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The Gaze in the Field of Dreams

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the special quality of dreams and dreamwork is depicted in striking images. These not only give an idea of the peculiarities of dreams. In fact, it is precisely here that Freud's art of representation is at its sharpest: in its simplicity it generates the idea of a secret. "I have a kind of pictorial riddle (rebus) before me", it is said of the manifest dream.¹ The processes of dreaming are read in images in which the world of thought is condensed in a way reminiscent of the hieroglyphs that fascinated 17th-century Baroque culture. When the elastic constructions of the dream crystallize in Freud's representation, they can form "fragment, rune".¹

The book's material consists of a variety of recorded dreams, the author's own and dreams taken from clinical experience. The dreams, with their interpretation according to the method developed in the work, are part of a self-analysis carried out during these years. The

i «In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is fragment, rune». «Externally and stylistically [...] the written presses toward image»; «this amorphous fragment as which allegorical image writing reveals itself», Benjamin 2019: 186, 185

dreams are given suggestive names such as “the dream of Irma’s injection”, “non vixit” or “the beetle dream”. Not infrequently, they are concentrated in striking details that give the individual dreams a unique character. Some may simply consist of a composition of phonemes forming a nonsense word, as in “the autodidacts” for example, while others may evolve around a “thought being succeeded by a picture”, as in the dream “R. is my uncle”.² In the dream – that first appears as “nonsense” to Freud, then “disagreeable” – two faces merge, as in Galton’s technique to “photograph several faces on the same plate”.³

Among these recorded dreams, the short dream of the botanical monograph stands out for its outstanding clarity and revealing themes. The elements of the manifest dream will unfold to form an intricate thematic web. This web includes fantasies about the dreamer’s own career and psychoanalytic practice, recollections of the so-called cocaine episode, and shards of an oedipal constellation in which a sister is given significance in a way that is never really explored. In the dream depicted, every detail seems to have been chosen with the aim of producing an effect of conciseness and sharpness: “I had written a monograph on a certain plant. The book lay before me and I was at the moment turning over a folded coloured plate. Bound up in each copy there was a dried specimen of the plant, as though it had been taken from a herbarium.”⁴ The dream exemplifies the fascinating imprint that the exploration of the hallucinatory field of dreams makes on Freud’s art of representation. The fact that what is shown in the dream separates the perceptual from the consciousness points to a distinction between the gaze and the eye, which radically raises the question of seeing in the dream.ⁱⁱ But what gives the dream image its specific aesthetic quality? The particulars: the monograph, the outline of a dried plant, the unfolding plate?

The dream image characterizes an intense now: the subject of the dream is *just* turning over an inserted colored plate, it says. Freud insists on always rendering the dream in the present tense, something Strachey’s English edition overlooks.⁵ “The present tense is the one in which wishes are represented as fulfilled” he states.⁶ The dream image appears as a lighted object without shadows, its elements drawn

ii «The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field», Lacan 1977: 73. See also Lacan 1988: 146

entirely without background. The description evokes the effect of something being immediately emphasized, of something being given. The elements of the dream are presented as a characteristic. This is captured in particular in the phrase “the book lay before me”. The elements of the dream – the colored plate, the dried plant “as though it had been taken from a herbarium” – seem without horizon, the dream image has no depth. Indeed, the phenomena take on the character of points – all the description provides is focus, as if there were neither perspective nor periphery.

In order to capture the particular sharpness that characterizes this dream image, we must partially depart from Freud’s own interpretation, to a certain extent giving central elements of it a different direction. This is particularly true of the concept of intensity, of the meaning of the image in general; finally, we are approaching the presence of a mental landscape. We are moving towards the point where objective content collapses to make way for a world of fragments. It is a matter of isolating the *style* of the representation; the way in which the work functions aesthetically, how it can generate certain effects. Style then refers to a set of variations in language, a kind of modulation that draws language to its absolute limits: to the “primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image and tone converge”.⁷ Style then marks the moment when language is not defined by what is said but what makes it take a certain shape. The writer becomes in this sense a clinician who can isolate possible forms of existence. Identifying a particular style then becomes not a matter of interpretation, but a form of experimentation that responds to what is happening in the writing, if by that we mean an outcome whose patterns must be unknown. The written does not render the visible but makes something visible. Experimentally isolating style in this way is not tied to a study of the author, or even a thematic reading, but it does make it possible to uncover a certain *constellation* of representations. The characteristics emerge most clearly if they are juxtaposed with others.

Walter Benjamin’s exploration of the expansion of the power of observation by drugs and technology or the opaque points developed in Franz Kafka’s short stories can sharpen the analysis. Benjamin’s engagement with Kafka’s world accompanies the major projects that occupied him during his exile and is concentrated in the essay he wrote in Paris in 1934. Benjamin’s reading of Kafka is oriented around the “secret” the interpretation of the parable that is never exhausted in

terms of what is “explainable”.⁸ His reading instead takes hold of certain impenetrable places, from which endless series can be unfolded: “he took all conceivable precautions against the interpretation of his writing.”⁹

Another point of departure is Jacques Lacan’s discussion of the gaze and its relationship to desire. In his second seminar from 1954-55, Lacan develops the concept of the imaginary introduced with the *mirror stage*. In the reading of the dream of Irma’s injection, it forms a way of thinking about the dream’s character of image, which Freud explained with the phenomenon of regression. With the reorientation that takes place ten years later with the eleventh seminar on the role of the visual field and the imaginary, the difference between seeing and the eye is understood as a fundamental gap that can be traced back to castration. When we try to identify the style that characterizes the specific pictorial writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the question of the dream image is raised based on these premises. But we can also see the presence of something else, namely the effects of the drug, inherent in the network of elements that the dream work leads to. The dream’s allusions to cocaine, which turn out to run like a secret layer through the analyses in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, therefore become significant. These are not only given thematic significance; they are indistinguishable from the peculiar sharpness that characterizes the designated dream images. The dream of the botanical monograph is one of the dreams that most clearly testifies to the cocaine episode, Freud’s therapeutic experiment with the drug and its effects. Finally, the specifically visual quality of the dream opens up the place where an unconscious operates; with *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud not only exposes the workings of an unconscious, he invents a language to show them. In his lecture on “The Freudian unconscious and ours”, Lacan has localized it at a point where something hangs between the cause and its effect, where a gap or a crack opens up.¹⁰ It is something *unrealized*. This is where the question of style can come into play. This point coincides with the analyst’s position insofar as he allows himself to be “besieged” as it were, by a “world of shades”, a zone created by the analyst’s presence.¹¹ That the analyst in this case holds the pen is thus crucial to the style we can crystallize from the text. If the punctuality of the dream image bears traces of the unconscious, it touches this zone of ghosts. Its elements – the drug’s intensification of perception, the image on which the unconscious has left its mark, and the gaze as it appears in the field of the dream – interact in Freud’s art

of representation as manifested in the dream of the botanical monograph.

But can we even talk about style when it comes to a work like *The Interpretation of Dreams*? After all, in hermeneutics, style denotes the individual imprint, an aspect of a work that makes it unique and associated with a specific voice. In the field of art, it guarantees the presence of a human experience, unlike technology where individuality is something random and irrelevant.¹² But how can such a thing be applied to a text whose form and effect do not correspond to a hermeneutic “intention” in that sense? Instead of a literary expression determined by aesthetic considerations, we are faced with an art of representation whose form seems to be an effect of the workings of the unconscious. If we consider the specific intensity and sharpness of the recorded dream images in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* --of which the dream of the botanical monograph is a striking example --from an aesthetic perspective, it comes closer to the realm of technology: the peculiar sharpness of the recorded dream images appears as effects that the author himself must consider as something precisely random and irrelevant. When he proofread the finished book in the fall of 1899, he also complained in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess about its “form”, which he found unsatisfactory. The presentation lacks the exalted purity of expression that corresponds to his ideals and seems rather colored by its subject, the dream.¹³ But in developing the dream elements and the nodes they form, Freud notes in his analysis of the dream of the botanical monograph that we here “find ourselves in a factory of thought where, as in the ‘weaver’s masterpiece’: ein Tritt tausend Fäden regt”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the dream seems a “fragmentary remnant of the total dream-work”, a “highly incomplete and fragmentary version” of the extensive dream-thoughts.¹⁵

The fact that the dream content appears to be a transfer of the dream thoughts to another mode of expression means that it is “expressed as it were in a pictorial script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts”.¹⁶ The psychoanalytic work is thus about isolating individual elements of this language. In this respect, the presentation corresponds to the precision prescribed by psychoanalytic work. In his *Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis*, Freud describes the pursuit of precision with the example of “the surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy, and concentrates his mental forces on the single aim of performing the operation as skilfully as possible”.¹⁷

Walter Benjamin distinguishes the surgeon from the magician in that, at the decisive moment, the latter refrains from relating to the patient as one human being to another: “rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him”.¹⁸ The magician and the surgeon relate to each other like painter and cameraman, he says. The former observes from a distance, the latter penetrates deep into the tissues of his subject. Benjamin concludes: “There is a tremendous difference in the picture they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law”.¹⁹ *The Interpretation of Dreams* reveals such decomposed images, distorted according to a principle Freud will name primary process.

The dream is the residue of a continuous “unconscious thinking”. Therefore, “it must be allowed that the great bulk of the thoughts which are revealed in analysis were already active during the process of forming the dream” as a result of an “astonishing” densification process,²⁰ the manifest dream appears as the residue of a self-organizing system. The factory of thoughts is residually active. The imprints of this production are captured in effects that are embodied in the kind of pictorial writing the dream manifests. The result is reminiscent of Jugend ornaments in which body and technology are linked; according to Walter Benjamin “the real meaning of Jugendstil is not expressed in this ideology. It represents the last attempted sortie of an art besieged in its ivory tower by technology”.²¹ The dream interpretation by Freud’s hand, exposes the amalgam between language and other artificial semiotic systems, it shows how meaning processes are active in fields where culture and biology communicate.²² This distinguishes the aesthetic we can detect here. Later, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud would almost ironically identify psychoanalytic discourse as a “figurative language” among others. Nevertheless, Jean Starobinski, for example, has sought to uncover rhetorical patterns in the overall structure of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, an example of which he finds in the introduction to the third chapter: “When, after passing through a narrow defile, we suddenly emerge upon a piece of high ground, where the path divides and the finest prospects open up on every side, we may pause for a moment and consider in which direction we shall first turn our steps”.²³ However, the analysis in the following approaches the details and the specific quality we can infer there at the level of style. We place greater emphasis on the phrase inserted in the letter to Fliess in which the sketch is presented: “Then

there is a cavernous defile through which I lead my readers – my specimen dream with its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad jokes – and then, all at once, the high ground and the open prospect and the question: ‘Which way do you want to go?’”²⁴ We place our attention on the details rather than the staged view and imaginary turning point, that is: the depicted dream with “its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad joke”. Therefore, the analysis of the statement will go in an opposite direction to the hermeneutic one. The ambition is not to find a “meaning” behind the linguistic “event” of the statement, hidden in its multiplicity of particulars. Instead of dissolving the peculiarities of Freud’s representation, considered as an “irrationality”, into something that would relate to them “rationally”,²⁵ the question is asked: why so and not otherwise?²⁶

INTERPRETATION EN DÉTAIL

Our example, the dream of the botanical monograph, testifies to a particular form of attention. Freud starts from the detail, in his work with the analysand he must “put the dream before him cut up into pieces” the method is therefore an “interpretation en *détail*”.²⁷ Benjamin linked the contemporary focus of attention, its possibilities and shortcomings, to the development of technology: “It is indeed a different reality that speaks to the camera from the one which addresses the eye; different above all in the sense that instead of a space worked through by a human consciousness there appears one which is affected unconsciously.”²⁸ He saw the perception broadened by technical means as analogous to what psychoanalysis could uncover through its method: “Photography with its various aids, (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this. Photography makes aware for the first time the optical-unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.”²⁹ The attentiveness that characterizes the dream image does not only characterize dreams subjected to Freud’s analysis, but is part of a kind of constellation, we can look for it in Kafka’s prose pieces as well as in the perception changed by technology. The camera is more related to technology and medicine than to landscape painting and evocative portraits, Benjamin points out. Faced with cellular tissues and structural relationships, photography “uncover[s] this material physiognomic aspects of pictorial words which live in the smallest thing, perceptible yet covert enough to find refuge in daydreams, but which once enlarged and capable of formulation, show the difference

between technology and magic to be entirely a matter of historical variables”.³⁰

In Freud’s recorded dream images, we find an astonishing fusion of an operative technical vision and biological phenomena. The uncovered particulars of the dream image open up urgent depths in the organs. When Irma finally opens her mouth, Freud sees in the representation of the dream of her injection “*extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose*”.³¹ There is another example of this. In the dream of the preparation of his own body, body parts and internal organs are depicted as if in magnification. The dream is reproduced in several places in the book – different elements are highlighted, and their composition shifts, but throughout Freud’s mentor, the physiologist Ernst von Brücke, forms a focal point. A first segment is reproduced under the heading of counting and speaking in dreams: “old Brücke had set me the task of making a dissection; [...] I fished something out that looked like a piece of crumpled silver-paper”.³² This draws attention to how a proper name has forced “a far-fetched use of out-of-the-way associations”.³³ The word “Stanniol” – for “crumpled silver-paper” – is associated with an author’s name Stannius, whose treatise on the nervous system of fish won the respect of the dreamer as a child. When Freud returns to the dream in his treatment of what he calls absurd dreams, the inserted words “*strangely enough*” are initially the starting point for an analysis that will lead to the author’s own self-analysis and the difficult task of publishing what belongs to the author’s “own private character”.³⁴ The self-analysis is here a preparation of the body, while the words inserted will unfold in a chain of thought that revolves around the idea of one’s own death and culminates in the fear of the idea that “children may perhaps achieve what the father has failed to”.³⁵ Given the “extent of condensation” Freud writes, a detailed analysis of the dream would take up many pages.

Old Brücke must have set me some task; *Strangely enough*, it related to a dissection of the lower part of my own body, my pelvis and legs, which I saw before me as though in the dissecting-room, but without noticing their absence in myself and also without a trace of any gruesome feeling. [...] The pelvis had been eviscerated, and it was visible now in its superior, now in its inferior, aspect, the two being mixed together. Thick flesh-coloured protuberances (which, in the dream itself, made

me think of haemorrhoids) could be seen. Something which lay over it and was like crumpled silver-paper had also to be carefully fished out.³⁶

If we leave interpretation aside for a moment, the specific nature of the dream as an image, and in particular the seeing that is recorded, becomes apparent. Rather than a total image, we are facing distorted and frightening fragments. The body “which I saw before me” lies shattered. Parts of the body are missing, others appear as in an enlarged close-up. The view that is released is thus given a technical character, separated from the subject: “it was visible”, it is said. The gaze moves like a camera from above and below where modes are mixed together. What is shown are extreme close-ups of organs, or parts of organs, as if disfigured: “thick flesh-coloured protuberances”. The reproduction of the dream establishes a different reality than the one the eye sees, and with Benjamin it can be said that, “instead of a space worked through by a human consciousness there appears one which is affected unconsciously”.³⁷ Through the “close-up, space expands” while we are confronted with organs and cellular tissues, “entirely new structures of matter” are brought to light.³⁸ The way the dream sequence is depicted thus provides examples of peculiarities in the hallucinatory imagery of dreams.

In Kafka’s short story ‘A Country Doctor’, we find a text in which strange transformations and displacements make the narrative resemble the dream work Freud tried to capture in his seminal work. Here, a doctor, summoned on an urgent journey by a case of illness, meets a bedridden boy who at first does not seem ill at all. But as he gets closer, “ – now I find out that, yes indeed the young man is ill. On his right side, in the region of the hip, a wound the size of the palm of one’s hand has opened up. Rose coloured, in many different shadings, dark in depths, brighter on the edges. “When the doctor sees it” close up, a complication is apparent”. Suddenly the wound now appears as if technically enlarged: “Worms, as thick and long as my little finger, themselves rose coloured and also spattered with blood, are wriggling their white bodies with many limbs from their stronghold in the inner of the wound towards the light.”³⁹ These technical enlargements and displacements of the gaze then result in an image in which the series is condensed as if in a point of intensity, an image whose interpretation cannot be exhausted. “Poor young man, there’s no helping you. I have

found out your great wound. You are dying from this flower on your side.”⁴⁰

What we find in these constellations are specific techniques – such as montage, the approach to the new medium of photography and film – but they appear as intensities.

In Freud’s work, the gaze itself can also become the subject of dreams and dream interpretation. The case study of the so-called Wolf Man is an example of this. The study lets a childhood dream recounted in the analysis form a kind of nave for the work. The distinctive character of the dream is given the same function as a point of intensity in the analysis as a whole as the open mouth in the dream of Irma’s injection did, whose condensation resembled the terrifying appearance of Medusa’s head. In the analysis of the Russian aristocrat Sergei Pankeyev, who, accompanied by a valet and a personal physician, came to Freud’s office in 1910 with a letter of recommendation after two years of staying in various sanatoriums, the dream is reproduced at a moment when the work has stagnated, when it has tended to become intellectualizing.⁴¹ The dream derives from a distant epoch of the analyst’s childhood; in it something indefinite is concentrated. The retelling of the dream in the analysis points to the dissolution of the subject and enables the emergence of another personality, a composite of different selves. The dream’s immediate perception of a multiplicity – the wolves – will bestow on the dreamer the proper name, Wolf Man, which will become his “true” one, even if it has since been “disfigured, misspelled, rewritten into a patronyme”.⁴² The details of the dream are characterized by intensity and sharpness. “*Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window*”.⁴³ The only action in this dream is that the window opens, there is no other movement, the wolves are perfectly still, but, it says, they “looked at me. It seemed as though they had riveted their whole attention upon me”.⁴⁴ At the same time, they are enigmatic enough to raise the question of whether they really are wolves. In the interpretation of the dream, details and their rich chains of signification lead to the reconstruction of a primal scene, which is not re-experienced, but where there is no doubt that it took place: “there’s a far more significant gap between this scene and what the subject sees in the dream than the normal distance between latent and manifest content of a dream”.⁴⁵ Two moments make an impression on the dreamer, “the perfect stillness and immobility of the wolves”, and “the strained attention with which they all looked

at him".⁴⁶ To this Freud adds the "lasting sense of reality, too, which the dream left behind it",⁴⁷ which he considered valuable. The analysis traces the solution of the dream's riddle in the chain of associations, its clustering of signifiers around individual details recorded in language. In this work, dream interpretation is oriented around the intensity of the gaze. The subject of the dream loses itself in the intense gaze of the wolves; everything is concentrated on the fascinating effect of the gaze.

But what is this seeing in the dream? Or, to put it another way: who is it that sees? The question is brought to the fore by Freud's analysis of the primal scene, the fantasy of or the obscure memory traces of the child's witnessing of the parents' sexual intercourse, which in the interpretation emerges as the core hidden behind the dream's images. The interpretation – that the "attentive looking, which in the dream was ascribed to the wolves, should rather be shifted on to him",⁴⁸ the dreamer – points precisely in the direction of *the gaze*. In Freud's interpretation, it simply indicates that the dream, in a distorted form, reproduces the dreamer's intense looking at the parents. But if we think that this intense looking separates the gaze from the seeing, a key is given to the phenomena that have been the focus of our interest. The gaze becomes directly linked to the unconscious memory traces that are active in the dream image. The gaze is hardly the subject of any particular investigation in Freud's writings, nor is the concept explored in any detail in them. It is only with Lacan's teaching that the gaze is articulated as a central concept, and not least in relation to the drive, it is added to its "list", so to speak.⁴⁹ Lacan distinguishes seeing from looking, not as a division between the visible and the invisible, but as a division that is "manifested at the level of the scopic field". This establishes the concept of the gaze in psychoanalytic theory.⁵⁰

The gaze, says Lacan, is what runs across and crosses the eye's registration of things and our relation to them, the forms and shapes of the imagination, but which always escapes the seeing. Thus not only does the gaze remain hidden from sight, but its function is also to secretly control this sight that imagines itself as a consciousness. The way to localize the gaze, according to Lacan, is through what he refers as the "function of, let us say the word, of *the stain*".⁵¹ This refers to the dream image's quality of absolute presence, its punctual representation that knows no background or horizon. It is this that appears to us in the dream images with their points of intensity. We

notice the function of the so-called stain in the forms of attention that characterize the representation, as I have tried to show here with some examples.⁵²

NET-LIKE EXTENSIONS

Already in the introductory remarks preceding the first analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, attention is given pride of place. It is easy to link the astonishing clarity with which the recorded dreams operate to this quality, for attention is not only the particular quality at work here in the psychic processes, it is also intimately connected with the psychoanalytic experience as such, and as a result, Freud's writing. The concentration on individual details or, for that matter, moving assemblages of discrete elements lends intensity to the depicted mental processes. It manifests itself, in Freud's vocabulary, as a psychic force in the work of dreaming, and can, by a multiple determination, put together the vast material of a situation or event, holding it, so to speak, in a picture. They "constituted 'nodal points' upon which a great number of the dream-thoughts converged, and because they had several meanings in connection with the interpretation of the dream."⁵³ In Freud's account, intensity is thus expressed as the dream's now, which gives the recording of it a definite touch of precision; the account is here, in Freud's words, subordinated to the condensing work of the primary processes.

In the dream of the botanical monograph, each element has such intensity. In the dream work, they are treated as discrete elements which become the object of an analysis, as it is called, "*en detail*", in which new series of data can be generated continuously. During the day, the dreamer has seen in a shop window a monograph the title of which, *The Genus Cyclamen*, reminds him – the plant is his wife's favorite flower – of a short vignette: a young woman reproaches her husband for having forgotten their anniversary, which he usually celebrates with flowers. The anecdote of the young woman, a former patient who has recently met his wife, leads the association to his concept of forgetting as an active process. This series of elements is now crossed by another the starting point of which is also the element of "monograph". "Once, I recalled, I really had written something in the nature of a monograph of plant", Freud recalls, "namely a dissertation on the *coca-plant*".⁵⁴ This new element, initially oriented around the subject of "the anesthetic properties of cocaine", goes on to generate elements that include a day-dream about his own success, but

also conceal a memory – “a specific event lay behind it. Shortly after Koller’s discovery, my father had in fact been attacked by Glaucoma; my friend Dr. Königstein, the ophthalmic surgeon, had operated on him; while Dr. Koller had been in charge of the cocaine anaesthesia.”⁵⁵ The new element thus concerns the “history of the birth of cocaine”, but the series branches out in yet another direction through an encounter with a Professor *Gärtner*, whose young wife’s “blooming appearance” has struck the dreamer. In this way, the elements monograph and plant can become the starting point for associations which, when written down, develop into series.

The intense elements of the dream image become nodes in complex networks with multiple starting points. Where the elements appear most dense, the most intense dream images appear as an effect. The open book with the colored plate is such an image. In the dream work as it is presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the conditions are now given for a reading of this intensity of observation that goes in a certain direction. The “folded colored plate” functions - through the analysis performed in detail - as such a condensation, which brings together details such as medical journals and the meeting with a colleague with a childhood memory which Freud analyzes as a “screen memory”, that is, it covers up the presence of other memories, Freud calls them, infantile “passion”. However, the author leaves these as a gap in the network: “For reasons with which we are not concerned, I shall not pursue the interpretation of this dream any further, but will merely indicate the direction in which it lay”.⁵⁶ Childhood memory, which appears to be characteristic of the function of the screen memory, is given a peculiar sharpness, similar to that which characterized the phenomena that formed the starting point of our investigation: “the picture of the two of us blissfully pulling the book to pieces (leaf by leaf, *like an artichoke*, I found myself saying) was almost the only plastic memory I retained from that period of my life”.⁵⁷

Allusions to cocaine run through the dream analyses in *Interpretation of Dreams* – and this applies to the author’s own dreams, those associated with Freud’s self-analysis – almost like a secret layer. They are found in the footnotes, interspersed and scattered in the excessive caprice that accompanies each dream. Cocaine is given a specific charge that is noticeable in the quality of the representation itself. The sharpening, the intensity and, not least, the clinical look at the abundant elements of the dream seem inseparable from the changes in the system of perception that the drug brings about. Freud called it

a “therapeutic experiment”.⁵⁸ The abundant contemporary documentation of the effects of the coca leaf led him to explore the drug for a specific purpose, namely to extract the pharmacological properties of cocaine. In particular, the depressive veils of gloom seemed to be dispelled by its action.

The monograph, published as early as 1884, describes the effect of cocaine after “repeated experiments on myself and others”. These attempts have a predecessor. Goethe’s self-experimentation with vision in order to make its physiology observable heralded a nineteenth-century epistemological restructuring by which the human subject could be subjected to experimentation. Here, also G. Theodor Fechner can be seen as a precursor of Freud. His experiments, conducted with a view to objectively measuring the luminous swarm of perception, form a link between Goethe’s speculative approaches and the formative science of the late nineteenth century, when the clinical gaze crystallized.⁵⁹ The common denominator here is self-experimentation, whether it involves exposing the eyes to direct sunlight, confining the body in a dark room, or meticulously observing the effects of chemical substances on awareness and perception. Freud’s experiments go back on these but add something radically new. The real innovation is perhaps the creation of a literary persona. The author simultaneously exposes his own body and perception to the effects of the drug while observing them soberly. Initially, there is a brief stage of intoxication that gives way to the real “cocaine euphoria” that follows, with its cooling effect and changes in pulse. With a breathing that becomes “lower and deeper”, a state of increased self-control finally sets in, and with it a vitalized feeling that allows an increased capacity for intellectual work. The exact changes in state of mind are always dependent on a variety of factors, such as the cocaine preparation used, the dose, the manner of ingestion, etc. - but above all, the effects are felt in the form of altered perception. Cocaine allows for different states of mind than the usual ones. The discoveries Freud made during his experiments were decisive for the therapeutic techniques he was to develop. The drug acts directly on the perceptual system. Freud makes himself an experimental subject when he experiments on himself as ‘on a small animal’, as Nietzsche ones puts it. Walter Benjamin notes: “It is one of the tacit suppositions of psychoanalysis that the clear-cut antithesis between sleep and waking has no value for determining the empirical forms of consciousness of the human being, but instead yields before

an unending variety of concrete states of consciousness, conditioned by every conceivable level of wakefulness within all possible centers.”⁶⁰

The condition is described, not as excited, rather the “absence of depressive elements” is emphasized. It is, Freud writes, “the normal mode of a well-nourished cerebral cortex, which is ‘unaware’ of its bodily organs”.⁶¹ From the presentation, then, it is as if the drug releases the action of a pure thinking faculty, as if the resistance of the relays in a circuit were completely overcome with an increased speed in all operations as immediate gain. With it comes “the wonderful stimulating effect of coca”, which we know by its effects: prolonged capacity for intellectual work without fatigue or hunger but with maintained motor ability.⁶²

In the absence of depressive elements, Freud, like many other doctors of the time, saw cocaine as a potential resource in psychiatry, especially in its ability to act on nerve centers without “reducing activity”, which is why there was great confidence in its therapeutic effect in cases of “hysteria, hypochondria, melancholic inhibition, stupor and similar maladies”, not least in the treatment of the disorders known as neurasthenia.⁶³ Freud describes the general effects as an elevated state of mind, increased physical and intellectual capacity, but they also depend on the individual’s disposition and can vary between euphoria, confusion and discomfort.⁶⁴ Soon Freud was prescribing the drug to friends and patients while using it more and more himself. Indeed, the effects of cocaine seemed “miraculous” to him. It seemed to act directly on mental processes in a way that was both revitalizing and stimulating. He felt that he was close to a discovery which, it seemed to him, would bring him real success and his final breakthrough, with financial independence and, by extension, the possibility of marriage. Everything seemed for a moment to depend on this drug.

The reality however, would be different, as discussed in the previous chapter. When Freud prescribed cocaine to his close friend and colleague Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow in 1885, it was to “replace” and thus dissolve a morphine addiction he had contracted. von Fleischl-Marxow had become dependent on increasing doses of morphine as a result of an infected injury to his hand, causing chronic pain. He was one of Ernst von Brücke’s assistants at the physiology department and was considered a promising talent. Brücke was one of Freud’s early mentors and in his laboratory, Freud found himself at home. He came to admire not only Brücke himself but also his assistants, especially Fleischl-Marxow, whom he found to be a ‘dazzling

personality'.⁶⁵ It is also in this environment that he gets to know Josef Breuer. When Freud began experimenting with cocaine in 1884, the drug was little known in wider circles but had been tried out in the army to enhance soldiers' performance. Initially, cocaine also seemed to overcome the withdrawal that followed the administration of morphine, as if cocaine itself had what was then called an "antagonistic effect" on morphine.⁶⁶ However, the consequences were fatal. The possibilities envisioned by Freud in the monograph soon turned into a nightmare; before long, von Fleischl-Marxow had gradually increased the dose, while the unbearable pain made it impossible for him to avoid morphine; eventually, he injected the cocaine, which led to the "profoundest despair". Freud, who on many occasions sought to come to the rescue, was horrified by his friend's agitated state, in which he was plagued by severe insomnia convulsions and finally a delirium tremens with "white snakes creeping over his skin".⁶⁷ In the dream of Irma's injection, it was precisely reproaches of this kind that crept into the ramifications of the analysis of associations: Freud writes, "the misuse of that drug had hastened the death of a dear friend of mine. This had been before 1895".⁶⁸

The cocaine episode coincides with important events in the early phase of Freud's career. This is when he is on the threshold of formulating the method and theory of psychoanalysis. During this period, he distinguished himself as a researcher through a number of neurological works, including the study of aphasia, which sought to link the inability to speak to language centers in the brain, and other publications in the medical field. This work helped to make the study trip to Paris, where he stayed at Professor Jean Martin Charcot's clinic in Paris, fruitful. During the period in which the material and data are collected which form the basis of the theoretical and methodological considerations manifested in 1900 with *The Interpretation of Dreams* and with psychoanalysis as such, Freud writes what would be his last neurological studies.⁶⁹ Against this background and given the medical field around 1900, Freud's preoccupation with cocaine can be considered a phenomenon of the time. What seems surprising is actually that he turns away from cocaine as well as other drugs or medicines to work out a method based on abstinence. Once he has abandoned his faith in the therapeutic effect of cocaine, he must seek other ways of acting on the psychic apparatus. The abandonment of cocaine, with its ability to directly manipulate the perceptual system, allows a different path to be taken. With this turn, a new concept of the unconscious

can be formulated. In the place of the drug with its direct action on the perceptual system and consciousness, an inaccessible plane is now assumed whose derivatives instead require interpretation. With *The Interpretation of Dreams*, this unconscious is systematically articulated and given a place in the so-called psychic apparatus.

Through the series of elements extracted from the dream image with the botanical monograph and the network of references that run through *The Interpretation of Dreams*' analyses – which at times are condensed into concise images where the idea of cocaine is most clearly illustrated – a secret core emerges that seems to lend the dream images something of their uniqueness. The allusions to cocaine can be said to form a network of statements that, like a rhizome, branches out over the analyses in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. At times, the braid becomes denser in dream thoughts, like “a mushroom out of its mycelium”.⁷⁰ In 1927, Walter Benjamin accepted the offer to become a subject in the drug experiments of doctors Fritz Frankel and Ernst Joël. The experience contributed to his ambition to write a “significant book on hashish” that would be an “addition” to his “philosophical texts”. The book was never completed, but alongside the many records and notes made, there is an essay written in 1928 that partly takes on the character of a short story, *Hashish in Marseilles*. Like the essay on surrealism written at the same time, the picture is set against the backdrop of the “threshold between waking and sleeping”. In Benjamin's work, intoxication is related to the dream state. These states leave their mark on the specific style Benjamin's text achieves, which is evident from the very first line: “Marseille, July 29. At seven o'clock in the evening, after long hesitation, I took hashish. The self-observation creates an analytical sharpness, while the overwhelming impressions are captured in sharp images, embedded in a kind of melancholic monotony. So I lie on the bed, reading and smoking. Opposite me always this view of the belly of Marseille. The street I have seen so often is like a knife-cut.”⁷¹

As a concluding remark. Benjamin, like Freud, is attentive to the awakening and the necessarily fragmentary reproduction of the dream work. The net-like expansions they contain are condensed into images; Benjamin likens them to flowers: “What one writes down the following day is more than an enumeration of impressions. In the night, the trance sets itself off from everyday reality with fine, prismatic edges. It forms a kind of figure, and is more easily memorable. I would say: it shrinks and takes on the form of a flower.”⁷² For Freud, this

means that in these overdetermined condensations - which arise like the mushroom from the mycelium - a wish impulse is present. Dream thoughts always involve, in Lacan's words, *desire*.⁷³ The dream of the botanical monograph provides an example of such a dream thought, and it is also one of the passages in which the preoccupation with cocaine is presented most clearly. Cocaine and its effects - the therapeutic experiment with its manipulations of the perceptual apparatus, the addiction with its black holes and delirium - open up an uncanny layer in the book. It is as if these assemblages of material allow a plane that not only operates at the level of the content, but gives the dream images something of their uniqueness: the peculiar sharpness, the speed and slowness of the flow of images, the distinctive elements and the absence of a unified self. In short, these are some of the crucial elements we identified at the outset as dominant in Freud's art of representation when it comes to visualizing the images and processes of dreams. It is an effect that determines the peculiarities of style and whose manifestations, by Freud's own conclusion, are always derivatives of *unconscious* processes. It is this action that we see determining the peculiarities of style rather than the *meaning* of hermeneutic interpretation in which the *event* of language is resolved.

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- 1 Freud SE IV: 277
 - 2 Ibid.: 138
 - 3 Ibid.: 139
 - 4 Ibid.: 169
 - 5 Mahony 1977: 84f
 - 6 Freud SE V: 535
 - 7 Benjamin 2002: 262
 - 8 Benjamin 2015: 120
 - 9 Ibid.
 - 10 Lacan 1977: 17-28
 - 11 Ibid.: 23
 - 12 Ricoeur 1973: 129-141
 - 13 Freud, letter to W. Fließ, September 21, 1899
 - 14 Freud SE IV: 283
 - 15 Ibid.: 279, 281

16 Ibid.: 277
17 Freud SE XII: 115
18 Benjamin 2015: 227
19 Ibid.
20 Freud SE IV: 280f
21 Benjamin 1999: 9
22 Thonack 1997: 58
23 Freud SE IV: 122
24 Freud, letter to Fliess, August 6, 1899
25 Ricoeur 1973: 129-141
26 Foucault 1972: 137
27 Freud SE IV: 103-104
28 Benjamin 1972
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Freud SE IV: 107
32 Freud SE V: 413
33 Ibid.: 413
34 Ibid.: 453
35 Ibid.: 455
36 Ibid.: 452
37 Benjamin 1972: 8
38 Benjamin 2015a: 18
39 Kafka 1919
40 Ibid.
41 Lacan 1988: 175.
42 Deleuze and Guattari 1987
43 Freud SE XVII: 29
44 Ibid.
45 Lacan 1988: 176
46 Freud SE XVII: 33
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.: 34
49 Lacan 1977: 78
50 Ibid.: 73
51 Ibid.: 74
52 Ibid.
53 Freud SE IV: 283
54 Freud SE IV: 170
55 Freud SE IV: 171
56 Freud SE IV: 173
57 Freud SE IV: 172
58 Freud 1975: 3
59 Deleuze 1993: 92; Crary 1992: 141-149
60 Benjamin 1999: 316
61 Freud 1975: 60
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.: 64
64 Ibid.: 9, 58, 60
65 Freud SE XX: 9-10; Gay 1988: 32
66 Freud 1975: 71
67 Jones 1961: 91; Markel 2011: 78
68 Freud SE IV: 111
69 Solms & Saling 1990
70 Freud SE V: 525
71 Benjamin 2006: 118
72 Ibid.: 122f
73 Lacan 1975: 45

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