined by the given) than what empiricism deems possible (or necessary, before anything can rightfully claim the status of knowledge).

\textbf{Consequences of our alternative description of the analytic process}\textsuperscript{re a-g.}

What we have here, is a would-be holism: a holism with an infinite deferral of the whole. Even if a supplement meant to complete the whole partly answers old

\textsuperscript{236} Lending words Foucault used in an entirely different context, we could describe the interpreter-analyst as wishing to “continue the sentence [the analysand] had started and lodg[ing him]self without really being noticed, in its interstices”. (Foucault 1981: 51) The dream of nestling in the folds of the analysand’s narrative probably does not apply to those analysts who, seeing the ideal of neutrality as based on an illusion, accept that the analyst’s counter-transference is unavoidable, and rather try to use it as a therapeutic tool.
questions and solves old problems, it also creates new ones. Everything gets its meaning from its relationship to everything else; “to its context”, we could say, if we can remember that the context is never either clear or bounded; “to the whole”, we could say, if we can remember

- that the whole is never achieved,
- that the movement of analysis is not linear, unbroken and homogeneous, but full of surprises, characterised by frequent and fundamental changes of aspect (for instance when the transference suddenly switches from positive to negative), and
- that this incomplete whole—the context—can neither be thought as pure presence, nor as pure absence.

In this ever more richly interconnected field, the expanding interpretandum cannot consistently be distinguished from the expanding interpretans. The analysand’s associations, for instance, are both; in practice the ongoing stream of associations in an analysis cannot be separated into two separate strands, “xs” and “associations to xs”. (For instance, one has associations to a dream, but the dream was itself an association to something else). Intelligibility is achieved as much by indefinitely extending (necessarily) incomplete series as by replacing opaque signifiers with transparent ones. Far from the manifest dream typically being opposed to the latent dream, e.g., as a text in another language that needs to be replaced by an integral translation, it typically appears as part of it:

Consider the relation of the dream-element to its unconscious background: it was, as it were, a fragment of that background, an allusion to it, but it was made quite incomprehensible by being isolated. (518n)

Its “unconscious” character then lies in its loss of (relevant) relations to its surroundings, even though it is itself part of the data of consciousness. This is very different from a conception of consciousness and the unconscious as two discrete orders. The quoted passage suggests that what is “unconscious” is actually to a considerable extent a larger whole of which what is conscious is a part. This is confirmed by the already quoted passage in which Freud, citing Lipps, says

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; …it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense-organs.238 (613-my emphases in bold)

237 Freud had said of secondary revision, which presents itself as part of the dream, that it is like a “first interpretation” of the dream. We now see that the dream and the second interpretation—the latent dream-thoughts—belong to a single network.

238 The passage from which the above quote was taken, contains a second, different line of thought, however, which seems to fit in better with the picture of manifest and latent as two entirely separate
Perhaps Freud’s dream theory is too complex to allow such a summary in a single picture, that would replace another, simpler one. Freud, who constantly supplements his metaphors with new ones, formulates his awareness of the relativity of all comparisons:

What is psychical is something so unique and peculiar to itself that no one comparison can reflect its nature. (1919a—SE XVII: 161)

Some of his observations in this regard seem to come straight from the later Wittgenstein:

In psychology we can only describe things by the help of analogies. There is nothing peculiar in this; it is the case elsewhere as well. But we have constantly to keep changing these analogies, for none of them lasts us long enough. (1926e—SE XX: 195)

Here we perhaps do the same thing: we supplement the simpler, more atomistic, more dualistic picture by this more complex, more holistic one, in which we try to explicate—but thereby supplement—Freud’s own supplements to his simpler model, which he often gives in a different context, and often only at a much later stage.

This is perhaps a sort of holographic model of the mind (to again supplement our metaphors with a new one). Instead of

- a production process, leading to atomistic production—the substance of the manifest atom is the compression of the substance of a whole host of related, surrounding atoms, “present” in it in some hidden, but ontologically determinate manner—

we get

- a differential model, in which each element, in ways that are not immediately evident, remains connected to countless other elements, so that disturbing it leads to disturbances in and among other elements. We are again reminded of Derrida’s (1981: 26) words: “Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.”

orders, so that the manifest dream reveals as little to us about the nature of the latent dream-thoughts as the phenomena reveal of noumenal reality [das Ding an sich], according to Kant.

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world. (613—my emphases in bold)

To Derrida, these would be features of every system; not just of those described by Freud. The words directly preceding this quote are also apposite in this context:

The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each “element”—phoneme or grapheme—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or

footnote ctd. on next page
The relation of the manifest dream to the latent dream-thoughts is not one of end-product to raw materials, but rather one of langue to parole. I.e., the latent dream-thoughts are the differential system (network) that forms the backdrop against which the manifest dream can only be understood.240 (This system is however always incomplete, always shifting).

The unconscious would then be an idiolect, a personal variant of a shared system of meanings. As the personal deviation from the shared system would not have to be governed by rules, such a “personal language” would not be excluded by Wittgenstein’s private language argument. It would be a differential system, that could only be understood by tracing how its elements are used, that is, by listening attentively and patiently to its subject’s words.

In such a system, each element bears traces of the rest of the system: “orange” can only function in the way it does thanks to its differences from other terms (firstly, other colour terms, and secondly, all sorts of other terms). In a sense, other terms (most obviously the colour terms) are “condensed” in a term like “orange”, but then because of its relations to them, not because they have been compressed into it in a production process. As a rule, the manifest dream is as little produced out of the latent dream-thoughts by the dream-work as “orange” is produced by processing “red, blue, brown, grey, white, black, green, violet” etc. The manifest dream never really ceases to be part of the psyche—the ongoing process in the larger distributed system—from which it derives. It does not contain the other elements as much as it represents a standing possibility of being related to these other elements. (Both by the external observer, as an event that need not change anything in the system, and by the analysand—or analyst—as an event modifying the system). Alternatively, if we were to insist on speaking the language of presence, and say that it “contains” them, then every piece of the network could in some sense also be said to “contain” the rest of the network—the elements of the latent dream as much as those of the manifest dream. Each piece becomes like a piece of a hologram. As a hologram is cut into smaller and smaller pieces, each piece continues giving a picture of the whole, but its picture quality (its resolution—the specificity of the information it contains) deteriorates. What the holographic metaphor probably misses, however, is the idea that some points are privileged access points—royal roads—to the rest of the system, and that different pieces give more direct access to different regions in the system. The network does not automatically present itself to itself—it has to re-present itself to itself, constantly, in the form of supplements to itself. In some of these supplements n other elements are ‘compressed’, i.e. such supplements contain countless links—like mnemonic devices—to other elements. (Far more than a normal fragment or an arbitrary

system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text.

(26)

240 I have never been sure what Lacan means by his pronouncement that “the unconscious is structured like a language”. (Lacan 1977a: 20) Perhaps I am here expressing the same or a very similar idea, in different terms.
point of departure for associations, such as a Rorschach test, that was not produced by the system). Perhaps the dream should be seen as a “narrative” strategy for telling an incomplete story that will function particularly well as a *pars pro toto*. A particularly suggestive fragment. (In the way a mouth usually evokes a person more completely than does an equally large patch of skin from the person’s back).

To conclude, let us oppose these two models to each other in a schematic form. We summarise our conclusions schematically in the second column of the following table; the first column repeats the corresponding points in the simple model, for the sake of comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple, localised, dualistic, atomistic model</th>
<th>Complex, distributed, relational model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The unit of analysis is circumscribed: the manifest dream(-content).</td>
<td>There is no clearly circumscribed unit of analysis. Firstly, the manifest dream can recur in a variety of different versions. Secondly, the ongoing stream of associations does not separate neatly into two different strands: the interpreters and the interpretandum. Any element—any arbitrary chosen segment of this stream of associations—usually is or can be both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dreamer’s associations, combined with the analyst’s interpretations, lead to another circumscribed unit: the latent dream(-thoughts). The work of analysis replaces one object, the manifest dream, with another object, the latent dream.</td>
<td>Even if we define a particular manifest dream as the unit of analysis, there is no clear criterion for what part of the whole stream of associations does, and what does not, “belong” to this manifest dream, as its “latent dream-thoughts”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we compare these two circumscribed objects (or series), the latent dream is incomparably larger than the manifest dream.</td>
<td>According to this account, it is only to be expected that the latent dream is “larger” than the manifest dream, as it is the latter’s context, i.e. the whole of which it is a part, i.e. potentially everything in the psyche (or outside of it: language, culture, etc.). Inter alia because the mental is not an entity, but an ongoing process, this is not the relation of two circumscribed series to each other, but of a (relatively) circumscribed series to another, open series that can be extended indefinitely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In one central metaphor the manifest dream is presented as the product of a production process, the dream-work. The dream-work takes the latent dream-thoughts and transforms them into the manifest dream.</td>
<td>The relation of the manifest dream to the latent dream-thoughts is not one of end-product to raw materials, but rather that of <em>langue to parole</em>. I.e., the latent dream-thoughts are the system (the differential network) that forms the backdrop against which the manifest dream can only be understood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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241 The following words of Wittgenstein’s seem to suggest something similar: The contemplation of the dream-image inspires us, … we just are inspired. Because if we tell someone else our dream the image will not usually inspire him. The dream affects us as does an idea pregnant with possible developments. (Wittgenstein 1978)

242 Freud attaches surprisingly little value to any attempt to get a faithful record of the dream. (1911e—SE XII: 95-96)
Paradigmatically, there are two classes of signifiers in psychoanalysis—transparent and opaque. Manifest dreams, symptoms, etc. are opaque; associations and interpretations (the latent dream) are transparent. The aim of analysis is to replace opaque signifiers by transparent ones.

The series of utterances that the analysand produces cannot be separated into two neat strands, the transparent and the opaque. The latent dream-thoughts have their own opacity; relative transparency can be obtained by the illuminating confluence of many opacities.

The direction of the work of analysis is the reverse of that of the dream-work, so that the work of analysis undoes the dream-work. The raw materials of the dream-work and the end product of the work of analysis coincide; we call them “the latent dream-thoughts”.

The work of analysis (at best) allows us to make an educated guess regarding the real genesis of the dream, but it is never possible to fully recuperate the way it really was from the traces it, in interaction with traces of extraneous origin, has left behind. If successful, the analysis at most addresses the present meaning of the dream, which gives a fairly good indication of its causal prehistory; however, meaning and genesis do not coincide.

The analysis leads to a translation replacing the manifest dream, because the latter is framed in a language that is completely unknown to the intended readership of the translation.

If we insist on using translation metaphors, analysis gives us the original text, supplemented by translations of, and annotations to, parts or aspects of the original that the reader is likely to overlook or find obscure.

| Must we see what is revealed by psychoanalysis in conjunction with the dream as “the dream's meaning”? |
| Imagine the following situation, in which the innovations of psychoanalysis regarding the interpretation of dreams are not attributed to one person, but to a whole series of people: |
| A asks the question: What is the meaning of this dream? B gives a two-line answer in which he interprets the dream in one specific way, saying “This is the meaning of the dream”. Next C comes along and adds: “No, the dream has a plurality of meanings; it means p, q, r and s.” Now D joins in and adds: “To really understand the meaning of your dreams, don’t just tell one dream and ask for the meaning of it, but tell me everything that happens to enter your mind for one hour every day; sometimes that will be a dream, and sometimes it won’t”. And E adds: “Understanding your dreams really is an ongoing process, new material keeps on changing the picture; the analytic process can carry on indefinitely.” Now A and B may well ask somebody who has gone along with all these developments: are you still talking about the same thing as we were? It sounds as if you’re not answering the same question, but rejecting it. Instead of giving the meaning of a dream—as something brief and circumscribed—you have now opted for a view in which dreams become an integral part of an ongoing process that is both explanans and explanandum. Their “meaning” has become so plural, dispersed, complex and unbounded that we do not recognise it as something deserving the name “meaning” any more. In allowing this ongoing production of discourse, you are spinning an ever more densely interconnected web of associations. It is clear that a real process of discovery or understanding—and simultaneously of transformation—is occurring here. The analysand is indeed getting more and more clarity regarding his reasons for liking and disliking, loving and dreading, seeking and avoiding the things he does. However, dreams are but one strand in the total web, and we cannot pretend that |
the whole process specifically illuminates these strands. Furthermore, illumination comes from being able to see more and more interconnections (while never even coming close to seeing, or being able to see, them all). It is impossible to demarcate any part of this web as something discrete and whole that would tell us what “the meaning” (or even “the meanings”) of any particular dream is. Besides, in isolation any part of the whole web is unclear and in need of interpretation, just as the dream was. We need then not insist on talking about looking for “the meaning of the dream”; we could also say: there is a process of traversing this web—of activating certain sections of it as one traverses it—and this process has no clear beginning, end, or halting places along the way. This interconnected web is not divided into separate territories, so that we can read: “You are now leaving the territory (i.e. “meaning”) of dream X and entering the territory of dream Y”, in the way one could formerly read that one was leaving West Berlin and entering East Berlin. The surge of associations following in the wake of a dream told during analysis does not always present itself as “the meaning of the dream”. In a purely pragmatic way, one can call this surge of associations (the immediate vicinity of a dream, the multifarious paths leading from it to other elements) “the meaning” of the dream, but would anything be lost if one didn’t? The dream, by showing or creating their interrelations, can illuminate them as much as it is illuminated by them. The dream could, pragmatically, then also be seen as contributing significantly to their meaning. For today, that is, just as they contribute to its meaning, for today. Tomorrow, departing from the same dream, we will discover how it is connected to other elements as well.

I cannot see that psychoanalysis would lose anything substantial by agreeing with this account. However, it could with reason insist on saying that psychoanalysis does tell us what the dream’s meaning is, if that is what we want to know. But the way we theorise meaning needs revision. Instead of there being two sorts of entities—explananda and explanantia, signifiers and signifieds, words and meanings—each having an ontologically distinct status, such differences are functional ones. In the ideal-typical situation in which any part of the network is completely isolated, it becomes a signifier lacking a signified, an explanandum without an explanans, a word without meaning. (This ideal type is never fully realised). The meaning of any part of the network (for instance, a dream, a symptom or a phantasy) is given by relating it to the rest. But this process of relating is never complete. No words used to convey the meaning or signified are ever self-evident, a rock-bottom beyond which we cannot hope to delve. Any explanans is itself an explanandum, needing a further explanans, as forcefully brought out by Peirce’s theory of infinite semiosis. (Cf. Derrida 1976: 49-50) Every new dream-thought that arises in conjunction with an element of the manifest dream content, or in conjunction with a previous dream-thought, gives

243 Often we do so by simply substituting for it something very circumscribed, of which the relations to the rest for us are sufficiently clear, e.g. explaining to a German speaker that parapraxis is the English translation for Fehlleistung.
rise to new questions. To construct a stereotypically “psychoanalytic” example: “What occurs to you in conjunction with the lollipop in your dream?” “A woman licking it, a woman licking my penis—her hands are tied while she does it.” “Why tied hands?” “That way I am in control.” “Why do you want to be in control?” Etc. The lollipop refers to fellatio, the details of the fellatio refer to control, the control … Such series can be carried on indefinitely. What is especially new in the psychoanalytic approach is the emphasis on the way associative series keep on forking, so that each term in the series of associations can itself be the point of departure for many other associative series, all going off in different directions. (Though sooner or later criss-crossing with each other, thereby forming not just series of associations, but a network of associations).

This gloss of the expression “the meaning of a dream” is not a departure from the normal use of the word “meaning”. What it does depart from, is a particular theory of meaning—the notion of meaning as a strange entity attached to a word or other sign—which has been so searchingly criticised by Wittgenstein, Saussure, and other thinkers of our century.

We have here concluded that it is defensible to call the sort of thing psychoanalysis does, “giving the dream’s meaning”. Whether the specific meaning psychoanalysis attaches to any particular dream, can lay claim to being the meaning of the dream, as opposed to the meaning attached to it by, say a Jungian or Gestalt therapist, is an issue we will not address in this context.

What becomes of the “latent dream-thoughts”, the “dream-work” and the work of analysis? In our account, the “latent dream-thoughts” become a virtual object—nothing more than a hypothetical (or hypostasised) correlate in the past of that ever still unfolding, never complete process called “the work of analysis”. By the same token the term “analysis”, with its empiricist connotations of doing nothing more than allowing something to decompose into its real components, then becomes misleading. Freud’s production metaphor—the dream-work—also becomes problematic. It remains plausible as long as we picture a finite set of objects: the latent dream-thoughts, as being transformed into another finite object: the manifest dream-content. But if the raw material of such a process becomes non-finite, how should we picture the production process in question? Similar considerations lead Spanjaard (1976: 91) to doubt whether the latent content has an independent existence before the dream. “After all, one can imagine that it concerns something conflictual that never had any other existence than a vague, implicit,

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244 This sort of material will of course usually not be produced in such a linear, immediate way, with every step being an answer to an explicit question on the part of the analyst.

245 Freud himself later states that the term ‘analysis’ has many connotations to which he would not subscribe. (1919a—SE XVII: 160-161)
unconscious ‘tenor’.” Spanjaard adds that “given the doubt regarding [the existence of] an independent latent dream one can hardly speak of dream-work, as dream-work is the process transforming the latent into the manifest dream.”

We are here reminded of Wittgenstein’s remarks concerning what happens when a representation has sharper boundaries than the original it is supposed to depict. (Wittgenstein 1968: §§76-77).

Embroidering on Spanjaard, we can perhaps ask whether the difficulty with Freud’s account is not that it makes the manifest and the latent exist in the same modality, while they actually represent two different modalities—actual (manifest dream) and potential (latent dream).

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