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# Foreword.

## The Royal Detour

In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, dated July 7, 1898, Freud comments on a fragment from his working draft for *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud reveals that the text “completely follows the dictates of the unconscious”, and he refers to the principle of Itzig, the Sunday rider. When people ask him, ‘Itzig, where are you going?’, he will answer, ‘Do I know? Ask the horse.’<sup>i</sup>

There is of course some false modesty, or maybe defensive self-criticism, at play in Freud’s words to his friend and master, Fliess. Further, the final book will have a lot of academic rigor to it, including the famous seventh chapter about “The Psychology of the Dream-Processes”, attempting to deliver a scientific model of the psyche. But there is something very right in Freud speaking about central parts of the book being dictated by the unconscious – steered by the horse, not the man – in the sense of it being a very astonishing read. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is extremely inventive not only in its choice of overall theme, but also in its choice of examples, its way of unlocking

i See also Mladen Dolar’s contribution in this volume for a comment on the Itzig-principle.

the material, in its interpretative efforts, in its ideas and attempts at criss-crossing between the most particular, even deeply intimate, and the most general. On every page there is something to awaken one's curiosity, an example of a dream, a bold interpretation, a newly made-up yet far-reaching concept.

Dictated by the unconscious. Consider the idea of something being dictated by what at first glance would seem to be meaningless, non-coherent, even irrational, foolish. The doctor is normally, and was certainly in Freud's time, the one who dictates. Dictating his instructions to staff and secretaries, conveying authoritative points on patients or on medical matters. But here the unconscious dictates, and the doctor must try to keep up. The book is not an attempt to destroy logos, reason, but it endeavors to tune in on something of a different order, something that works or shatters logos itself from within, its flipside, its Other. Freud is listening to voices, visions, narratives that fall apart. What kind of discourse is this? What can it do? Where does it lead us? It is not simply the rider and the horse, to adjust Freud's image a bit, where the rider would stand for reason and the horse would stand for chaos. It is the rider ridden by something of a different character, something that dictates, something that calls for him. Quoting again Freud to Fliess about the fragment from the *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "I did not start a single paragraph knowing where I would end up."<sup>2</sup>

Another curious statement from Freud to Fliess in the letter declares that the text in mention "is of course not written for the reader."<sup>3</sup> That the passage, and maybe even the most important parts of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is not written for the reader may mean that regarding this very special material – the dream as unconscious, and the unconscious as dream – there is no such thing as first clarifying and structuring the material and then presenting it in the best possible form to the reader. The book may instead have been written for the listener, for and by Freud himself as a listener. For someone who is "called into listening", as one of the articles in this volume has it, listening to something that speaks in and through detours.

*The Interpretation of Dreams* was, as Freud mentions now and then, written in the aftermath of his father's death in 1896, as part of his self-analysis.<sup>ii</sup> From death to dreams, and from dreams to dreams,

ii As in the preface to the second edition: «[T]his book has a further subjective significance for me personally – a significance which I only

and with every dream a bunch of associations. The book is the result of detours; it is a plea for the detours required to follow the zig-zag ride of the unconscious. If you try to approach the unconscious directly, as for example with the Freudian term “latent dream thoughts”, you completely miss the point, the detour. This is why Freud introduced the term of “dream-work”. The unconscious sits and works in the detour itself, in the dream as a detour, in the many associations to the dream, in the very form (not content) of the unconscious. Freud’s father died, and death is an important theme in psychoanalysis, as well as sex, but what is original about psychoanalysis, is a focus on how this content is thought, processed, dreamt, the way it rides us like a mare.

Another important thing about death and fathers. If the background for the book is the death of Freud’s father, the book is also the very birth of psychoanalysis. It is, retroactively, the birth of Freud as the father of psychoanalysis. If Freud is a master, and if Freud cannot but carry with him the problems of the master, of authority, even as he himself points them out with his Oedipus complex – Jacques Lacan in several places speaks of “the cult of the dead father” alluding to Freud’s proteges – Freud is something of a “master of the new” in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The book is not a classical “medical” book, full of authoritative statements, or rather, its authority comes from its inventiveness, its ingenuity, its willingness to take risks. Being carried along roads that lead to new places. The book is written by Freud as dreamer, as discoverer. It is dictated by the unconscious, written from the horse’s back.

The book is thus not only a book, but the introduction to another kind of discourse, the discourse of the Other, the decentered discourse. Thus, you cannot just copy Freud, if you want to work with dreams, with the unconscious. Repeating Freud is not simply (or only) to use his method and concepts, but to place oneself in a certain opening. The “research object” called dreams are not to be laid bare by accumulating knowledge to arrive at a final understanding. Rather, with dreams, even if numerous writers from antiquity and onwards held certain views on dreams and their meaning, Freud emphasizes that: “No foundation has been laid of secure findings upon which a later investigator might build; but each new writer examines the same

grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father’s death – that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man’s life.» (Freud 1971: xxvi)

problems afresh and begins again, as it were, from the beginning.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, investigating dreams is exactly about accounting for the problem of achieving “foundation”, when it comes to their meaning and function, it is about inventing a discourse that can work with dreams as “non-founded objects”; objects that, while we investigate them, make us think.

#### FREUDIAN AWAKENINGS

This special edition of *Lamella* is the result of the conference, “Re-awaking Freud”, held in Copenhagen, January 2025, organized by The Danish Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Many of the talks and papers presented at the conference, as well as a few extras, are presented in this volume.

The theme of “awakening” is of course of utmost importance in relation to *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Awakening relates to something very fundamental in the book, namely a new theory of the subject. A new theory that would be the cornerstone of both the practice and theory of psychoanalysis.

An important point of entrance to issues of sleeping, dreaming and awakening in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, would be the question that Shoshana Felman poses in her seminal and influential discussion of the Irma-dream. “[I]s it possible”, she asks, following a thesis on the recalcitrance of Irma<sup>iii</sup> to Freud’s solutions, “that the dream itself could have a *waking function*? Is it possible that sleep itself could *wake us up* from our daily dream of wakefulness?”<sup>5</sup> We will not go into Felman’s analysis of Freud’s (analysis of the) Irma-dream here, but only dwell on her suggestion. What if dreams are in fact relays for awakenings – never are we so close to waking up as when we sleep, and that is reported in the dream.

This is of course also the approach of Lacan when he with the concept of fantasy outlines our waking life in the register of dreaming. What we call reality is the fantasy-construction of an imagined-coherent world that we live, navigate and somewhat feel at home in. However, when confronted with a dream, a dream that has a certain weight, such as the dream of Irma, or the dream of the burning child, we confront what Lacan calls the Real – what cannot be smoothly

iii Irma is the cover-name for Freud’s real-life patient Anna Hammerschlag-Lichtheim.

integrated into the texture of reality. When Freud dreams about Irma, about her recalcitrance, in a dream that is itself recalcitrant, or when somebody dreams of a burning child in a burning dream, presenting a voice that “brings fire where it falls”,<sup>6</sup> we are on the verge of awakening. Awakening like in a flash, before anxiety sets in. Awakening when hitting the kernel of some conflict that no solution can make go away.<sup>iv</sup>

From dream to awakening. When we are sleeping, when the curtains are closed, one could imagine that nothing of importance would happen in our minds. Maybe “the system” tries to rid itself of stupid thoughts and residues from our waking hours, but nothing else. Freud of course has another view on this. The dream testifies to a never-stopping thinking in us. When approaching the phenomenon of the dream, Freud is not trying to show us a completely different or mystical world, and he is not trying to crush our bourgeois reality with some kind of surrealistic super-reality. What he is trying to show is how the dream pertains to a thinking that may not obey everyday common-sense logics but nonetheless amounts to an important intellectual effort.

Freud may sometimes come through as a dualist thinker: We have the conscious and the unconscious, the ego and the id etc., as if there was a world of order repressing or holding down a world of chaos. Thus, we have the dualism of the state of being awake and the state of dreaming. The Apollonian and the Dionysian. The adult and the child. The rider and the horse. However, the whole of *The Interpretation of Dreams* testifies to a Möbius-strip inversion of these dualisms. In one Freudian slogan: Repression is always the return of the repressed. Thus, in our dreams we can experience awakenings, and this does not only come in the form of brutal flashes but also in the little shivers produced by the dream’s subtle, strayed out, drifting enigmas. Dreaming is, as Daniel Hayes has shown in a wonderful little text, what the writer or the artist do when working with some unarticulated idea. The artist enters the state of a “forgetful self-listening”, a form of wakeful dreaming, and this “can often lead you down a path that you had not intended to take.”<sup>7</sup> For Hayes this means that dreamers, artists and

iv The theme of an impotent solution has a prominent place in the Irma-dream. In the (recount of the) dream, Freud reproaches Irma for «not having accepted my 'solution' yet.» (Freud 1971b: 107) The Irma-dream is thus also a dream about solutions of the classical medical kind that fail, paving the way for a new practice and discourse.

analysts are much closer siblings than one should think. Psychoanalysis is also a creative enterprise (for all the reservations Hayes has with the connotations of specialness and benevolence in “creativity”).

Repression is always the return of the repressed. The whole of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is full of surprising returns. Long dead fathers or other important figures returning in dreams, day-residues mixed with age-old material returning in new enigmatic constellations, even dreams being told in public and hereafter re-dreamt by another person and brought to analysis, as the dream of the burning child. We should of course not be surprised to find infantile wishes in every instance of a dream that Freud analyses. This is the grand thesis of the book: That the dream is wish-fulfillment. But once again we should be attentive to Freud’s displacement of a simple opposition between infantile wishes and censorship (the repression performed by the mature and culturalized psyche). Censorship means that dream-wishes never survives in the “raw” state but suffers from the mechanisms detected in the dream: displacement and condensation. However, unconscious wishes are exactly what never comes in raw, unmediated form. At the “bottom” of the dream there is the dream-navel, where the dream is attached, fastened, to something unknown, and the very body of the dream consist of dream-work. The raw state disappears.

The dreams discussed in Freud’s book are windows into processes that weaves their strange patterns from halted wishes. Freud acknowledges repression, as well as he, on another level, acknowledges the resistance that is played out in the clinic. “Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious”, Freud states: “One of its rules is that *whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance.*”<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, what interrupts analytic work is approaches to psychological material that are way too smoothly working, too focused on sense-making, too cautious and unwilling to take risks. Freud wants to address what interrupts these kinds of interruptions, what keeps on interrupting discourse as such. He sides with the insistence of the unconscious. This focus on what insists is another invention of Freudian psychoanalysis. It can be seen in Freud’s interest in what paves its way – enigmatic and excessive phenomena like dreams, symptomal acts, jokes – up to his theoretical investigation into the drives, repetition etc. There is in Freud a daring appropriation of the way dreams operate, a transposition of the dream-work of the dream into the two central rules of the clinic: the analysand’s free association and the analyst’s evenly-hovering attention. Freud borrows his method from the dream, his method of

madness. And there is in him an ethic, a working program, focused on addressing what insists, not stopping it from insisting.

#### NEW AWAKENINGS

The articles in this volume relate *The Interpretation of Dreams* to a wide range of topics, within and beyond the clinic. Inspired by Freud's insights and method, they present analyses of ideology, literature, art, and even of Freud's own dreams and writings.

In "Irma Revisited" Mladen Dolar presents a close rereading of Freud's dream of Irma's injection, regarding it as the most prominent candidate for the birthplace of psychoanalysis. The article proposes six different paradigms of interpretation, starting from Freud's own interpretation and its blind spots, then following the clues of his familial circumstances, taking up Erikson's influential rereading in the fifties, examining some feminist critical appraisals (Kofman, Felman) to finally present Lacan's reading (in *Seminar II*). Dolar argues that all six paradigms are interconnected and can be taken as a pattern that subtended so much in the history of psychoanalysis up to this date.

Alenka Zupančič, in her article "Freud, the Unconscious and Artificial Intelligence", asks if the recent advancements in AI render Freud, his discoveries, and his methods obsolete, belonging to an entirely different era. Taking her point of departure in a case reported by a psychoanalyst – a patient presenting a dream generated by ChatGPT – she opens the possibility that the Freudian theory and method could actually provide us with tools surprisingly apt to navigate such phenomena.

"Father, don't you see I'm Burning?" is an often quoted line from the dream that Freud recounts of a father who has fallen asleep at the wake of his deceased son, and in his dream hears his son pronounce this line, to wake up and see that the shirt of his son's dead body has actually caught fire. "Father, don't you see I'm Burning?" is also the title of Søren Bo Aggerbeck Larsen's article, with the subtitle "Freud, Lacan, and the Return of Burning Children in the Age of Climate Crisis". Lacan interprets the son's words in the father's dream as an encounter with the Real, forcing the father to wake up to escape its unbearable truth. Larsen points to a precursor to Freud's burning child in Goethe's poem "*The Elf-King*", and to a successor in the figure of future children burning from the flames of climate crisis, reproaching us for their suffering. Larsen's article explores the figure

of the burning child as a recurring trauma, revealing the gap of Enlightenment reason.

In “What is Called Listening?”, Anders Ruby, following the Heideggerian notion of thinking, argues that listening is not an act, but a posture into which we are “called.” Through a philosophical inquiry into the nature and strangeness of listening, Ruby proposes listening as a fundamental mode of subjectivity – in some sense even more foundational than thinking itself. Building on Lacan’s idea of otherness, Ruby explores listening as an “active passivity” that situates the subject not in mastery or activity but in response to an Other. Reframing Freud’s analysis of dreams, this article proposes that the dreamer is not a thinker but a listener.

Building on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Joonas Taipale – in his article “A Finite Infinity” – compares dreaming with less comprehensive immersion such as music-listening and examines the temporal structure of these experiences. Taipale argues that immersed experiences, including the dream, have their own peculiar temporality and could be regarded as experiences mediating between the conscious (temporal) and unconscious (non-temporal) regions of the mind.

In “Against Against Interpretation” Lilian Munk Rösing argues for an interpretation of art inspired by Freud’s interpretation of dreams. Rösing sees Freud’s method – interpretation by association – as a third alternative to the decoding of signs (Panofsky) on the one hand, and the prohibition against interpretation (Sontag) on the other hand. Following some chains of associations in Freud and in Georges Didi-Huberman, the article proposes a psychoanalytically inspired method of interpreting art based on a certain sensitivity to the aesthetic (sensuous, material) qualities of the signifier.

Pablo Lerner dives into Freud’s metaphor of “the dream’s navel”. In his article – “A Descent into the Navel or, Navel-Gazing In-Between the Knowable and the Unknown” – he explores the possibility of conceptualizing the dream’s navel as a space that separates the knowable from the unknown. Using as metaphorical depictions of the descent into the navel Poe’s story of the Maelstrom, Rimbaud’s seer, and various trends of Jewish mysticism, Lerner argues that encountering the unknown is to be understood in terms of seeing, witnessing, or gazing. Suggesting that the unknown is to be conceived of as unimaginable rather than unnamable, Lerner raises the question of the implications of considering the existence of a space outside and independent of the workings of language.

“The Other Is Right!” is the declamatory title of Brian Benjamin Hansen’s article, followed by the subtitle: “On Epistemic Injustice and Psychoanalysis”. Hansen takes his point of departure in Freud’s question: “What is the analyst’s task?” Informed by Freud as well as Lacan, the article is an attempt to condense the dialectics of analytical discourse. Throughout the article, Hansen unfolds the claim of its title. “The Other is right” means, first, that the analysand is right – that they, not the doctor, possess the key to their suffering. But it also means that the unconscious (which Lacan conceptualizes as the discourse of the Other) is right. Lastly, it means that psychoanalysis itself, as the Other of the process, of what a process of treatment can be, is right.

In “The Purity of Perversion” Marie Bendtsen argues that perversion as the protection of the Other’s self-sufficiency – of which certain Lacanian’s accuse transpersons – is rather at work in transphobia. The article seeks to further develop Lacan’s notion of perversion as a structure that “masks the conflictual articulation at the level of logic itself.” Taking as her point of departure Lacan’s analysis of the exhibitionist perversion at work in the crusaders, Bendtsen finds a similar structure in right wing populism, J. K. Rowling’s statements, and Catherine Millot’s *Horsexe*.

Jakob Staberg’s article “The Gaze in the Field of Dreams” aims to show how the gaze and the image are central to understanding Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*. Drawing on Lacan’s reflections on the gaze as well as Walter Benjamin’s exploration of the expansion of the power of observation by drugs and technology, Staberg examines the specific qualities of Freud’s dream image, and the style of his “pictorial writing.”

Finally, we end this volume where we started: at Freud’s dream of Irma’s Injection. Henrik Klasson focuses on the scene where several male doctors examine the young female Irma, at the time Freud’s patient, and inject her with a solution. Klasson claims that the implicit sexual material of this scene has not received sufficient attention and connects it to archaic and mythological imagery found in the substratum of Western culture.

*The Interpretation of Dreams* not only put forward some interesting ideas, it made new things possible. The book inspired not only people working with psychology and psychiatry, as it became foundational for a whole new practice and discipline, psychoanalysis, but also artists, cultural theorists, political activists and more. Freud’s book on

dreams and awakening awakened a whole era. With our “reawakening Freud” we aim for the same impulse that the book originally spurred. Reawakening what Freud stood for in today’s cultural and academic milieu that somehow has forgotten, put to sleep, the groundbreaking approaches and ideas of the book.

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- 1 Freud 1985: 319
  - 2 Freud 1985: 319
  - 3 Freud 1985: 319
  - 4 Freud 1971b: 5
  - 5 Felman 1993: 91
  - 6 Lacan 1998: 59
  - 7 Hayes 2008: 2080-281
  - 8 Freud 1971c: 517

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