# Dream construction, deconstruction: what a re-reading of Freud on dreams can tell us about the structure of the unconscious and its relationship to deconstruction

# Dream Construction, Deconstruction:

## *What a re-reading of Freud on dreams can tell us about the structure of the unconscious and its relationship to deconstruction*

Joshua John Cunliffe

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Birkbeck College, University of London

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Joshua John Cunliffe

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# Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that a deconstructive approach to Freudian dream-work gives new perspective on how meaning is generated in the mind. Using that perspective I develop a new metaphor for mind, and an accompanying theory of meaning.

I argue that *The Interpretation of Dreams* suffered from assumptions about the nature of consciousness issuing from attachment to a 'metaphysics of presence'. This inhibited the development of metapsychology, putting concepts such as the unconscious, phantasy and repression on an unstable basis and contributing to the subsequent development of psychoanalysis in a fragmented manner. It also prevented Freud from reaching valuable philosophical conclusions about the relationship of the unconscious to consciousness.

Existing literature has examined Derrida's approach to Freud but this has found application primarily in fields such as literary and critical theory: far less attention has been paid to the potential *clinical* implications of a deconstructive reading of Freud, or the possibilities for a revised theory of mind.

Extending Derrida's delineation of Freud's metaphors for mind, I suggest a new metaphor, based on the method of Fractal Image Compression used to store images digitally. I claim this updated version of Freud's 'mystic writing pad' enables us to conceptualize how the mind processes experience to produce meaning based on structures of difference, thereby providing a challenge to traditional representational theories of mind.

This model of the mind provides a conceptual frame within which psychoanalytic theories can be evaluated and brought into conversation with each other. I use it as a tool to test different theories of dream interpretation, analysing a dream of my own. I then demonstrate how we can employ it to critically evaluate different psychoanalytic schools of thought by showing how my account supports and extends Bion's notion of 'dream-work-alpha', and challenges Lacan's ideas about language and the unconscious.

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# Acknowledgements

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“Freud had the courage to write, 'Without metapsychological speculation and theorizing — I had almost said "phantasying" — we shall not get another step forward' (1937a p.225). We cannot accept that our theories are fantasies. The best solution would be to accept that they are not the expression of scientific truth but an approximation to it, its analogue. Then there is no harm in constructing a myth of origins, provided we know that it can only be a myth.”

(Green 1975, p.18)

“…re-reading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere).”

(Barthes 1975, pp.15-16)

“We thus come to posit presence – and, in particular, consciousness, the being-next–to-itself of consciousness – no longer as the absolutely metrical form of being but as a ‘determination’ and an ‘effect’. Presence is a determination and effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but that of difference; it no more allows the opposition between activity and passivity than that between cause and effect of in-determination and determination, etc. This system is of such a kind that even to designate consciousness as an effect or determination – for strategic reasons, reasons that can be more or less clearly considered and systematically ascertained – is to continue to operate according to the vocabulary of that very thing to be de-limited.”

(Derrida 1979, p.147)

# 1

# Introduction

"Writing, here, is *techne* as the relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses. It opens up the question of technics: of the apparatus in general and of the analogy between the psychical apparatus and the nonpsychical apparatus. In this sense writing is the stage of history and the play of the world. It cannot be exhausted by psychology alone. That which, in Freud's discourse, opens itself to the theme of writing results in psychoanalysis being not simply psychology – nor simply psychoanalysis"

(Derrida 1978, p.278)

This quote from Derrida lays out the territory of this thesis and sums up what is, for me, both the appeal and the most significant contribution of psychoanalysis. As an undergraduate student of analytic philosophy (in the Anglo-American tradition) I was invited to consider the question "what is meaning?" and this became the substance of those three years of work. Although interesting, I found this also to be an unsatisfying pursuit, since both the questions asked and the methods used in that discipline seemed to me to take me far away from the human experience that gave form and depth to the original motivating question. When I began to read Freud, however, I found an enquiry into the nature of meaning which was far more profound and satisfying than any I had previously encountered. I clearly saw that Freud was not simply discussing psychopathology but addressing, in a spirit of real philosophical enquiry, the fundamental question of how human life comes to have meaning. And in his work I understood 'that which… opens itself to the theme of writing' to be the *metapsychology*, Freud's metaphorical attempts to sketch the mechanical workings of the mind. Whilst fascinated by his texts, I also struggled with the difficulties and contradictions in the models he put forward to help us

understand how meaning is generated. When I later read Derrida these contradictions were in turn revealed in a new light, as I began to see them as deriving from a commitment to what Derrida calls the 'metaphysics of presence'. What follows, then, is my attempt to bring the insight Derrida provided to bear on psychoanalytic metapsychology. In doing so, I contend that we also find that psychoanalysis is 'not simply psychology – nor simply psychoanalysis'.

## Whose Freud?

Freud's work is paradoxically both conservative and radical (Benjamin 1998; Bersani 1986; Dean & Lane 2001) and he has been seen as both Enlightenment scientist and alternatively "harbinger of the postmodern trajectory" (Barratt 1993, p.6). Considered by many, including Freud himself[1] to be his greatest work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* displays a commitment to a 'metaphysics of presence' (Derrida 1976, 1978, see below and Chapter 3) characteristic of Enlightenment thinking. Also present in this work, however, is the foundation of a radical critique of self-presence characteristic of contemporary post-structural thinking about self and subject. I argue that such conflicting positions point to a philosophical confusion at the root of Freud's dream theory[2] which prevents us from appreciating the philosophical and psychoanalytic implications of his work, and from following Freud's logic to its conclusion.

I will argue that a significant problem for Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*[3] is a failure to adequately engage with questions of meaning and the nature of consciousness. The metaphysics of presence led Freud, despite his best efforts, to

[1] Freud said of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a
[2] Confusion which is evident in much other psychoanalytic theorizing beside the dream theory, including in debates over repression, memory, primary and secondary process, and the nature of symbolic thought. I explore these confusions further in my literature review in the next chapter.
[3] Although Freud's thinking famously evolved throughout his working life (see for instance Sandler et. al 1997) meaning that some of the theoretical and philosophical problems in early work were addressed, a thoroughgoing exegesis of Freud's writings is a lifetime's task and not achievable in a mere doctoral thesis. More importantly though as I hope to show, many of the problems were not adequately resolved and their legacy continues to haunt psychoanalysis. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is such a monumental work, and contributes so much both in terms of metapsychology and clinical material, that it is an ideal place to identify foundational philosophical issues: for this reason I will keep my focus tightly on this work.

assume that he had a greater understanding of consciousness than he did, before he attempted to define the unconscious in opposition to it. With this instability at the origin of his enquiry, the whole of the book can be read as a reluctant and halting movement towards a consideration of the nature of consciousness, concluding as it does with a chapter entitled 'The Unconscious and Consciousness'.

This is important for two reasons: firstly, because although in the dream-book Freud made vital contributions to thinking about meaning and consciousness, I contend that these were limited by his commitment to a metaphysics of presence, which foreclosed on vital *philosophical* insight. And secondly, because the metapsychological picture that he drew in the *Interpretation of Dreams* contained within it unstable theoretical objects[4] derived from these philosophical problems (including, but not limited to, the concepts of repression, phantasy, and the unconscious itself), fault lines in psychoanalytic theory were created with ramifications that persist today[5]. Therefore, by addressing these philosophical issues I believe we can both gain philosophical insight, *and* help to address intractable problems in psychoanalytic theory. My aim is to follow through on Freud's intention "to clarify and carry deeper the theoretical assumptions on which a psycho-analytic system could be founded" (1917d, p.222 footnote).

Initially I will undertake a deconstructive reading of the dream-book, inspired by Derrida, which will interrogate assumptions and prejudices about consciousness, and help to show that in order to investigate the unconscious we must investigate consciousness at the same time. Having examined the wider operations of the metaphysics of presence in *The Interpretation of Dreams* I will narrow my focus to the problem of mental representation. I will show that difficulties and inconsistencies in Freud's idea of mental representation form a conceptual fulcrum where questions of consciousness and meaning meet: a locus of difficulty but also a possible site of development and breakthrough. I claim that Freud lacked a well-developed model for understanding mental representation, and this led him into

[4] Alan Bass (1996) speaks of "the way in which Freud's thought hovers between the modern and the postmodern, as has psychoanalysis ever since" (p.630).
[5] In Chapter 2, I will look at some of these present-day issues and how they connect back to Freud's earliest theorizing.

difficulties, from his 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*[6] right through to 1925's *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad*. Derrida has traced this trajectory in *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1978). In this text Derrida follows the evolution of metaphors for mind in Freud, emphasizing questions of memory, perception, registration and representation. In order to address the difficulties with Freud's idea of mental representation I intend to continue this evolution by adding a metaphor of my own, drawn from my understanding of the process of digital image compression – in particular, the process of Fractal Image Compression (FIC).
In brief[7], this is a means of storing images digitally in a space (memory) efficient way, by identifying parts of the image that are similar to other parts, and storing the *transformations* which connect them. In this way a coherent whole can be built out of iterative operations on disparate parts: ultimately an image such as a photograph can be stored in great detail through the registration of information about transformative operations on relations of difference, and crucially, in a form which is in no way isomorphic to the original (so the registration of information in the mind and in memory does not involve the *re-presentation* of an external reality in an isomorphic form). Therefore I argue that using FIC as the basis for a model of mental processes allows us to conceptualize mental representation as a system of differences rather than, for instance, the capturing of essential qualities. This poses what might be thought of as an *ontological* challenge to the status of mental objects, and enables a critique of what Kim (1980) characterizes as "The Cartesian doctrine of the mind as the private inner stage, "the Inner Mirror," in which cognitive action takes place" (p.589)[8].

An enquiry into the nature of mental representation necessarily includes, ultimately, the representation of that knowledge itself. Thus such an investigation may suggest limits to that knowledge, which has consequences for the language and method employed in this thesis. This is the reason for what may seem to be a 'confusion of tongues'; the unusual combination of attempting to proceed by rigorous logical steps and considering the role of cognitive mechanisms, but at the same time following and endorsing Derridean conclusions about the impossibility

[6] Published in 1950.
[7] I will explore the model in detail in Chapter 5.
[8] Kim's text is a critique of Rorty's (1979) famous attack on what he saw as philosophy's traditional over-reliance on a representational theory of perception and a correspondence theory of truth.

of arriving at self-evident terminating truths with correspondingly exact language. I do not see these as opposing methods[9]; I propose to read *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a work of philosophy, concentrating on Freud's metapsychology, and in this thesis I will demonstrate why I do not think it is right to demarcate strictly between between philosophy and metapsychology. This is in my view a continuation of Freud's work in inviting us to consider how our knowledge develops in the context of experience. As a consequence questions traditionally thought of as metaphysical may be approached afresh in the domain of psychology. As Freud put it:

> One could venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to *transform metaphysics into metapsychology*. (1901, p.259, my emphasis)

Alan Bass expands:

> Metapsychology, the understanding of the unconscious in terms of defensive displacements of energy, *is for Freud the "real" explanation of the supposed deductions of the philosopher*, the theologian, and the paranoid. (1993, pp.199-200, my emphasis)[10]

The FIC based model must be understood in relation to Freud's original text, as it is intended to complement and develop the work that Freud did there in providing both rich subjective descriptions of dream experiences and a metapsychology which sought to explain how (and why) those experiences were generated. I argue that although the dream-work is a useful analysis of the operations that take place

[9] In Chapter 3 I will make the case for using Derridean insight in such a 'constructive' way, though it is unusual to do so.

[10] It is not my intention however to conduct, as Derrida puts it, 'a psychoanalysis of philosophy' (1978, p.246). Not least because the terms and techniques of psychoanalysis are contingent within the episteme (Barratt 1993), and what we are concerned with here is the opening of our discourse into a wider question, by pursuing the 'theme of writing'. I will however probe the anxious and epistemophilic movements that shape knowledge, because as Derrida has begun to illustrate, the text of the psyche is structured in part by the anxious wish for resolution that creates conceptual oppositions and 'closures'. I intend to resist a particular kind of metaphysical closure (which Freud resisted but I will argue, ultimately succumbed to in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) by way of an inquiry into the ontological status of mental objects (mental representations).

in the mind, the metaphysics of presence prevented Freud from taking his logic to its conclusion, and considering that a process like the dream-work does not just manipulate mental objects but may be thought of as actually *constituting* them whilst simultaneously relating them to others. This subtle but crucial difference in perspective can be arrived at by using the FIC model as a kind of zen *koan* (see below) to be held in mind when thinking about the experience of dreams: using it we can understand how the associative dream processes described by Freud may be the subjective experience of operations of difference which contribute to generating meaning and conscious lived experience; and in doing so I aim to create a bridge of understanding between the mechanistic speculations of Freud's *Project* and the metapsychology and rich clinical accounts of dreams found in the *Interpretation of Dreams*.

The intervention of the FIC model, then, will operate in several ways: as a way of thinking about mental contents which makes a claim about their ontological status; as a way of describing parts of our conscious experience not reducible to simple self-presence, and thus enabling a new understanding of the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious; as a means of understanding mental representation in a manner which engages with and extends the psychoanalytic conception of phantasy; and, since it helps to explain why our mental contents feel meaningful, as the basis for a theory of meaning. This will have both philosophical consequences (as it speaks to *epistemological* questions about how we know about the world) and psychoanalytic ones, since engaging with the FIC model suggests both revisions to our understanding of the function performed by the dream-work, and alterations to Freud's metapsychology. So the resulting theory of meaning can be used as a tool: to work in conjunction with a reading of the dream-book to extract further philosophical conclusions from the text, and also as a basis for the re-evaluation of later psychoanalytic theory, as we shall see (in Chapters 7 and 8).

I will read *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Derrida's texts together to explore the connections between them, drawing on the work of surprisingly few others (two such are Barratt 1993, and Bass 2006), who have explored the complex interrelationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction in the specific, metapsychological, clinically applicable way I wish to. I am aware that many

writers have touched on the relationship between Derrida, Freud, and psychoanalysis. Indeed Derrida's writing owes such a debt to psychoanalysis (Bennington 2000, Royle 2003 p.104) that arguably one cannot engage with Derrida without in some way apprehending the relationship between deconstruction and psychoanalysis. Much work in critical or literary theory that issues from Derrida or deconstruction (such as that of the Yale School which would include work by de Man and Geoffrey Hartman) thus references psychoanalysis. Furthermore there is at least one journal (*The Undecidable Unconscious: A Journal of Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis*, University of Nebraska Press) dedicated to this very theoretical intersection. I am talking, in the very tightly circumscribed area of this thesis, about work which, through a recursive and iterative process of the type I attempt, describes the applicable metapsychological or clinical consequences of re-reading Freud by way of deconstruction; examples of this type are hard to come by though are exemplified by Alan Bass' sustained attempt (see especially 2000, 2006) to bring the insights of deconstructive thought to bear on clinical practice.

Derrida sees Freud's text as opening beyond psychoanalysis when it embraces the theme of writing: as Bennington (2000, p.102) points out, this theme underpins the Freudian idea of *nachträglichkeit* (the après –coup or 'afterwards-ness'), helping us to think meaning through difference and challenging the foundational position of the 'living present'. This thesis investigates the Freudian 'opening' of psychoanalysis and asks if we can develop it further. Can we develop psychoanalytic metapsychology in a more metaphysically aware manner? And if so what consequences will this have for psychoanalysis, and for philosophy?

## The Metaphysics of Presence

'Metaphysics of presence' is a phrase originally used by Martin Heidegger (1962); in Derrida's hands, it suggests a way of thinking which assumes an epistemic level of transparent meaning, or direct access to reality - the assumption that our concepts have an accessible origin or centre which is 'present'. Working in a 'postmodern' tradition informed by Freud, Derrida gave a lecture entitled

*Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* in 1966[11], in which he fatally undermined structuralism by questioning the notion of a stable centre or origin and denying that there was a 'present' or semantically transparent foundation for our concepts. 'Present' can be taken in (at least) two ways: as denoting something which is physically existent, here, 'with us'; and as indicating temporality, to say that something is happening now, 'in the present'. Both senses are alive in any discussion of the metaphysics of presence, perhaps particularly when discussing consciousness. Derrida argued that in the tradition of Western philosophy, metaphysics has always sought a foundational value and in doing so it has created or exploited structures whereby certain terms or parts of the structure were privileged in opposition to others; the classic form of this is the binary opposition where one term is elevated (consciousness versus the unconscious, reason vs. emotion, speech vs. writing etc.) at the expense of another, in a manoeuvre which furnishes apparent conceptual stability at the cost of foreclosing on deeper understanding through the violent imposition of a hierarchy.

I will ask whether a model drawn from an understanding of Fractal Image Compression can continue the opening of Freud's work to the theme of writing, by helping us to conceptualize mental representation. I will claim that the assumption that we have privileged, intuitive understanding of our consciousness of being in the world is characteristic of the metaphysics of presence and that this assumption, woven into Freud's thinking, does not bear scrutiny. Such scrutiny will equip us to do as Freud suggests when he says:

> It is essential to abandon the overvaluation of the property of being conscious before it becomes possible to form any correct view of the origin of what is mental. (Freud 1900, p.612)

'Abandoning the overvaluation' of consciousness is to my mind not about denigrating that state or property, whatever it may be, but rather appreciating the complexity of the relationships between perception, registration, and memory which inform and constitute it: this re-evaluation simultaneously requires us to

[11] Included in *Writing and Difference* published in 1978 and henceforth referred to thus.

relinquish the ontotheological[12] idea that consciousness is a simple unitary state or experience, immediately and intuitively understood.

Alan Bass has recognized both the need to probe the philosophical weaknesses of Freud's work and also the possibility of a recursive use of an 'updated' Freudian metapsychology. His argument here summarizes my rationale and my intention:

> If metaphysics does function such that an unquestioned subject-object relation, a privileging of representation, and an implicit transcendentality perpetuate the oblivion of difference, where is this oblivion traced if not in metaphysics itself? What other evidence do we have? This is one reason why Heidegger is so insistent about the study of the history of philosophy, and I would make a similar argument about Freud. *If there are unanalyzed metaphysical assumptions within Freudian theory, the delineation of these assumptions is also the point of access to however Freudian theory might challenge such assumptions*. (Bass 1993, p.206, my emphasis)

This, then, is my programme: to work 'within' the psychoanalytic literature to delineate the unanalyzed and problematic metaphysical assumptions in Freud, and then to use the insights of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in concert with my proposed metaphor in order to challenge those assumptions. As Bass says (1993, p.198) in order to really understand the nature of Freud's clinical project – and psychoanalysis as it has developed since Freud - it is not just desirable but *necessary* to investigate the places in Freud's text where it opens to the possibility of thought beyond ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence.

To clarify my FIC metaphor and its connection to psychoanalysis I will need to draw on many areas of study (including philosophy, cognitive science, computer science, and psychoanalysis), making this a truly interdisciplinary thesis. In what I

[12] Although the term 'ontotheology' was coined by Kant and used (in a different sense) by Heidegger, I use it here after Derrida's fashion, for instance when he says: "The privilege accorded to consciousness thus means a privilege accorded to the present… This privilege is the ether of metaphysics, the very element of our thought insofar as it is caught up in the language of metaphysics. We can only delimit such a closure today by evoking this import of presence, which Heidegger has shown to be the *onto-theological* determination of being. Therefore, in evoking this import of presence… we question the absolute privilege of this form or epoch of presence in general, that is, consciousness as meaning in self-presence" (1979, p.147, my emphasis).

see as a Derridean vein I do not admit a neat cleavage between methods and disciplines, nor accept a hierarchy to the legitimacy of their claims to knowledge. As Spivak observes in her introduction to *Of Grammatology*:

> Derrida… does not see in the method of the so-called exact sciences an epistemological method of exactitude. All knowledge, whether one knows it or not, is a species of bricolage. (1976, preface, p.xx)

Or in Derrida's own words:

> The *bricoleur*, says Levi-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… If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur* (1978, p.360)

Building a picture of mental representation by drawing on different disciplines and methods fits with the principle of *consilience*, originally described by Whewell (1840), whereby a conclusion is regarded as stronger when reached by evidence converging from disparate sources; and the inverse also holds, that the strong conclusion is taken as evidence of the soundness of the methods used (see also Wilson 1998, Schönefeld ed. 2011). This is also something like how the Symingtons describe Bion's work, an appropriate comparison perhaps, since I will later be investigating how my approach to dreams and mental representation supports and helps to explain some of Bion's thinking on the subject:

> Bion describes the phenomena, making use of theories in order to do so. He uses theories, models and myths as a language to describe the activity of the mind. What Bion provides, then, is not a theory but a descriptive analysis or a descriptive synthesis. (1996, p.2)

My thesis will comprise both a theory *and* a descriptive synthesis, with my FIC model forming a focal theoretical intervention around which I develop a descriptive synthesis to support my theory and show how it engages with existing thinking (primarily in psychoanalysis, but also in cognitive science, philosophy, and computer science). My metaphor, and the model of the mind that it suggests is not meant to be in any sense functional (though I believe, and will consider the claim that, it has a structure which might be a reasonable analogue of the mechanism used to store information in the mind) but I intend it to be used somewhat like a Zen *koan*. A koan is a statement or puzzle, traditionally set by a Zen master, the contemplation of which is intended to bring enlightenment to the student. D.T. Suzuki, a famous ambassador for Zen in the West explains that the idea "is to unfold the Zen psychology in the mind of the uninitiated, and to reproduce the state of consciousness, of which these statements are the expression" (1996, p.135). Another way of explaining a koan is to say that it is a proposition or assertion which can be held in mind to help expose the structuring linguistic and conceptual context within which our objects of study (meaning, consciousness, and mental representation in our case) are framed. This (koan-like) metaphor will operate by calling into question the ontological status of mental objects, in particular mental representations. In doing so I will open the way for thinking about mental operations in a way which is not only philosophically coherent but also enables us to bring together insights from different disciplines involved in the study of mind.

## The Uses of Philosophy

As I have suggested, any new metaphor cannot be employed without careful examination of the conceptual territory into which it is to sit. Slaney and Maraun sound a note of methodological caution, urging that conceptual clarification must take place before empirical investigations, as it is the conceptual context that renders empirical evidence meaningful: "despite the potential utility of analogy and metaphor for simplifying complex ideas… it is essential that conceptual issues

are sorted out prior to empirical investigations of the phenomena of interest" (2005, p.170).

I intend to employ philosophy to clarify concepts and demarcate an area of study in preparation for future enquiry[13], and in doing so will inevitably have to engage with terms and concepts which, though they may be naively familiar, are not necessarily well-defined. For reasons which I will discuss in more detail in the methodology chapter, it is my position that a position informed by structuralism (and post-structuralism) makes clear that it is not just difficult but in fact *redundant* to attempt to define terms with absolute precision before proceeding, since the meaning of those terms continually changes in the context of ongoing enquiry and discussion. For that reason what my 'deconstructive method'[14] aims to do is locate those moments in Freud's texts where his argument hinges around unstable theoretical objects: I will explore the idea that these 'objects' of study (meaning and consciousness for instance) are held in tension at a point of effective *undecidablity* (Livingston 2010), so that they hover, unstably, at the frontier between objective and subjective, internal and external, idealist and empiricist, epistemology and phenomenology. Rather than appearing unclear, these concepts often seem to us to be transparent or self-evident[15]: this is the metaphysics of presence at work, and its operation, installing impossible centres to our discourses in this way, acts to paralyze thought.

One way in which thought is thus paralyzed is through the assumption that the objects of our study are self-evidently present; leading us to ask epistemological questions when we need to ask ontological questions. In the case of consciousness and mental representation, as I will argue, these questions have emphasized the

[13] An aim also congruent with Paul and Patricia Churchland (e.g. 1998, 2007, and see also Pat Churchland's interview in Interalia Magazine April 2015), who practice philosophy as a kind of 'pre-science', though my methods and conclusions are somewhat different; in the development of eliminative materialism (a position with which they are associated) our ordinary 'folk-psychological' terms would be entirely replaced by a more 'accurate' and predictive description. I am also put in mind of Einstein's debt to David Hume, with the latter's skepticism opening the way for the theory of Relativity: "The type of critical reasoning required for the discovery of this central point was decisively furthered, in my case, especially by the reading of David Hume's and Ernst Mach's philosophical writings" (Einstein 1949).

[14] Which I will detail in Chapter 3.

[15] As Bass says I am seeking "liberation from ideas that appear to be natural or self-evident, but which are actually limiting restrictions on what is thinkable" (1996, p.629).

'how' of the phenomena under scrutiny with insufficient consideration given to *what* is actually there at all. Slaney and Racine (2011) remark on the tendency to confuse epistemological with ontological questions, arguing that the latter must be sorted out prior to the former: "one cannot embark on an investigation of how individuals acquire concepts generally (or a particular concept) if one has no idea what a concept is" (p.80). In like manner I will argue that Freud was hamstrung in explaining the unconscious by not having approached the question of what consciousness was; and in turn his understanding of consciousness was restricted by not having a well-developed model of mental representation. For without an understanding of how knowledge is represented in the mind, how could he explain how those same representations were hidden (repressed) or distorted (e.g. by the dream-work)? I will argue that my FIC model will help us to re-evaluate the ontological status of mental objects (the mental representations of our knowledge of the world) and consequently help us to develop a new understanding of the relationship between what is conscious and what is unconscious.

I should say at this point that the idea of a mental object or internal object is one that has a specific meaning and use in psychoanalysis: and to be clear from the outset, when I refer to mental objects I do not intend to use the phrase in exactly the same way that psychoanalysts might, when they talk of 'internal objects' or 'object relationships'.

## Mental Objects

The idea of an 'object relationship' arguably plays no part in Freud's own conceptual scheme[16]; the idea of an object for Freud came into play in his discussion of instincts as "the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim" (1915a, p.122). The question of how to conceptualize an internal object became more pressing through the work of later object relational theorists[17] (notably Klein, Winnicott and Fairbairn). Joseph

[16] Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973 p.278.
[17] Laplanche and Pontalis note that: '…since the 'thirties the notion of object-relationship has gradually attained so much importance in the psycho-analytical literature that today it constitutes the major theoretical parameter for many authors' (1973, p. 278).

Sandler, who has written extensively on metapsychology, attempts to define the 'internal object' of psychoanalysis:

> What, then, one may well ask, shall we refer to as internal objects? If we want to be precise, it would seem most appropriate to use the term to refer to the psychological structures that lie outside the realm of subjective experience and not to use the term for conscious or unconscious self- and object images. This view is different from the Kleinian position that internal objects are the objects experienced in unconscious fantasy, thought to be, under the right conditions, directly accessible to subjective experience. In this context the notion of structure is used in the sense of any enduring psychological organization, and image for subjective experience in any sensory modality. (1990, pp.870-871)

This appears to be quite different from the sense of 'mental object' I wish to engage with (at least initially), since my aim is to discuss how we might conceptualize how the objects of our perception are stored in our memories and mentally represented, informing future perception (and dreams). Sandler clarifies that he is locating internal objects in the 'nonexperiential' realm of mental structure, a realm which is in principle un-knowable unless and until it shapes subjective experience in a perceptible way. This is different again from the psychoanalytic idea of an imago (Jung 1916), a kind of unconscious prototype or set of ways of understanding others, derived from real and phantasied interactions in early life. Sandler is attempting to draw a rigorous distinction between the perceptual and ideational content of a mental representation and the mental structure which organizes that content, a structure which itself is not and cannot be, experienced[18]. He continues:

> …internal objects and internal object relations in the sense in which I have been describing them, can only be conceived of as organizations lying behind the material brought by or elicited from the patient. Interpretations made by the analyst in terms of internal objects or internal object relations

[18] I am not at all sure whether such a distinction can be made rigorous, a question my metaphor will help us to interrogate.

> are constructions for the purpose of anchoring the material of the analysis within an appropriate frame of reference built up by analyst and patient during the course of the analytic work. (1990, pp.874-875)

Sandler's claim (above) that the Kleinian internal objects of unconscious fantasy are in principle "directly accessible to subjective experience" appears to me to slightly overstate (or oversimplify) the case, as it is in danger of encouraging us to see Kleinian internal objects as akin to mental representations. I would argue that for Klein an internal object is as much a *relation* as a representation, and furthermore I see the status of a Kleinian internal object as changing throughout the development of the infant. It is perhaps true that a Kleinian internal object can be said to come into 'focus' with the developmental achievement of the depressive position (Klein 1935)[19], but that object has from the beginning of life been part of a story which blends cognitive and emotional development in an indivisibly relational entanglement with others (1975, pp.52-53). Klein's view is representative of (and was instrumental in developing) a tendency in the psychoanalytic literature to see the drive either as *the* mental representation of experience, or at least as intrinsically bound up with that representation. Freud had originally identified the drive as a bridge between realms, "lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical" (1905d, p.168), and as he moved into the second, topographical phase of his work (Sandler et al. 1997)[20] during which internal forces came to play a greater role in his understanding of the psyche, the drive became more prominent. Klein and her followers (especially Isaacs) subsequently elaborated a picture of unconscious mental life where drive, affect, object and fantasy are inextricably linked:

> …the *sensation of a drive* in the psychic apparatus is automatically associated with the fantasy of an *object* that is appropriated to it, with each

[19] "It seems that at this stage of development the unification of external and internal, loved and hated, real and imaginary objects is carried out in such a way that each step in the unification leads again to a renewed splitting of the imagos. But as the adaptation to the external world increases, this splitting is carried out on planes which gradually become increasingly nearer and nearer to reality. This goes on until love for the real and the internalized objects and trust in them are well established. Then ambivalence, which is partly a safeguard against one's own hate and against the hated and terrifying objects, will in normal development again diminish in varying degrees." (Klein 1935, p.173).

[20] "Emphasis now came to be placed on the role of instinctual forces in the individual's development and subsequent adaptation" (p.60).

> incitement of the drives having its own corresponding fantasy (the desire for food, for example, is associated with the affect of hunger and the breast object). From the moment of birth, the drive engages in a binary expression: sensation/affect and the object both *coexist*, and the presentation of the object clings to sensation. The Kleinian phantasy is the mechanism of this juncture, of the drives' destiny to be both inside and outside: it is an 'object-seeking' drive. (Kristeva 2001, pp.141-142)

However although this theoretical picture proved to be clinically fruitful[21], and despite the efforts of Isaacs (1948) to flesh out the conception of fantasy ('phantasy' in her proposed spelling) it entailed, I would argue that Klein's perhaps 'heuristic' approach bequeathed an under-theorized conception of unconscious fantasy and mental representation to psychoanalysis: my claim is that a more philosophically rigorous account of mental representation will contribute to clarifying this situation. Part of the difficulty may be the fundamental reliance on the notion of the drive - a concept that Freud admitted was vague from the outset, saying: "Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness" (1933, p.95)[22].

This lack of clarity did not prevent subsequent thinkers from attempting to explore and describe an area of pre-verbal, pre-symbolic experience and the effects it has upon the psyche. Lacan's (1988a) idea of the Imaginary was one such and his influence was felt on later work in this area (notably from Laplanche 1997, Anzieu 1989, and Kristeva 1984). Kristeva's doctoral thesis, published as '*Revolution in Poetic Language*'[23] described what she called the 'semiotic chora', a pre-verbal and pre-oedipal non-symbolic space dominated by the drives and the rhythms of the 'real'. Postulating the chora enabled Kristeva to consider in the abstract, the territory out of which the speaking subject emerged into the symbolic – the term

[21] Kristeva comments that Klein's 'heterogeneous' understanding of the internal object is clinically useful, though lacking in theoretical clarity: "Klein's thinking here evokes a cornucopia of images, sensations, and substances whose theoretical 'impurity' is superseded by the clinical advances she proposes: the complexity of the internal object, in Klein's view, is indispensable for tracking the specifics of the fantasy in childhood as well as in borderline states or psychosis" (2001, p.64)
[22] This quote uses the Standard Edition's translation of *triebe* as 'instinct', rather than 'drive'. This translation has caused much debate, see for instance De Lauretis 2008 pp.20-38, Laplanche and Pontalis 1973 pp.214-217.
[23] Abridged version published in English 1984.

chora itself, borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*, is used to indicate a liminal region, 'between' in both temporal terms (as a developmental stage might be) but also 'between' the bodies of mother and infant. Margaroni (2005) characterizes Kristeva's project here as proposing a "theory of signification" that will take into account the formation of the subject at the intersection of "corporeal, linguistic and social forces" (pp.78-79). Although not explicitly proposing a theory of signification, my focus on meaning and mental representation does carry me into similar debates. However, although I am aware that there is a significant and valuable tradition of work following the trajectory I have been describing (one which is more concerned both with the relational and the embodied), I intend to pursue a different and very separate course. For one thing, for reasons that I will explore in more detail in later chapters, I do not embrace the Lacanian triptych of imaginary, symbolic and real, nor do I accept Lacan's linguistic emphasis, nor his treatment of signification. These theoretical emphases, evident in a good deal of the work I have just referenced, have in my opinion substantially muddied the waters for a great deal of post-Lacanian work on the possible structure of the unconscious. My intention is to follow the thread that I see emerging in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in order to develop an understanding of mental representation and mental objects. I will argue that the metaphysics of presence underpins an assumption that we have a clearer understanding of the phenomena of language and consciousness than we in fact do, and that one consequence of this emphasis has been a theoretical concentration on the pre-linguistic and pre-symbolic as the source or 'origin' of meaning. In contradistinction to this, and with Derrida's help, I hope to show that our understanding of consciousness and the unconscious are held in tension through a structural relationship to one another: and that by deconstructing some traditional theoretical commitments around consciousness and meaning I will clarify the nature of some mental phenomena. Not by filling a 'gap' (or 'supplement'[24]) around what is 'symbolic', but by re-evaluating the nature of mental representation and consequently (or concurrently, simultaneously) re-evaluating what is symbolic, what is conscious, and what is unconscious. In her book on Klein, Kristeva identifies the elision in Klein's account and underlines the importance of the question of mental representation:

[24] The logic of the supplement being a key idea for Derrida – see for instance 1976 p.153 or p.281.

> This brings up one of the most difficult problems in psychoanalytic theory, one that Klein's clinical approach addressed creatively without theorizing the concept as such, thereby leaving it to her successors to explore a subject that is the focus of current psychoanalytic inquiry: what is *psychic representation*? Or, put another way, what are *the* psychic representations? (2001, pp.140-141)

As I will argue in later chapters, confusion over the ontological status of mental objects means that there are few descriptions of mental representation in the psychoanalytic literature that fit my intentions. Solms, working in the area of neuropsychoanalysis, is moving in a congruent direction with his description of 'mental solids':

> The answer to our question, "What does cortex contribute to consciousness?" then, is this: it contributes representational memory space. This enables cortex to stabilize the objects of perception… Based on this capacity, cortex transforms the fleeting, wavelike states of brainstem activation into "*mental solids*." It generates *objects*. Freud called them "object-presentations" (which, ironically, predominate in what he called the "system unconscious"). Such stable representations, once established through learning, can be activated both externally and internally, thereby generating objects not only for perception, but also for cognition (perception involves recognition). To be clear: the cortical representations are unconscious in themselves; however, when consciousness is extended onto them (by "attention"), they are transformed into something both conscious and stable, something that can be thought in working memory. (It is no accident that we describe the consciousness of everyday experience as working memory.) The activation by brainstem consciousness-generating mechanisms of cortical representations thus *transforms consciousness from affects into objects*. (2013, pp.12-13, my emphasis)

Solms describes here how the objects he calls mental solids fit into a Freudian frame of reference, as well as how they fit into an abstract description of the mind: I intend to discuss in more detail how such objects might be constituted, and how

we might conceive of them as functioning to produce the phenomena Freud describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This quote from Solms demonstrates a view of the inevitable interconnectedness of questions of perception, memory, recognition and consciousness/the unconscious; it also suggests that we share a conviction that a more detailed picture of the nature of mental objects and mental representation is a valuable asset to psychoanalysis. Through elaborating a FIC model I intend to flesh out an account of how such mental objects can be understood.

## Why, and How: Methodological Pluralism, or 'These are my methods, if you don't like them, I have others'[25]

As we have seen above (e.g. Barratt 1988, Butler 1990, Dean and Lane 2001) psychoanalysis has been widely embraced in the humanities and continues to be employed as a productive resource. However elsewhere the picture is not so rosy: there is a familiar opposition to the methods of psychoanalysis from analytic philosophers and more positivistic psychologists (Eysenck 1985, Gellner 1985 and 1992[26], Grunbaum 1984, Nagel 1959, Popper 1963), social and political critiques (see Barratt 1988 for an overview, Smail 1993, Webster 1995), and the influential criticism of Masson (1988) who trained as an analyst and did important archival work editing and translating Freud's letters to Fliess, before taking a position against psychoanalysis. Concern about the health of psychoanalysis does not just come from those outside the discipline: as early as 1975 André Green remarked "psychoanalysis is going through a crisis" and called for an understanding of this situation on the basis of "analysis of the *contradictions at the very heart of psychoanalysis* (theory and practice) itself" (p. 1, my emphasis). More recently Chessick's 2007 '*The Future of Psychoanalysis*' charted the difficulties of psychoanalysis in the face of modern psychiatry and pharmacology. Considering the issues raised by Chessick, Perman (2009) comments "Psychoanalysis is in crisis as it struggles to maintain its relevance in today's marketplace" (p.172).

[25] With apologies, and all due respect, to Groucho Marx.
[26] For a more detailed discussion of the arguments around psychoanalysis' status as a science see Frosh 1997, chapter 2.

Frosh has observed that "there is a lot of uncertainty about the future of psychoanalysis" and that "Outside the therapeutic clinic, psychoanalysis is in a more promising situation, although still showing important weaknesses" (2012, pp.11-12).

I see the contradictions Green invited us to consider as being instrumental in the piecemeal and sedimentary development of psychoanalytic theory, which in turn has contributed to the difficulties faced by the clinical enterprise. Alan Bass, a clinician who is also, as a pre-eminent translator of the work of Derrida, a sophisticated theoretician and critical evaluator of psychoanalysis, identifies the same problem and issues a challenge. He bemoans the:

> …current organization of psychoanalysis into various groups with commitments to various theories. This kind of splintering is characteristic of a postmodern age, which suspects universal, all-encompassing narratives. *Yet it leaves psychoanalysis looking more and more like a set of beliefs with no particular rationale to hold it together*. While there can be many salutary effects from no longer having one central theory and practice of psychoanalysis, there can also be an aggravation of an ad hoc empiricism that engages in therapy for therapy's sake and clinical experiment for the market's sake. The integrative vision of nature, science, theory and practice that characterizes Freud are all too easily rationalized away in such a climate. *The greater challenge is to rethink Freud's original vision, taking into account all the critiques of such integrative efforts.* (2000, p.5, my emphasis)

The pressure for psychoanalysis to engage with and absorb insights from other disciplines is growing, from a variety of different theoretical directions and schools of thought. Fonagy, arguing for psychoanalysis to move in the direction of a science by becoming more rigorous, systematic and integrated with other disciplines, comments that:

> Whilst clinical psychoanalysis needs little help in getting to know an individual's subjectivity in the most detailed way possible, when we wish to generalize to a comprehensive model of the human mind, *the discipline can*

> *no longer exist on its own*. A general psychoanalytic model of mind, if it is to be credible, should be aligned with the wider knowledge of mind gained from a range of disciplines. (2003, p.74, my emphasis)

In order to utilize the findings of clinicians, then, according to Fonagy, psychoanalysis needs help from other disciplines in order to build a coherent theory of mind. But the problem with theoretical isolation cuts both ways; psychoanalysis is simultaneously a tool for investigating and describing the mind, as well as a form of treatment[27]. And if the wider psychoanalytic picture of the mental is starved of input from other sources, he claims that this may well restrict the efficacy of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic modality: "It may be that the difficulty in pinpointing the curative factors in psychoanalytic treatment is directly related to the limitations of the uniquely clinical basis for psychoanalytic inquiry" (Ibid., p.74). Mark Solms agrees that psychoanalysis is impoverished because of its isolation, and believes that this lack of connection also weakens enquiry in other fields. He says that no approach has yet developed a coherent or unified theoretical understanding of the mental because "Freudian metapsychology has become insulated from scientific progress" (1997, pp.701). In turn, he believes that cognitive science is hampered by a lack of awareness of the understanding of human subjectivity made available by psychoanalysis.

It seems though, that psychoanalysis is not just starved of input from outside the discipline, but that *internal* links between schools of thought are also weak or non-existent[28]. As I have said it is my contention that certain philosophical flaws and inconsistencies in Freud's thinking about the mind have resulted in persistent weaknesses in psychoanalytic theory and metapsychology, and this has contributed to the ad hoc development of the discipline. Bass echoes this sentiment:

> There has been no consistent development of psychoanalysis guided by the question of how theory of mind, theory of treatment, and format of treatment are integrated… Instead, clinical techniques or new insights into

[27] Milton et al 2004 (see esp. p.17), Frosh 1997, Freud (1923a, p. 235).
[28] See Wallerstein 1988, Green 2004 on fragmentation and pluralism in psychoanalysis.

> psychodynamics effective in the treatment of non-neurotic patients are incorporated into the clinical repertoire without examining the relation between theory of treatment and theory of mind. (2000, p.4)

Aside from any underlying weakness in the metapsychology, this problem (the lack of an overarching theory of mind or an attempt to connect such a theory to clinical practice) is compounded by a postmodern suspicion of grand unifying narratives and the inevitable disciplinary pressures of knowledge production (Bourdieu 1988, Bourdieu et al 1991, Foucault 1970, Hacking 1999, Hook 2007) which can engender a kind of insular factionalism, to the detriment of the production of new forms of knowledge. Whilst I understand that the demand for 'evidence' as defined in a narrow positivistic sense can be incompatible with the methodology or aims of psychoanalysis[29] (see for example Vaspe ed. 2017 on the difficulties of providing psychoanalytic psychotherapy in the context of the NHS in a neoliberal age, with its demands for 'evidence based' therapies), I suspect that in in certain quarters the opposition to attempts to *quantify* psychoanalysis is an attempt to resist the colonization of the discipline by forces and discourses with a quite different ideological agenda[30]. A parallel development can be seen in the wake of the 'turn to affect'[31] in the humanities. This has led to an anti-intentionalist[32] use of affect (see Leys 2011) which seeks to bracket the affective as a source of motivation which escapes or exceeds the rational: whatever other goals this manoeuvre may have, it seems clear that it is in part an attempt to harness the "potentially emancipatory qualities" (Leys p.441) of biology to free psychological discourses from reductive biological determinism; an aim which resonates with many manifestations of psychoanalytic theory and their vision of the dynamic unconscious as a wellspring of behaviour which somehow *exceeds* attempts at regulation, or repression. "The (neuro)biology that is summoned in the turn to affect is, as we can now see, a

[29] Not to assume that psychoanalysis is a monolith with universally agreed aims (or even methods): for example, those who follow Habermas (1972) in seeing it as a kind of hermeneutic science would have very different ideas about the kind of 'evidence' that would support psychoanalysis from those such as critics such as Gellner (1985), or again from neuropsychoanalysts such as Solms (e.g. 2014).
[30] See Frosh 1987 for a detailed investigation of the different possible political investments in psychoanalysis and the ways in which it can be positioned as, variously, a normative or emancipatory practice.
[31] For an overview of the treatment of emotion see Reddy 2001; for a more critical view of the politics in play, see Papoulias and Callard 2010.
[32] Which might be summarized as: "The claim that affect is a formless, unstructured, nonsignifying force or "intensity" that escapes the categories of the psychologists" (Leys 2011, p.442).

helpmeet for a distinctly *political* project" as Papoulias and Callard (2010, p. 36) remark. My view is that in these situations the desired endgame is dominating the discussion from the outset[33]: understandable ideological concerns are restricting the tools available for psychoanalytic enquiry. Regardless of the source of the aversion to harnessing the resources of more positivistic or materialist disciplines in service of psychoanalytic knowledge, there is growing consensus that this insularity must come to an end:

> …an attempt at exhaustively delineating the multifaceted background behind the deeply ingrained hostility to the life sciences so pervasive within the relatively recent intellectual traditions rooted in Continental Europe is something for another occasion. For now, suffice it to say that, as will be argued here (and as I argue elsewhere), *the deliberate, principled neglect of biology and related fields is no longer justified or defensible*, psychoanalytically or philosophically. (Johnston 2013, p. 81, my emphasis)

In the same volume Catherine Malabou also argues for the evolution of a position that blends the insight of Continental philosophy with the developing knowledge of more traditionally positivistic science:

> The time has come to elaborate a new materialism, which would determine a new position of Continental philosophy vis-à-vis neurobiology, and build or rebuild, at long last, a bridge connecting the humanities and biological sciences. (2013, p. 72)

[33] This is something like what Bernardi (2002) calls 'incommensurability as a defensive strategy': "Psychoanalytic theories become incommensurable when it is accepted that their hypotheses can only be discussed from the premises on the basis of which they were formulated. Instead of what should occur in a hermeneutical circle, where theory and experience are each in turn enhanced by the other, in the above-mentioned case each premise ends up providing the basis for its own validity, limiting the possibility of being questioned from outside, or from the dimension of observable facts… What looks like incommensurability can thus be explained as a strategy to defend one's own position. This strategy makes it possible to limit the argumentative field to the circle of certain ideas and exclude rival hypotheses." (p.858).

## Structure

This is precisely the sort of bridge building I wish to undertake, by way of some careful philosophical work and the provision of a new metaphor for mental representation. After Derrida I understand that we cannot hope to escape the enclosure of metaphysics altogether, whatever precautions we may take, and we have no option but to employ the vocabulary and methods of those who have gone before us:

> Derrida nowhere denies (and indeed goes out of his way to affirm) that we have to think in accordance with classical logic if we are… to locate the symptomatic stress-points – the moments of *aporias* or logical tension – where such thinking meets its limit. (Norris 2003, p.162)

I intend to see if we can locate and investigate these aporias in psychoanalysis and especially in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Having engaged with these fundamental philosophical issues, I claim that we can provide a theoretical framework which will unsettle some limiting assumptions in psychology and in doing so, bring together disparate parts of psychoanalytic theory as well as furthering a conversation between psychoanalysis and other disciplines: such a dialogue may not only be fruitful in applied fields, but by exploiting other vocabularies which are not so tightly circumscribed by the language of truth and representation (as philosophy must necessarily be), we may also open up new ways of understanding our place in the world as conscious beings.

The structure of this thesis, then, will be as follows. In the next chapter I will review the literature on some *current* debates in psychoanalysis, and suggest that the issues therein are driven, at least in part, by unstable theoretical objects issuing from Freud's unarticulated (or incompletely worked-through) metaphysical commitments. Then, in Chapter 3, I will discuss the relevance of Derrida's work and explain how I am using his thinking to develop a methodology for my enquiry. Chapter 4 examines Freud's notion of the '*dreamwork*', which I will view through a deconstructive lens, attempting to specify more closely the

"unanalyzed metaphysical assumptions within Freudian theory" (Bass 1993, p.206). In Chapter 5 I will follow Derrida's examination of metaphors for mind in Freud by proposing my own Fractal Image Compression metaphor and examining some implications for our understanding of mental representation, as it relates to psychoanalysis. Chapter 6 applies the model of mind informed by FIC to an in-depth examination of a dream of my own, to see how my newly developed understanding of mental objects supports, or does not support, the psychoanalytic practice of dream interpretation. Chapters 7 and 8 continue to explore the application of my model and associated view of mental objects, by demonstrating how the theory I develop in this thesis can be used as a tool to critically evaluate different psychoanalytic accounts. First (in Chapter 7) I will look at Bion's ideas around what he called 'dream-work alpha', and then in Chapter 8, I will assess Lacan's idea that the unconscious is structured like a language, before finally reviewing my argument and its implications in the conclusion, in Chapter 9.

# 2

# Literature Review

"As for what 'begins' then – 'beyond' absolute knowledge – *unheard-of* thoughts are required, sought for across the memory of old signs"

(Derrida 1973, p.102)

My contention in this thesis is that unanalyzed and under-theorized unstable objects in psychoanalysis, present at least since Freud's metapsychology in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* continue to create theoretical weakness and fragmentation in the discipline. In Chapter 4 I will look at specific issues in that original text, but here I wish to briefly review some live debates in psychoanalysis today and see if it is possible to detect the trace of philosophical issues which, I argue, reach back to Freud's earliest work.

There is no doubt that there is considerable fragmentation within psychoanalysis, which has been well documented at least since the famous 'Controversial Discussions' of 1942-1944 (see King and Steiner eds. 1991) between competing schools of thought, represented variously by Anna Freud and Melanie Klein (it is interesting to note that our discussion in the introduction has already led to a partial re-staging of this debate!). Subsequent to these meetings psychoanalytic training in the UK has, until recently, been separated into three parallel strands, Freudian, Kleinian and Independent (represented by figures such as Fairbairn and Winnicott – see Kohon ed. 1986). The picture has become more complicated over time with the emergence (clinically, primarily in France and then South America but also subsequently in the academy in the humanities more generally) of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Whilst broadly tolerated in a spirit of pragmatic compromise, the ongoing division has remained a cause for concern in some quarters. In Green's 1975 paper he detailed what he saw as problems arising out of the parallel development of theory and practice, lamenting "the problem of communication between analysts" (p. 18). In 2000, a two-day conference took place in New York on dissidence in psychoanalysis, in the presence of significant figures such as Green, Kernberg and Wallerstein. The proceedings were later presented in book form (Bergmann, ed. 2004). Bernardi (2002) has looked at the possible generative consequences of genuine debate, and the conditions of possibility for such debate, in the context of the Klein/Lacan controversies in the Rio de la Plata (Buenos Aires and Montevideo) when Kleinian and Lacanian ideas were comparatively assessed

during and after the visit of Leclaire to the Asociación Psicoanalítica Uruguaya in August 1972 (see Leclaire 1972).

I take these debates to be symptomatic of the very real theoretical differences between schools, and the absence of even a common vocabulary to frame their encounters (Bernardi 2002). From 2009-2013 the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) Committee on Conceptual Integration attempted to form a method to compare the different usage of concepts and different theoretical approaches across different psychoanalytical factions (see Bohleber et al. 2013), with mixed results (some of which will be discussed in the section on fantasy/phantasy below).

I do not intend to review all of these discussions in full, rather I intend to identify a few specific theoretical issues where very lively debate still rages today, and show how these arguments may be seen to issue from unstable structures of thought bequeathed to psychoanalysis by Freud's original theorizing.

## The Return of Repression

Perhaps an appropriate place to start is with the notion of *repression*, given Freud's remark that "The theory of repression is the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests" (1914, p.16). Although the term and the concept had been in use for some time, Freud gave detailed consideration to the process of repression in his 1915 paper '*Repression'* where he broke down the different phases: from primary or primal repression, essentially constitutive of the unconscious[34]; to repression proper or 'after pressure' where further ideas were attracted to the 'kernel' formed by primal repression; to the final stage, the 'return of the repressed' in the form of symptoms, parapraxes and dreams[35]. Simply put, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Freud, 1915b, p. 147). Although, like most of

[34] Hinshelwood 2008 p.506: "From very early on Freud thought of repression as implicated in creating the unconscious as a separate zone or 'psychical system'".
[35] We will examine in more detail the process by which dreams are created in later chapters.

Freud's theory it evolved throughout his writings, repression always had a pivotal role. Hinshelwood writes:

> Repression has been seen as the main workhorse of the defences, and at times it has seemed synonymous with the term 'defence' (Freud A, 1936). It is also the specific defence found in hysteria. At other times, all disorders were seen to have a kernel of repression around which other defences could be organized. There is a sense in which repression is the very process that constructs and sustains an unconscious. Indeed, insofar as the given biological drives are a 'primary repressed', it is almost synonymous with the unconscious itself. (2008, p.516)

Along with repression as a foundation for unconscious mental life comes a therapeutic model that focuses on undoing repression or making the unconscious, conscious, as well as a frame of reference for understanding dreaming in which interpretation points back to a hidden origin (or 'latent' content, much more on this later). Although a great deal changed over time, both in Freud's thinking as well as that of subsequent analytic theorists, the legacy of this theoretical frame lingers, as illustrated by Fonagy's comment that:

> The aims of psychoanalysis have been greatly elaborated over the hundred years since Freud's original model of undoing repression and recovering memory into consciousness (see for example Sandler & Dreher, 1997). But these advances have not brought with them an updating of the role of memory in the therapeutic process, nor a clear and consistent theory of therapeutic effect. Some still appear to believe that the recovery of memory is part of the therapeutic action of the treatment. There is no evidence for this and in my view to cling to this idea is damaging to the field. (1999, p.215)

In this paper Fonagy argues for a therapeutic concentration on the transference, claiming that pathogenic and otherwise significant life events are encoded into object relationships in a way that is in principle inaccessible to conscious recollection or reconstruction. He relies upon a distinction between different

memory systems (Fonagy 1999, p.216): broadly speaking, explicit memory which is involved in the ordinary conscious process of remembering, and implicit (such as procedural) memory which can be accessed without an effort to remember – this is the kind of memory associated with riding a bike, or playing the piano. This distinction, drawn from research in cognitive science, is used to underpin a picture where truly unconscious phenomena such as object relations are part of implicit memory and cannot thereby meaningfully be accessed through the discussion (or even re-creation) of memories of past experience. I have heard Mark Solms advance a similar theory[36] and it seems to be gaining currency in the field of neuropsychoanalysis – see for instance Turnbull et al. (2006), who conclude: "This work emphasizes the fact that the interpersonal properties of the transference relationship seem to be mediated by classes of memory system that are entirely different to those of conscious episodic recall" (p.203). Emphasis on the transference[37] is a key part of current psychoanalytic practice in the clinic[38] – Frosh (2012) says that "there is a wide consensus among analysts that transference is core to understanding the analytic relationship, and that this understanding is in turn central to the practice of therapy" (p.191)[39] – and this chimes with a Kleinian and object-relational perspective which has always emphasized the transference as a way of accessing the phantasies and object-relations at play for the analysand (see especially Joseph 1985).

Others have also located conceptual difficulties in the idea of repression: Maze and Henry (1996) characterize these as "the problem of knowing something in order not to know it" (p.1087). Their proposed solution involves a reimagining of Klein's mechanisms of splitting and projection in neuroscientific terms, a model that resembles disavowal more than repression (more below). However many do not agree that repression, and the process of recovering or uncovering memory, can be set aside so readily. Leaving aside the (quite substantial) question of what the demotion of repression does to the whole of Freudian metapsychology, many authors have raised more specific practical and theoretical concerns. Auchincloss

[36] At the Tavistock Clinic in London, late 2017.
[37] Even here there is a troubling lack of theoretical coherence. Frosh (1987) remarks: "Given the centrality of transference in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, it is perhaps surprising to realize that there are substantial differences even of definition" (p.239).
[38] Kernberg 2001.
[39] See also Spillius et al. 2011 for a Kleinian perspective.

and Samberg (2012) say that "Work with understanding and undoing repression is part of every psychoanalytic treatment" (p.197). Shevrin et al. (1996), Singer (1995) and Westen (1997) have all brought psychoanalysis together with other disciplines to explore repression. And Karon and Widener (2001) explicitly look at the evidence for repressed and subsequently recovered memories. Blum (2003) takes aim squarely at Fonagy:

> Whereas Peter Fonagy almost dismisses the importance of repression and the recovery of repressed and suppressed memory, the author believes that the analysis of repression retains importance in clinical psychoanalysis. (p.497)

He continues:

> Even if the conjectured infantile patterns of procedural memory could be inferred and interpreted in nonverbal transference phenomena, this would not necessarily support Fonagy's virtual dismissal of the therapeutic value of uncovering of repressed memory and its fantasy elaboration. To the contrary, I would maintain the critical importance of the repressed in pathogenesis, and the lifting of repression in the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. (Ibid., p.501)

Fonagy (2003) has replied that he is not dismissing the value of memory *per se*, but that he is questioning its veridicality and consequently it cannot be a reliable guide to history: furthermore he maintains that it cannot be the locus of therapeutic action, not just for this reason, but also because the *kind* of memory that is responsible for (for example) traumatic repetition is different from that accessible to recollection and reconstruction. To an extent then this exchange demonstrates two traditions talking past each other: however Blum's intervention does drive at something significant in the association which is being made between unconscious phenomena and implicit/procedural memory in Fonagy's work; and this 'something' opens into a wider question about the particular nature of psychoanalysis. Within limited parameters, Fonagy acknowledges the significance of memory:

> Memory is of tremendous importance, but as a mediator, a valuable channel for communicating about the nature of internal representations of object relationships, not as an account of history, be it accurate or inaccurate. It is the flesh on the skeleton of the internal structure, but should not be confused with the structure itself—the procedures underpinning ways of experiencing the self with the object. (1999, p.218)

The 'underpinning procedures' here being those inaccessible memory structures that cannot be brought directly into consciousness but only experienced by way of the transference in a clinical encounter. However I would argue that this concession to the value of memory (as a 'mediator') in fact suggests an aporia in Fonagy's presentation: the need for mediation, and the question of *what* mediates access to these procedural or implicit memories. I take Fonagy's point that deep-seated pathogenic structures may have arisen through experiences which have been somehow stored within us in some inaccessible way, either because they occurred before we were even capable of processing them symbolically, or because the mechanism of their registration is inaccessible to us (Freud's contention after all was that mental processes are inherently unconscious[40]). But can we understand those experiences without (accessible, biographical) memory? I would say that this is an example of Derrida's (1976) logic of the supplement, where the theoretical intervention of the (conceptual frame of) procedural memory cannot function without the mediation, or 'supplement', of the context of memories of lived experience. To put it another way, what would those object relationships explored in analysis *be,* or how would we conceptualize them, *outside of* the framework of memories of events in our lives?

Blum is not arguing for the value of memories as an accurate historical record, as he clearly says that they are "subject to selection, fantasy distortion and then secondary elaboration and editing at the time of their recovery" (2003, p.510).

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[40] "... psycho-analysis asserts that … what is mental is in itself unconscious and that being conscious is only a quality, which may or may not accrue to a particular mental act" (Freud, 1925b, p. 216).

Rather he is engaging with the question of unearthing the traces of meaning structures in the unconscious, as psychoanalysts have traditionally done: he says that the "primary process evident in dreams and symptoms cannot be attributed to procedural memory" (p.512). Whilst I would not wish to be so categorical about what attributions can or cannot be made between these different ways of conceptualizing the unconscious, I would say that the problem with aligning the unconscious so utterly with procedural memory is that, even if one accepts the basic premise (that certain affective responses and ways of behaving are kept within us in the form of procedural or implicit memory which we cannot consciously access through introspection), it is hard to understand how those memories are triggered, or enacted, without some kind of mnemonic or symbolic context. In the simplest case, of an analyst exploring the transference with an analysand in the consulting room, whatever affective responses are produced, are produced only in the context of a symbolic and biographically 'mediated' perception of the current situation, i.e. the consulting room and the relationship with the analyst. And if we then accept that implicit memories are *essentially dependent on* symbolic or declarative memory, how intelligible is their continued theoretical separation? I would argue that the idea of an entirely encapsulated procedural response to stimulus, considered separately from any conceivable stimulus, is not just unhelpful to us clinically but actually incoherent: the symbolic structure that mediates that response is entirely material.

What Fonagy's intervention does highlight which is relevant to my thesis, are the weaknesses in the traditional Freudian view of repression; however these are weaknesses that are reproduced in Fonagy's response. There is a general movement in Fonagy's argument, the broad shape of which is familiar from Freud: beginning with an assumption that we understand mental representation to some degree (characteristic of the metaphysics of presence), there is the construction of a binary between evident and occluded (conscious/unconscious, explicit/implicit, declarative/procedural) which positions the really vital explanatory work behind a shroud of theoretical obscurity – along with the implication that we will *at some point* achieve an explanation which is, for now, deferred. What is elided in these explanatory stories is this 'mediating' structural process which takes place

somewhere between perception and memory. Fonagy does speak of 'models', networks of:

> …unconscious expectations or mental models of self–other relationships. Individual experiences that have contributed to this model *may or may not* be 'stored' elsewhere as discrete autobiographical memories, but in either case the model is now 'autonomous', no longer dependent on the experiences that have contributed to it. (1999, p.217, my emphasis)

In a footnote he remarks that these models may be understood as self-other-affect triads (Kernberg 1988) or unconscious expectations (Bowlby 1988) or "more evocatively, as 'unconscious phantasy', which seems to be a clear and appropriate description of a non-conscious internal mental model" (p.217). Once again though this seems to me to leave out an essential step: how does the mind, in apprehending current reality, locate or identify those features of the present situation which map onto the past, whether that past takes the form of 'models', internal objects, or unconscious phantasy? How does the registration of experience, and the connection with mental representation, take place? As we shall see in later chapters, I argue that this same explanatory gap was present in Freud's original texts and has persisted as part of the structure of psychoanalytic theory ever since.

Bass (1997, 2000) has explored the connection between the registration of experience and repression, and has concluded that the unconscious registration of experience has to be investigated seriously; and that to do so troubles the traditional Freudian picture of perception, registration, memory and repression. Investigating 'concrete' patients (not psychotically concrete, but those for whom analytic interpretation does not seem to trouble their 'concrete' ideas about cause, effect and motivation) he argues that disavowal may be fundamental in psychic defence, and follows a chain of logic leading to the idea of unconscious registration and unconscious secondary process. Using the model of fetishism he suggests that anxiety caused by, for example, the perception of the lack of a penis in the mother allows 'negative hallucination' which unifies perception and memory – therefore there is a 'need to see' something which reduces anxiety. In the fetishists' case this

becomes the fetish, whilst in the clinical examples he gives it is the 'need to see' the analyst's behaviour in a particular light, in defiance of all interpretation:

> Freud himself situated the generalization of fetishism in a discussion of the relations between the psychic apparatus and the external world, what we usually think of as reality. Traditionally, our knowledge of the external world is linked to consciousness and perception. If fetishism and concreteness perspicuously reveal an organization of consciousness that eliminates reality testing, then, as Sandler has pointed out, one has to think of an 'unconscious secondary process'. The counterpart of the domination of consciousness by primary process in fetishism or concreteness is the unconscious reality testing or secondary process which has to have occurred if the patient so strenuously defends against it…The larger postulate, then, is that concreteness leads to thinking about *an unconscious process that registers real or external differentiating processes and can initiate complex defenses against them*. (2000, p. 51, my emphasis)

Bass is attempting to explain a logic of disavowal which requires a state of affairs to be simultaneously apprehended and repudiated. This is in the context of a movement he finds in Freud's later writings away from repression and towards disavowal as a form of defence. But Bass's conclusion is that disavowal requires us to separate perception and consciousness, and consider that registration may take place unconsciously. He acknowledges that this is a radical conclusion, which "has to change our conventional sense of reality as much as the theory of repression changed our conventional sense of mind" (2000, p.9).

More recently Hinshelwood (2008), in comparing repression and splitting, has also examined Freud's development, very late in life (he cites Freud 1927 and 1940), of the idea of disavowal as a defence used alongside or instead of repression. Hinshelwood concludes that more research is needed on the connections between perception and registration:

> …a closer-related issue might need another and perhaps similar study to the present one. This is the question: is disavowal of reality in which the

> representations are obliterated the same as the process of annihilation of the ego-function of perception? (p.518)

To my mind Hinshelwood hasn't quite gone as far as Bass in appreciating the extent to which this line of argument requires us to alter our estimation of consciousness. Hinshelwood merely hints that perception may be under attack in disavowal, whereas Bass is openly considering a situation where we perceive, register, remember and identify features of the world, all without conscious awareness[41]. But it's clear that they are closing in on the same questions, questions that I would argue are motivated by an original instability in Freud's arguments. Just as the debate between Fonagy and Blum over repression led us to consider the registration and mental representation of experience, so too have Bass's enquiries led him to this topic. The hasty construction of binary structures in Freud's metapsychology, and the attribution of an occluded status to certain mental contents in the context of a situation where the understanding of registration and mental representation of experience was not well developed, has led to a present-day environment where these same gestures are recapitulated. In the body of the thesis I will examine how a re-evaluation of the processes of the registration and mental representation of experience will have implications for our understanding of the role of repression.

## Double Ph(F)antasy

One other issue I would like to consider at this point is the status of the concept of unconscious fantasy, (or phantasy after Isaacs 1948, to make a clear distinction between a daydream or conscious construction, and the workings of the unconscious mind). It seems appropriate to address the question of phantasy because taken together repression and phantasy are arguably at the heart of psychoanalysis, and an engagement with these concepts is fundamentally

[41] The evidence for this was available to Freud: "It is a very remarkable thing that the Ucs. of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs. This deserves closer investigation, *especially with a view to finding out whether preconscious activity can be excluded as playing a part in it*; but, descriptively speaking, the fact is incontestable. [Cf. an example of this in Freud, 1913i.]" (1915c, p.194, my emphasis).

characteristic of the discipline. According to Bell, phantasy is "the basic foundation of all mental life, including drives, impulses, all anxiety situations and defences" (2017, p.785). Erreich (2003) echoes this when she says:

> …despite important definitional differences, unconscious fantasies have become central to analytic work because they provide a vehicle for the mental representation of those aspects of psychic life that psychoanalysis addresses: affects, wishes, defenses, our general relation to ourselves and others. (2003, p.545)

Erreich underlines with this quote how (as we have already seen) theorizing about phantasy is interwoven with thinking about affect and repression (defences). However as she notes, despite the centrality of phantasy there are important definitional differences between different schools and factions of psychoanalysis. Here is the definition given by Laplanche and Pontalis in their 1973 reference work *The Language of Psychoanalysis*:

> Imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes.
>
> Phantasy has a number of different modes: conscious phantasies or daydreams, *unconscious phantasies like those uncovered by analysis as the structures underlying a manifest content*, and primal phantasies. (p. 314, my emphasis)

Note that this definition explicitly connects conscious daydreams with unconscious phantasy, and represents a phantasy as having been *distorted* by defensive processes in the same way that Freud believed manifest dream content to be. Differences between Freudians and Kleinians over the definition of phantasy were central to the 'Controversial Discussions'. Spillius (2001) says that the Freudians generally adhered to what she calls Freud's 'central usage' of the concept of phantasy (she acknowledges that here, as in so many areas, there is variation in Freud's language throughout his writings and accordingly the potential scope of

the concept) which has it that unconscious phantasy is generally a product of logical, secondary process thinking that has subsequently been repressed, in line with the definition provided by Laplanche and Pontalis above. By contrast for Kleinians (as we have already touched upon in the introduction) unconscious phantasy is 'originally unconscious' as a fundamental mental representation of instinct (certainly it was seen this way after Isaacs 1948), a substrate that underlies dreams and symptoms:

> In Freud's view, although there are phantasies in the system unconscious, the basic unit of the system unconscious is not phantasy but the unconscious instinctual wish. Dream-formation and phantasy-formation are parallel processes; one might speak of 'phantasy work' as comparable to the 'dream work'; both involve transformation of primary unconscious content into a disguised form. For Klein, on the contrary, unconscious phantasies are the primary unconscious content, and dreams are a transformation of it. For Freud, the prime mover, so to speak, is the unconscious wish; dreams and phantasies are both disguised derivatives of it. For Klein the prime mover is unconscious phantasy. (Spillius 2001, p.362)

For now let us just note that the Freudian view, thus defined, can be seen to privilege conscious (logical, rational) thought, making the phantasy a secondary product, once it has been worked on by defensive processes. For this reason the Kleinian view seems potentially more revolutionary, in a way we will probe in more detail later on. Despite being central to the Controversial Discussions[42] the Kleinian model of phantasy has not undergone a great deal of explicit development since that time, leading Spillius to comment that:

> Kleinians' changes in their definition and use of the concept of phantasy have been minimal. Considering that Kleinians regard unconscious

[42] Hayman (1989) gives a good summary of the differences over conceptions of phantasy at play in the Controversial Discussions, and also notes: "how the term 'phantasy' is still used for such widely differing notions: to indicate the problems that must exist, of what we mean and of how to communicate our ideas, if different people mean such different things by one technical term that is in constant use" (p.113).

> phantasy as such an important concept, it is perhaps surprising that little has been written about it since Isaacs' original paper. (2001, p. 368).

She continues: "Since 1943 the differences of definition and usage have continued, though most of the heat has gone out of this particular debate" (2001, pp.367-368). Almost three decades after the Controversial Discussions Arlow noted (1969a): "It would seem that a concept so well founded clinically and so much a part of the body of our theory would long since have ceased to be a problem for psychoanalysts. This is not the case however." (p. 3). Bringing us further up to date, Reeder (1995) observes the continuance of the problem: "The status of the concept of unconscious fantasy is ambiguous in Freud's writings and to this day still debatable within the psychoanalytic community" (p. 79). And in 2001 Levy and Inderbitzin note that the problem of definition persists, which they see as contributing to the fragmentation of psychoanalysis:

> Psychoanalytic discourse across theoretical, geographic and cultural boundaries has become increasingly difficult as psychoanalysis has grown internationally from its central European origins. Psychoanalytic terms have been used inconsistently, often with little regard for the problems in communication and scientific and intellectual progress such inconsistency creates… even within the perspective of contemporary ego-psychology, of which our work is representative, there is considerable variability, contradiction and lack of clarity about what the term fantasy refers to. (2001, p.795)

They continue: "In our view, the reluctance of the international psychoanalytic community to arrive at some definitional consistency has inhibited progress and led to serious misunderstandings" (Ibid., p.800). Quite why (in Spillius' words) the 'heat has gone out of the debate' is unclear to me: differences in definition which represent fundamental conceptual differences over such a key part of theory seem unsustainable, and have clearly led to confusion and fragmentation, with corresponding difficulties in communication even between different 'branches' of psychoanalysis, let alone between psychoanalysis and other disciplines. The IPA's Committee on Conceptual Integration produced a paper in 2015 (Bohleber et al.)

attempting to assess the prospects for developing an integrated conceptualization of phantasy. They reviewed key papers from Kleinian, Contemporary Freudian, Ego Psychology, Self Psychology, Relational psychoanalysis and French psychoanalysis and attempted to generate a 'meaning space' where differing conceptualizations could be compared, by positioning different understandings of phantasy along 5 different axes, or 'dichotomized dimensions': endogenously generated (imagination) versus veridical; essentialism vs. nominalism; organized vs. unorganized; phantasies as 'global' or 'particularized'; and age at which phantasy formation is possible (from birth vs. 1st/2nd year of life). Though a fantastically detailed and even-handed exercise the results were equivocal at best:

> A number of dimensions thus distinguish the different versions of the concept 'unconscious phantasy' very well, demonstrating that, while some versions share similarities, others are so divergent that they resist integration with at least a few of the other versions. Above all, these key divergences turn on the fundamental assumptions of the various school traditions as these combine with different metapsychological frames of references and with unresolved epistemological problems. (2015, p.725)

Interestingly they conclude with a discussion of these 'epistemological' concerns, concerns that largely turn on the *ontological* status of phantasies in the mind. This closely reflects the direction of my own enquiries.

One possible defence of the terminological looseness over phantasy comes from Joseph Sandler's (1983, 1986) idea of an 'elastic concept'. He makes a virtue of the flexibility of the concept of phantasy, arguing that within a discipline like psychoanalysis, which has of necessity to engage with speculative metapsychology, having flexibility with concepts allows the development of an overarching structure:

> Elastic concepts play a very important part in holding psychoanalytic theory together. As psychoanalysis is made up of formulations at varying levels of abstraction, and of part—theories which do not integrate well with one another, the existence of pliable, context—dependent concepts allows

> an overall framework of psychoanalytic theory to be assembled. (1983, p.36)

For me, Sandler's argument would hold more weight if the use of elastic concepts had enabled the development of a flourishing *and* coherent body of theory: instead, over a century after its inception it is increasingly fragmented and outside of its adherents, frequently dismissed altogether as either therapeutic practice or as a means to investigate the mind (see discussion in Chapter 1). As ever with Freud's work, part of the problem arises through the continued evolution of his own thinking as his body of work developed and he continued to challenge himself. It is widely recognized that Freud's topographical and structural theories of the mind are not consistent, particularly where it comes to the notion of phantasy (Arlow 1969a, 1969b, Brenner 1994, Sandler 1986). Here is Freud himself musing on the theoretical bind he found himself in with regard to phantasy:

> Among the derivatives of the Ucs. instinctual impulses, of the sort we have described, there are some which unite in themselves characters of an opposite kind. On the one hand, they are highly organized, free from self-contradiction, have made use of every acquisition of the system Cs. and would hardly be distinguished in our judgment from the formations of that system. On the other hand they are unconscious and are incapable of becoming conscious. Thus *qualitatively they belong to the system Pcs., but factually to the Ucs*.… Of such a nature are those fantasies of normal people as well as of neurotics which we have recognized as preliminary stages in the formation both of dreams and of symptoms and which, in spite of their high degree of organization, remain repressed and therefore cannot become conscious. (Freud 1915c, pp. 190-191, my emphasis)

Erreich (2003) identifies these thoughts as part of Freud's evolution from the topographical to structural models, observing that this movement in his thinking was accompanied by "a more universal model of the dominance of unconscious fantasies as determinant for psychic reality. Ultimately, the nature of the patient's fantasy life became the central interest of psychoanalytic work." (2003, p. 542). In practice, since Freud, many analysts adopt the heuristic of switching between

topographical and structural frames of reference as the need arises (Sandler 1986). Clearly though this does not resolve the underlying theoretical instability – the need to see phantasy as both (potentially) a highly structured phenomenon reminiscent of the secondary process, and simultaneously as essentially unconscious. Arlow (1969a) remarks: "unconscious fantasies embarrass our methodology. The evidence is clear that such fantasies do exist but precisely where is one to place them in our conceptual frame of reference?" (p.4). More recently Sandler has made explicit that no amount of conceptual 'tidying up' has been able to reconcile the topographical and structural models, especially where phantasy is concerned:

> Although it has been possible to clarify, either in terms of the topographical model or the structural, some of the various meanings attributed to the notions of fantasy, and it has seemed relatively easy to transform the topographical formulations into structural ones, the relation between the two frames of reference is not straightforward, and the transition from the topographical to the structural theory of the mind has left us with problems which Freud was unable to solve and with which a number of psychoanalytic authors have subsequently grappled. (Sandler 1986, p.179)

Levy and Inderbitzin note that both Arlow and Brenner have tried to address the incompatibility of Freud's topographical and structural models. Their proposed solution is that we "should consider the function of fantasising, de-emphasising the differences between unconscious and conscious fantasies" (2001, p.796), therefore focussing on the activity and its effects, presumably sidestepping ontological questions about the nature of phantasy (or its location). The Sandlers (Sandler 1986, Sandler and Sandler 1986, 1994) have attempted their own clarification by introducing a novel distinction between the 'past' and 'present' unconscious. Briefly, the 'past unconscious' can be roughly aligned with the id or system unconscious of the topographical model. It is a kind of amalgam of instinctual wishes, early child-like responses to stimuli both internal and external, and is 'originally unconscious', segregated from other psychic contents by its place behind the barrier of primal repression. The 'present unconscious': "can be regarded as an organized part of the personality that perhaps most closely

resembles the unconscious ego of the structural model " (1986, p.188). The contents of the present unconscious are able to pass the 'first censorship'[43] and become subject to secondary process operations: it is oriented towards wellbeing and the concerns of everyday life, and serves a 'stabilizing function' for the personality (Ibid., p.191). The different kinds of phantasy then, and their different modes of operation, derive from the different areas of the unconscious. The Sandlers' proposals are interesting, though they have not been widely adopted, possibly because the conjoint notions of two 'kinds' of unconscious function and additional layers of censorship require a substantial revision to Freudian metapsychology.

I have not even begun to describe the treatment of phantasy in the French tradition of psychoanalysis. This is partly because Lacan's influence (e.g. 1966) has been very great in this sphere: I disagree quite profoundly with Lacan's view of the unconscious and therefore devote an entire chapter later on to analyzing this in more detail. It is also because, as Levy and Inderbitzin say, "French psychoanalysis is perhaps even more heterogeneous and difficult to summarise than contemporary American ego-psychology" (2001, p.800). This in itself supports my purpose in this literature review, which is to demonstrate that philosophical problems stemming from Freud have led to confusion and fragmentation, which persists to the present day. Levy and Inderbitzin again:

> Insisting on the priority of its language isolates each psychoanalytic school from the others, and worse, all our work from adjacent disciplines that find our scientific discourse chaotic, incomprehensible and therefore increasingly irrelevant. (2001, p.802)

[43] Joseph Sandler's metapsychology depends on a second censorship explained in Sandler 1986, and also at length in the material on dreams in Sandler et al. 1997. "The proposition that there is, in addition to the usual notion of a censorship operating between the systems Unconscious and Preconscious, a second censorship between the Preconscious and Conscious systems, was never properly integrated into the topographical model. It disappeared from view after the structural theory was introduced, when the metaphor of censorship was more completely absorbed into the pre-existing ideas of resistance and defence. There is a strong case, I believe, for the re-introduction of the idea of the second censorship into current psychoanalytic thinking in some form, in that it permits a closer fit between psychoanalytic theory and clinical experience" (1986, p.185).

To bring us up to date completely I'd like to look briefly at a very recent discussion, which demonstrates that debates over the nature and uses of the concept of phantasy continue to this day. In 2014 a debate took place in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* between Lucy LaFarge and two discussants, Donnel Stern and Michael Feldman. LaFarge, a self-described 'North American object relations theorist' says that "phantasy and transference are the defining features of psychoanalytic practice" (2014, p.1265). She elegantly describes phantasy as:

> …the idea that our everyday, conscious experience is interpenetrated by unconscious wishes, fears, and beliefs that are only partially explained by contemporary, external reality. A second, unconscious reality at all times shapes our experience and is evoked by it. We perceive the present through the lens of this unconscious, psychic reality; and, at the same time, contemporary, conscious reality appears to bring to life elements of psychic reality which, blended with, and represented by, contemporary events, press toward the repetition of familiar dramas (Arlow, 1969; Isaacs, 1952). Although these elements draw upon historical events and are linked to specific developmental phases, a close examination indicates that they are not replicas of historical reality. Rather they are organizations of phantasy. (2014, p.1265)

According to her phantasies are unconscious phenomena and cannot be known directly. As with Klein (1946) she believes that from very early on phantasy and objects are bound together, and that the most influential phantasies originate in early wishes and bodily experiences. Opposing LaFarge, Donnel Stern, an interpersonal/relational psychoanalyst[44], holds that "the inferences that lead to the concept of phantasy, however useful they may be to many clinicians, are not demanded by the phenomena" (2014, p.1286). That is to say, Stern appears to have a philosophical objection to adopting phantasy as a means to explain unconscious mental phenomena. He has an understanding of mind that does not depend on phantasy, believing that we should view the unconscious (he prefers

[44] Feldman, a Kleinian, differs from LaFarge more in terms of technique than theory so I have not detailed his responses here. They can be found in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 95: 1279-1281.

'unconsciousness') as a realm of *unformulated experience*: this stems from his view that consciousness is an emergent phenomenon resulting from non-linear processes (see Gleick 1988). This entails a rejection of psychic determinism and leads Stern to view mental activity as unpredictable (though in the sense of non-linear systems, therefore not random). I appreciate that this is not a mainstream or widely held view, though neither is Stern alone in his understanding (Mitchell 1997, Hoffman 1998, Cushman 1996, Seligman 2005). The important thing here is to illustrate that there is sufficient variation in theory amongst currently practising psychoanalysts to allow for such polemical, contradictory understandings of the importance of phantasy. Stern still subscribes to other tenets of psychoanalytic belief, such as the importance of working with the transference. Citing Harry Stack Sullivan (1940, 1953), Stern approvingly describes the view that:

> …anxiety is created by contagion, most influentially in the parent-child relationship, but also continuing through the rest of life. When the child behaves in a way that sets off parental anxiety, anxiety is induced in the child. The whole process occurs outside consciousness for both parent and child, and in this way the behaviour and experience in question, which cannot be tolerated in awareness, come to exist in dissociation, outside the bounds of the self… like trauma, *this aspect of subjectivity is not symbolized anywhere in the mind*, and appears only in anxiety-laden interactions which threaten to bring it to the fore… In this way, anxiety (trauma, if you like) is transmitted across the generations. (Ibid., p.1288, my emphasis)

For Stern this clearly represents a situation where behaviour (and affect) is transmitted unconsciously, resulting in changes of subjective experience and creating a situation which can conceivably later be approached in psychoanalysis – though according to Stern, not usefully understood in terms of phantasy. In this quote a great deal rests on what one takes 'symbolized in the mind' to mean, and how one sees symbolization taking place. First of all, and most profoundly, what is a symbol?[45] Do we only accept that something is 'symbolized in the mind' if the symbols used represent, in some isomorphic way, the original anxiety-generating situation? Is it only the case if that symbolic structure can be apprehended through

[45] See especially Chapter 8.

introspection, or reconstructed as a memory? Or, reached or reconstructed through interpretation, with the analyst's help? As Erreich has said, part of the problem is that "Traditional psychoanalytic theory has had no competing concept for how to represent mental content other than unconscious fantasy" (2003, p.545). She references Bowlby's (1973) 'internal working models' and Daniel Stern's (1985) RIGs (Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized) but notes that in both cases "their conceptualizations were supposed to represent only the veridical aspects of object relations" (2003, p.545). Even if one takes such conceptualizations to go beyond the veridical, as we saw in the introduction there has been little description or understanding of how such models would represent object relations and connect with wider symbolic apprehension of the world, leaving them in danger of seeming to be encapsulated 'black boxes' driving behaviour and affective response through unknown mechanisms (not unlike the role I see implicit memory assuming in Fonagy's discussion of repression earlier in this chapter). In like manner, I would argue that Stern's description of the transmission of anxiety between parent and child presents a scenario where essential parts of the process have been elided. I struggle to see how or why you would describe an anxiety producing parent-child interaction without appreciating that the specific behaviour in question will be perceived and registered in the mind (whether it is consciously remembered or associated with the affect or not) in a manner which affects later responses to stimulus. One might believe that 'the whole process occurs outside consciousness' in the sense that neither participant was conscious of the association of behaviour and affect at the time that it took place, but that they were in some way conscious of the behaviour and could subsequently remember it and appreciate the connection with the affect (anxiety). Alternatively, it is possible that some kind of registration of events has taken place entirely outside of conscious awareness, such that it *cannot* be consciously appreciated: this would fit with Bass's idea of the unconscious registration of reality and yet would still not prove that the anxiety-causing situation was *not* symbolized anywhere in the mind. The connection between perception, registration, memory and affect is complicated but the point is that once again we have run across a fault line in psychoanalytic theory that seems to issue from an underdeveloped concept of mental representation. Levy and Inderbitzin (2001) note that the question of 'where' mental content exists is not a simple one. They

also remark on the importance of a well-worked out theory of mental representation and the essential connection with meaning, and hint at the potentially radical nature of such a theory:

> Where fantasies come to reside and, more generally, whether content exists 'within' a mind at all or is outside the functional conception of the structural model is a vexing problem. Such a model, to be consistent, acts on mental content, creates and alters it, responds to it, but does not contain it. This view is far more radical than most structuralists embrace. It fails to provide a way of conceptualising how fantasies from the past influence current perceptions, experiences and behaviours, an idea central to Arlow's own point of view (1969b) regarding the impact of fantasy on conscious experience. A comprehensive theory of mind must include functions and account for an inner world of fantasy, memory, self- and object-representations and meaning in general. (2001, pp.796-797)

Stern certainly appears at times to have a static or somewhat restricted idea of phantasy, "like a stage set behind a curtain, ready to be revealed when the curtain is raised" (2014, p. 1290), but although I would not accord with this nor go along with his movement away from phantasy as a theoretical construct, I am sympathetic to his dissatisfaction with classical descriptions of the unconscious as drawn from Freud. Blass (2014) raises the question of whether Stern's work entails "a radical shift away from the theory of phantasy as he suggests, or whether it is an effort to better present the unconscious" (2014, p. e4). Although I'm not sure how useful the concept of 'potential' or 'unformulated' experience is I do agree that the unconscious "has no single predetermined shape" (Stern 2014, p.1290). However my question is whether there *is* a better way to understand the unconscious, and hence bring some clarity to these ongoing and seemingly intractable theoretical problems. Whilst I am a believer in the fundamental importance of phantasy I do not share the view of those like Litowitz (2007), who hold that the concept of phantasy as it stands is sufficiently robust to serve as the basis for dialogue with those in other fields.

I have examined current literature on repression and phantasy in some detail to show that certain aporias, and theoretical gestures in response to them, have been recapitulated continually throughout the history of psychoanalysis, up until the present day. My claim is that a critical weak point in Freud's original theorizing was the theory of mental representation – or rather, the lack of one, which issued to a great extent from a commitment to the metaphysics of presence. On the issue of phantasy Erreich asserts that:

> It seems possible to demystify the notion of unconscious fantasy and locate it securely within a cognitive model of the mind. *Any model of the mind must be able to account for varieties of mental content (e.g., imagistic and propositional), mental functions that operate on or manipulate that content (e.g., defensive operations), and the means by which that content is represented in the mind. Analysts have not generally made these distinctions*, resulting in a variety of problems, including uncertainty about the relationship between compromise formations and unconscious fantasies. (2003, p.543, my emphasis)

I entirely agree, and subsequent chapters will be devoted to investigating whether, with Derrida's help, we can develop a model that meets (or at least more closely approaches) these criteria. In the next chapter I will look specifically at how Derrida may help us to develop a methodology.

# 3

# A Deconstructive Method

“My contention is that the nature of Freud's clinical project cannot be appreciated without expanding his passing thought that the Nietzschean attack on philosophy in general said something that he could not quite formulate, that was 'mute' in him"

(Bass 1993, p.198)

“Derrida demonstrates that without knowing it, Freud placed radically nonpresent difference at the heart of his thinking”

(Bass 2006, p.99)

## Resistances to Derrida

Derrida's philosophy has greatly informed my thinking, and I intend to make a very particular kind of use of his perspective, methods and conclusions, performing a deconstructive reading of psychoanalytic texts to probe the philosophical issues that both shape them and hold them back. Having done so, and employing my Fractal Image Compression metaphor, I will examine the repercussions for psychoanalytic theory of a deconstructively informed metapsychology. This kind of recursive engagement between Derrida and Freud seems obviously productive to me, but is very rare in the literature. This is not to say that Derrida's engagement with Freud has not been picked up by many writers – as I pointed out in the introduction Derrida has been influential and his work is so thoroughly informed by psychoanalysis (Bennington 2000, Royle 2003) that it is scarcely possible to discuss it without acknowledging that fact. The 'Yale School' of literary theorists, critics and philosophers, including de Man, Hartmann and Bloom, owes its existence to Derridean deconstruction, and other significant philosophical figures such as Helene Cixous and Jean-Luc Nancy, and more recently Catherine Malabou, have all been heavily influenced by Derrida and engaged with his work. Malabou (see especially 2009, 2013) comes closest to my own project by triangulating philosophy, neuroscience and psychoanalysis, though ultimately her focus is philosophical and ethical. Moreover it seems to me that Malabou imposes an extremely restricted reading of *Of Grammatology* which misses the profound implications of Derrida's approach to 'writing' (and therefore to 'grammatology'). Introducing her 2007 essay '*The End of Writing: Grammatology and Plasticity'* she says:

> This essay will propose that an original modifiability, not reducible to the single operation of writing, is initiated from the beginning as well. I call this modifiability "plasticity." "Plasticity of writing" would then be the paradox inherent in the redefinition of writing itself that may explain the "failure" of any "grammatology". (2007, p.431)

As we can see Malabou introduces the notion of plasticity as her own unique intervention. However what she says here about modifiability seems to partially restate Derrida's thinking of the 'trace' rather than initiate anything original. Whatever she may mean by the 'single operation of writing', I am quite sure that Derrida does not employ the figure of writing with the intention of fixing it to any particular medium, location or 'operation'. For example, in assessing approvingly Freud's use of the metaphor of writing Derrida says:

> If such metaphors are indispensible, it is perhaps because they illuminate, inversely, the meaning of a trace in general, and eventually, in articulation with this meaning, may illuminate the meaning of writing in the popular sense. (1978, pp.249-250)

In other words Derrida engages with the metaphor of writing because it opens to the idea of the trace and in doing so goes beyond any historical or technical specificity: he is very precise about this, insisting that "this unnameable movement of *difference-itself*, that I have strategically nicknamed *trace*, *reserve*, or *différance*, could be called writing only within the *historical* closure, that is to say within the limits of science and philosophy" (1976, p.93). At the very least Malabou's use of 'writing' is infused (and confused) with what Derrida here calls the 'popular sense' of the term. She continues her essay "*The expansion of the concept of writing is not necessarily, or not uniquely, a graphic gesture*" (Ibid., p.435). No indeed, and Derrida would never have thought, or said so; the observation therefore speaks to a fundamental misunderstanding of his work, in my view. Kirby has also remarked on how Malabou appears to overlook the ways in which the texts she is critiquing have *already* addressed her concerns:

> Malabou's challenge makes no mention of the networked systematicity conjured by Derrida's *différance*, a 'non-concept', a 'no-thing', which cross-references the divisions she relies upon for the validity of her argument, even as it breaches and fractures the locatability of these divisions/differences as an 'in-between' any*thing*. (2016, p.62)

In short, though Malabou is keen to move on from Derrida to talk about plasticity (or 'plastology') I believe she is too hasty: there is yet more to be learnt from an examination of writing and the trace, as accessed through Freud.

Where other authors engage with Derrida, though psychoanalysis may feature as a motif or focal point, they do not make any sort of detailed examination of his substantial, long-term engagement with the discipline (which occurs within, but is not limited to, for instance: some significant passages within *Differance* (1973), *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1978), *Positions* (1981), *The Post Card* (1987) and *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1998)). And more significantly for my current purposes, they do not examine the *consequences* for psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic metapsychology or clinical practice, of Derrida's work.

A much more familiar trajectory in the humanities points to Jacques Lacan. Superficially there are similarities between my thesis and Lacan's project – offering a philosophically inflected re-reading of Freud, informed by structuralism. There are however substantial differences between us, which stem from my engagement with Derrida. Why Lacan has been so warmly received (notably in my own discipline of psychosocial studies) where Derrida has not is unclear. In a review of Derrida's *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* in 2000, Anthony Elliott asks: "Why is Slavoj Zizek's reading of Lacan so popular in the academy at the present time, and why is it preferred over Derrida's Freud?" (p.129)[46]. A few notable exceptions, who *have* paid close attention to Derrida's engagement with psychoanalysis over time, are Major 1991, Bennington 2000, Ellman 2000. There has also been some interest in Derrida's engagement with post-Freudians, especially Abraham and Torok (see Derrida 1986, 2007, discussed by Melville 1986). Yet on the whole when Derrida's work on psychoanalysis is thought of, it is often in conjunction with, or as an aside to, reference to either Lacan (see for example *The Purloined Poe* Muller and Richardson eds. 1988, Hurst 2008, Lewis 2008) or alternatively, Deleuze (Protevi 2001, Schwab, ed. 2007). Derrida is seldom put centre stage: the treatment of Derrida's powerful critique of Lacan,

[46] I will be examining Lacan's re-reading of Freud in a later chapter, and considering the ways in which Lacan's account differs from my own.

published in '*The Post Card*' (1987) but also in the collection of essays *The Purloined Poe* (1988) is a case in point. Reviewing the latter, Bellin comments:

> The most serious critique of Lacan's theory of the signifier comes not from a psychoanalyst, but from a philosopher, Jacques Derrida. However, in this collection, the cards are stacked against him. Muller and Richardson give us only a scant introduction to Derridean deconstructive methodology and thinking, in "The Challenge of Deconstruction," and no map, and few notes to the Derridean text. (1990, p.478)

This neglect, elision or even, one might say, *repression* of Derrida's work on Freud may be a consequence of the particular, enmeshed nature of the relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Derrida has said that there could be no deconstruction without psychoanalysis (*Positions* 1981, p.83), a debt also investigated by Bennington[47] who says that deconstruction "already inhabits psychoanalysis, is marked in advance by it, as though by a language one does not choose and cannot place in an external position" (2000, pp. 99-100). Yet Derrida also resists, and is resisted by, psychoanalysis, in the same way that resistance is essentially part of all analysis - as he says in his characteristic style:

> There is no analytic position once resistance is not identifiable. As for the analytic position, it can only be a resistance to this law. (Derrida 1998, p. 32)

Wortham (2011) has taken this idea further, suggesting that this inbuilt resistance to analysis renders psychoanalysis so unstable that it is impossible to take a simple position in regard to it:

> …resistance to psychoanalysis cannot be thought outside of the resistances *of* psychoanalysis—that is, a resistance of itself to itself as both a form of analysis and concept–making, opening up an internal division that traverses the "subject" and "object" of psychoanalysis "itself" (hence a resistance of

[47] "the relationship of Derrida with Freud is *original* in the sense that it is there at the origin, from the start, that there is, and would have been, no Derrida without Freud" (Bennington 2000 p.96).

> the "other" of itself to itself). Thus, analysis—psychoanalysis—cannot acquire the conceptual unity or self–identity that would be needed in order for it to be posited as a stable "object" simply to be resisted, critiqued, or condemned. (Wortham 2011, p.53)

It is notable that this examination of Derrida's relationship to psychoanalysis is taking place in a literary journal, as literary theory appears to be the arena in which Derrida's ideas are most readily welcomed. At what was arguably the time of his greatest influence, Flax (1981) observed that "Derrida's impact on English and American philosophy has not nearly matched his remarkable influence in academic departments of literature" (p. 237). Bennington suggests that the complexity of Derrida's ideas (and the sophistication of his presentation) is part of the reason for this selective reception:

> Derrida has not so much re-defined philosophy (the traditional task of philosophy) as rendered it permanently in-definite. This difficult situation has been the cause of many misunderstandings of Derrida, by both philosophers and non-philosophers, and demands a delicacy of reading which is all but unmanage-able, but which goes some way towards explaining the attraction Derrida's work has held for students of literature. (Bennington 2000, p.7)

The complexity of his work cannot be the only reason though, since Lacan's writing is also extremely dense and abstract, to the extent that, as Frosh admits, it "can appear wilfully obscure" (2012 p.171). I think that there is something more at work with Derrida's texts, a difficulty not only with his style but also with the perceived intractability of the underlying problems he tackles, that leads many readers to believe that he is in some way against truth, or that his methods are incompatible with rigorous enquiry. It is in the nature of deconstruction to 'leave everything as it is' (as Wittgenstein[48] might have it), since as Bennington (2000) says, it "involves less an *operation on* than a *demonstration about*" (p. 8) the logics, assumptions and restrictions of any text it examines: it does not, in and of itself, transform the texts it examines, and according to Norris (2003) deconstruction is

[48] *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) I. 124.

not even a method[49]. This does not, to my mind, mean that a deconstructive approach cannot carry us somewhere new or lead to new insight. Nonetheless the following, part of an article explaining deconstruction to a psychoanalytic audience in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* is a fairly typical response to Derrida's work:

> Many Western intellectuals and artists would now agree that one cannot prove 'truths' about the nature of the world and of human experience; that nothing expressed in language can be an absolute truth; that binary oppositions and hierarchies, particularly if political or social, are suspect; that we do not have unmediated access to reality, independent of our personality, culture, history or situation; that reason serves power; that we are not masters of our own language, thoughts or sayings; that there are no facts free of preconception … In short, we live and think, it seems to me, in an intellectual climate of deconstruction. Rather than try to enumerate all these relativisms, I could simply make a contemporary gesture: shrug and say 'whatever'. (Holland 1999, p.161)

It seems to me that the hopeless shrug Holland suggests underpins (in some form or other, if metaphorically) many of the responses (or lack of the same) to Derrida's work: as if to say, if Derrida is correct, what then? What difference does it actually make to our practices, or even our way of thinking? As Bennington says, rather more succinctly: "If we know a priori that metaphysics can be neither established nor overcome, what are we trying to achieve in our dealings with it?" (2000, p. 14). Perhaps this, more than anything, is the reason that deconstruction has been employed more in a spirit of *undoing* – in the critique and unsettling of texts, structures and systems of thought – and less in a spirit of *doing*, of the initiation of new ways of thinking, of the constructive extension of philosophical or psychoanalytic endeavour.

This uncertainty about what to *do* with Derrida is frequently transmuted very rapidly into outright negativity, and hostility to the idea of deconstruction,

[49] "To present 'deconstruction as if it were a method, a system of a settled body of ideas would be to falsify its nature and lay oneself open to charges of reductive misunderstanding" (p.1).

poststructuralism or the 'postmodern' (demonstrated for instance by the 1992 row over Cambridge University's proposal to award him an honorary degree, but see also Ellis 1989, and Norris 1990 for a review of some of the main complaints against Derrida, including Ellis's, and Habermas's). Holland says bluntly:

> Although deconstruction may have led to art forms that let us challenge ourselves profoundly, deconstruction itself can create nothing. It depends on differences, subtractions— there are no positives. (1990, p.160)

This statement embodies the peculiar nihilism that creeps over many commentators when discussing Derrida's work. Though literally correct – deconstruction *itself* (if one can meaningfully say that, as though deconstruction were a 'thing') can create nothing, does not seek to create – the conclusion that 'there are no positives' seems to go beyond the factual and suggest that deconstruction involves an absolute negativity, a negation of thought and hope. Yet I think that this is both an exaggeration and a misreading of Derrida. I do not believe that the correct response to Derrida's arguments is to surrender judgement, rigour, or rational enquiry. Neither does Bennington:

> Deconstruction is not a form of hermeneutics, however supposedly radical, for just this reason: hermeneutics always proposes a convergent movement towards a unitary meaning (however much it may wish to respect ambiguity on the way), the word of God; deconstruction discerns a dispersive perspective in which there is no (one) meaning. Many readers of Derrida have lost their nerve at this point, fearing *a nihilistic consequence which does not in fact follow*… The absence of a unitary horizon of meaning for the process of reading does not commit Derrida to the recommendation of meaninglessness, nor does it entail the equivalence in value of all different readings (rather the singularity of each), and indeed demands the most rigorous textual evidence for readings proposed: but it does argue that no one reading will ever be able to claim to have exhausted the textual resources available in the text being read. (2000 p. 11, my emphasis)

As Bennington says, what *is* demanded by deconstruction is precisely rigour, along with humility; given those caveats, it remains possible to argue for philosophical positions, for the advantages or disadvantages of different readings or for different ways of doing things. Two authors who have attempted to constructively outline, in different ways, the implications of deconstruction for (applied) psychoanalysis are Barnaby Barratt and Derrida's sometime translator and practicing psychoanalyst Alan Bass. Each attempts to draw out the dialogue between deconstruction and psychoanalysis. In *Psychoanalysis and the Postmodern Impulse* Barratt attempts "to distinguish between psychoanalytic process as the revolutionary science of discourse and systematized 'psychoanalysis' as a normalized and normalizing doctrine" (1993, p.xii). However he is adamant that he will not offer a new reading of Freud since his project is not to debate between 'schools':

> I do not adduce new evidence but instead try to show that what is and is not evident is precisely at issue in the breaking of the very episteme that has determined what will count as evidence in the first place (1993, p.xiii)

From this we can see that Barratt intends to view the whole notion of discourse through a Derridean lens. At stake for Barratt is not just our understanding of Freud, but an appreciation of the conditions of historicity that allow us to view discourse (including psychoanalytic discourse) in a certain way. In other words, the designation of certain types of discourse as able to provide 'correct' interpretation is a process which only makes sense in terms of a hierarchy of discourse wherein the aim is to authorize certain types of discourse and disallow others. The rupture Derrida speaks of in *Structure, Sign and Play* (1978) may well be the breaking of the modern episteme; at issue in our discussion is ultimately whether Freud has helped to place us in a position whereby we can renegotiate our ideas of truth as they obtain in discussions of psychological phenomena. I am in accord with Barratt's premises, but his chosen method differs from mine; as a clinician his emphasis is on exploring the emancipatory potential of free association, whereas I would like to begin the renegotiation at the level of metapsychology (Barratt also relies quite heavily on a classical model of repression, which along with Bass (1996) I find problematic).

Barratt is right however to remind us that we must be mindful of the terms of our discussion, since we are hamstrung by our metaphysical inheritance; a conundrum familiar to deconstructionists and one which continually threatens a re-evaluation of Freud's metapsychology. Bass begins with a narrower aim, to help us understand Freud's clinical project. He reminds us of:

> …the necessity of conceptualizing clinical concerns and the general delimitation of philosophy together. But Freud seems to have left this question only at the level of intuition. However, the sustained nature of his clinical-theoretical enterprise, which always pushes against the boundaries of even his own thought, cannot be divorced from the sustained efforts of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida to think through the very question that Freud intuited. (Bass 1993, p.198)

Bass believes that deconstruction and psychoanalysis have a great deal in common, that deconstruction is "implicitly psychoanalytic" in that it "works to show how contradictions, exclusions, and impasses are resources for new ways of thinking" (2000, vii). As we have already seen, Bass has taken this positive, generative attitude to deconstruction and extended Freud's late-period thinking on defence and disavowal, resulting in his conviction that the unconscious registration of reality has to be investigated in more detail. In the following chapters I will employ a similarly constructive and optimistic reading of Derrida in order to examine the idea of mental representation, particularly as it relates to, and derives from, *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad*. A Derridean idea that will be particularly helpful here is that of 'trace'[50], and my Fractal Image Compression metaphor can be thought of as a way

[50] Like many of Derrida's innovations 'trace' is not strictly a concept, nor amenable to easy definition, but is put into context by Bennington thus: "Difference (radicalised by Derrida's neologism *différance* to bring out both spatial and temporal resonances, identity being an effect of differences from other elements *and* between events of repetition) is the *milieu* in which identities are sketched but never quite achieved (any element being defined only in terms of all the others and all its repetitions, the *trace* of which remains as a sort of constitutive contamination), but never quite lost (*différance* can be thought of as a dispersion, but never an *absolute* dispersion). Identities depend on traces of other identities: but the trace 'itself', now the logically prior term, is not

to help think the trace in the context of dreams and memory. Major (2016) describes the significance of 'trace' and the way in which it marks the opening of Freud's texts into the question of writing:

> If I had to retrace in a few words the properly Freudian anchor of Derridean deconstruction, I would situate this in the thinking of the trace. That is indeed the point at which deconstruction proves itself to be most analytic, and the point from which deconstruction was most questioning of a certain psychoanalytic thinking. Derrida grasped from the outset how Freud had crossed the barrier of repression that since Plato had maintained the force of the trace and of writing outside of the logos and of speech in a logocentric repression in conjunction with all forms of onto-theological metaphysics… Memory, as the very essence of the psyche, is at the same time resistance and openness to the effraction of the trace. Freud interrupts the Platonic and Aristotelian assurance with regard to perception and memory in order to open up a new type of questioning about metaphoricity, writing, and spacing in general. (Major 2016, pp.7-8)

This point, where psychoanalysis and deconstruction intersect, and Freud crosses the 'barrier of repression' to gesture towards a new way of thinking about memory and consciousness, is the territory I wish to operate in.

## Freud the Philosopher

As Derrida has shown, (and as Freud realized, as we will see in Chapter 5) Freud leads us directly to questions at the 'centre of nature' (Freud, letter 27). Though these are conceptual issues within psychoanalysis, they lead us to, or open onto, questions of fundamental importance for philosophy: the nature of mental representation, meaning and consciousness. In his descriptions of mental processes, and particularly in his unpacking of the contents of dreams, Freud has given us a way of proceeding from 'within' which nonetheless supports and

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answerable to any metaphysical characterisation (it is, for example, neither present nor absent, and, as the condition of identity in general, is not itself *identifiable*)" (2000, p.12).

harmonizes with a belief system which is neither transcendentalist nor idealist. In a sense this is a standpoint with a distinctly *phenomenological* flavour. Glendinning describes what he sees as typical characteristics of phenomenological thought, and he includes as key items, first, that phenomenologists find a way of 'going on' in philosophy that does not require a 'sideways on' view of reality. Nonetheless:

> A thoroughgoing phenomenologist would not want to *deny* that there is, for each of us, 'a reality completely independent of the mind which conceives it, sees or feels it' for the phenomenologist should not *slight* or *diminish* the *sense* of objectivity that we pre-reflectively affirm. Phenomenology should give a (faithful) explication and not a (reductive) explanation of that sense. (2007, p.19)

On which account, we do not slide into a situation where we have a mind/world dichotomy, or risk solipsistic conclusions. We should understand why we *feel* the way we do about the reality of our surroundings, whilst acknowledging the limitations and peculiarities of our own, personal viewpoint. Such an explication or description, for Glendinning's phenomenologist, does not leave us feeling that we need another order of explanation, or perspective; on the contrary, a sufficiently rich description would be transformative:

> …here we find an impulse in the inheritance of philosophy as phenomenology… which aims radically to question the *intelligibility* of the idea of reflectively shifting from what one might call 'the insider standpoint' to one which conceives that standpoint from sideways on. (2007, p.55, emphasis in original)

In other words it's not (or not just) that we can't, due to some epistemic limit, shift between (perhaps ideally conceived) 'internal' and 'external' ways of looking at the world, but rather that there is something fundamentally incoherent about the idea of doing so, an incoherence which a successful phenomenological account will somehow bring to light. The ultimate target I have in mind here is the difficulty that we have in reconciling the fact that we instinctively feel that there is

'something that it is like'[51] to have an experience, with the modern belief that (from 'sideways on', we might say) our experiences somehow reside in the mechanical/chemical/electrical activity in our brains, activity that doesn't 'look' (from the side) like it 'feels' (from inside). One, much attempted, line of attack is to explain how the 'side on' view accounts for, or exhausts, or eliminates, the 'insider' account. A happy prospect is that a way of proceeding phenomenologically will obviate the need for such explanations. As Glendinning says:

> Of course, *bringing it about that others see too that we do not need such explanations* in philosophy is also part of the philosopher's task. (2007, p.26)

John Russon (2004) has observed the congruence between Freud's work and phenomenology, observing that for Freud, knowledge comes through lived experience; one of Freud's fundamental achievements was to encourage us to see that our understanding of the world (the family, in the first instance) is embodied. He saw that a scientific or biological description was simply insufficient. This may be a simple step, methodologically, but one which had eluded generations of scientists and philosophers, who – with the exception of the phenomenologists – have a tendency to unthinkingly import the sophisticated conceptual apparatus of a (well-educated) adult into considerations of concept formation or early development. Not so Freud, who understood that where we think of 'milk', the child experiences a constellation which may include warmth, intimacy, the lips, experiences of frustration or satisfaction, and perhaps even the dawning sense of an 'other'[52]. Russon comments:

> Freud's own insights should have led him to recognize the description of our intersubjective experience as the ultimate method (which is what he often *practices* in his case studies, but not what he explicitly relies on in his

[51] See for instance Nagel's 'What it is Like to be a Bat' (1974).

[52] I am paraphrasing and simplifying here for the sake of brevity. But see the progression in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905d) from p.181, via p.198, to p.222 where Freud says: "There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it.".

> theoretical statements). This description of intersubjective experience as it is lived just is the method called phenomenology. (2004, p.46)

It is my belief that we may come to see that Freud gives us a way of proceeding 'from within' that does not require a 'sideways on' view to account for meaning; a way which we can understand in mechanistic terms, but which simultaneously allows us to see how the feeling of meaning could emerge. I do not mean to imply any broad commitment to a particular philosophical method, traditionally defined: Derrida has (rightly in my view) critiqued phenomenology's reliance on the metaphysics of presence (1973, 1976, 1989b), for instance saying of Husserl that any method that depends on close attention to the lived experience of the moment "relies heavily on the dominance of the now" (1973, p.63). For now I only intend to embrace what we might call a phenomenological *attitude*, where we engage with Freud's focus on subjective experience as the necessary source of knowledge, and attendant concern with the *form* that knowledge thereby takes, without also seeking a transcendental or absolute guarantee for meaning in that experience. In Chapter 5 I will suggest a way of thinking that will simultaneously bring into question the status of mental objects whilst also aligning itself with an idealized physical model (which is at least in principle instantiatable) determined in accordance with our phenomenological attitude, through evidence amassed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Such an approach, by cleaving neither to traditionally understood mental objects nor appeals to crude materialism, will hopefully persuade the reader of the worth of a description of mental processes that it is simply incoherent to break apart into mental and physical components. Or in Derrida's words, we are not engaged in 'erasing or destroying meaning' but "…determining the possibility of meaning on the basis of a 'formal' organization which in itself has no meaning" (1982, p.134).

## The Impossible Centre, A Coherent Contradiction

In *Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida mounted an argument that ushered in the post-structuralist era. Primarily criticizing Levi-

Strauss, he examined the idea of structure and questioned its coherence. Structure, he says, requires a centre; by centre he means a "point of *presence*, a fixed origin" (1978, p.352, my emphasis). This centre will organize the structure it is part of and in doing so govern the play of elements within it. However, Derrida argues, in order to do so the centre itself must be fixed and permit of no 'play' or substitution. Thus, the centre is "paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it" (Ibid., p.352). This is not just paradoxical but contradictory, and in a very Freudian vein he remarks:

> The concept of centred structure - although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science - is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. (Ibid., p.352)

Derrida might as well be speaking here of the psychoanalytic idea of neurosis, where a symptom reveals both a wish and the desire to conceal it; contradictory elements held together by desire. Our desire within the current *episteme* (Foucault 1970) is to locate the security of a fixed origin or centre where play and substitution is arrested and meaning is transparent; where an explanation no longer refers on to a further fact or theory. But this wish appears to be countered by reality, which does not seem to furnish a centre. It is this 'neurotic' cohesion, sustained by desire, which I will argue is at the heart of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Derrida notes the different forms taken by this characteristic search for presence:

> …the entire history of the concept of structure... must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix... is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence

> - *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia*, *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth. (1978, p.353)

Thus metaphysics, and science, have exchanged these different candidates for the present, stable centre, which is sought to give form to structure. Ironically, though inevitably, as Derrida shows, even these markers of presence are continually exchanged and deferred, each one giving way to the next in a continual play which itself does not halt or reach its *telos*.

The notion, or promise, of *presence* sits centrally and covertly at the heart of our ordinary usage; the living, consciously directed intention assumed in meaning and the immediate, self-evident access we think we have to the state of consciousness. Derrida again:

> But can we not conceive of a presence and self-presence of the subject before speech or its signs, a subject's self-presence in a silent and intuitive consciousness? Such a question therefore presupposes that, prior to signs and outside them, and excluding every trace and *differance*, something such as consciousness is possible. It supposes, moreover, that, even before the distribution of its signs in space and in the world, consciousness can gather itself up in its own presence. What then is consciousness? What does *consciousness* mean? Most often, in the very form of 'meaning', consciousness in all its modifications is conceivable only as self-presence, a self-perception of presence… The privilege accorded to consciousness thus means a privilege accorded to the present. (1979, pp.146-147)

Derrida's question at the beginning of this paragraph is key. Can one *not* conceive of a presence, to itself, of the subject before signs? It is at once a suggestion that it is possible, and a doubt of the same. We *feel* that we can conceive of such a state, since what we value in consciousness is that sure self-presence, that immediacy. But in another way such an imagining is meaningless, since a subject outside of language is incommensurable with one made in, or existing in, language. By definition, there can be no exchange between the two, since anything structured that passed between them would become symbolic, ultimately linguistic. So

someone in such a sign-less intuitive state would not, could not, share in our experience. Derrida challenges us to recognize the connection here between signs, meaning and consciousness, at least in our everyday conception of consciousness. Though we may not recognize it we smuggle the sign, perhaps in the way of reflexive definition (as with Descartes' *Cogito*), into our conception of consciousness, and with it, the idea of meaning. The 'perception of self in self-presence' requires a symbolic structure as much as it requires living awareness or 'intuition'. That intuition, or the special kind of 'knowing' that we appear to have in the case of our own consciousness seems to make it impossible to provide a sufficiently full definition of that phenomenon via a 'sideways-on' view. For many philosophers, the fatal blow to any mechanistic account of mental operations is that inability to marry up the physical description of the mind with that indubitable, self-evident transparency of first-person experience. But Derrida is troubling the apparent unity and simplicity of that experience of conscious self-presence. As Glendinning puts it:

> …according to Derrida our picture of 'consciousness' in general, a picture that Derrida identifies as one in which consciousness is 'thought only as self-presence', deflects us from proper acknowledgement of structures within the heart of our situated openness to the world that cannot be reduced to what is 'at present' alive or 'immediately' available to those who are at home in it. Conceiving consciousness in terms of self-presence remains a mark of our situation 'today'. (2007, p.183)

The observation here is that the idea of consciousness cannot be reduced simply to presence or immediacy, though that is the current tendency: Derrida is not trying to capture the experience of self-presence but rather showing us that matters are not so simple as perhaps we thought, while simultaneously drawing our attention to the operation of the metaphysics of presence and the way it arrests the movement of thought; we are led to believe that we cannot 'solve' the mystery of consciousness since we cannot penetrate or go beyond this state of self-presence which anchors it. This anchor is a 'centre' which is simultaneously at the heart of the structure (of our thinking about consciousness) and outside it, since we do not seem to be able to account for it 'sideways-on'; that is to say, in any 'objective'

account the anchoring notion -subjectivity, 'raw feels' (Tolman 1932), qualia (Lewis 1929, Jackson 1982, Dennett 1988), intuitive immediacy etc. - vanishes.

My own procedure in this thesis will be to try to identify the moments in Freud's text where he relies on moments of immanent presence, and suggest that in these places the motifs and concepts he seeks to use to anchor the text are insufficient. As Culler (1993) says this kind of textual difficulty is typical of the metaphysics of presence: "When arguments cite particular instances of presence as grounds for further development, these instances invariably prove to be already complex constructions" (p.94). If consciousness develops out of these 'structures within the heart of our situated openness to the world' (structures irreducible to moments of presence), and these structures are in fact complex constructions, the intention of the FIC model is to show how they might be understood to operate. It is in this way that the FIC model offers an ontological challenge, as it suggests that what is 'in the head', functions not as an object which guarantees meaning through its presence, but as a system of relations which operate as structures of difference. The FIC model is a mechanistic description which, through its alignment with the Freudian dream-work, can help to show how these operations might be experienced subjectively.

Another (still Derridean) way of thinking about this situation is offered by Paul Livingston (2010) via his examination of the notion of undecidability. Livingston draws an analogy between Derrida's work on undecidability and the logician Kurt Godel's work on incompleteness.[53] Godel famously showed, in a formal result that sent reverberations through epistemology more generally, that within any formal system of sufficient complexity there would exist propositions which were undecidable (whose truth or falsity could not be determined) given the rules of that system. Livingston argues that it is fruitful to consider deconstruction in a similar light; we might think of Derrida as having shown that there are terms which encode the problematic logic of the system (language) to such an extent that they are undecidable. Thus we might imagine that terms such as 'meaning' or 'consciousness', resting as they do on the metaphysics of presence, somehow encode the structuring assumptions of the system as a whole but because of this

[53] See especially Nagel and Newman's elegant exposition 'Godel's Proof' (2001).

very property, cannot be satisfactorily analysed within that system. To echo what was said before, they form structuring centres within the text which are somehow simultaneously without it, since they cannot be brought into question without the entire system being brought into question.

There is a debate[54] over the extent to which it is possible, or useful, to appropriate the structure of Godel's argument in this manner, however I think that the parallels are obvious, and that if we can allow the more formal logical analysis to bring light to deconstruction, we should. Agamben has also pursued similar lines of thought here, as we can see from the quote below – a long excerpt[55], but one that I think it is worth taking the time over:

> The concept 'trace' is not a concept (just as 'the name 'différance' is not a name'): this is the paradoxical thesis that is already implicit in the grammatological project and that defines the proper status of Derrida's terminology. Grammatology was forced to become deconstruction in order to avoid this paradox (or, more precisely, to seek to dwell in it correctly); this is why it renounced any attempt to proceed by decisions about meaning. But in its original intention, grammatology is not a theory of polysemy or a doctrine of the transcendence of meaning; it has as its object not an equally inexhaustible, infinite hermeneutics of signification but a radicalization of the problem of self-reference that calls into question and transforms the very concept of meaning grounding Western logic...
>
> It does not suffice, however, to underline (on the basis of Gödel's theorem) the necessary relation between a determinate axiomatics and undecidable propositions: what is decisive is solely how one conceives this relation. It is possible to consider an undecidable as a purely negative limit (Kant's Schranke), such that one then invokes strategies (Bertrand Russell's theory

[54] See for instance: http://www.newappsblog.com/2012/03/paul-livingston-responds-to-the-new-apps-symposium-on-derrida-and-formal-logic.html, accessed December 2015.
[55] As a general methodological note, I am aware that in general I reproduce more complete original quotations than may be usual in academic texts. However this is in keeping with the argument of this chapter, that meaning is determined by total context, and also with the method of *bricolage*. I believe that doing so is the best and most honest way to convey the meaning I have taken from the source material, particularly where delicate philosophical points are at issue.

> of types or Alfred Tarski's metalanguage) to avoid running up against it. Or one can consider it as a threshold (Kant's Grenze), which opens onto an exteriority and transforms and dislocates all the elements of the system.
>
> This is why the notion of the 'trace' constitutes the specific achievement of Derrida's thought. He does not limit himself to reformulating logical paradoxes; rather, like Heidegger – who in 'On the Way to Language' wrote, 'there is no word for the word,' and proposed an experience of language in which language itself came to language – Derrida *makes these paradoxes into the place of an experiment in which the very notion of sense must be transformed and must give way to the concept of trace*." (1999 pp.213-214, my emphasis)

Following the thread of undecidability, Agamben spells out that the movement of deconstruction suggests an understanding of self-reference[56] that transforms 'the very concept of meaning'. He insists that what is significant is how one tackles moments of undecidability within the text. Undoubtedly, part of Derrida's genius lies in recognizing the bind we are in and attempting to engage with it in a way that does not simply repeat the structure, and hence the mistakes, of prior metaphysics, a problem of such subtle complexity it remains difficult even to outline it without enmeshing ourselves in the logical structures that engender it, hence Derrida's oft-noted linguistic gymnastics. In Derrida's 'experiment' we cannot simply exchange trace for sense, since in doing so we would continue the cycle of deferral and difference, sliding ever further along the continual movement towards presence. What is required is an altogether new state of mind, where we can somehow hold the structure of our text in mind whilst simultaneously standing alongside it. Not beyond it – no closure or final movement towards (self-)presence is permissible or possible here, but a placing of the understanding into neutral, a suspension of judgment so thoroughgoing that what lies beyond judgment is not sought: an almost spiritual act of the intellect.

[56] The problem of 'self-reference' can be thought to have a double meaning, or at least an echo, in that terms within language might be thought to encode a logic in the moment of their use (as we have just seen) but also that the language user is referring to their own intention and context.

## The Goose in the Bottle

The Western philosophical tradition is not the first to grapple with this difficulty.

> Li-Ku, a high-ranking officer in the Tang dynasty asked a famous Chan master: "A long time ago a man kept a goose in a bottle. It grew larger and larger until it could not get out of the bottle any more. He did not want to break the bottle, nor did he wish to harm the goose. How would you get it out?"
> The master was silent for a few moments, then shouted, "Oh officer!"
> "Yes."
> "It's out." (in Smith, 1991, p.83)

This is an example of a *koan*, used in the practice of Zen. Considering the goose conundrum above we could say that we have been invited to consider an undecidable situation, given the normal parameters of logic (as we would also be when thinking of other famous Zen koans such as 'what is the sound of one hand clapping'). There are no doubt many paths to Zen and I do not proclaim myself an expert; but we can see that one possible function of these statements is to produce in the student a state of mind in which one is forced to go beyond the usual stepwise progression of logic, to suspend the system of thought within which the puzzle has been posed, and to contemplate the parameters within which one is usually held. As with deconstructive practice, the object is not to 'solve' the problem within the terms in which it is set, but to gain a new perspective on the ordinary structure of our understanding. This is to say that there is, in a certain way, a means of moving 'forward' from an undecidable position which, though it may not proceed according to the logic of what has gone before, is nonetheless of some value or meaning; or perhaps, to be more precise, we should say that it offers the possibility of redefining meaning or offering a ground for meaning which is not rooted in the metaphysics of presence. A 'closure' without closure, if that is not too much of a koan in itself. To have one more attempt at understanding such an intellectual contortion, we can return to Derrida. In discussing his notion of the

trace he describes how we might think trace in a way that preserves, yet also 'sets aside', our conventional metaphysics:

> In the language of metaphysics the paradox of such a structure is the inversion of the metaphysical concept which produces the following effect: the present becomes the sign of signs, the trace of traces. It is no longer what every reference refers to in the last instance; it becomes a function in a generalized referential structure. It is a trace, and a trace of the effacement of a trace. In this way the metaphysical text is *understood*: it is still readable, and remains to be read. It proposes both the monument and the mirage of the trace, the trace as simultaneously traced and effaced, simultaneously alive and dead… Thus we think through, without contradiction, or at least without granting any pertinence to such contradiction, what is perceptible and imperceptible about the trace. (1979, pp.156-157)

The structure Derrida is speaking of explicitly here is that of his understanding of the trace; but the intellectual manoeuvre he hopes to execute would equally serve us in thinking about consciousness, or meaning, inasmuch as the thread of the trace is woven through both. In examining Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* through a deconstructive lens, and offering a specific model for understanding the associative processes of the mind, I claim that we can stimulate a perspective shift which enables us to come to terms with the 'undecidable' elements 'meaning' and 'consciousness' in a new way.

This is an ambitious project no doubt, but to be explicit I don't propose to give an exhaustive definition of either concept. As should be clear from the foregoing, I don't believe that such a method would, in any case, get us closer to the closure of 'truth' or satisfy an enquiry set off within the in-closure[57] of Western metaphysics. Instead I argue that an unreflective idea of consciousness as self-presence (employed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as I will show) is mistaken, and something like a network of associations in which we are aware of ourselves

[57] A term of Graham Priest's, used by Livingston in his 2010 article: "The system is closed only at the price of the inherent paradox of tracing its limits, and open just insofar as this paradoxical closure also operates as the diagonalization that generates a contradictory point that is both inside and outside" p.10.

as an agent is a necessary part of an account of what we would take to be 'full' human consciousness. I will offer a description of how such a network might function, supported by Freud's clinical accounts of dreams, which will act in a manner analogous to a Zen koan and hopefully accomplish Glendinning's suggested aim for the phenomenologist of bringing it about that others see that this type of explanation is satisfactory – that we do not need to invoke the 'ghost in the machine' in order to come to terms with our place in the world.

## Constructive Deconstruction

Is it coherent, or practical, to suggest that we can use Derridean deconstruction as the basis for a constructive enquiry into meaning? I hope that what has gone before has shown that at the very least Derrida's work provides a useful vocabulary for thinking about the problems which face us, and a framework for both approaching the task and gauging our success. Although it is common to regard Derrida as some kind of nihilist or 'ultimate relativist' about meaning, I hold with those who take a different view[58]. I believe that the significance of Derrida's work lies in his continuing attempts to articulate a kind of truth, in the face of all the linguistic traps that erode the ground beneath us even as we attempt to lay foundations. At the very least reading Derrida produces in us an awareness of the form and limitations of our episteme, but he proceeds, in my view, guided by a certain kind of commitment to truth and realism, though perhaps not as traditionally expressed. Norris, too, sees Derrida as working as hard as possible to speak through conventional logics, changing course only when he has made their topology visible and exhausted their capacity for expression:

> Thus it is always a matter of holding out so far as possible for the requisite standards – as indeed he conceives them – of a classical or bivalent truth-

[58] There is also another way of looking at the question: Richard Rorty (1989) has suggested that Derrida can either be read as a 'transcendental' philosopher – that is as someone who is sincerely advancing arguments in search of the truth – or as someone working in a more 'literary' tradition whose playful and inventive style comments and provokes without making substantive claims. I am certainly in the camp of those who take Derrida's pursuit of knowledge very seriously, along with, for instance, Norris 2003, Cavell 1995, Cumming 1994, Johnson 1993, Lawlor (ed.) 1994, Wheeler 2000.

> based logic, and having recourse to those other (deviant, non-classical, many-valued, or paraconsistent) logics only at the point where thought is confronted, through the close-reading of problematic texts, with dilemmas or aporias that cannot be resolved on classically acceptable terms. (2010, p.196)

There is an echo here, once more, of the idea that we might encounter the undecidable and need recourse to a different vocabulary. But to emphasize once again, it is not a matter of deferring judgement and passing the problem of meaning along to a new term. In deconstructive practice we are at once highlighting and interrogating the problems inherent in our existing logical structure, and attempting to progress by way of exploring different logics, different forms of articulation. But not, in doing so, giving up the power of language:

> …it would be the worst misunderstanding of Derrida's gesture to think that it could be exhausted in a deconstructive use of philosophical terms that would simply consign them to an infinite wandering or interpretation. Although he calls into question the poetico-terminological moment of thinking, Derrida does not abdicate its naming power; he still "calls' by names (as when Spinoza says 'by *causa sui* I understand…' or when Liebniz writes, 'the Monad, of which we will speak here…'). For Derrida, there is certainly a philosophical terminology; but the status of this terminology has wholly changed, or more exactly has revealed the abyss on which it always rested. (Agamben 1999, p.209)

So I believe that it is legitimate, having absorbed Derrida's insights, to continue to speak of truth or use the existing framework of metaphysics as a guide. And that it is possible to put forward new ways of conceptualizing meaning and consciousness whilst holding in mind that what we are doing will never provide closure, though it may be enlightening. In doing so rigorous thinking and fine distinctions remain the philosopher's friend, as Derrida himself makes clear in no uncertain terms in *Limited Inc*.:

> What philosopher ever since there were philosophers, what logician since there were logicians, what theoretician ever renounced this axiom: in the

> order of concepts (since we are speaking of concepts and not of the colours of clouds of the taste of certain chewing gums), when a distinction cannot be rigorous and precise, it is not a distinction at all. (1989a, pp.123-124)

This is as explicit an affirmation as one could wish for, that rigour and precision are desirable, nay *necessary*, goals for philosophers. But my intention is not merely to draw distinctions but to offer a constructive hypothesis, a framework for thinking about meaning which will enable us to draw together insights from different disciplines: to offer a way of thinking, like the idea of the *trace*, which helps us to understand why we have the feeling of meaning, how it can be founded without any apparent foundation. Discussing Saussure, Derrida says:

> Within a language, within the *system* of language, there are only differences. A taxonomic operation can accordingly undertake its systematic, statistical, and classificatory inventory. But, on the one hand, these differences *play a role* in language, in speech as well, and in the exchange between language and speech. On the other hand, these differences are themselves *effects*. They have not fallen from the sky ready made; they are no more inscribed in a *topos noetos*, than they are prescribed in the wax of the brain. (1979, pp.140-141)

In examining *The Interpretation of Dreams* we will look not at the system of language as such but at ideas (or mental objects), considering both how ideas play, but also at how they might be thought of as effects. We will begin by considering, in the next chapter, how and where we can see the metaphysics of presence at work in Freud's dream-book.

# 4

# Dream Construction, Deconstruction

"We shall be obliged presently to explain our view of the nature and function of consciousness"

(Freud 1900, p.594)

I intend to show that *The Interpretation of Dreams* displays a commitment to the metaphysics of presence[59], a commitment which has left an enduring legacy in terms of the framing of the whole debate around the nature and purpose of dreams (as well as other significant theoretical issues in psychoanalysis, as we saw in Chapter 2). The privileging of ideas of consciousness and the linguistic – logocentrism[60] – led Freud to proceed with his enquiry without noticing that the *terra incognita* was not just his destination, but also that which he departed from.

In fact it is my claim that the whole of Freud's masterwork proceeds inevitably but reluctantly towards a discussion of consciousness; though that state, or phenomenon, is assumed as a (sufficiently well understood) term of the discussion from the outset, the instability this assumption creates at the heart of the text causes it to continuously collapse inwards towards a single question: *what is consciousness*? Though Freud's work to describe and explain the function of the unconscious as accessed through dreams is rich and illuminating, it is constantly destabilized by the unspoken question, the incomplete and possibly undecidable 'centre' of his discussion. This undermines each fresh attempt to elucidate the mechanism of the unconscious.

The issue of consciousness was to continue to haunt Freud's work as an occluded centre throughout his career: he wrestled with the topic during his 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, and after *The Interpretation of Dreams* it surfaced explicitly again in The Unconscious (1915c). In 1915 Freud wrote to Abraham about a series of metapsychological papers he was writing and mentioned a paper

[59] This chapter proceeds by way of a close reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It must be borne in mind that the text I am engaging with has been read in translation, and caution must therefore be exercised with regard to forming too strong a position on Freud's original intentions in writing. Beyond the usual ('traduttore, traditore') caveat, both Freud's particular style and the idiosyncrasies of the German language further complicate matters. Rolnik (2015) comments that: "Freud in German is a less convenient target for criticism than the Freud familiar to readers of the English Standard Edition of his works. He is elusive and tentative no less than he is categorical and authoritative" (p.316). He continues: "it is not unusual for Freud to resort to hyperbole or to make an assertion and then contradict it in the same breath, aided by the fact that German displays an exceptional ability to allow a single word to bear two almost entirely contradictory meanings" (p.322). With this in mind I should say also that my intention here is not to categorically fix Freud to one reading or intended meaning; my concern is to note that less widely remarked-upon readings are available, and to chart what their effects may be.

[60] 'Logocentrism' is a term coined by philosopher Ludwig Klages (Josephson-Storm 2017) but see Derrida 1976 for his own extended meditation on the idea.

on consciousness was among them, saying that it needed considerable further work (see Silverstein 1986). Silverstein thinks that Freud had delayed addressing the issue up to this point:

> In "The Unconscious" (1915) Freud repeatedly recognized the need to answer questions about the nature of consciousness and the mode of functioning of the system Cs., but always postponed the discussion for a later time, probably intending to deal with the issues in the "Consciousness" essay. (1986, p.181)

But the essay on consciousness was one of six of these never published and is thought to have been destroyed (Gay 1988). I believe that a deconstructive reading of the dream-book suggests a new possibility – that we can read Freud's text as a profound and substantial approach to the question at its heart, which remains explicitly unarticulated until the very last chapter, the last section of which is entitled 'The Unconscious and Consciousness – Reality'.

One way in which Freud's logocentric assumptions are felt throughout is the failure to really engage with the question of who a dream is *for*. Who, (or what) is the audience? There is, as we shall see, a repeated assumption that there exists a present, self-aware, complete, conscious perceiving agent, experiencing and reporting the dream. I will insist on the distinction between *having* a dream and *experiencing* one; a distinction seldom made in the literature from Freud onwards, for reasons we shall investigate, but one which opens important questions. It is true that Freud dealt at length with the question of dream forgetting (see for instance 1900 pp.43-47), but at the time of his writing the only evidence of dreams was the subjective experience of them. Although Freud was astute enough to suspect that this experience may only be the tip of the iceberg[61], and despite his explicit assertion that dreams "are not made with the intention of being understood" (Ibid. p.341) there is a tendency in his writing to treat the experience of a dream as the purposive endpoint of its construction. This tendency is

[61] "Certain personal experiences of my own lead me to suspect that the dream-work often requires more than a day and a night in order to achieve its result; and if this is so, we need no longer feel any amazement at the extraordinary ingenuity shown in the construction of the dream" (1900, p.576). This quote also prefigures the work of Bion in regard to 'dream-work alpha' – see Chapter 7.

pervasive throughout the psychoanalytic literature on dreams and is particularly pronounced in theorizing which asserts that the function of dreams is served explicitly through the subjective experience of them (see for instance de Monchaux 1978, also Chapter 6 of this thesis). However my claim is that the default assumption of the meaningfulness of a subjective experience of dreams to a self-aware, 'present' agent, is characteristic of the metaphysics of presence and in this field of enquiry, obscures an important truth about dreaming: that it is an unique opportunity to witness the emergence of consciousness at a stage when it is as yet incompletely formed.

Very early on, in his discussion of the distinguishing psychological characteristics of dreams, Freud comes tantalizingly close to considering that dreams reveal different states, or levels of consciousness:

> There is particular difficulty in assessing the position in dreams of what is ostensibly the highest of the psychical functions, that of consciousness. Since all that we know of dreams is derived from consciousness, there can be no doubt of its persisting in them; yet Spitta (1882, 84-5) believes that what persists in dreams is only consciousness and not self-consciousness. Delbœuf (1885, 19), however, confesses that he is unable to follow the distinction. (1900, p.58)

We can only assume that Freud was also unable – or unwilling – to follow the distinction since he pursued it no further. Despite giving thorough consideration to the notion that dreams might be the product of pathology or impaired cognition (he concluded that they are not) the basic assumption henceforth is that they are *perceived* by a full, present consciousness. What has changed since Freud's day is that our knowledge of the state is no longer exclusively through conscious awareness of our dreams. At least since Aserinsky, E. & Kleitman, N. (1953) the scientific orthodoxy has been that dreams coincide with regular periods of rapid-eye movement in sleep, and so occur far more frequently than even the most prodigious subjective reports of dreams. More recently still, evidence has accumulated that dreaming is not even confined to REM sleep, suggesting that the

*vast majority* of dreams go un-experienced and unreported[62]. If it is the case that the subjective experiencing, and subsequent remembering, of a dream is the anomaly rather than the rule, this has important consequences for our thinking about dreams, which I would argue has not been sufficiently assimilated into theory: if the function of a dream is not intimately connected with our experiencing it, it is far from clear that such function should be evident, or even derivable, from the subjective experience; and though that experience may still be meaningful and reveal valuable truths to us, the nature of those truths may be somewhat different if we believe that the experienced dream itself (as opposed to the underlying dream *process* which occasionally produces a conscious experience) is not a purposive phenomenon. The fine distinction that I would like to press here is twofold: firstly, understanding that a dream may not be a production for an audience (the fact that the overwhelming majority of dreams are forgotten suggests either that it is not such a production, or that it is a very bad one, a failure). Freud did not believe that this was the intended function of a dream either – he saw dreams as the guardians of sleep (1900)[63], taking the form that they do in order to prevent overstimulation of the sleeping mind (more on this below). But secondly, and in addition to that claim, the idea that whatever audience there is for a dream – the mind of the dreamer – may not be the complete, present consciousness that is assumed. Rather, might we not think about dreams as a rare opportunity to study the conditions under which consciousness develops as the mind presents itself to itself? This unsettling of consciousness is the sub-text I see in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* which continually troubles Freud's arguments and finally breaks through in the last chapter, though Freud's conclusions there are brief and unsatisfactory.

[62] Solms (2000): 'A mounting body of evidence suggests that dreaming and REM sleep *are dissociable states*, and that dreaming is controlled by forebrain mechanisms' p.843 my emphasis, or (1999): 'whatever the explanation may be for the strong correlation that exists between dreaming and REM sleep, it is no longer accepted that dreaming is caused exclusively by the REM state' p.81.
[63] "Dreams are the guardians of sleep and not its disturbers" p.233.

## Dream Wishes and Dream Thoughts

Freud famously hypothesized that a dream was the expression of the fulfilment of a wish. A seemingly innocuous event in daily experience (the 'day's residues') would resonate with some more deeply held wish or desire from the past, and find a form of expression in a dream. The *purpose* of the dream itself was to preserve sleep, in the face of the potentially disturbing feelings connected with the wish. Explaining the prevalence of seemingly innocuous components from recent experience in dreams, Freud used the analogy of the relationship of entrepreneur to capitalist, explaining that whilst a daytime thought (the entrepreneur) might provoke a dream, it needs the 'capital' of an unconscious wish to drive process of dream-creation (1900, p.561). Freud hypothesized that a censoring force in the psyche operates to distort the dream-wish, rendering it unrecognizable, or almost so, in the dreams we have at night. This censoring agency operates to distort the dream by way of what he called the 'dream-work'. The dream-work is what turns the underlying wish or 'dream thought', also known as the *latent* content, into the dream as it is experienced – the *manifest* content.

According to Freud, dream distortion takes two principal forms: *condensation* and *displacement*. Condensation refers to the fact that the manifest dream is 'brief, meagre and laconic' (p.279) in comparison to the thoughts that provoke the dream and lie behind it; this is as a result of one idea in a dream being made to stand for several, or for various 'associative chains' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973). Therefore *one* element in the dream may provoke *multiple* associations to dream-thoughts, all of which are meaningful in the context of the dream. This is the phenomenon of 'over-determination' whereby one of the elements of the manifest dream is determined repeatedly by different dream-thoughts.

The second key element in distortion is displacement. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud uses the term to describe a process whereby the intensity of feeling or interest which attaches to one element of the manifest dream does not correspond to the intensity of feeling attached to the associated part of the latent content; or to put it another way, the significant parts of the dream-thoughts may be represented by apparently insignificant elements within a dream. As Laplanche

and Pontalis note (1973), the free exchange of energy between ideas is a fundamental principle of the functioning of the unconscious (or primary process) in Freud's thinking. The type of displacement operating in dreams can be seen to be different from this in that it is not free but purposive, i.e. constrained in the service of distorting the content. It seems to me that the work of displacement could be viewed as being accomplished in one of two ways: either the affect/cathexis is withdrawn from one idea and transferred to another, or one idea is exchanged for another; their effects would be indistinguishable from the point of view of the manifest dream content. In fact if one assumes the latter, that apparently insignificant symbols represent important dream-thoughts and have come to do so by way of a movement along a chain of associations, it becomes difficult to see how one can rigorously separate condensation from displacement. For condensation takes place, according to Freud, by way of the selection of 'nodal points' (1900, p.283) where chains of association meet and two (or more) ideas can thus be represented by a single idea; such movement along chains of associations may seem, under the interpretation I offered above, to be nothing other than displacement.

According to Freud there are two other elements of the dream-work, namely considerations of representability and secondary revision. The second element, 'secondary revision', is the process of organizing the manifest dream so that its elements are presented in some sort of coherent sequence. Secondary revision is a peculiar addition to the mechanisms of the dream-work in that, as Sandford (2017) points out, Freud's explicit conclusion in the *Interpretation of Dreams* is that the dream-work is utterly different from waking thought; secondary revision however is admitted by Freud to be "a psychical function which is indistinguishable from our waking thoughts" (1900, p.489).[64] The 'considerations of representability' mean that: "of the various subsidiary thoughts attached to the essential dream-thoughts, those will be *preferred* which admit of visual representation" (p.344, my emphasis). Who, or what, *prefers* them?

[64] Sandford here is pursuing another fault-line in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, an inconsistency which she perceives to issue from two different flavours of Kantianism in Freud, as we will see in Chapter 7.

## Dream Wishes and Censorship

Having established to his own satisfaction by the end of the 'dream of Irma's injection' (1900, pp.106-121) that dreams gave expression to the satisfaction of a wish, Freud had an additional motivation to demonstrate that the underlying content of a dream was disguised: in the dreams of children the underlying wish might be evident, as in the case of Freud's nephew and his dream of eating cherries (p.131), but in the case of adults many dreams did not initially appear to be wish-fulfilments, anxiety dreams being a case in point[65]. Freud acknowledges that he is not the first to view some dreams as wish-fulfilments, but it is at the point where he wishes to broaden the claim to *all* dreams that he first introduces the distinction between manifest and latent content (p. 135). If we accept that there is a latent wish (or dream-thought) why has it been distorted – has it been hidden or disguised? Freud's first substantive approach to this problem was to propose the mechanism of *censorship*:

> 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... one of these forces constructs 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. (1900, p.144)

It is very difficult to depart from what the philosopher Daniel Dennett (1991) would call a 'homuncular' explanation for mental events; installing a new, complete consciousness at an ever-smaller level each time a mental process must

[65] His commitment to the wish as the central focus of psychic activity is evident here: "But all the complicated thought-activity which is spun out from the mnemic image to the moment at which the perceptual identity is established by the external world—all this activity of thought merely constitutes a roundabout path to wish-fulfilment which has been made necessary by experience. Thought is after all nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish; and it is self-evident that dreams must be wish-fulfilments, since nothing but a wish can set our mental apparatus at work." (pp.566-567).

be accounted for. One problem with the 'censorship' model is that it invites just such an interpretation, the 'censor' becoming a miniature intelligent agent within the mind which acts independently of our consciousness, making decisions about what content may be included in a dream and how it is to be represented (think of those dream-thoughts being 'preferred' which admit of visual representation). Cathexis is actively diverted and ideas 'chosen' for their associative valence. The logical problem here is fundamentally the same as that which plagues the theory of repression – how is it the case that part of the mind is able to know what is and is not permissible to consciousness? How is the 'censor' able to bear what is so horrifying to the conscious mind that it must be excluded? This is the issue that Maze and Henry (1996) characterize as "the problem of knowing something in order not to know it" (p.1087). Sifting through the metaphors, what does Freud believe the nature of this censorship is? Is it a co-ordinated activity? The language used frequently suggests so, as we hear about the *selection* of ideas at nodal points to allow condensation, and/or the *re-allocation* of cathexis to disguise the affective focus of the dream. I emphasize the active part of the processes here because I think that these activities raise the question of agency, particularly the nature and location of that agency.

Boag (2006) thoroughly reviews and summarizes arguments for and against the censor as a kind of independent agency within the self. Although in his later writings Freud explicitly cautioned the reader against taking the term 'censorship' too literally and imagining a localized agency or homunculus (1916, p.140) his language at other times not only personalizes the concept, as when he uses the German for 'censor' rather than 'censorship' (see Boag 2006 p.8), but also, as I have observed, "Freud's metaphors clearly reflect the censoring agency as both *deliberate* and *strategic* in its actions" (Boag 2006, p. 7). Whatever caveats are issued it is very hard to understand the operations of the censor without viewing it as a rational agent (Gardner 1993; De Sousa 1976; Gouws 2000). Later writers, attempting to align the concept with Freud's structural model, have identified the censor variously with the super-ego or the 'unconscious ego'. Sandler and Joffe (1969) and Sandler (1976) have discussed an 'unconscious scanning function' which assesses the suitability of material for access to consciousness. Regardless of location or terminology, the censorship function seems to require access to all

contents of the mind, absolute authority, and the ability to function continuously without rest. The possession of these omnipotent attributes scarcely seems credible, and many authors have consequently rejected the idea of the censor as a dedicated or localized agency, or questioned the extent to which the 'disguise' function of the censor is operative in dreams (Jung 1934, Adler 1936, Stekel 1943, Bonime 1962). Some, like that that perennial enemy of dream meaningfulness, J. Allan Hobson[66] (Hobson 1988, 1999; Hobson & Pace-Schott 1999; McCarley and Hobson 1977) have taken this as a reason to reject the whole Freudian account of dream meaning and disguise. However as Boag points out, there is an alternative account of repression available in Freud which is given in terms of inhibition or drive conflict. Coming from a neuropsychoanalytic viewpoint, Boag is concerned to flesh out this account since inhibition is a significant and well-researched concept in neuroscience (see Clark, 1996; Houghton & Tipper, 1996; Nigg, 2000; Smith, 1992). Boag is satisfied that this mode of explanation can account for the odd presentation of the manifest dream – dream 'bizarreness':

> In terms of dreams, the apparent bizarreness could result not from a censor deliberately disguising content, but, instead, from inhibition of direct drive expressions consequent on threat, and the formation of substitute aims. (2006, p.12)

Indeed there is plenty of evidence in Freud's writings, starting from the dream-book, to support an alternative account. In Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud explicitly tells us that the odd, distorted character of the manifest dream is not just down to censorship. Initially he enumerates the factors responsible for dream presentation thus:

> …apart from the necessity of evading this censorship, other factors which have contributed to their formation are a necessity for the condensation of their psychical material, a regard for the possibility of its being represented in sensory images and—though not invariably—a demand that the

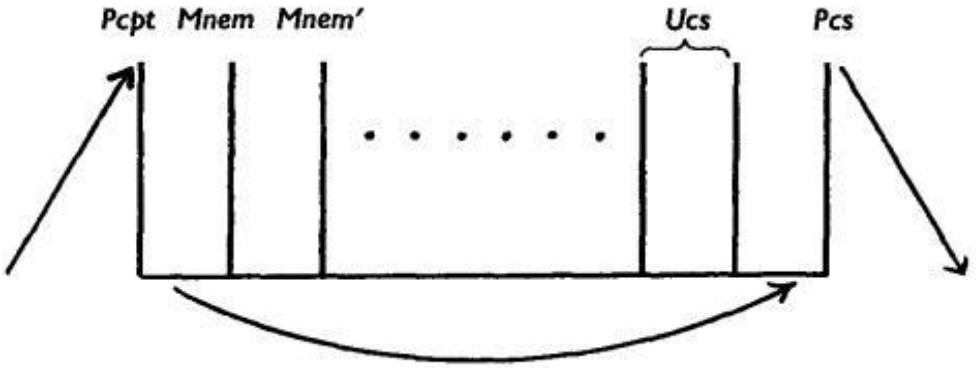
[66] Hobson along with Robert McCarley put forward the 'activation synthesis' hypothesis in 1977 which suggested that dreams were the result of the brain trying to interpret random nerve cell firing during sleep and thus that dreams were effectively meaningless. Interestingly his position has mellowed since, though he remains critical of psychoanalytic accounts of dream meaning.

> structure of the dream shall have a rational and intelligible exterior. (1900, p.533)

Shortly afterwards he goes further, and here the question of consciousness comes explicitly to the fore. He explains how the dream-thoughts are able to become conscious as part of a dream:

> During the night they are able to obtain access to consciousness; but the question arises as to how they do so and thanks to what modification. If what enabled the dream-thoughts to achieve this were the fact that at night there is a lowering of the resistance which guards the frontier between the unconscious and the preconscious, we should have dreams which were in the nature of ideas and which were without the hallucinatory quality in which we are at the moment interested. Thus the lowering of the censorship between the two systems Ucs. and Pcs. can only explain dreams formed like 'Autodidasker' and not dreams like that of the burning child which we took as the starting-point of our investigations. The only way in which we can describe what happens in hallucinatory dreams is by saying that the excitation moves in a retrogressive direction. Instead of being transmitted towards the motor end of the apparatus it moves towards the sensory end and finally reaches the perceptual system. (Ibid., p.542)

The 'Autodidasker' dream (see p.298) was a brief dream lacking in perceptual images, which Freud interpreted as having been derived from verbal condensation and homophony; he is contrasting it here with a dream rich in visual imagery. The movement he describes is in relation to his schematic picture of the psychic apparatus:




Schematic picture of the psychic apparatus, reprinted from Freud (1900) Figure 3, p.541

In this picture the usual, waking movement of thought is from perception, after which memories are laid down, through the apparatus, which is largely unconscious. Unconscious ideas develop out of memory traces and if they do not meet the resistance of censorship they emerge into the Pcs. or preconscious, and move "from there to obtain access to consciousness" (p.542), and discharge through 'M', the motor end of the apparatus. In dreams, he suggests, this movement is reversed, resulting in hallucinatory perceptual images.

What Freud characterizes as a regressive movement in the mind is intended to explain not only how dreams become represented visually, but also why they become *conscious*. Their becoming conscious follows if you accept the equation between perception and consciousness – perception functioning as, according to the metaphysics of presence, the prime example of the plenitude of the living present. This equation is implied in the main text and spelled out in a footnote, added later, the delay perhaps reflecting the ambivalent attitude towards the question of consciousness in the body of the book:

> [Footnote added 1919:] If we attempted to proceed further with this schematic picture, in which the systems are set out in linear succession, we should have to reckon with the fact that the system next beyond the Pcs. is the one to which consciousness must be ascribed—in other words, that Pcpt. = Cs. (footnote 1, p.541)

If perception equals consciousness as per this formula, then a regressive movement back towards perception in the psychic apparatus would result in conscious experience of the dream. However as this footnote highlights, there is a complication here. Referring back to the diagram (Fig. 3 above) we can see that at one end we are being offered perception as the model of consciousness, and *at the same time* we are told that consciousness develops out of the preconscious, at the *opposite* end of the apparatus[67].

## Perceptual Identity and Thought Identity

Freud's developmental story explains why he views dreams as wish-fulfilments, since the form of thought they resemble is the hallucination of a satisfying stimulus, an attempt by the mind to reach what he calls a 'perceptual identity'. This is the force in the mind that 'constructs' the wish expressed by the dream:

> Nothing prevents us from assuming that there was a primitive state of the psychical apparatus in which… wishing ended in hallucinating. Thus the aim of this first psychical activity was to produce a 'perceptual identity' — a repetition of the perception which was linked with the satisfaction of the need. The bitter experience of life must have changed this primitive thought-activity into a more expedient secondary one. (1900, p.566)

Thus the type of hallucinatory construction we encounter in dreams is of the type experienced during, for instance, early yearning for the breast (1900, pp.542-544). Hallucination is taken to be the shortest route to obtaining a perceptual identity (repetition of the satisfying situation/stimulus would bring perceptual identity but early on the infant would not be equipped to bring about such repetition at will). This attempt to establish perceptual identity is also described by Freud as the 'primary process' in thought. It's worth pausing for a second to notice how extraordinary this idea really is; the idea that the mind is so powerful that it can

[67] A contradiction Lacan has also struggled with, see 1988b pp.140-145.

store and *recreate* the conditions of a satisfying experience. The idea that hallucinatory fulfilment is the basis not only for dreaming, but also forms the mechanism for psychotic delusion, has been very fruitful, and it might be taken to represent a Kantian strain in Freud, in that the operations of the mind are informing perception to such a degree that the results are indistinguishable from perception of external events. We might also note in passing that here we have a phenomenon that potentially spans both sleep and waking (albeit in waking only under pathological conditions), a remarkable proposal since at other times in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud works very hard to distinguish mental activity in dreams from waking activity – a contradiction we will return to later on (see Chapter 7).

Freud is developing the idea of perceptual identity as a way to tie together vivid hallucination with wishes and this has become integral to his dream theory for two reasons: firstly because he believes that dreams represent the fulfilment of wishes (which he has discovered through dream analysis and interpretation); and secondly because he wants to explain the 'complete sensory vividness' (p.543) of many dreams. If dreams are like hallucinations, he seems to be saying, they are vivid because hallucinations are as vivid as perception; and in that, they are also different from memory. As we will see later, Freud remarks often on the importance of understanding memory and perception separately[68] - after all, it would be very difficult to function if we were continually confusing memories with perceptions. His argument here rests on the experience in dreams being closer to perception than recollection, in fact that the hallucinatory experience of dreaming is demonstrably different *in kind* from that of recollection; I am not at all sure that this is true. I think there are three problems here: firstly, that it is not straightforward to separate perception and memory, even for the purpose of

[68] In his *Project* Freud had already attempted to distinguish between perception and recollection by way of consciousness: "Remembering brings about *de norma* nothing that has the peculiar character of perceptual quality. Thus we summon up courage to assume that there is a third system of neurones-ω perhaps [we might call it]-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*" (1950, pp.308-309). Later on, in his *Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams* (1917d) he is still wrestling with these distinctions and the paper is mainly an attempt to flesh out the mechanism of hallucination: "Hallucination must therefore be something more than the regressive revival of mnemic images that are in themselves Ucs. Let us, furthermore, bear in mind the great practical importance of distinguishing perceptions from ideas, however intensely recalled" (p.231).

explanation; more on this below. Secondly, that it is even harder to separate memory from hallucination; the ability to hallucinate a perceptual stimulus must be *consequent* on the prior storage of that perception and a facility for reproduction, surely the basic precondition for the recollection, or even recognition of, any external object through perception. In other words, being able to store and recollect (which involves some manner of reproduction) any perception is something we simply *have* to be able to do *all the time* in order to function, not just in certain cases fuelled by powerful drive activity. And lastly, I am not sure that whatever happens in dreams (whether memory or hallucination) is the same as perception, and do not think we can treat it as self-evident that it has 'complete sensory vividness'. We *feel as if* the overflowing plenitude of the external world is in some way harnessed or captured by our perception – but close our eyes for a second after looking at a scene and what remains? Can we draw what we have seen, even schematically? How much detail can we describe? In like manner we feel as if our dreams are 'completely vivid' (at least on occasion) but what threshold must they reach to give us this subjective conviction? I would argue that they only need reach the level of detail or vividness of the perceptual impression that was originally *retained* – and this level is not what we habitually assume it to be. As we will see in the next two chapters my claim is that we can characterize our engagement with the 'external world' in terms of our apprehension of a system of differences, rather than the fulsome capture of essences (or even just rich reproduction of detail) through full and present sensory perception.

What we are beginning to see here is the operation of the hidden centre of the text, the unarticulated difficulty of explaining what it is to be conscious. Although dreams are derived from our memories and seem in some ways like memory, we sometimes become conscious of them and believe that we are experiencing them: absent any other mechanism for explaining this conscious sensation, Freud relies on perception, and in particular perception as a self-evident, immanent moment of clarity – the metaphysics of presence. But in order for perception to perform this function in his argument it must be separated in principle, since memory does not, in and of itself, produce consciousness (1950, pp.308-309). This theoretical separation is unstable and Freud struggles to maintain it, as we shall see.

The corollary of perceptual identity is what Freud identifies as the more 'expedient' secondary process, namely thought identity, which establishes the association of ideas in the mind, and is for him the basis of rational, conscious, systematic thought. Thought identity, then, is the mapping of ideas on to the memory of satisfaction. In this way Freud has described how an unconscious wish can connect with thoughts in the preconscious, producing both dreams and pathology:

> …the gap in the functional efficiency of our mental apparatus which makes it possible for thoughts, which represent themselves as products of the secondary thought-activity, to become subject to the primary psychical process… such is the formula in which we can now describe the activity which leads to dreams and to hysterical symptoms. (1900, p.603)

By now Freud has developed a more or less complete picture accounting for dreams as a consciously perceived phenomenon: the unconscious wish connects with a preconscious idea (by way of the association of ideas in the secondary process) and during sleep triggers a regressive movement back towards the perceptual identities of the primary process, which represent wishes and operate according to their own peculiar logic, explaining the bizarre character of dreams. But in addition to the confusing assertions about consciousness following from the diagram in Figure 3, is there not also a contradiction here in suggesting that the most deeply *unconscious* part of the mind, the primary process, is responsible for the hallucinatory quality that enables dreams to reach the level of *conscious* experience? In more recent times Solms has been troubled by what he sees as the contradiction inherent in supposing that the Id is both unconscious and *at the same time* the seat of powerful affective drives (see Solms 1997, and especially 2013). His examination of the issue in the context of the structural model exceeds our brief here, but I believe he is probing the same seam in Freud's writings, of the uneasy (and potentially impossible) co-location of apparently disparate phenomena, conscious and unconscious.

Furthermore, and perhaps most problematically of all, if a regressive movement in the psychic apparatus is sufficient to explain both the visual imagery and

distortion present in dreams, what further need does Freud have for the hypothesis of any kind of censorship? With his characteristic intellectual honesty Freud did admit to this problem, but tellingly, in a footnote, where he claims that he has *deliberately* omitted an explanation, the provision of which would have taken us too far afield:

> Here and elsewhere I have intentionally left gaps in the treatment of my theme because to fill them would on the one hand require too great an effort and on the other would involve my basing myself on material that is alien to the subject of dreams…. Nor have I entered into *the obvious problem of why the dream-thoughts are subjected to distortion by the censorship even in cases where they have abandoned the progressive path towards consciousness and have chosen the regressive one*. And there are many similar omissions. (1900, footnote 2 p.606, my emphasis)

This particular omission is to my mind not just unfortunate but critical, since as we have seen, both the idea of censorship and the idea of a regression in the psychic apparatus have problems, which hinge on the issue of consciousness. Moreover not only is each proposed explanation for dream bizarreness problematic separately, but I see further problems fitting them together as a whole. The tension they reveal in his model of the mind betrays philosophical issues that need to be addressed, and in glossing over this difficulty Freud misses a crucial opportunity to do so. How can we characterize the relationship between the 'censorship' and the 'regression' models?

Censorship and consciousness are explicitly woven together in Freud's text:

> It remains to enquire as to the nature of the power enjoyed by this second agency which enables it to exercise its censorship. When we bear in mind that the latent dream-thoughts are not conscious before an analysis has been carried out, whereas the manifest content of the dream is consciously remembered, it seems plausible to suppose that *the privilege enjoyed by the second agency is that of permitting thoughts to enter consciousness*. Nothing, it would seem, can reach consciousness from the first system without

> passing 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. Incidentally, this enables us to form a quite definite 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. It can be demonstrated that these basic assumptions are absolutely indispensable to psychopathology. We must, however, postpone our further consideration of them to a later stage. (1900 p.144, my emphasis)

Some of this 'further consideration' takes place in the last section where Freud is explicitly musing on the nature of consciousness:

> Examples of every possible variety of how a thought can be withheld from consciousness or can force its way into consciousness under certain limitations are to be found included within the framework of psychoneurotic phenomena; and they all point to the *intimate and reciprocal relations between censorship and consciousness*. (1900 p.618, my emphasis)

In the first passage we can see the tension that exists between censorship and the idea of perception as the exemplar of conscious experience. Freud's language here is that of bureaucracy and government, consistent with the way in which he has introduced the censorship metaphor. The 'enter consciousness' in 'permitting thoughts to enter consciousness' could be read as a *name for the process* of becoming conscious, in the same way that a debut allows a debutante to 'enter' society; society here of course is not a place and the debut is a process rather than a movement in space. The language here guards against that possibility though, as becomes explicit as the passage continues. The official endorsement of the censor in this scenario makes 'entering consciousness' like entering an area (crossing a border) where consciousness could be applied, or take place. This subtle linguistic

emphasis[69] makes all the difference, as it passes on responsibility for explaining the decisive moment of becoming conscious: this is consciousness as a pure self-contained moment of awareness – of *presence* – rather than as a phenomenon that potentially emerges from an arrangement of parts, or has a structure. He makes this explicit as he says that becoming conscious is a "specific psychical act, distinct from and independent of the process of the formation of a presentation or idea". Note how quickly Freud moves from the censorship model to introduce perception ('consciousness as a sense-organ') as the paradigmatic case of conscious awareness, before forestalling any further discussion of the matter.

The latter view (consciousness as akin to perception) is, however, one that perpetually defers understanding - separating out a 'specific psychical act' which is still, as yet, unexplained, remaining as it is in the text, modelled on the moment of perception as pure present awareness - from the process of formation of an idea; an idea which may have duration, shape, structure. This is a movement of thought that separates the (dead) perceived from the (live, present) perceiver, the object from the subject, the censor from the censored. Our perception *appears* to us to be such a moment of present awareness, but unless we are prepared to unpack this apparent 'punctual simplicity' any explanation that follows the logic of this naïve view of perception will recapitulate the confusion that it contains, perennially requiring an impossibly self-sufficient perceiver, complete in itself, to account for what is perceived. Freud's first attempt to explain the movement of dreams into consciousness by way of the censor (or censorship) continually threatened to fall into this aporia, producing a homuncular perceiver; but a more schematic and mechanistic censorship leaves unsettled the question of how *anything at all* comes to be conscious, so he was then forced, as we see demonstrated in the passage above, to reintroduce the motif of perception.

In the last section of *The Interpretation of Dreams* the uneven orbiting of the text around the notion of consciousness comes to an end with a definition, which restates the logic we have uncovered:

[69] For a really fascinating discussion of this movement of thought, where naming allows 'the thing itself' to escape, see Agamben's essay '*The Thing Itself*' (In *Potentialities,* 1999).

> But what part is there left to be played in our scheme by consciousness, which was once so omnipotent and hid all else from view? *Only that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities*. In accordance with the ideas underlying our attempt at a schematic picture, we can only regard conscious perception as the function proper to a particular system; and for this the abbreviation Cs. seems appropriate. In its mechanical properties we regard this system as resembling the perceptual systems Pcpt.: as being susceptible to excitation by qualities but incapable of retaining traces of alterations – that is to say, as having no memory. The psychical apparatus, which is turned towards the external world with its sense-organ of the Pcpt. Systems, is itself the external world in relation to the sense-organ of the Cs., whose teleological justification resides in this circumstance. (1900 p.615)

Here we see both the final use (in the dream-book) of the idea of consciousness as perception, and also the separation of perception and memory by definition (and thus also the separation of consciousness and memory). In the last sentence Freud appears to be saying that consciousness is necessary (is 'teleologically justified') in order to perceive the workings of the mind, which, if I have understood him correctly, seems a circular argument. What is clear to me is that this positioning of consciousness as a perceiving surface is necessary for Freud's argument, although perhaps not for the functioning of the mind; I believe we should seek alternative explanations.

## Perception and Memory

Freud's attempts to separate the faculties of perception (and consciousness, in the system 'Pcpt.-Cs.') and memory proceed mostly by definition rather than through argument, and the arguments he does advance are weak:

> It is clear, then, that, if the Pcpt. system has no memory whatever, it cannot retain any associative traces; the separate Pcpt. elements would be intolerably obstructed in performing their function if the remnant of an

> earlier connection were to exercise an influence upon a fresh perception. (1900, p.538)

This seems odd, since the practice of psychoanalysis suggests that our perception is continually informed by our history (which would become increasingly clear to Freud as he developed his understanding of transference), and I would argue that this enmeshment with the past (even if much of it is unconscious) contributes significantly to our conscious experience of being in the world. He continues this section:

> It is the Pcpt. system, which is without the capacity to retain modifications and is thus without memory, that provides our consciousness with the whole multiplicity of sensory qualities. On the other hand, our memories—not excepting those which are most deeply stamped on our minds—are in themselves unconscious… A most promising light would be thrown on the conditions governing the excitation of neurones if it could be confirmed that in the ψ-systems memory and the quality that characterizes consciousness are mutually exclusive. (1900, pp. 538-539)

Part of the argument of the first passage is reasonable *prima facie*; Freud is here continuing the logic of the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, where he tried to account for the mind's capacity not only to receive and store impressions from the outside world, but also to continually remain open for fresh perceptions. Yet I think we are headed towards difficulties with this line of attack. For one thing a literal reading of this passage would mean everything in the mind passes through conscious awareness first (given his footnote caveat that perception = consciousness); given our earlier discussion this seems unlikely. And aside from the conceptual difficulties of describing hallucination and perception as entirely different from memory, the strict separation of faculties certainly does not chime with my lived experience. It would be a very odd experience as a human to live in a moment of living present awareness, a fleeting pool of light illuminating our passage through the world, entirely divorced from history or context – and then to have one's memories and motivations entirely unconscious, disappearing into darkness never to return. Freud himself struggles to maintain the separation of

processes and states he is attempting to construct, as at the end of the previous passage there is a footnote which begins: "1 [Footnote added 1925:] I have since suggested that consciousness actually arises instead of the memory-trace. See my 'Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"' (1925a)". In this chapter I have attempted to focus my attention on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but for a moment let's follow the thread that begins in the dream-book, which we will develop in the next chapter. Here is a quote from towards the end of the brief paper Freud references:

> But I must admit that I am inclined to press the comparison still further. On the Mystic Pad the writing vanishes every time the close contact is broken between the paper which receives the stimulus and the wax slab which preserves the impression. This agrees with a notion which I have long had about the method by which the perceptual apparatus of our mind functions, but which I have hitherto kept to myself. My theory was that cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses *from within* into the completely pervious system Pcpt.-Cs. So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill. *It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers*, through the medium of the system Pcpt.-Cs., towards the external world and hastily withdraws them *as soon as they have sampled the excitations coming from it.* (1925a, p.231, my emphasis)

A perceptual (and conscious) system which *only* functions so long as it is connected to the unconscious, which in turn can *only* 'reach back out' to the world through perception, does not seem to be autonomous, independent or separate in any real sense. In fact perception, and the Pcpt.-Cs. system, having been installed as the impossible 'centre' of this discussion, begin to seem rather marginal – consciousness appears to arise only on the basis of connections with the *memory* systems. So what is going on here? In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud says:

> Psycho-analytic speculation takes as its point of departure the impression, derived from examining unconscious processes, that consciousness may be, not the most universal attribute of mental processes, but only a particular function of them... What consciousness yields consists essentially of perceptions of excitations coming from the external world and of feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which can only arise from within the mental apparatus; it is therefore possible to assign to the system Pcpt.-Cs. a position in space... Consciousness is not the only distinctive character which we ascribe to the processes in that system. On the basis of impressions derived from our psycho-analytic experience, we assume that all excitatory processes that occur in the other systems leave permanent traces behind in them which form the foundation of memory. Such memory-traces, then, have nothing to do with the fact of becoming conscious; indeed they are often most powerful and most enduring when the process which left them behind was one which never entered consciousness. We find it hard to believe, however, that permanent traces of excitation such as these are also left in the system Pcpt.-Cs. If they remained constantly conscious, they would very soon set limits to the system's aptitude for receiving fresh excitations. If, on the other hand, they were unconscious, *we should be faced with the problem of explaining the existence of unconscious processes in a system whose functioning was otherwise accompanied by the phenomenon of consciousness.* (1920, pp.24-25, my emphasis)

The broader point, that consciousness alone is not sufficient to account for psychic life, is so well-established now that it seems obvious, though Freud was undoubtedly ahead of his time in assigning the greater emphasis to the unconscious, and his work has helped establish this intellectual climate (Humphrey 1997). And clearly it would be a bewildering world in which memory and perception had *equal* vividness at all times; but at the same time the complete separation of memory and consciousness is problematic. Since Freud has told us that consciousness equals perception, how can memory traces be generated when they have never entered consciousness? On this account they have therefore never been perceived. And it is clear that the last section of this quote is an extraordinarily weak argument – to paraphrase, Freud is remarking that it would

be inconvenient to find unconscious components operating within a system he has *defined* as conscious; which is evidently no reason to suppose that they do not exist there. What Freud is trying to offer here, again, is consciousness as pure receptivity, pure sensation – a self-present moment of awareness which stands apart from the mechanical facts of the operations of memory and the unconscious. This is the metaphysics of presence *par excellence*, but we can see that even as Freud attempts to set up this opposition the notion of consciousness destabilizes and erodes the logic of his metapsychology; it is an unstable 'centre' operating outside the otherwise pure materiality of his account that continually threatens to derail it. Even as he denigrates consciousness ('not the most universal attribute of mental processes') Freud reinstalls it as the unanalyzable root of lived experience, and finally (in this passage) resorts to setting it apart *ex hypothesi*. The separation of consciousness as immanence and memory as mechanism has been forced into Freud's argument by definition; and it creates an edifice which will not hold together.

## Whence and Whither the Dream Thoughts?

We have seen how perception was introduced by Freud as a marker for consciousness, to shore up his psychic model once he moved beyond the idea of censorship as the gatekeeper of consciousness. But tensions over the nature and location of consciousness pervade the dream-book in other ways. We have already touched upon the potential confusion that arises out of Freud's diagram, where consciousness is seen to arise both at the perceptual 'end' of the apparatus and also out of the preconscious[70]. The preconscious is *descriptively* unconscious, in that it represents the implicit contents of mental activity that are in principle accessible to consciousness, though they may not be so at any given moment. The distinction between unconscious and preconscious is down "to the fact that preconscious ideas are bound to verbal language – to 'word-presentations'" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, p. 326). We have seen how an unconscious wish

[70] See also Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: "consciousness may be looked upon as connected with the preconscious – Freud speaks of the system Pcs. –Cs. But in other passages of *The Interpretation* the preconscious and what Freud calls the perception-consciousness system are sharply demarcated off from each other" (p.326).

may connect with preconscious ideas – how the latter may be 'drawn into'[71] the functioning of the unconscious during the formation of a dream. Here, towards the end of the book, Freud frames this in terms of primary and secondary processes:

> …from the moment at which the repressed thoughts are strongly cathected by the unconscious wishful impulse and, on the other hand, abandoned by the preconscious cathexis, they become subject to the primary psychical process and their one aim is motor discharge or, if the path is open, hallucinatory revival of the desired perceptual identity. (1900 p.605)

Such hallucinatory revival being the production of a dream, as we have already seen. Dreams are the product of the meeting of different influences, a rational, secondary process dream-thought and an unconscious wishful influence, which distorts this thought:

> Thus we are driven to conclude that two fundamentally different kinds of psychical process are concerned in the formation of dreams. One of these produces *perfectly rational dream-thoughts*, of no less validity than normal thinking; while the other treats these thoughts in a manner which is in the highest degree bewildering and irrational. (1900, p.597, my emphasis)

Do we need the rational 'dream thoughts' to explain or interpret dreams? In the same way that the censor appears superfluous once we have the theory of regression to perceptual identity, won't the unconscious wishes and hallucinations that ensue, suffice to explain dream content? The model Freud is developing seems to assume that rational, linguistic (we have seen that the verbal is the mark of the preconscious as well as that which elevates thoughts into consciousness), conscious, thought is the paradigmatic *kind* of thought, which implies in turn that offering a rational interpretation involves a *return* to a form of thought which was pre-existing: uncovering – or rather *recovering* - the rational dream-thoughts from the preconscious that were drawn into illogical and unconstrained primary process operations.

[71] 1900 p.594.

I read *The Interpretation of Dreams* as shot through with the assumption that we begin from a position of conscious, present, self-evident rationality; such a supposition is characteristic of the metaphysics of presence, and as such can readily pass unnoticed in our *episteme*. However if we read the dream-book as a movement towards the question of what consciousness is and how it comes to be, and recognize that this question is barely formulated let alone answered – then we have cause to challenge the initial assumption. Conscious thought is repeatedly tied with the idea of language but again, an understanding of how language comes to be characteristic of consciousness – a theory of meaning - is equally lacking.

The phrase 'dream-thoughts' enters *The Interpretation of Dreams* on p.122 when Freud first explicitly puts forth the idea that a dream is the fulfilment of a wish, where he asks "What alteration have the dream-thoughts undergone before being changed into the manifest dream which we remember when we wake up?". No definition or characterization of dream-thoughts is offered at this point. Since the whole purpose of Freud's enquiry is to establish what lies behind the manifest dream, it might be thought reasonable that he does not commit himself to specifics early on, and is offering up the idea of 'dream-thoughts' as a simple placeholder. Yet if it does not quite commit us, the language does at least *encourage* a certain way of thinking – namely, to view the 'dream-thoughts' as identifiable singular entities, which have been conscious or are at least capable of conscious apprehension; and the suggestion that those dream-thoughts which "admit of visual representation" (see above and p.344, 1900) are preferred for dream expression carries the implication that they are not *inherently* visual in nature, and thus may well be linguistic. The privileging of the linguistic and verbal is habitual in Freud, for instance demonstrated in his language here, as he describes Strümpell's conclusions about the distinction between dreams and waking life: "The waking mind produces ideas and thoughts in verbal images and in speech; but in dreams it does so in true sensory images" (1900, p.51)[72]. One might say that the very notion of a 'verbal image' is slightly incoherent – I certainly don't find it easy to understand the contrast between a 'verbal image' and a 'true sensory image'. Does a 'verbal image' just mean a word, or some kind of mental picture of a

[72] Freud is paraphrasing Strümpell here but he does not appear to demur from the idea that there is a fundamental connection between conscious waking thoughts and language.

word? But the general idea here is that words have a kind of weight or authority, which elevates them and aligns them with consciousness[73]; exactly how this authority operates is unclear.

We have other good reasons to think that Freud envisaged the latent dream-thoughts as linguistic in nature, since he likened the dream to a rebus, a picture-puzzle which is solved by replacing images with words. He said:

> …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 but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance. A dream is a picture puzzle of this sort. (1900, p.278)

The notion of the rebus is a colourful way of describing representation, however Freud clearly does not restrict himself when interpreting dreams to a simple practice of assigning words to pictures – if that was an exhaustive account of dream-interpretation it would be a poor and unenlightening process indeed. A review of clinical accounts of dreams reveals images in dreams being associated with words, yes, but also with other images, with places, contexts, feelings; all of which are necessary to develop a sophisticated understanding of the dreamer and his or her place in the world. In examining specimen dreams one very quickly comes across images or ideas that can't easily be given a name. For example Blechner (1998) considers Allan Hobson's own example dream, in which he is given an object by a colleague, "*something like the lock of a door or perhaps a pair of paint-frozen hinges"* (p.183). Hobson himself, in keeping with his stance on the meaning (or lack thereof) of dreams, dismisses the possible symbolic significance of this image. Blechner, with what may be thought a more 'psychoanalytic' openness to symbolism, suggests that the image of the 'lock/hinges' may be thought to represent a barrier or gateway in Hobson's relationship with his colleague: a lock would stand for a complete barrier, where 'paint frozen hinges'

[73] I am concentrating here on *The Interpretation of Dreams*. But In this famous passage from *The Unconscious* Freud also relies on the authority of the linguistic to explain consciousness: "We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation… the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone" (1915c, p.201).

might be eased over time to allow passage, so the image perhaps indicates a relationship which is at an impasse but which may yet 'open up'. Whatever conclusion one draws, images like this occur frequently in dreams (as Freud was well aware – see his discussion of 'intermediate ideas' at p.293 and p.596), and demonstrate the difficulty of interpretation (or at least interpretation by way of direct translation into language). Furthermore due to overdetermination, images and characters in dreams frequently represent more than one person or idea, further complicating the idea that they can just be named. If Freud knows this, as he seems to in practice, why has he used the simple figure of the rebus to express himself? At one level Freud is asking us to see that the dream should not be understood simply at the level of pictorial composition, however I read him here as also seeking recourse to the authority of language to underwrite the meaning of the dream.

In accordance with the movement I see in the text of the dream-book, Freud eventually produces a fairly explicit statement of his logocentric reliance on the verbal in his final chapter, at the point when he can defer the question of consciousness no longer:

> Thought-processes are in themselves without quality, except for the pleasurable and unpleasurable excitations which accompany them, and which, in view of their possible disturbing effect upon thinking, must be kept within bounds. 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. (1900, p.617, my emphasis)

'Quality' is clearly doing a lot of work in this statement, as it is that which is seen to elevate memory into consciousness. I am put in mind of Derrida's discussion of the "series of substitutions of centre for centre" where "the centre receives different forms or names" and:

> …all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence - *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia*, *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth. (1978, p.353)

To this list might be added 'quality'[74]. The opposition between quality and memory (which is in effect an opposition between quality and quantity) which Freud employs here is one he has developed earlier in Chapter VII[75], and Derrida discusses this in some detail in *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1978). The notion of quality itself is not fleshed out – in the foreword to the Standard Edition version of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Strachey remarks that:

> Students of Freud's theoretical writings have been aware that even in his profoundest psychological speculations little or no discussion is to be found upon some of the most fundamental of the concepts of which he makes use: such concepts, for instance, as 'mental energy', 'sums of excitation', 'cathexis', 'quantity', 'quality', 'intensity', and so on. (1900, xxii)

It is true that there is a section of the *Project* which deals explicitly with 'The Problem of Quality'. Although detailed consideration of Freud's argument in that text is beyond the scope of this thesis, *The Interpretation of Dreams* was not meant to require the support of the earlier text, as the latter was unpublished at the time. I would further note that even his attempt to explain quality in the *Project* required the introduction of a new, third system of neurones to explain conscious sensations of quality, and later also introduced the 'obscure' (according to Strachey, footnote 3 p.310, 1950) concept of 'period'. In the absence of further explanation it seems that in each case Freud has done little more than substitute

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[74] A dialectical manoeuvre executed by Robert M. Pirsig in his philosophical fictionalized autobiography, '*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance'* (1974).

[75] Memory and quality are opposed on p.540, 1900. And the opposition between *quantity* and quality is explicit *here*: "We know that perception by our sense-organs has the result of directing a cathexis of attention to the paths along which the in-coming sensory excitation is spreading: the qualitative excitation of the Pcpt. system acts as a regulator of the discharge of the mobile quantity in the psychical apparatus. We can attribute the same function to the overlying sense-organ of the Cs. system. By perceiving new qualities, it makes a new contribution to directing the mobile quantities of cathexis and distributing them in an expedient fashion. By the help of its perception of pleasure and unpleasure it influences the discharge of the cathexes within what is otherwise an unconscious apparatus operating by means of the displacement of quantities" (Ibid, p.616).

one undecidable term for another, throwing little light on consciousness. In other places in the dream-book the notion of 'attention' is put to use in a similar way, for instance:

> The excitatory processes occurring in [the preconscious] can enter consciousness without further impediment provided that certain other conditions are fulfilled: for instance … that the function which can only be described as "attention" is distributed in a particular way. (1900, p.541)

> Becoming conscious is connected with the application of a particular psychical function, that of attention. (1900, p.593)

> The system Pcs. not merely bars access to consciousness, it also … has at its disposal for distribution a mobile cathectic energy, a part of which is familiar to us in the form of attention. (1900, p.615).

Attention is also discussed at length in the *Project* (see p.360)[76]. However the *Project* partly foundered since Freud was disturbed by how quickly it led him to confront the nature of consciousness and was unable to settle the conceptual issues he faced there (see the next chapter for more detail). So what we are left with in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is a restless movement in the text, a 'series of substitutions of centre for centre'. And having followed this movement we are none the wiser as to why verbal memories possess the singular power to attract consciousness.

Freud has told us that dreams have the power to reach consciousness because hallucination is like perception, which is equated with consciousness; and our waking thoughts are conscious because they are based on words. Notwithstanding the difficulties I have found with each part of this proposition, do the two parts of this picture, conscious and unconscious, connect as part of a convincing explanation of the interpretation of dreams? There is an important

[76] Although even here he refers us on to another concept, employing the motif of perception in the manner we have examined: "The outcome *of psychical attention* is the cathexis of the same neurones which are bearers of the perceptual cathexis" (1950, p.360).

difference between *reconstituting* a set of rational 'dream-thoughts' and providing an explanatory account of hallucinatory dream phenomena in rational linguistic terms, where those phenomena are *not* thought to derive from specific linguistic dream-thoughts; in the first case the correctness of interpretation is assured by a successful return to the origin, whereas the second is more open, since a number of different explanations may be seen to account for the same observed phenomenon (the subjective experience of the dream). In the latter case the way is open for critics to claim that the process of dream interpretation is entirely subjective and there is no question of truth involved; the extreme case of this objection being the idea that the stimuli that produce the dream are meaningless (as in the 'activation synthesis' hypothesis of McCarley and Hobson 1977) and that the *dream itself*, not just attempts to interpret it, is a form of post-rationalization or an attempt to impose order where none previously existed, effectively characterizing *all* dream activity as a sort of 'secondary revision'. So one of the things that is at stake here is the kind of claim that can be made about the validity and accuracy of any dream interpretation[77]. It seems clear to me that Freud cleaves to a model of dream interpretation which allows the possibility of such claims about truth and validity (and hence also implicitly endorses the idea of pre-existing linguistically based, rational dream-thoughts)[78]. Subsequent to his 1917 *Metapsychological Supplement to the Interpretation of Dreams* he added a lengthy paragraph (pp. 523-524) to the dream-book disputing Silberer's contention that dreams afforded two possible interpretations – a strictly analytic, and what Silberer called an 'anagogic' interpretation. The analytic interpretation addressed the unconscious (infantile-sexual) motivating wish while the anagogic located the "more serious thoughts" (p.524). In this respect Silberer's model may be seen to be struggling with, and trying to explicitly formulate, the tension between the different modes of explanation in Freud's account. Freud however is having none of it, and though he grudgingly acknowledges that occasionally the dream-work

[77] In fact, various contemporary readings of Freud stand or fall on whether one takes the dream thoughts to be recoverable linguistic structures. Boag's (2006) preferred 'inhibition' model of censorship, discussed above, is conceivable if the original dream thoughts are not explicitly formulated verbally, but are competing currents of excitement. It is much harder to imagine how any model might function on the basis of 'inhibition' if the initiating dream-thoughts were linguistic propositions, since any agency inhibiting their expression could be thought to 'know' their content, producing the logical problem which Maze and Henry objected to.

[78] This is also how Blechner (1998) reads Freud: "Freud's view was that dream interpretation is a process of undoing the disguise of the dreamwork. We *reconstitute* the original latent dream thought, which is something like a grammatical, understandable sentence" (p.182).

finds it difficult to process more 'abstract' thoughts (which are not themselves given any more detailed characterization here) and requires the introduction of more easily represented intermediate (Freud calls it 'allegorical') material, he ultimately insists on what he calls "the *correct* interpretation of the material" (p.524). The underlying question is what form do our thoughts *usually* take (i.e. in waking life) – are they, in fact, verbal? If they *are* we will need to understand how words come to be meaningful before we have any hope of understanding how they connect with dream-images. And if they are not, what consequences does this have for Freud's whole theory of mind, and what can then form the basis for the division between conscious and unconscious? If wishes can be articulated and experience processed in the mind in a form that is non-linguistic and never consciously expressed, this surely threatens our conception of ourselves as rational beings (even more so than the Freudian unconscious superficially does). At what point does a conscious rationality have to enter the picture?

Perhaps driven by anxiety[79], the metaphysics of presence operates through this whole discussion in the pairings of concrete/symbolic, conscious/unconscious, latent/manifest, language/image, primary/secondary: in every case the elevation of one component apparently resolves tension and provides structure, but at the cost of real understanding; the bargain that we strike in accepting a binary formation like conscious/unconscious is that we defer understanding but at the same time suspend the movement of thought, so that we do not notice how tenuous is our grip on the concepts involved, or how greatly the two opposites partake in each other. For this reason it is no surprise that we accept an account of a hidden and coded unconscious meaning without really examining whether that which is to be 'coded' was transparent to us in the first place. This, as I have argued, is the problematic at the heart of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The commonsense (but nonetheless imbued with the metaphysics of presence) idea of ourselves is as rational, linguistic creatures, so if we wish to examine (as Freud did) our less obvious motivations we might create a structure whereby the

[79] I am put in mind of Freud's observation in Beyond the Pleasure Principle "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli" (1920, p.55). One might say: to reduce anxiety by simplifying.

*ir*-rational and non-linguistic come into play; but in trying to clarify how certain mental contents are occluded what comes into focus in Freud's account is how vague our initial conception of rationality is (was). We can see then, that the wider picture that is in danger of being foreclosed on is the possible description of a human subject whose principal mode of functioning is not rational, conscious or linguistic. A further conclusion that follows from this is that what is interpreted by a psychoanalyst might often be states of affairs that have never previously had expression in linguistic or 'secondary process' form. The analyst then may not be 'restoring' a state of rational order, but 'reading' the analysand from a position they cannot themselves take, and in doing so, helping to constitute a *new* form of subjectivity. Perhaps, as Freeman elegantly puts it, "interpretation leads back to an origin which has never been present in an already articulated form" (1989, p.307). Or as Andre Green says of meaning:

> …the analyst does not only unveil a hidden meaning. He constructs a meaning which has never been created before the analytic relationship began (Viderman, 1970). I would say that the analyst forms an absent meaning. (1975, p.12)

Through practice and reflection analysts like Freeman and Green have clearly developed a sophisticated understanding of meaning, possible in part because of the rich resource of Freud's writings. However the metaphysical ambiguities we have seen in Freud's early work seeded a theoretical landscape where this practical insight lacks a consistent, coherent underpinning rationale. Yet at the same time Freud has made available to us the concept of *nachträglichkeit,* which Bennington calls the "true discovery" of psychoanalysis (2000, p.102) permitting us to see that *all meaning*, not just that which emerges in the psychoanalytic consultation, develops through spacing, over time, and after the fact. To really grasp this we need to look more closely at how Freud's work has opened the way to thinking psyche in terms of writing, and trace. This is a difficult exercise – even as Freud warns us against the habitual, reflexive, radical overvaluation of consciousness, his text recoils from the implications of its own logic. Derrida notes this discomfort in his own work and makes clear that he does not regard himself exempt from this temptation at the conclusion of *Structure, Sign and Play*:

> Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose conception, formation, gestation, and labour we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing - but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity. (1978, p.370)

In the face of this 'monstrosity', how should we proceed? Derrida has offered us the vision of the unconscious as a "certain alterity" (1973, p.151), a kind of necessary supplement which allows us to think the self as multiple, layered. This points the way to viewing the unconscious not as a privileged (or pathological) area created by repression, but as an essential aspect in characterizing the totality of our cognition. In this chapter we have had cause to interrogate various binary structures we may have previously taken for granted: sleeping and waking, conscious and unconscious, perception and memory. In particular it is difficult to see how memory, or registration, can be consistently separated from perception, in a psychoanalytic account of consciousness at least. Once we have cause to question a view of consciousness based on the immanent plenitude of perception, can we instead understand the operations of the mind as a mechanism that functions through spacing and difference? I will look specifically at one possible way forward in the next chapter.

# 5

# Freud and Models of the Mind

"Not depending on any sensory plenitude, whether audible or visible, phonic or graphic, formally anterior to the sign articulated in terms of the signifier/signified, the trace, in its most Freudian sense, elusive otherwise than in différance, is the condition of possibility of language and of what is called the unconscious"

(Major 2016, p.8)

# Models and Metaphors of Mind: From the Project to the Scene of Writing

In Freud's (unpublished in his lifetime) 1895 work *Project for a Scientific Psychology* he engaged with a very modern task, congruent with Enlightenment ideals. He attempted to sketch the outline of a psychological machine, one that would 'run of itself'[80]. At the heart of this enterprise was the challenge of accounting mechanistically for both perception and memory, of explaining how the mind could register impressions from the outside world but also remain continually open to new experience: how could the mind be both a 'blank slate' and a repository of past experience? Freud's relationship with the *Project* was a troubled one, as in writing it he veered from optimism to despair. As Strachey notes in his introduction to the *Project*, Freud was never at ease with this difficult child and even attempted to destroy it when he was reunited with it in later life[81]. It seems clear that the burden of this work consisted in the profound questions it inevitably unearthed; physical, mechanical questions could not be answered without addressing their metaphysical corollaries. In a letter to Fliess Freud wrote:

> The "Psychology" is really a cross to me… After all, I wanted to do no more than explain defence, but I was led from that into explaining something *from the centre of nature*... Now I want to hear no more about it. (Letter 27, Aug 16th 1895, my emphasis)

The problematic that was opened with the Project could not be laid to rest, however, and it was continually engaged with throughout his work in a thread that includes *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911), the metapsychological papers of 1915, *The Ego and the Id* (1923b), and *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad* (1925a). Strachey regards the 'poststructuralist' trajectory initiated in the *Project* as having been scuppered by Freud's realization that he could not account for consciousness:

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[80] "In the course of a busy night…the barriers were suddenly raised, the veils fell away, and it was possible to see through from the details of the neuroses to the determinants of consciousness. Everything seemed to fit in together, the gears were in mesh, the thing gave one the impression that it was really a machine and would soon run of itself". Letter 32, Oct 20th 1895.
[81] See Ernest Jones' biography of Freud, 1953, pp.316-318.

> …he found that his neuronal machinery had no means of accounting for what, in The Ego and the Id (1923b, Standard Ed., 19, 18), he described as being 'in the last resort our one beacon-light in the darkness of depth-psychology'-namely, 'the property of being conscious or not'… The Project must remain a torso, disavowed by its creator. (Foreword to the *Project*, 1950, p.293)

Derrida, however, was not content to let things rest there. In *Freud and the Scene of Writing* he fleshes out the implications of Freud's metaphysical commitments, which he finds implicit in the work stretching from the *Project* to the *Note*, and perhaps most significantly elaborated in the *Interpretation of Dreams*. Like Derrida, I believe that the metaphysical instability at the heart of Freud's work is not an interesting sidebar (or 'supplement') but indicative of the necessary entanglement of memory, meaning and consciousness, and a complication which must be embraced if we are to truly reap the benefits of his intellectual labour.

From the neurophysiological 'machine' of the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (finally published in 1950) with the *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud moved on to a topographical model, detailing the arrangement of the Unconscious, Preconscious and Conscious parts of the psyche. This topographical theory outlined the inter-relationship of the parts of the psychic apparatus, and in doing so expanded the question opened by the *Project*, of how meaning is constituted out of physical space; the understanding of psychic phenomena became further enmeshed with the understanding of the physical structure of the mind. However, the topographical metaphor also complicates what it purports to explain: *The Interpretation of Dreams* is haunted by the question of *how* the conscious and unconscious mind can coexist, and this question comes repeatedly to be framed in terms of *where* each is located. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud has already warned us explicitly against a 'double inscription model', and the literal notion of separate spatial locations for conscious and unconscious:

> Thus we may speak of an unconscious thought seeking to convey itself into the preconscious so as to be able then to force its way through into

> consciousness. 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. (1900, p. 610)

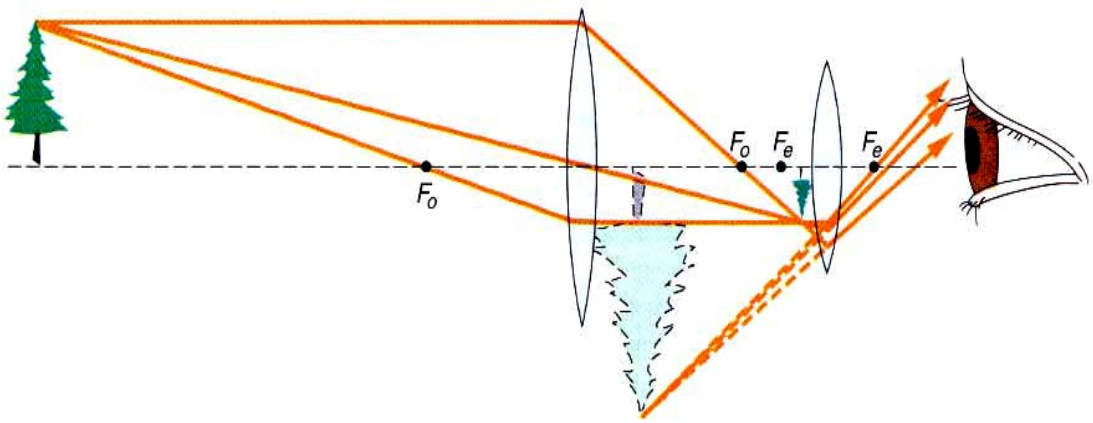
Here he explains that rather than a simple topographical change he is suggesting a 'dynamic' representation of mental events, whereby the cathexis or energy supply to any particular thought determines whether it is conscious or unconscious. Freud himself does not settle the question, because shortly after warning us against 'double inscription' he says:

> Nevertheless, I consider it expedient and justifiable to continue to make use of the figurative image of the two systems. (1900, p.611)

Freud believes that we can avoid abusing the spatial metaphor by regarding ideas, thoughts etc. as not existing in a specific part of the system but arising *between* different physical components of that system.

> …ideas, thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localized in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, *between* them, where resistances and facilitations provide the corresponding correlates. 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. (1900, p.611)

Understanding 'objects' of internal perception (representation?) as *virtual* is a difficult mental exercise and he immediately reaches for another metaphor to assist us, this time an optical one. Freud's point is that the image that we think we perceive through a telescope is located at an *ideal point*, in a sense an imaginary location – clearly the object viewed is located in the external world, and our impression of it is mental and internal (illustrated below).




This metaphor remains inadequate, however, since it does not account for the capture or registration of an image and so does not allow for the essential mental function, as stipulated by Freud in the *Project*, of retaining an impression but also remaining continually open to new impressions. So we return to the double inscription model. Derrida remarks:

> Let us simply recall that the economic hypothesis and the difficult concept of anticathexis which Freud introduces after refusing to decide on the last question, do not eliminate the topographical difference of the two inscriptions. (1978, p.278)

The topographical difference is not eliminated since withdrawing cathexis may mean that a thought/complex/concept was not active, but it would still exist in some form somewhere, to become active (or conscious) once again when re-supplied with energy. This pervasive difficulty encountered with the notion of psychical location might suggest to us that something more profound is going on here: and Derrida pulls at this thread, which connects spatiality, consciousness and writing:

> Freud emphasizes this: psychic writing does not lend itself to translation because it is a single energetic system (however differentiated it may be), and *because it covers the entirety of the psychical apparatus*. Despite the difference of agencies, psychical writing in general is not a displacement of

> meanings within the limpidity of an immobile, pregiven space and the blank neutrality of discourse. (1978, p.268, my emphasis)

Derrida insists that we will not locate the unconscious by considering an arrangement of parts in a 'pregiven space'. Instead, he would have us see that part of Freud's account is located in what we might consider an 'undecideable' area of logic, and in examining it we are led astray by our commitment to a metaphysics of presence which has confused us over the nature of writing itself. We must understand that writing is always already constituted by a reference to something outside itself, or supplementary: "a pure idiom is not language; it becomes so only through repetition; repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time" (Derrida 1978, p.268). This repetition is somehow structured into the psyche in the form of the unconscious, a ballast that guarantees the meaning of the conscious 'text'. Our conventional logic has it that each phenomenon has a full and present origin but Derrida presses us to think in terms of the logic of *différance*, where the notion of a present origin is called into question and the differential and deferring structure of the whole holds itself together in a certain way, without a centre, or an origin. Derrida is asking us to suspend our ordinary logic, a very difficult mental exercise indeed, and in fact is suggesting that to do so is essential to a proper understanding of the unconscious (and hence, of the relationship between manifest and latent content). In his essay *Differance* he elaborates:

> If the diverted presentation continues to be somehow definitively and irreducibly withheld, this is *not because a particular present remains hidden or absent*, but because différance holds us in a relation with what exceeds (though we necessarily fail to recognize this) the alternative of presence or absence. A certain alterity – Freud gives it a metaphysical name, the unconscious – is definitively taken away from every process of presentation in which we would demand for it to be shown forth in person. (1973, p.151, my emphasis)

Here he has spelled out his meaning very carefully – a search for the unconscious in another *location* is guaranteed to be fruitless. For Derrida, the unconscious is not a thing, but a name given to Freud's (perhaps nascent) understanding that the

psyche is a kind of writing, the proper understanding of which cannot be achieved under a metaphysics of presence. Here we can see Derrida pressing the case for an understanding of consciousness and the unconscious in terms of an extended materiality, not an immediately accessible present. He continues:

> …the unconscious is not, as we know, a hidden, virtual, and potential self-presence. It is differed – which no doubt means that it is woven out of differences, but also that it sends out, that it delegates, representatives or proxies; but there is no chance that the mandating subject 'exists' somewhere, that it is present or is 'itself', and still less chance that it will become conscious. In this sense, contrary to the terms of an old debate, strongly symptomatic of the metaphysical investments it has always assumed, the 'unconscious' can no more be classed as a 'thing' than as anything else… in order to read the traces of the 'unconscious' traces (there are no 'conscious' traces), the language of presence or absence, the metaphysical speech of phenomenology, is in principle inadequate. (1973, p.152).

Such an understanding complicates the notion of mental representation; if the unconscious is not a 'thing', then no more are what we take to be the mental 'objects' that populate our inner world, the representations of people and places we somehow conjure in our dreams. How then, do we characterize such mental furniture?

## The Scene of Writing: What or Where?

The topic of mental representation has been central to philosophy at least since Plato, especially within the analytic philosophy tradition, and subsequently to cognitive science and artificial intelligence. This is a rich area and one containing far too large a body of work to survey here. Furthermore, for reasons that may already be apparent, I don't want to engage with the analytic philosophy debate on its own terms, first and foremost because starting so centrally from within the

closure of western metaphysics encumbers us with weighty baggage: the metaphysics of presence goes largely unanalysed in this philosophical tradition, and in searching for definitions the movement of deferral is quickly apparent as the search for a centre drives the continual redescription of phenomena in a movement that appears regressive or circular. Thus for instance attempts to give an account of a representational theory of mind appeal to notions such as the 'symbol' (e.g. Fodor 1975, 1981, 2003); 'semantics' (Tarski 1944), and with it a reliance on 'truth' (Church 1951, Grice 1957, Davidson 1967), another potentially undecidable anchor for meaning; 'information' (Dretske 1981) or 'resemblance' (Locke 1975, Jackson 1976) – all of which themselves contain unanalysed fantasies of completeness (as one might say, looking at it psychoanalytically) and thus merely defer the question. Critics from within the discipline of cognitive science such as Horst (1996) have observed the circularity here, yet the philosophical difficulty remains unresolved and so "there is still no consensual model of what representation, thus cognition, is" (p.53) as Bickhard observed in 2015. There have been other theoretical critiques of a representational theory of mind (and the attendant correspondence theory of truth) from pragmatist angles. Bickhard himself offers a pragmatist vision of cognition, and Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) took a neopragmatist, Wittgenstein-inflected line of attack on the idea that the mind mirrors, or represents, an independent external reality. The pragmatist solution to what are seen as linguistic pseudo-problems is in some ways congruent with a deconstructive approach; they share a suspicion of linguistic constructions, a respect for the social and contextual contributions to meaning, and a mistrust of a search for apodicticity. Whilst I am in sympathy with Rorty's assault on foundationalism, I believe a pragmatist solution to the philosophical problem here is problematic. In some sense it depends on what one takes the function of philosophy to be: attention to language use is one way of attempting to sidestep the problematic metaphysics, and I share Rorty's caution over unreflective scientism, however here I believe his dialectical manoeuvres lead us to foreclose on a more detailed account of what mental mechanisms might enable us to relate to the world; or at least to hurry to a conclusion before developing a full appreciation of what implications our philosophical commitments have for a materialist view of the mind.

How much Freud can have been aware of the implications of his presentation of the unconscious is debatable, though from his complaints to Fliess about the *Project* we can see that he was aware that his thinking had led him into deep and murky waters indeed (see his quotation about being led to explain "something from the centre of nature"); indeed, as Derrida would have it he is talking about consciousness and, necessarily, at the same time, about the relationship between life and death. Within Freud's tergiversations Derrida sees the suggestion of psyche as text and a glimpse of the significance of such a realization: for if the psyche is text, we must realize that we know ourselves only when we come to *be read*; that is, only after the fact and through a medium which is itself dead. As Derrida says: "writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself (is conscious of itself)" (1978, p.282). Though Freud bids us to abandon the overvaluation of consciousness, to fully do so means accepting an alienating distance from ourselves and relinquishing an attachment to a notion of a coherent, present self that has proved unshakeable across human history, a task of monumental significance:

> That the present in general is not primal, but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present - such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. This pursuit is doubtless the only one which is exhausted neither within metaphysics nor within science. (Derrida 1978, p.266)

The finer details of mental functioning encompass both metaphysics and science, since our physical constitution determines the limits of our conceptual reach (in ways which we shall shortly probe further); but as Freud has discovered, investigations into that same physical constitution require us to engage with deep philosophical issues. According to Derrida, Freud's investigations into the structure of the psyche have led us inevitably to metaphysics, though in a 'conceptual scheme unequal' to the task. Unequal perhaps since Derrida believes that in order to settle questions about the relationship of the unconscious to the conscious mind, we must address the nature of writing itself and our conceptual

commitments (the commitment to a metaphysics of presence being one of them). We will be unable to settle the question of 'where' the unconscious is if we are forever, and in Derrida's eyes mistakenly, looking for something 'present' behind it. Or, again, we may not recognize the unconscious for what it is if it appears dead to us: we must be prepared to understand that the system as a whole[82] and not some 'present' component, produces the effects of meaning, or consciousness (one is put in mind of the modern quest to locate the 'origin' of consciousness, like attempting to locate the 'origin' of symmetry, or as Derrida might say, the 'origin' of repetition).

Even if we agree with Derrida thus far, it is undoubtedly very difficult to imagine how, absent the moment of immediate, self-present consciousness, the system runs 'of itself' and produces the effect familiar to us all; the feeling of being in the world. Derrida may have helped us, if not to abandon altogether the overvaluation of conscious experience, at least to problematize the same so that we can begin to see where a mechanism, extended in space and time, might fit into our understanding of lived experience. But what sort of mechanism? The best Freud has offered us so far is an optical metaphor, suggesting that our thoughts (and hence consciousness) exist between the components of the mechanism, like the image in a telescope. To assist us we need a new metaphor, and later in his career, Freud suggests one.

## A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad

In *Freud and the Scene of Writing* (1978) Derrida suggests that in *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad* (1925a) Freud hits upon an appropriate metaphor to resolve our difficulties: a child's toy consisting of a slab of wax with a celluloid cover. The marks left upon the wax with a stylus are visible until the celluloid is lifted, whereupon they cease to be visible though they remain etched into the wax below; a machine which is forever freshly available to new impressions, whilst retaining old impressions beneath the surface. This satisfies, for the first time, the dual

[82] "Freud emphasizes this: psychic writing… *covers the entirety of the psychical apparatus*." Derrida 1978, p.268, my emphasis.

requirements laid out in the *Project*, that a model for the psyche must register impressions but somehow remain permanently ready for fresh ones. Derrida regards this as a definitive step towards a psychic metaphor that simultaneously stages the 'scene of writing':

> Whereas other writing surfaces, corresponding to the prototypes of slate or paper, could represent only a materialized part of the mnemic system in the psychical apparatus, an abstraction, the Mystic Pad represents the apparatus in its entirety, not simply in its perceptual layer. The wax slab, in fact, represents the unconscious. (1978, p.282)

Here we have a model which goes some way towards producing an unconscious ballast for meaning (or consciousness) yet begins to show us how a mechanical process of registration can be responsible:

> Let us note that the *depth* of the Mystic Pad is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. It joins the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation. (1978, p.281)

However it is in this duality that Freud's model really fails – for to generate the depth that Derrida admires we require a user, a pair of exterior hands which use the Mystic Pad and consign the trace of the present to memory by lifting the celluloid sheet. Moreover once the marks are hidden in the wax the model, supplementary as it essentially is, cannot retrieve them in the same way that we can summon memory:

> Abandoned to itself, the multiplicity of layered surfaces of the apparatus is a dead complexity without depth. Life as depth belongs only to the wax of psychical memory. Freud, like Plato, thus continues to oppose hypomnemic

> writing and writing *en tei psychei*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of a present truth outside of time. Henceforth, the Mystic Pad, separated from psychical responsibility, a representation abandoned to itself, still participates in Cartesian space and mechanics: *natural* wax, exteriority of the *memory aid*. (Ibid. p.286)

Derrida is remarking that in Freud's account the mechanism of the Mystic Pad still only has the status of 'memory aid'; it is not a model that will 'run by itself', not capable of consciousness. It requires supplementation from something outside itself, the depth of presence from an exterior source, to truly model the mind. As Bass observes:

> Freud's gesture here is Platonic: the writing of the 'soul' is living; the scriptural machine is dead. But, says Derrida, everything that Freud had thought about the unity of life and death should have made him ask other questions here, and ask them explicitly. If the metaphor of the writing machine is more than a metaphor, if it is the psyche, then the traditional opposition of the living soul to the dead machine itself becomes questionable. (2006, p.113)

Indeed, and those 'other questions' are the ones that I attempt to enumerate here. But let us take this notion seriously: if we reject the opposition of living soul to dead machine, and accept that in some way our experience of conscious presence in the world emerges through the action of some kind of writing, a new complication develops. Appreciating that thought can be viewed as text, with Derrida, we can see that we need to be 'at a distance from ourselves' to 'read ourselves'. When one part reads another we *supplement* ourselves sufficiently that we become conscious (at least, such is the suggestion); but it is the system as a whole that we ascribe the property of consciousness to, such a property does not and cannot reside in the 'dead' text. But: this process produces a schism within the self, or perhaps a deconstruction of the notion of a unitary self; because we must each be *multiple* in order for one part to 'read' another. A consciousness which lacks a perceiving surface (a surface alive to itself) is of necessity multiple. A perceiving psyche constituted through spacing and deferment, where experience

must be 'read', separates out the elements of the *perceiver*. Derrida once again is aware of the implications of such a reading of Freud:

> …'perception', the first relation of life to its other, the origin of life, had always already prepared representation. We must be several in order to write, and even to 'perceive'. The simple structure of maintenance and manuscription, like every intuition of an origin, is a myth… The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. *The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata*: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found. (1978, pp.284-285, my emphasis)

Perception and representation, awareness and memory, inextricably intertwined, force us inevitably to confront the myths of our sovereign, present, immediate subjectivity. 'Perception… had always already prepared representation': Derrida here reminds us of the lesson of psychoanalysis: that our present is shaped by our past, which is continually informing our actions, not lying dormant like marks in wax. Perception is not simple, complete in itself, *sui generis*: we see 'through' the unconscious, which is why we both see in the world, and recapitulate, patterns from our past. The "crisp fact" (Gellner 1985, p.53) of transference recognized by even the staunchest critics of psychoanalysis demonstrates that our perception of new individuals is always complicated by the fact that we do not see them innocently or veridically, but rather as a composite of others who we have known before them. Freud acknowledges his model falls short in this respect:

> It is true, too, that once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot 'reproduce' it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that. (1925a, p.230)

Can we imagine a model that could reflect this facet of perception, that it is always already informed by memory? One that respects the 'depth' memory lends without requiring a supplementary intelligence to operate it? And, if we can describe such a model (I believe we can), how can it speak to Derrida's observation that *"the*

*subject of writing is a system of relations between strata"*? We have set ourselves the task outlined by Derrida:

> Thus, the Freudian account of trace must be radicalized and extracted from the metaphysics of presence which still retains it (particularly in the concepts of consciousness, the unconscious, perception, memory, reality and several others). (1978, p.289)

In the service of this aim, and continuing the trajectory taken by Derrida in *Freud and the Scene of Writing,* I believe it is possible to offer another, more modern, metaphor for mental functioning that goes some way to achieving these goals. A model which accounts for many of the subjective phenomena of dreams, helps to explain the complicated relationship between perception and memory, and allows us to understand the bottomless 'depth' of subjectivity. Perhaps not a fully functioning neuro-physical model, but at the least the Zen koan of the last chapter, which will refresh our understanding of consciousness and allow us to take our bearings anew.

## A Very Modern Metaphor: Image Compression

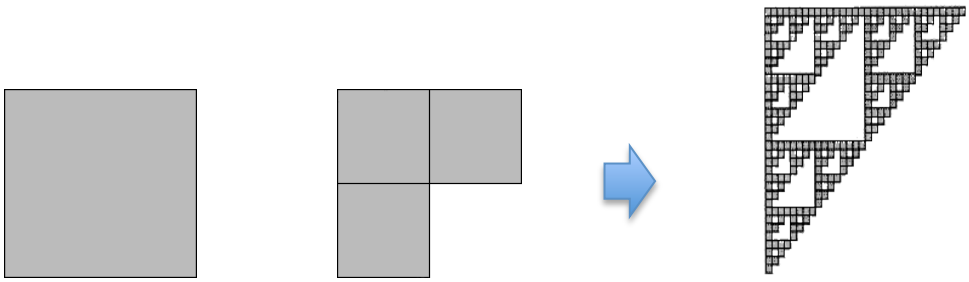
Fractal image compression (FIC) is a method of using iterated function systems to 'compress' visual images in a computer. It was first developed in the 1980s as a method of image compression but has not been widely adopted owing to difficulties in implementation[83]. However I suggest that it is extremely useful to enable us to understand what might be going on in the mind, and to develop a neo-Freudian understanding of dreams that sidesteps many of the traps set for us by the metaphysics of presence.

Image compression reduces the amount of storage space required for each image. If an image is made up of many pixels, rather than storing information about each

[83] Fractal image compression is what is known as an *asymmetric* form of compression, meaning that it takes a longer time, or more work, to compress an image than to recover it, producing an image that can be retrieved quickly. This asymmetry has meant that it is not suitable for all commercial applications, but may be relevant by way of analogy to dreams, as we shall discuss later.

of those pixels, it is possible to store information about transformations known as affine transformations (rotations, reversals, changes of scale etc.) that relate parts of the image to other parts. Once this information is stored, and starting from a relatively simple data set, a complex image can be built up through repeated iteration[84]. The significant thing about *fractal* image compression as opposed to other forms (such as the more familiar JPEG) is that its inventor, Michael Barnsley, noticed that there was substantial redundancy (*affine redundancy*) in many natural images, which is to say that parts of the image are similar to other parts, and can be transformed into them if subjected to the right operations.

It is important to notice that FIC is what is known as 'lossy compression'; that is, not all of the information contained within the original image is retained, and the image that is compressed this way will not be identical to the original in every detail (we will return to this facet of the process when examining the metaphor in more detail in the context of mental representation). A simple example of an image which can be efficiently stored, compressed, using FIC and retrieved is the classic fractal image of the Sierpinski triangle (or gasket), seen here:



This is still clearly very basic but it is possible to build up much more detailed, photo-realistic pictures through an extension of the same method.
It is not essential to grasp the specifics of the process; the important point to notice is that a complex image is built up out of very simple components, combined with very simple instructions. Above you can see that a change in scale, plus rotations,

[84] The key point about iterated function systems is that they will converge on an 'attractor' – in this case an image – if iterated enough times on a starting set. This property means that a complex image can be built up from relatively simple starting data, a fact which may be more relevant later on.

and reflections, can generate the more detailed image. What is then retained by image compression software is far less information; basic elements plus a record (we might be tempted to say, 'trace') of the transformations needed to 'unpack' them into the full image. And, significantly, what has *not* been stored is an exact replica of an image or the 'essence' of the original. There is no tiny version of an image somehow located within the computer hard-drive, but a set of abstract instructions about ways to perform geometric transformations. Repeated iterations of a given set of transformations produces an image, which is known as the attractor for that set; it can be thought that the image is *latent* within the original transformations.

To extend the metaphor, we need to look at one further piece of technical detail. FIC is a specific type of a form of compression known as Vector Quantization (VQ); FIC is unique in that it uses parts of the emerging image/attractor to continue to develop the image through iterations. However in VQ more generally, patterns that occur frequently within an image are identified and stored in what is known as a 'codebook'. These patterns may be edges, curves or particular angles, for instance. Together with the transformations that enable their conversion to more complex images, the codebook might be used to compress not just one image but many different ones (the transformations will obviously be unique to the specific images). To give a crude example, suppose that formative experiences with parents and caregivers provide a sort of 'codebook' of a structure of differences which allows us to tell people apart and consistently identify them. These could be differences of any sort; physical differences in appearance (tall/short, skin tone, pitch of voice etc.), differences in behaviour (threatening, comforting, reliable), or the feeling that is evoked in us by their presence. Under this model, from the start what we know about people is represented in their differences (not their essences), and as our knowledge of the world develops so does a branching network of transformations which connects new acquaintances to old friends and family; this person who I have just met looks a little like my sister, but is older and has a laugh that reminds me of my father. Of course many of these associations are unconscious; some we may never be conscious of and some may suddenly occur to us, or indeed be revealed in dreams when we realize we have 'exchanged' one person for another on the basis of some similarity. This exchange on the basis of

similarity is what makes *Fractal* Image Compression a particularly suitable metaphor: thinking about image compression *per se* helps us to conceptualize the registration of experience on the basis of difference, but the emphasis on the functional role of the similarity of parts of experience in FIC has particular resonance with psychoanalytic descriptions of memory and phantasy, as we shall continue to see.

## A Return to Freud

Returning first to his telescope metaphor, we can again see that Freud was tantalizingly close to an explanation that eschewed the metaphysics of presence when he said that ideas: “must never be regarded as localized in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, *between* them” (1900, p.611). As I said before, imagining ideas as located *between* elements of the nervous system is a difficult task, but particularly so if one is envisaging, say, the whole (and present) concept of a person occupying such a virtual space. The reason this 'telescope' metaphor is rejected by Derrida is, as we saw, that it does not allow for the dual requirement of both registering information (i.e. memories) whilst still remaining open to new information. If we now think of our mental objects as consisting entirely of negative differences or transformations, as in the FIC model, we can incorporate all three elements (registration, openness, and the 'virtual' knowledge of the telescope) into our explanation. To give a very crude example, if when we meet person B we recognize (at some level) that they are like person A, except that they have blue eyes, and we ‘register’ them in our network of mental transformations (knowledge of person A is retained, whilst the new information is captured by way of a transformation which relates the new person/mental object to our prior knowledge) then in a sense our concept of person B really does exist 'in between' our knowledge of the characteristics of person A and the additional knowledge that they have blue eyes. Like the chess piece in Saussure's example, the substance of the piece (or in this case, the idea of the person) is not significant; it is the structural relationship of the parts that matters. Because that knowledge of a new person exists only in relation to other people we have known (which in turn

consists only in a network of differences) it can be seen to be 'virtual' in the sense described by Freud. This allows us to begin to see why exchanges take place so frequently in dreams but also why a phenomenon like transference takes place; when we meet a new person we are literally 'looking through' other people we have known; in a very substantial sense, we know them *only* in relation to others.

In some way this is not far from Freud's idea from the *Note*, of the unconscious stretching out feelers through the system Pcpt.-Cs, though it does complicate any neat division between perception and memory. The model I am proposing would suggest that our conscious perception is continually informed by our memories, and that we are continually striving to make sense of new experience in terms of how well it marries up with our past; a large proportion of our conscious experience may comprise our minds trying to make sense of what we are perceiving in terms of what we already know. Moreover I am proposing that part of the feeling of conscious awareness is an awareness, at some level, of how that process of 'making sense' is going – we are often aware for instance of perceiving something as comforting, familiar, disturbing or uncanny, without knowing how or reflecting on what causes the sensation.

In terms of our image compression metaphor we can say that on meeting a new person what is retained is the *transformations*, which take us from one person to another. These transformations don't need to be worked through or unpacked in order for us to feel as if we know someone, or something, as the whole experience of following the transformations is collapsed into the awareness that we can potentially do so[85]; this might also account for the experience we have of knowing that we know something, without having to trace fully how we know it every time we use the knowledge[86]. To use Derrida's phrase this is 'infinite depth in the implication of meaning'. The illusion of presence, of knowledge which appears replete with a living present of self-evident meaning, though this meaning is

[85] See also the idea of 'Sparse distributed memory' (Denning 1989, Kanerva 1988), a mathematical model for memory which shows how memories can be constructed (or reconstructed) on the basis of partial data sets; the implication being that the partial data which forms the initial conditions for memory may be sufficient to engender a feeling of familiarity – or that an idea is on the 'tip of your tongue'.

[86] Perhaps in the manner described by Franklin and Mewhort, Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology, vol. 69(1) Mar, 2015. Special Issue: Immediate Memory. pp. 115-135.

constructed out of a system of spacing and difference, written in the mind. Revisiting Derrida's thoughts on the Mystic Pad they seem to resonate equally strongly with the image compression metaphor:

> …depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. (1978, p.281)

I claim that this simple metaphor enables us to conceptualize an ontological revision: the mental objects on which the representational theory of mind is based, the present 're-presentations' critiqued by Derrida (1976, 1978) and by Rorty (1979) need not exist. Put simply, we do not need to have, 'in our heads' anything that resembles anything in the 'external' world. What we need is a reliable mental map of the transformations which connect the salient features of our environment in our understanding, and affective charges which mark out what *is* salient. It's worth noting also that this view of memory is congruent with research that shows that "cortical representations of stimuli are often highly distributed" (Rissman and Wagner 2012, p.120). As our analysis of dreams in the next chapter will emphasize, the associative transformations that create mental objects occur across multiple axes – through visual similarity, temporal simultaneity, linguistic connection, affective context (to name but a few), and would therefore need to recruit or be derived from a variety of brain processes and locations. It is surprising that an intuition based on the metaphysics of presence, leading to the assumption that representation of external objects would take the form of localized internal objects, has held sway for so long[87].

[87] The picture I am developing resonates with the philosophy of Henri Bergson, especially as it is articulated in his work *Matter and Memory* (2016, originally published 1911). Anticipating the modern distinction between procedural and declarative memory, Bergson distinguished two types of memory; he drew inspiration from clinical and experimental studies in psychology; he opposes the idea of the localization of psychical processes, especially memory; and most pertinently he sees memory as participating in perception. He says: "The interest of a living being lies in discovering in the present situation that which resembles a former situation, and then in placing alongside of that present situation what preceded and followed the previous one, in order to profit by past experience" (2016, p.171). Bergson escapes Derrida's critique of phenomenology (Guerlac 2006, p.183) as his perceptual story does not rely on simple moments of self-presence, complicated as it is by memory. He also resists the suppression of time common to metaphysics, instead making it central to his philosophy. However his aim is in many ways the opposite of mine, as his approach is 'frankly dualistic' (2016, vii), though he attempts to reconcile materialism and idealism. Moreover

We may object here that our perceptions, memories and dreams – our internal representations, or 'mental objects' - are richer in content than this model allows, richer than a 'perfectly superficial exteriority'; they certainly *feel* as if they are. But what can we know of them, really? Freud has done more than anyone in the *Interpretation of Dreams* to trace the ways in which we understand the content of our dreams – I will explore his work in more detail in the next chapter to support my argument. But in other ways we may have cause to doubt the richness of our internal representations. Let me note a few of them here.

## Evidence and Support from Other Disciplines

Firstly, empirical work in psychology and neuroscience has begun to show that even our apparent explicit visual knowledge of the world is far more limited than we imagine, by exposing the phenomena of change-blindness (Levin and Simons 1998) and inattentional blindness (Mack and Rock 1998, Simons and Chabris 1999). The latter phenomenon occurs when subjects are occupied with a task that requires intensive attention, under which conditions they can fail to notice even very large changes in their environment – to the extent of failing to see a gorilla walking through the scene (a similar scenario with a moonwalking bear walking through a group of basketball players was used in the UK as part of a road safety awareness campaign). Furthermore, it now appears that a good deal of our perception is hallucinatory[88]; that is, it is not the result of a detailed and veridical apprehension of the 'external world', but is generated by the brain in concert with external stimulus. To paraphrase: even what you think you see is not really what you see. This is a first sign that the intuitions we have about the concreteness and reliability of our mental representations may not be correct (for if we have not perceived veridically in the first instance, our *re-presentation* is (always) already

his philosophy relies upon a hypostasized idea of time ('pure duration') derived from unmediated experience of the real (Wambacq 2011, Ansell-Pearson 2018) utterly different from the temporality implicated in my account. An interesting future project would be to examine precisely where Bergson's view of perception and memory diverges from my own.

[88] "What is now widely accepted is the once radical notion that perceptual consciousness is endogenously generated; exteroceptive stimuli merely constrain and sculpt what is fundamentally a hallucinatory process (for reviews, see Blom & Sommer, 2012)" Solms, 2013.

undone by the inadequacy of first presentation. This fits with a FIC model for perception and memory – that what we see and experience is shaped by its resemblance to what is already known, already experienced.

Secondly, after perception, we might further question the status of our internal representations. To give two very brief examples; suppose that you listen to an interesting lecture, and that you have a conversation with a person you have not met before. After the lecture, if you have been paying attention, there is a good chance that you will be able to tell a friend what the main themes of the lecture were, and give more detail on some of the arguments or points of interest. There is almost no chance that you will be able to recount the lecture word for word, or even repeat short passages employing the same words used by the speaker (anyone who has ever memorized poetry will attest how difficult it is to exactly reproduce even a few lines; it is possible, of course, but it takes effort and practice, and it is a different practice from listening comprehension). What does this mean about the way in which the 'text' of the lecture is represented within you, the hearer? It seems that what is represented within you, the 'objects' of your understanding, even on the basis of a linguistic presentation, are not copies made with absolute fidelity but something far more abstract.

Next, try to remember the face of the new person you spoke to; again, there is a good chance that you will recognize that person again if you see them soon, perhaps even on meeting again after a few months and years. But it is far more difficult to summon a mental image of that person. Again, this is congruent with the idea that what is mostly retained (as a representation or mental object representing that person) is a group of associations or transformations that allows us to tell people apart – a system of differences. If you have ever tried to sketch someone, in person or from memory, it becomes clear that the difficulty is not merely one of physically reproducing a mental image (in the 'mind's eye) which itself has perfect fidelity; the image in the mind can be remarkably vague, and success can be a question of taking note of salient features in the first place and being creative about how they are represented on paper; representational or figurative forms of art are a great deal to do with attending to how we perceive (and store our ideas of) the world in the first place. This kind of exercise makes

clear that there is a great deal of difference between the external objects of our perception and our internal representations of them, differences which are elided by the reflex adherence to a metaphysics of presence which can easily dupe us into thinking that the mental objects we use to navigate the world are a far more exhaustive, or substantial, facsimile of their originals than they really are.

Recent research on language acquisition puts this into interesting perspective. In a 1997 paper in the *Psychological Review* ('A Solution to Plato's Problem'), Landauer and Dumais address themselves to the problem of how children, at a certain age, learn new words far faster than appears justified by their exposure to new information. This is familiar also as Chomsky's (1991) problem of the 'poverty of the stimulus', the observation of which has been used by him to support the idea of a universal grammar[89]. Using a model they refer to as 'Latent Semantic Analysis' (LSA), they use a purely mathematical model to predict word meaning. Ranking inputs on co-occurrence and contiguity, their model then determines meaning similarity by determining the proximity of words within an abstract 'semantic space'. It does so very successfully, in tests predicting synonyms at a rate equivalent to applicants to U.S. colleges from non-English speaking countries (p. 220, 1997). Describing the functioning of their model in psychological terms, they say:

> …if a particular stimulus, *X,* (e.g., a word) has been associated with some other stimulus, *Y,* by being frequently found in joint context (i.e., contiguity), and *Y* is associated with Z, then the condensation can cause *X* and Z to have similar representations. However, the strength of the indirect *XZ* association depends on much more than a combination of the strengths of *XY* and *YZ.* This is because the relation between *X* and Z also depends, in a well-specified manner, on the relation of each of the stimuli, *X, Y,* and Z, to *every other entity in the space*. (1997, p.217, my emphasis)

[89] Chomsky reasons that the only way children can master language on the basis of the small sample of it available to them is to have a pre-existing innate 'grammar' or rule-based system.

The structuralist resonances here are clear[90] – they are describing a model which produces meaning, or at least accurately re-produces results which a human observer would take to be the consequence of meaning structures, on the basis of a purely abstract relationship of parts, defined by difference. And within the semantic space that their 'well-specified' i.e. formally distinct and reproducible mathematical transformations produce, the value of each term is dependent on its relation to *every other* term in the space. Of course it remains an important question, whether this abstract mathematical procedure is a close analogue to neurobiological mechanisms:

> For example, theories that postulate meaningful semantic features could be effectively isomorphic to LSA given the identification of a sufficient number of sufficiently independent features and their accurate quantitative assignment to all the words of a large vocabulary. *But suppose that it is not necessary to add such subjective interpretations or elaborations for the model to work*. Then LSA could be a direct expression of the fundamental principles on which semantic similarity (*as well as other perceptual and memorial relations*) are built. (1997, p.216, my emphasis)

Whether LSA is a direct expression of mental principles or not, it supports the argument that meaning can emerge from a structure that doesn't 'look' semantic to us. Furthermore it is another way to envisage internal structures of 'representation' which are not isomorphic to what is represented, showing that meaningful information (about language in this case) can be stored in a way which is not itself linguistic nor obviously symbolic (structures in dreams are sometimes hard to understand or recognize, being neither linguistic nor obviously symbolic; an example might be the 'paint frozen hinge' from Allan Hobson's dream in the previous chapter). We may be coming closer here to understanding some of the problems with the notion of mental representation (and the ways in which the term 'representation' may be misleading). A model such as LSA clearly carries information about both context and meaning, with input and output that is recognizable to human observers. Yet the way in which words are 'represented'

[90] As well as the echoes of the discussion of Meno's paradox and the impossibility of progressing within philosophy using a 'definitional' method in the chapter 'A Deconstructive Method'.

and processed in the system is abstract to a degree that might make it difficult to apply the usual terms of reference in a discussion about meaning. One is put in mind of Searle's 'Chinese room' argument (1980), where a non-Chinese speaking 'interpreter' in a sealed room was passed input in the form of messages in Chinese, and followed rule-based instructions to manipulate the language, producing an output or reply also in Chinese. Searle's point was that though the output may be an intelligible reply in the original language (Chinese) the 'interpreter' who provided this reply could not be said to have understanding in this situation[91]. The context of the current discussion throws a different light on this, since whilst Searle's reasoning might be sound we now see the 'Chinese room', or the abstract semantic space of LSA, as only one part in a 'system of relations amongst strata' (to quote Derrida). The level at which we usually impute understanding is that of the whole conscious human being, though psychoanalysis puts even this into question: we might say that according to Freud the neurotic or hysterical subject can be seen as a kind of 'Chinese room' in themselves, processing input (in the form of past trauma) and producing output (in the form of a compromise formation or conversion disorder) that is not understood consciously by the analysand, until it has been interpreted and/or worked through.

There is a possible objection here: that the type of model under discussion (which might apply to LSA but also my proposed FIC metaphor) can only work in a manner supplementary to a pre-existing understanding of the world. The claim here would be that such abstract structures as detailed by Landauer and Dumais may work to extend knowledge but only once they are grounded in some context, or given foundation by more traditionally representational forms of knowledge. In other words, in terms of my own project, that the ontological revision I am proposing for mental objects (knowledge structures) may only work as a supplement to more 'present' objects of knowledge, signifiers with surer guarantees of their being or essence. In terms of the FIC/VQ metaphor this could be construed as a question about how the 'codebook', if such exists, is constituted. This is an argument rehearsed by Derrida himself in *White Mythology* (1974) when he objects to the notion that one can intelligibly order metaphors or fit them into a hierarchy of expressive language. He rightly points out that ideas of 'foundation'

[91] Which was taken as an objection to 'strong AI'.

are themselves metaphorical (pp.23-24 and p.28) and attempts to use one metaphor to 'ground' another are therefore fruitless – the kind of practice known as 'bootstrapping' in analytic philosophy circles[92].

Whilst I agree that it is wise to be mindful of falling into the trap of attempting to secure the logic of an argument by reference to a hidden centre, I think we can defend ourselves on two fronts. First, it is possible, along the lines developed in this thesis, to argue for the idea that mental objects are constituted *at every level* by nonpresent difference; it's 'turtles all the way down'[93]. Secondly, and conjointly, as I hope to have established in earlier chapters, I am seeking to develop a way of thinking, a *koan,* or tool to enable us to sidestep the clôture of metaphysics, to reappraise our understanding of meaning structures. Thinking about meaning structures in terms of a FIC model I believe helps us to see that the idea of 'metaphor' itself is not, and cannot be foundational since 'metaphor' is just a name for a pattern of similarity and (nonpresent) difference by way of which mental operations can be thought through (echoing Derrida's conclusion in *White Mythology*). Essentializing metaphor (and linguistic structures in general) is, I believe, the trap which Lacan fell into and which I will be discussing in more detail in a later chapter. The interesting linguistic and philosophical consequence of this new way of thinking is that we view metaphor in an appropriately deconstructive light, as simultaneously both *only* a tool to enable understanding by way of similarity or contiguity (as opposed to, say, a handle on a self-evident truth about the world), and as *the only* means we have to understand the world; we fully recognize the 'double bind' of appreciating the value and the limitation of metaphor at the same time. In fact the philosophical ramifications of this way of thinking can hardly be overstated. In a way this is the opposite of Descartes' manoeuvre in the *Cogito* (see his *Discourse on the Method* 1980) – assuming the coherence of a sophisticated idea of personhood or subjectivity as a basis for questioning 'external' reality. Descartes overlooked the long developmental struggle to make sense of the world each of us faces before we can confidently and meaningfully use the designation 'I'; in doing so he smuggles a great number of

[92] Since attempting to pull yourself up off the ground by your bootstraps is impossible, as it is attempting to get more out of a system (or argument) than is present within it.
[93] As the anecdote at the beginning of Stephen Hawking's 'Brief History of Time' would have it.

(realist) conclusions about the world into his minimal, sceptical platform. By contrast, here we take a realist position about the 'external' world and use the evidence it provides to question the assumed simple coherence of our sense of self. Having done so, accepting a metaphor like FIC which suggests negative difference as the basis for thought processes, *implicitly* specifies epistemic limits based on our physiology and *explicitly* demonstrates that we do not grasp anything about the world at the level of a grasp of its 'essential nature'[94]; *ex hypothesi*, we can only know about any aspect of the world through its difference from other objects of our understanding, themselves constituted through a structure of difference, the limits of which are set by our perceptual and cognitive apparatus.

Returning to the terminology of dreams, let us meditate for a moment on the nature of the latency in Latent Semantic Analysis. To make the comparison with the 'latent' content of dreams, here we have meaning, or at least a component of meaning – a structure that relates similar words and their contexts – which exists, as per the Freudian suggestion, in a *virtual* place, encoded in the relationship of parts in an abstract space. The 'knowledge' represented by the structure is clearly meaningful but is not occluded or placed 'elsewhere'; it is an essential though perhaps non-obvious property of the whole system. Landauer and Dumais are thoughtful about the implications of their theory for the ways in which we think about the mental representation of knowledge:

> Another interesting aspect of this notion is the light in which it places the distinction between episodic and semantic memory. In our simulations, the model represents knowledge gained from reading as vectors standing for unique paragraph-like samples of text and as vectors standing for individual word types. The word representations are thus semantic, meanings abstracted and averaged from many experiences, while the context representations are episodic, unique combinations of events that occurred only once ever. The retained information about the context paragraph as a single average vector is a representation of gist rather than surface detail. (And, as mentioned earlier, although text passages do not contain all the juice of real biological experience, they are often reasonably

[94] That is, we cannot 'cleave reality at the joints' as Plato's *Phaedrus* would have us do.

> good surrogates of nonverbal experience.) Yet both words and episodes are represented by the same defining dimensions, and the relation of each to the other has been retained, if only in the condensed, less detailed form of induced similarity rather than perfect knowledge of history. (1997, p.228)

Do we ever have 'perfect knowledge of history'? Recall the earlier examples of listening to a lecture and trying to sketch the face of an acquaintance, in light of this paragraph. These are examples of situations where less information is retained than may be assumed initially – where in fact, vital information about both specifics and context has been retained, but in a 'condensed' form, 'gist' rather than surface detail. After the fact we can piece together the information that we have retained, but the way in which that *condensation* takes place is mysterious to us. As a final demonstration of the significance of such an approach, in 2015 a team of researchers[95] used automated analysis (based on the use of LSA) of narrative interviews with young people assessed as being at high risk of psychosis, to predict the later onset of psychosis. Their trial predicted onset of psychosis with 100% accuracy, superior to (human) clinical assessment. At the very least we can see from this that a structure of nonpresent difference can track, or emulate, mental processes central to human experience.

Research from other, more psychologically-oriented directions appears to converge on the same conclusions. Beebe and Lachmann (2002) discuss how we process knowledge encoded into the body through our existence in the world, knowledge which has never been rendered conceptually through language and may not be amenable to such treatment: this nonverbal knowledge, acquired in early life, may be 'implicitly processed' through motor or image schemas. It may not be available to conscious introspection but may nonetheless affect how we feel or behave. Moreover they argue that it is a mistake to suppose that such implicit processing is just a primitive forerunner to a more sophisticated developmental endpoint of linguistic, explicitly conceptual 'processing'. Such abstract schemas and 'representations' may persist throughout life, operating unconsciously to influence our thoughts and behaviour. They spell this out in detail:

[95] Bedi et al.

> Presymbolic representation has been seen in psychoanalysis chiefly as a 'preamble' to symbolic representation. It was originally important as the putative beginning of primary processes, as contrasted to secondary processes... This way of thinking no longer obtains… the infant begins life with an extraordinary organization. Through complex social and nonsocial interactions, as early as three to four months the infant rapidly generates a rich, discriminated set of experiences that come to be remembered and expected: presymbolically represented… Although transformed in various ways, these same capacities continue to operate across the life span, and in the consulting room, usually out of awareness. They may be detected in the form of unconscious memories, enactments, or patterns of nonverbal interaction. (2002, pp.83-84)

It is relatively easy to see how longings, or implicit embodied procedural information may remain unconscious, since they are so hard to articulate in the first place. Work such as this helps to sketch out the vast 'iceberg' of cognitive and affective process taking place below the level of conscious attention. And shows how meaningful patterns of experience, both linguistic and non-linguistic, can be stored within us in ways which are nameless, either because they do not easily lend themselves to linguistic description or simply because they have never been named. Beebe and Lachmann's 'remembered and expected' motoric schemas or sensory memories, though they may lack linguistic labels, still help to guide the transformations that associate the more readily (consciously) apprehended objects of our experience, and in doing so, generate our internal reality. Once again we can appreciate the inversion performed under the auspices of the metaphysics of presence, that has us regard linguistic expression as the apotheosis of our humanity: we celebrate the actor who speaks the words onstage as though they emerge spontaneously, a pleasant illusion which allows the neglect of all the mechanics of the theatre, the long toil of the playwright, the labour of the carpenters who build the sets, the design of the lighting, and so on.

To recap: I have followed Derrida's account of the evolution of metaphors for mind in Freud's texts, and in doing so interrogated the Freudian notion of the

unconscious, and the ways in which it engages with a metaphysics of presence. I have suggested a new metaphor for mind (Fractal image compression) which I believe serves as a tool helping us to think about the mind without the metaphysics of presence, and in doing so re-evaluate the ontological status of mental objects – including mental representations, and what Mark Solms referred to as 'mental solids' in the introduction. We are beginning to form a picture of an unconscious not essentially constructed through repression as a hidden realm of meaning, but one that forms an unseen but necessary ever-present 'alterity' supporting the text of our thoughts and lives. I hope that the FIC metaphor will help to conceptualize the nature of this structure, and through our discussions we have considered ways in which parts (at least) of the unconscious may be so abstract as to be literally ineffable. The requirement to interpret the contents of the mind at a level apart than that of the conscious attention of the subject/analysand, puts a particular complexion on analytic work. This view ties in with theoretical work by psychoanalytic clinicians, for instance Blechner's (1998) observation that sometimes dreams represent things that can't be expressed linguistically, or Bollas' view of the 'receptive' unconscious (1992, 2007):

> Let us think of someone in particular – our father, for example – to see what we register within ourselves; what we think of. Perhaps some image of the father's expression will cross our mind, but this hardly adds up to the experience that is taking place within us. Indeed it is important to stress that at the moment of thinking of the father we are undergoing an experience, as inner constellations of feelings, unthought ideas, deeply condensed memories, somatic registrations, body positionings, and so forth are gathering into an inner sense. But what is this? The total experience is, in fact, the effect upon ourself (naturally reflecting the self we are as well as the other whom we represent) of the father. And if we think of anyone else, our mother, our spouse, one of our children, a close friend, a neighbour, a shopkeeper, then we feel an inner forming inside ourself, a restructuring of our inner world that is evoked by the name of the person we are then considering. (Bollas 1992, p. 56)

Bollas' elegant words resonate with the arguments of this chapter. Thinking of an individual we feel 'an inner forming inside ourself' – that is, when we consciously direct our attention, part of the experience of our conscious awareness is the deeply meaningful sensation of the connectedness of the components of our minds; in my terms, an awareness (at some level) of the transformations that both connect, and allow us to 'construct', the objects of our understanding. Bollas' work as shown here represents beautifully the idea of an unconscious replete with all sorts of information about the world, emotionally charged (if not always repressed) and fundamentally interlinked, a part (or stratum) of the self which helps to provide the 'inner sense' of full, present, conscious awareness.

What I hope to have added to this picture is an idea of how we might imagine this inner sense being generated, a metaphor which gives us new ways to think about perception, memory, and consciousness. This metaphor, if taken seriously and followed to its logical conclusion, in turn calls into question some fundamental presuppositions of philosophy, interrogating the scope of metaphysics and in particular questioning representational theories of mind which have long been popular in philosophy and have informed much recent research in psychology (see Slaney and Racine 2011). And it both promises to illuminate, and has implications for, psychoanalytic models of the unconscious, repression, transference, and interpretation. First though, I will return to the study of dreams, looking at the ways in which Freud's work in *The Interpretation of Dreams* provides support for the FIC metaphor and exploring how the metaphor can help us to think about, and evaluate, psychoanalytic theories of dream interpretation.

# 6

# The Interpretation of (Some) Dreams

"The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind"

(Freud 1900, p.608)

"There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism...."

(Derrida 1978, p.369)

What does my deconstructive reading of Freud, and Fractal Image Compression-inspired metapsychology, mean for the psychoanalytic approach to dreams? In this chapter we will see how the FIC model affects a psychoanalytic understanding of dream interpretation. Dreams remain meaningful, since interpretation of a dream allows us to track the transformations which locate (and, simultaneously, create) the objects of our understanding in the web of experience – and the nature of these transformations and connections can reveal to us significant patterns in our experience and memory, in the same way that an analysis can. But perhaps we can now understand these patterns and objects in the mind as constituted out of those transformations, 'between' as Freud originally suggested, rather than 'present', 'trace' rather than either dead text or living awareness. I propose that we hold this explanatory metaphor in mind as a kind of koan, opening the way to seeing mental operations as trace, and the unconscious, latent content in an indispensible (though not 'essential'), irreducible relation with the conscious, manifest dream, existing not as a translation or explanans in another realm but as a *con-text* for the meaning of dream elements and mental objects:

> There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present… The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united – a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, nachträglich, belatedly, *supplementarily*: for the nachträglich also means *supplementary*. (Derrida 1978 pp.265-266)

Perhaps this slightly arcane formulation becomes clearer in the light of a FIC model of mental objects and ideas which do not exist concretely, absolutely or independently, but only ever in reference to other ideas or objects: patterns of difference whose existence is determined by their spacing and relation to other parts of the understanding, not to some self-present 'essence'. We can also see that the spatial metaphor has led us astray slightly over the question of where the

latent content resides. The latent content of dreams can be extracted by linguistic transformations which exist *potentially* in the same way that objects exist *virtually* within the mind; as a sequence of connections, representing only difference. *The associations which are made to the dream are a trace or map of the process by which mental objects are constructed*. Ultimately linguistic formulations, like dream interpretations and all conscious mental objects, are a *production*, the end result of a mental operation which creates a coherent conscious world, and not the beginning.

What we can now see is that in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud has amassed evidence for, and begun to describe, thought processes which create meaning; the mechanisms which he is articulating do not require us to connect deeply with reality, they only require that we can *tell the difference* between the objects of our experience. This is an understanding of the dream not as a production for an audience, to soothe and prevent waking, but as a glimpse into a process of meaning creation; a glimpse that is permitted when *for some reason* that activity passes the threshold required to reach conscious awareness. What that reason might be is another question but one which we will at least consider, later on; and we can see that in framing dreams in this way the study of dreams also becomes a study of the conditions of possibility for consciousness (as I claim *The Interpretation of Dreams* in fact was, though this aspect was repressed or unacknowledged).

One point to note is that in the Freudian account of dreaming the distortion encountered in a dream is directly related to the reason for the dream: the distortion is taken to be a necessary disguise to allow the dream to occur without waking the dreamer. However if we believe that the distortion and exchanges that occur in dreams are part of a mechanism which is required to relate the components of our experience to one another, the *specific* distortions which take place do not necessarily derive from the motivating thought or impulse for the dream (if such exchanges always take place as part of our ordinary thought processes), though they do furnish information about the unconscious, because they illustrate connections which we may not be consciously aware of. Considering the transformations which represent similarity and difference as constitutive of the unconscious does not privilege any particular association: so we may consider

associations made along different axes to be equally important, for instance; at the level of the overarching narrative of the dream (the 'kind' of story being told); to a place in the dream (geographical or geometric, see Pile 1999); to a person, or object (visual, perhaps the most common); to a word or phrase (linguistic, see for instance Freud's 'Autodidasker' dream, p.298 1900); or to an affective context, that is, the association is made primarily to a situation where the feeling evoked was very similar.

## Structure and Trace in the Dream of the May-Beetles

In his analysis of the work of condensation Freud relates the dream of one of his analysands, the 'May-Beetle dream', the content of which was as follows:

> *She called to mind that she had two may-beetles in a box and that she must set them free or they would suffocate. She opened the box and the may-beetles were in an exhausted state. One of them flew out of the open window; but the other was crushed by the casement while she was shutting it at someone's request*. (1900, p.289)

Freud uses this dream to demonstrate how a great deal of information is condensed into a brief symbolic representation. The crushing of the may-beetles provokes the analysand's recollection that before the dream she saw a moth which had fallen into a glass of water - her daughter had pointed this out but she had failed to remove it. This leads to associations to instances of cruelty to animals, connected in particular to her daughter's cruelty to insects at an earlier age. At the time of the dream her daughter had grown far more kind-hearted, and reflecting on this contradiction in character leads to a further association to the novel *Adam Bede* and a contrast between characters in the book: between a pretty but stupid girl and an unattractive girl of high character; their various romantic encounters are with men who are similarly marked by superficial contradictions (a lascivious 'nobleman', a poor but truly 'noble' working man). The male characters connected with letters she had received from admirers in her youth. And the letters were

associated further to letters she had written her parents shortly after her marriage, claiming that she was happy – though in fact she was not.

Freud identifies the analysand's underlying thought as concerning the contradiction in her own character, between her outward respectability and her hidden sensual desires. Remembering her daughter's request for some arsenic to poison butterflies with induced further associations, to a book with erotic content that her daughter had gotten hold of (Freud explains that the association is to a remark that 'books of that kind are *poison* to a girl' (1900, p.290)), and to the use of arsenic as an aphrodisiac; through this, to the aphrodisiac 'Spanish fly', made from crushed beetles. Finally, there was a dispute between the analysand and her husband over whether the bedroom window should remain open at night; the analysand enters analysis complaining of exhaustion.

In analysing this dream we *could* characterize the 'dream-thoughts' linguistically: some suitable propositions might be 'my outward appearance conceals the truth about me'; 'ingesting certain materials can provoke forbidden/sexual activity', and, connected to this; 'I would like a more active sex life'. However we have (in previous chapters) been critical of the idea that the dream thoughts need to exist in a linguistic form prior to their expression in a dream, and examined some of the contradictions that appear to issue from this position. So can we understand this dream, and the dream-thoughts Freud has suggested are present, through the framework we have been developing?

First of all I think we can see that associations take place along different 'axes', in the manner suggested above. There are, indeed, linguistic associations – the analysand was born in May, and married in May. In addition the beetles provoked an association to the quotation 'Verliebt ja wie ein Käfer bist du mir' (p.291), literally 'you are in love with me like a beetle' meaning 'you are madly in love with me'. But perhaps most strikingly there are associations where the simple structure which can be 'transformed' across contexts is quite obvious. In the dream an association is made between the dreamer's daughter, the characters in *Adam Bede*, and the dreamer herself. What they have in common is that their outward appearance is misleading. Here we can see that there is a simple common structure

(discrepancy between inner and outer) that any of these people can be fitted into, if we accept that dream objects can be freely exchanged according to their difference or similarity. More evidence for the freedom with which objects are exchanged is in fact provided by the dreamer having exchanged herself for a beetle - in the dream the beetles are weakened and exhausted, as she herself is (in a sense the structure of 'discrepancy between inner and outer' is carried to an extreme in the dreamer's representation of herself as an insect). In accordance with the FIC model, we might say that we are more or less nakedly witnessing the basic symbolic structures that constitute our thought processes. This specific structure is one which we could imagine being represented in a variety of ways, either linguistically or spatially (an image of the Tardis from the series Doctor Who springs to my mind); we should also remember though the conclusion from the previous chapter, that information can be represented in the mind in ways that are so abstract as to be literally ineffable - pure differences in abstract space, as we saw in the Latent Semantic Analysis model.

We need to be clear, also, about the causal direction of travel, because the idea that ideas or objects can be exchanged in dreams was of course a central part of Freud's original thesis and is nothing new. I believe that using the Fractal Image Compression metaphor allows us to think about how we process and recall information, and how that procedure is revealed to us through our dreams. Let's sketch out what that might mean for the Dream of the May Beetles. First of all we need to think about how some of the information represented in the dream was originated. The proposal here is that perception, and the storage of new memories, operates on the basis that new situations are processed on the basis of similarities with, and differences from, pre-existing memory constellations and understandings. So in this case we might say that experience in the analysand's earlier life had created some sort of 'registration' (bearing in mind the caveats of the previous chapter, that this does not imply figurative similarity or the 'capture' of anything essential about what is registered) or inner constellation, of a situation where there was an important difference between how something (or someone) seems from outside and how they 'really' are. The typical early experience of concealing sexual desire might engender such a constellation, which was then echoed when the analysand wrote to her parents to tell them she was happy within

her marriage, when in fact she was not. We might then suppose that upon reading *Adam Bede* the narrative resonated with her, because these inner constellations were stimulated. Details from the novel were then stored in memory by way of relating the events in the narrative to the abstract constellation 'discrepancy between inner and outer'. Such a constellation would carry a powerful emotional charge since it already encoded such significant experiences as emerging sexuality and unhappy marriage. The 'day's residue', then, of the memory of failing to save a moth from drowning in a glass of water, would become incorporated into memory constellations by way of movement along pre-existing vectors: anxiety and guilt at the treatment of animals, the associated thoughts about the development of her daughter's character, which memory itself was perhaps modelled on her memory of her own development, and the many ways in which she did not always show externally how she was affected by events, and in fact her outward appearance quite contradicted an inner truth.

## The Form of the 'Inner Forming'

One way of thinking about how such inner constellations are formed and may be tracked, quite separate from the discourse of psychoanalysis, has been extensively explored in the field of cognitive science and linguistics by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By* argued that our conceptual system – the entire structure of our thought – is governed by systems of metaphors which shape and constrain both language use and thought. On this account, metaphor is not just a part of language but a fundamental part of the apparatus we use to navigate and understand the world. Metaphors are acquired through our embodied experience in the world[96] and are an inescapable, essential part of our thinking. The use of metaphors is pervasive and it's not hard to find examples, for instance, 'ideas are food': *you've put a lot on my plate; it's hard to take in; we'll chew it over; that's hard to swallow; that stuck in my throat; it's hard to digest.* 'Ideas are food' is based in turn on further metaphoric structuring, 'ideas are objects' and 'the mind is a container' (2003, p. 152). Metaphors have their own logic, based on the

[96] See especially Lakoff and Johnson 1999.

embodied experience they derive from (1999, p.31 – the logic of the container metaphor is transitive). Once a system of metaphors is established it can be used across a range of different domains: for instance the metaphor of 'war' is often employed to understand both disease and love. His *fight* against cancer is over, the illness *won*; the divorce *battle* ended when *lines of communication* were opened. In this way we can see that the occurrence of systems of metaphor is one way to track abstract structures (or constellations) that are employed across a range of situations.

The fact that we do not notice the metaphoric systems in play (most of the time anyway) is characteristic of the operation of the metaphysics of presence: the substantial work of memory, drawn from embodied experience and expressed in images through metaphor is 'rolled up' into simple linguistic expressions which we then treat as full of meaning, without being aware exactly how that meaning is conveyed. The comforting exactness of language relieves the anxiety of the messy, contingent labour of experience. Or, in the infinitely more elegant and expressive language of Derrida:

> The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without différance. (1976, p.71)

On-going research supports the conclusion that metaphors are not just picturesque parts of language but are actively at work in thought processes: Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) at the University of Stanford asked people to suggest policy solutions to a hypothetical crime wave, having first seeded metaphors of crime as either a 'beast' or a 'virus'. Overall, 'enforcement' strategies (emphasizing actions such as 'capture', 'enforce' and 'punish') were preferred by all participants, but a significant swing to 'reform' strategies (those which emphasize 'diagnose', 'treat' and 'inoculate') took place in the group invited to see crime in terms of the 'virus' metaphor. What's more, steps were taken by the researchers to ascertain whether the sample group were aware of the metaphors

at work – only a very small percentage appeared to be, and even when these people were excluded from the results the framing metaphors used exerted a powerful effect over the policy solutions suggested. Therefore the influence over thought processes exerted appears to be unconscious (in some sense). The authors say:

> Metaphor is incredibly pervasive in everyday discourse. By some estimates, English speakers produce one unique metaphor for every 25 words that they utter. Metaphor is clearly not just an ornamental flourish, but a fundamental part of the language system…Interestingly, the influence of the metaphorical framing is covert: people do not recognize metaphors as an influential aspect in their decisions. (2011, p.10)

However useful as a tool for understanding it may be, it's worth warning again about the unreflective deployment of the idea of metaphor, lest we recapitulate the problem under discussion, hypostasizing metaphor as a mental entity and tucking up a complex discourse into a neat and familiar linguistic figure. I think it's safer to say that metaphor is the familiar linguistic endpoint of the mental operation FIC has been helping us to come to terms with. Such terminological hygiene is an attempt to ward off philosophical ailments that may be the thin end of a substantial wedge of misunderstanding. As an example, despite offering profound insight into the mechanisms of thought George Lakoff still falls into the traps of the metaphysics of presence, which I described earlier as an inversion of priority of the likely causal mechanisms at work. Here he is talking about metaphor in dreams:

> The metaphor system plays a generative role in dreaming-mediating between the meaning of the dream to the dreamer and what is seen, heard, and otherwise experienced dynamically in the act of dreaming. Given a meaning to be expressed, the metaphor system *provides a means of expressing it concretely in ways that can be seen and heard*. That is, the metaphor system, which is in place for waking thought and expression, is also available during sleep, and provides a natural mechanism for relating concrete images to abstract meanings. The dreamer may well, of course, not

> be aware, upon waking, of the meaning of the dream since he did not consciously direct the *choice of dream imagery* to metaphorically express the meaning of the dream. (1993, p.86, my emphasis)

Saying that the metaphor system 'relates' concrete images to abstract meanings and that it 'provides a means' to express meanings concretely is reminiscent of Freud discussing the conditions of representability and claiming that the mind 'selects' pre-existing symbolizations to convey meaning. According to this shared perspective, the meaning of the dream is somehow not *present* within the dream because it lacks a 'conscious' direction. The key confusion in this paragraph is represented in the words 'provides a means of expressing', since we now have ample reason to think that the metaphor (such as those in dreams) does not exist as a *means of expression* of another idea (perhaps a linguistic one), but represents a more fundamental mechanism of thought which later becomes associated with other ideas and ultimately perhaps a linguistic expression. Or rather, it's not exactly that the *metaphor* (a term which carries the implication of a symbolic relation with an original and more concrete figure) represents such a mechanism in thought, but that there *is* such a mechanism in thought, which we can understand more easily by comparison with the familiar linguistic idea of metaphor. Linguistic metaphor is one ultimate production of a mental system which structures experience (and memory) through difference and similarity: I am suggesting that we now understand this system by way of the 'metaphor' of fractal image compression, a development which helps us to think in terms of abstract relations of difference rather than in terms of mental objects, be they 'concrete' or 'symbolic'.

## Pastures New: The Possible Causes Of and Reasons For Dreams

For Lakoff and Johnson (as for Thibodeau and Boroditsky) the metaphors that shape thought and language may be unconscious but not in a psychoanalytic sense (not in the Freudian sense of the dynamic unconscious):

> The system of metaphors, although unconscious, is not "repressed" - just as the system of grammatical and phonological rules that structure one's language is unconscious but not repressed. The unconscious discovered by cognitive science is just not like the Freudian unconscious. (Lakoff 1993, p.87)

Lakoff argues that though many metaphors are employed unconsciously, very few tabooed thoughts (as indicated by metaphor) show up in everyday waking language, supporting the idea that the principal functioning of the unconscious is in a receptive, creative and associative mode, and not via repression:

> Freud and many of his followers were interested more in sexual symbolism-metaphors of a tabooed nature. But what we find through the study of everyday language is that unconscious symbolic thought is, for the most part, not sexual or tabooed. Tabooed thought only rarely shows up in ordinary everyday conventional language. (Ibid., p.85)

I'm not sure that this argument is watertight since one of Freud's insights is that tabooed content is smuggled into everyday language via metaphor – hence for instance the expression 'old bag' (Freud 1916, p.161 – the translation uses the term 'old box' rather than the modern equivalent 'old bag') which renders an observation about senescent female reproductive organs inoffensive enough to pass mostly undetected in everyday conversation (though still clearly offensive it is less tabooed than open remarks about genitals or reproductive organs). One would have to track the occurrence of every 'hidden' tabooed reference in this way to conclude definitively that it wasn't present in everyday speech, an exercise I don't think Lakoff has undertaken. However, we might accept his wider point that detecting metaphor in ordinary language opens up a panorama of unconscious symbolic thought which goes far beyond repression (assuming we accept that such examples as he has given are unproblematically not subject to repression, as it seems fair to do). Accepting this argument doesn't mean that we have to accept that there isn't such a phenomenon as repression but rather that if it does exist, it doesn't have to do the work we take it to in Freudian theory – i.e. creating the

structures whereby a train of thought may be followed unconsciously. In the psychoanalytic literature Stolorow and Atwood have outlined a similar understanding, saying that the structures of a person's representational world are what they call 'pre-reflectively unconscious' (Atwood and Stolorow 1980), not repressed but resulting from a "person's inability to recognize how the personal reality in which he lives and moves is constituted by the structures of his own subjectivity" (1982, p.205-206). Whilst their acceptance of 'non-defensive' unconscious formations is similar to mine Stolorow and Atwood adhere strictly to a psychoanalytic phenomenology which keeps their focus on the experience of the analysand. They follow George Klein's (1976) distinction between the clinical and the metapsychological, and consequently draw no deeper conclusions about the mental mechanisms responsible for such psychic organization.

Earlier we saw how Bass's (1997, 2000) investigations into the phenomenon of 'concrete' patients led him to consider the possibility of the unconscious registration of experience. Bass has acknowledged that he is picking up on a trajectory in Freud's work, detected by Morris earlier. In Freud's later years he began to give more consideration to alternative modes and methods of psychic defence, which were not based on repression. Morris remarks that in late work Freud:

> …turns his theoretical attention back to the more dissociative types of defence that had preoccupied him in the 1890s, and that he specifically locates now between perceptions of external reality and the registrations of memory. (Morris 1993, p. 34)

In the classical Freudian view, as illustrated in the dream-book, wish-fulfillment, repression and the primary process hold each other in a sort of explanatory tension; having questioned both the necessity of the ubiquity of repression as a mechanism and the idea of the censor we may also query the position of wish-fulfillment as the head of the causal chain in dream formation. This opens the way for considering other possible purposes for dreams.[97] Fosshage (1983) has already

[97] I should emphasize at this point that my research primarily bears on the reason for dream 'bizarreness'; I do not have the space here to offer an exhaustive account of all the possible

argued that a view of dreams as regressions to primary-process phenomena has eclipsed the idea that the dream has an organizational function:

> It is my thesis that this metapsychological view of dreams as predominantly a product of regression to primitive-infantile levels of functioning and organization has tended to preclude the recognition of the organizational or synthesizing purposes of the dream, the manifestation of varying levels of organization in dreams, and the use of dreams for the assessment of object-relational development or the level of differentiation and structuralization of self and object representations. (p.644-645)

Fosshage suggests here that dreams are used to 'assess' structuralization of self and object relations, but a view of the dream-process as actually *constructing* those relations would fit neatly with, and be supported by, the FIC metaphor; indeed I am suggesting that the bizarreness associated with dreams is a product of being made privy to (by way of consciously experiencing our dreams) the structural connections that generate meaning, at the point when they are first instituted – whilst dreaming. Hartmann (1976) has described a process of memory encoding that also begins to suggest the special character of dreams in relating idea to affect:

> Items recently learned (day residue) or items entering during sleep do not slip neatly into the ordinary memory schemata, as they normally would during waking. Rather, they are connected with various old *emotionally related themes* from the subject's entire life. They are incorporated into the dream by the mechanisms of the dream-work. (1976 p.332, my emphasis)

This is probably a good time to recall that Fractal Image Compression is an asymmetric process; that is, it takes more time to encode the information than decode it (a familiar competitor to FIC is JPEG which is a symmetrical process). The benefit of the FIC method is that having taken time to encode a great deal of

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functions of dreams. However having replaced Freud's censor with the metaphor of Fractal Image Compression does allow new possibilities to take centre stage. One benefit of a rigorous metapsychology is that it enables one to methodically distinguish between different theoretical accounts and clinical practices.

information, it can be retrieved very quickly; the downside is obviously that the process of encoding is laborious which may be why JPEG has been more commercially successful. Following the FIC metaphor we might notice that the additional 'processing' time of REM sleep appears necessary to psychological health[98]; after sleep we appear to be able to access the information processed at night quickly and efficiently[99].

I'll also press further here on the distinction I drew earlier, between *having* dreams (or, playing host to the mental function that results in what we call a dream) and *experiencing* them, a distinction that is made surprisingly little in the psychoanalytic literature (despite Freud's own assertion that dreams are not made to be experienced). Where it *is* made it usually relates to speculation that the function of the dream is dependent on our experience of it (e.g. de Monchaux 1978 where she says that relating dreams is a "medium for communication between internal object, self and other" p.452) or implies that the form of dream expression is 'chosen' or motivated by a need to be perceived in a certain way by the dreamer: for example, in Stolorow and Atwood's dream phenomenology "dream symbols bring the state of the self into focal awareness with a feeling of conviction and reality that can only accompany sensory perceptions" p.213. It's hard to see how this could be thought to be therapeutic without some level of conscious awareness, clearly suggested by 'focal awareness' and the 'feeling of conviction' that are said to accompany the dream. In contradistinction to this I am arguing that the important thing is the *process* which underlies the dream, regardless of whether or not one becomes consciously aware of it – though clearly if one *is* aware then interpretive therapeutic use can be made of such awareness. This opens a related and probably significant question of why we remember some dreams but forget or are never consciously aware of most[100]; I will return to this point later on.

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[98] See for instance Ford and Kamerow (1989) who found that insomnia was a risk factor for anxiety and depression.

[99] See, e.g. Tononi and Cirelli (2006), Stickgold (2003, 2005), Cartwright (1991), Wamsley et al. (2010), Lewis and Durrant (2011) for examples relating to emotion, memory, cognitive schemata and problem solving.

[100] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the evidence from neuroscience is now very strong that dreams occur throughout the night and that we are aware of very few of them. See Cartwright (2010): "At best, we are able to recall far fewer dreams from any night in comparison to what we can collect on a single night by making REM awakenings in the laboratory. Further, the dream recalled spontaneously is most likely to be the last one of the night, or one so disturbing it wakes us. Neither is a representative sample of all those experienced" (p.174).

Certainly I am in agreement with Grenell who says: "from the perspective of psychobiological adaptation, it makes little sense that a phenomenon so ubiquitous as dreaming… would be useful only on the rare occasion that a dream is recalled, let alone interpreted" (2008, p.246). My focus here is on the understanding that is opened up by my explanatory metaphor – and I would say that understanding the dream in terms of access to the process of compression of information can certainly allow us to understand why it is the *process* that is of significance rather than the *experience* of that process.

Outside of the psychoanalytic sphere, there is mounting evidence from neuroscience and dream research in experimental psychology supporting the idea that some type of organizational activity is taking place in the brain at night during sleep. Memory consolidation (Lewis 2013)[101], threat simulation (Revonsuo 2000) and down-regulation of strong emotion (Cartwright 2010) have all been investigated, and in particular the evidence is strong that during periods of REM sleep later in the night some kind of emotional processing of memories takes place[102]. Cartwright's research into the dreams of depressed subjects who were going through a traumatic life event (divorce) found that not only did sleep contribute to an improvement in mood both in the short and long terms, but that the type of dreams that were reported were actually predictive of the participants' likelihood of having recovered from depression by the end of the study. Those who recovered had, in their dreams, connected dream images of the present to older memories of their marriages, expressed affect, and begun to assume an active and engaged role in their dream narratives (all in contradistinction to those who did not return to 'mental health')[103]. This type of research in experimental psychology appears to converge on conclusions that have been approached by psychoanalysts, especially those working in an ego psychology tradition, for some time. For instance, Greenberg and Pearlman (1975) employed empirical work within a psychoanalytic tradition to show that dreams help deal with and organize emotional experience. Wishes can be identified in the dream but often as they are

[101] Lewis: "…sleep appears to actively process memories in a way that noticeably strengthens them" (2013, p.102).
[102] Panksepp 2000: "If most REM-dreams reflect forward directed, experience-expectant emotional processes, then they may not be the epiphenomenal or psychologically irrelevant that many investigators are coming to believe" p. 990
[103] See for instance p.150, 2010.

in the process of being relinquished. Like Cartwright and Lewis, their idea of the dream is that it is adaptive:

> Our concept of adaptation is similar to that described by Joffe and Sandler (1968), in which the ego attempts to create new organizations of the ideal state of self in order to preserve a feeling of safety and to avoid the experience of being traumatically overwhelmed. Successful adaptation involves a relinquishing of ideals (wishes) which are no longer appropriate to present reality. That these previous ideal states are not always so easily abandoned contributes to the appearance of infantile wishes and the wish-fulfilment aspect of dreaming. We are suggesting that dreams portray the struggle, inherent in the interaction between the wishes of the past and the needs of the present, and reflect the process of integration which appears to take place in REM sleep. (1975, p.447)

Cecily de Monchaux (1978) also argues for an adaptive function, with repetitive dreams enabling the integration of traumatic events into a person's self-concept by way of reliving them, and so "reducing the split in the ego":

> I want to ask whether dreaming may not be a specially suitable means of achieving reintegration after stress induced dissociation. That it is, and how is a means of so doing, we have much analytic clinical evidence for. (1978, p.448)

This is a tradition in psychoanalytic thought which has persisted up to the present day: Grenell, for instance, was to be found in 2008 suggesting that "the dream provides a psychological space wherein overwhelming, contradictory, or highly complex affects that under waking conditions are subject to dissociation, splitting, or disavowal may be brought together for observation by the dreaming ego" (p. 223).

## The 'Turn to Affect'

'Affect' is sometimes used as shorthand for either feelings or emotions; in the human sciences understanding and employment of the concept of affect follows a trajectory from Spinoza through Deleuze (e.g. 1987), and in the specifically psychoanalytic sphere, authors like Green (e.g. 1999), with a rich debate and literature of its own. Here is Spinoza's definition:

> By *affectus* I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections. (1883, xix Ethics III, Def. 3)[104]

Translator of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, philosopher Brian Massumi has produced influential work on affect (1995, 2002, as well as the introduction to 1987's *Plateaus*) as part of the recent 'affective turn' (Leys 2011[105]) in the humanities and social sciences. Reflecting the 'anti-intentionalist' cast to much of this work (as discussed earlier), Massumi insists that it is important to maintain a separation between the 'prepersonal' (1987, xvi) *affect*, the biographical or personal *feeling* and the socially available *emotion*. Affect on this view is bodily intensity tied to action but removed from representation. Moore and Fine's more psychoanalytic classification has a similar distinction between publicly observable emotion and feelings as a subjective state (though they may be unconscious); they use affect as a global term for "all related phenomena" (1990, p.9). From a different direction, in disciplinary terms, there has been a movement in cognitive science towards taking account of affect and appreciating how fundamentally intertwined the cognitive and affective are: Stapleton (2013) notes that although 20th Century cognitive science largely ignored emotion, and treated it as separable from cognition, there is a growing realization that "a properly embodied cognitive science embraces the affective not merely as critical for realistic cognitive systems but as integrated in cognition itself" (p.9).

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[104] It is interesting that Spinoza couples the affect with the *idea* of the affect, foreshadowing the psychoanalytic idea of drive representation.

[105] Leys questions the clarity or sustainability of a strict separation between 'affect' and 'emotion', terminological discipline meant to underpin the separation of affect from meaning-laden context of the sort we might associate with emotion. I tend to agree with her.

In the field of neuropsychoanalysis Panksepp (1998) has famously enumerated seven basic, innate emotional systems, which have been used as the basis for much research in the discipline. I don't want to engage with such detailed taxonomy since from a Derridean perspective I believe that the power of naming attaches to context, and I do not think that we yet have a sufficiently well-evolved context (i.e. theory of mind) within which we can productively insist on such linguistic specificity. Nonetheless some working notion of affect is clearly crucial for psychoanalysis in general and the theory of dreams in particular, despite Freud's own difficulty with the concept and the consequent vagueness in his own texts:

> Freud's affect theory is poorly understood and frequently misrepresented. This is attributable largely to the fact that he never published a definitive, comprehensive statement of this theory. (Solms and Nersessian 1999, p.5)

As Baraitser and Frosh (2007) say, affect "is murky stuff, hard to define or grasp" (p.76). It can be hard to recognize or name, even as we experience it or are motivated by it. I distinctly remember, for instance, feeling an unusual queasiness on my first day at university and realizing that I was experiencing 'butterflies in my stomach' as a result of anxiety. I'd be quite certain that wasn't the first time in my life I had cause to experience anxiety, but it was the first time I had explicitly named and identified it as such. The complex and inter-linked questions of how affect relates to ideas, and whether affects themselves can be thought of as unconscious, have arguably been poorly addressed, beginning with and since, Freud. Johnston says:

> What absolutely must be acknowledged is that Freud is indeed genuinely and entirely inconsistent apropos a metapsychology of affect, erratically oscillating in indecision between various speculations regarding the existence and nature of unconscious affects in particular. (2013, p. 118)

Recent work in neuroscience (especially Solms 2013) has challenged the idea of unconscious affects, and places affect as a central organizing principle of the psyche. Solms (like Damasio 2000, 2010) expresses the idea that affect is not only

the seat of consciousness, but a regulatory force that lets us know 'how we are doing'[106] as organisms. He remarks:

> …we simply *are* conscious, and our conscious thinking (and perceiving, which thinking represents) is *constantly accompanied by affect*. This constant "presence" of feeling is the background *subject* of all cognition, without which consciousness of perception and cognition *could not exist*. (2013, p.16)

This teleological or adaptive view of affect is prevalent in neuropsychoanalysis (Panksepp 1982, 1998 in particular) but has a long and distinguished history going back at least to Hume's observation that 'reason is the slave of the passions' (T II.3.3 p.415). The affective does seem to operate on us in a different way to what we might call the cognitive: my subjective experience is that it's much easier to bring to mind the mental image of a Christmas tree than to summon affect such as wonder or joy – although of course for some of us sustained meditation on a memory of a Christmas tree does bring back childhood feelings like those. Human beings do seem to take a special pleasure in experiencing affect outside of its naturally occurring context, but find it hard to summon it at will, which is perhaps why the novel and the play exist; a successful work of fiction builds an arrangement of ideas and mental imagery until emotion follows, demonstrating that it is a job of work for us to put together affect and idea, not something 'given'. Dreams are in some sense the reverse of novels, often apparently starting with an emotion and assembling an array of mental images and narratives accordingly, and this comparison may suggest the function of the dream process.

As far as dreams are concerned, the idea of affect has often tended to coincide with the idea of excess; in psychoanalytic thought the idea that affect might overwhelm the ego, and in research such as Cartwright (2010) and Grenell's (2008), the idea that dreams might help to manage dangerously strong feelings. Much as I celebrate

[106] Solms 2013: "…phenomenal states of the body-as-subject are experienced affectively. Affects do not emanate from the external sense modalities. They are states of the subject. These states are thought to represent the biological value of changing internal conditions (e.g., hunger, sexual arousal). When internal conditions favor survival and reproductive success, they feel "good"; when not, they feel "bad." This is evidently what conscious states are for. Conscious feelings tell the subject how well it is doing" (p. 7).

the recognition of the significance of affect, focus on excess or pathology (though it fits with Freud's original framing of the dream as following a process analogous to the pathological), even in dreams, appears myopic, to say the least. Such a view appears to take for granted the enormously rich affective and conceptual content of our 'normal' apprehension of the world. In other words, it is not just when we are ill or traumatized that affect is significant; how we *feel* about the world and the objects of our understanding is everything to us as human beings, and this delicate fusion of feeling and understanding has to be *created*. My contention is that the knowledge that we can 'unpack' the transformations needed to navigate between the objects of our understanding, together with the affective texture that this mental map has – the feelings of pleasure, disgust, joy and sadness that flicker through us as we let our minds wander, and which guide our thoughts – is a substantial part of our conscious awareness[107]. This structure, though, needs effort to create, maintain, and revise.

For one thing feelings are transient, which is perhaps why they have escaped academic attention for so long. But the connection between time, affect and consciousness, and self-consciousness in particular, has a philosophical pedigree of its own:

> The process of autoaffection is for Kant time itself. The subject receives its own forms, it perceives its own logical structure, through the way in which it apprehends itself empirically as remaining the same through change and succession. Autoaffection is thus the temporal difference between the self and itself. Heidegger declares: 'Time, that is pure autoaffection, constitutes the essential structure of subjectivity'. (Malabou 2013, p.6)

The connection between time and affect is persuasive (it's certainly easier to conceive of an image frozen in time than a feeling) but as should be clear by now I'm not so sure about the priority of the self, no matter how naïvely appealing it has proved across different philosophical traditions. Nor can we rest on an idea of

[107] Solms (2013): "…cortical representations are unconscious in themselves; however, when consciousness is extended onto them (by "attention") they are transformed into something both conscious and stable, something that can be thought in working memory. (It is no accident that we describe the consciousness of everyday experience as working memory)" p.13.

autoaffection, which is redolent of the 'punctual simplicity' of the classical subject that Derrida has urged us to rethink, instead asking us to consider the possibility of heteroaffection (see 1976 for the first instance of this), where the self is extended, complex and structured: the experience of the self is always already the experience of another. Crucially, as Derrida has also said, "time is the economy of a system of writing" (1978, p.284): if affect and time are interdependent, then understanding affect is essentially interconnected with understanding the operations of the system of writing that produces the text of the psyche. The challenge, therefore, is to describe a system of writing that we might believe could produce the self as an effect. Metzinger, a philosopher active in the field of consciousness studies, discusses the emergence of the phenomenal self through what he calls a 'self-model':

> Nobody ever was or had a self… No such things as selves exist in the world: All that ever existed were conscious self-models that could not be recognized *as* models. The phenomenal self is not a being, but a process – and the subjective experience of *being someone* emerges if a conscious information-processing system operates under a transparent self-model. You are such a system right now… as you read these lines you constantly confuse yourself with the content of the self-model currently activated by your brain. (2003, p.1)

I would further argue that this type of self-model makes sense only in the context of an environment of others and objects; what we think of as the 'external world'. After the fashion of an Hegelian dialectic of recognition[108] such 'externality' only comes into being in tension with the creation of what we regard as our 'inner selves'. A more modern psychological framing of this idea comes from Beebe and Lachmann:

> Thus, what is initially represented is not an object, but an object-relation: self-in-relation-to-object. These presymbolic representations of self and object are simultaneously constructed and are constructed *in relation* to each other. What is represented is an emergent dyadic phenomenon, the

[108] The 'master-slave' dialectic from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.*

> nature of the *inter-relatedness*, which cannot be described on the basis of either partner alone… there is no object representation that does not stand in relation to a self-representation, and vice-versa. (2002, p.118)

Therefore we could say that the formation of 'object-representations' in dreams is also the formation of 'self-representation'; we cannot meaningfully separate the two. If my mind has constructed an understanding of the world based on my memories, which allows me to produce mental objects rich in meaning owing to my feelings about them, I have at the same time and of necessity begun to construct an understanding of myself. Realizing that we *do not* begin from a position of immanent, present self-awareness but have to construct our own unique picture of the world, can begin to allow us to see how our self-understanding emerges as a part of that process. It is my contention that dreaming forms at least part of that process – or rather, that what we are able to witness when we experience or remember our dreams is part of that process, and therefore dreams provide valuable evidence of how we construct our understanding of the world and our place within it. With that in mind I will offer a dream of my own and my associations to it, and interpretation of it. I do not suggest that my own interpretation can necessarily offer anything beyond what can be gleaned from existing psychoanalytic techniques in terms of insight into my personality or pathology; but my focus is on what the process of interpretation can tell us about the mind and how meaning is formed, and less on what it can tell us about the analysand. I am also aware that there are shortcomings and limitations to self-analysis. As I have been arguing part of the function of psychoanalysis is to foster the creation of a new form of subjectivity since another person can sometimes 'read' the text that we present them differently, and in a wider context, than we can ourselves. However I do believe that in examining my dream in line with the metaphor of fractal image compression it is possible to see how mental objects of importance to me – the people, places and situations that matter most to me – are constructed through transformations away from existing memories. Crucially this does not require me to engage with new situations *sui generis* but allows me to understand them in terms of prior experience. And further, how the work of the dream is producing a mental landscape and set of references that allows me to wake up and function with emotional stability and perspective; it

does this through organizing my thoughts and emotions and in doing so my personality, my selfhood, grows and develops.

## Dream at Pig Hill Inn, Cold Spring

Context:

My partner and I were staying with her grandmother, Mrs. Y, in Manhattan, and had gone upstate to a little town called Cold Spring for a night away, to have some privacy and for some time alone. While we were in Manhattan (and before the trip upstate) Mrs. Y's apartment building had a problem with cockroaches, which we had seen in her kitchen, where there were many gaps between kitchen units and a good deal of clutter allowing them space to hide. In particular there was a wooden panel hanging on the wall with holes and hooks to hang pots/pans from. During the day before we left to take our trip upstate I had looked up at the various food items in bags and tubs on the shelves and thought that it would be good if someone cleared or threw them out; Mrs Y. was elderly and was finding it hard to keep on top of clearing out old food from her kitchen (in fact she was considering leaving the apartment where she had lived for many years and moving to Canada to be closer to one of her sons). But then I thought Mrs Y. might not like that and it would be odd for her if someone cleared out her kitchen while she was still living there, as if they were preparing for her death – or at least her moving to a retirement home.

The dream:

I dreamed that I came downstairs into the kitchen of my childhood home. I noticed that there was a kitchen unit with shelf space that had been completely cleared out and thoroughly cleaned. I realized it was because my father had taken offence to something and had left home (in the dream I was many years younger and living at home – my father was correspondingly younger and living with my mother and I at home). I was hurt and angry at him but also in the dream remember being

impressed that he would be so thorough as to take all of his things, and thought with a certain sour humour that it was just like him to clean up behind him so thoroughly. Looking at the empty space was oddly calming as it was so clear, but also upsetting, as it spoke of abandonment. Looking around I realized that he had taken other items he thought were his including a whole piece of furniture. The furniture in question was a wooden dresser/sideboard that I used to like to climb on when I was little – I would sometimes climb up to raid the cooking chocolate stored there. On the wall where the dresser had been were some holes and hooks as though the furniture had been hanging there. I was upset with my father but not surprised at his actions.

Addendum:

There was part of the dream that was difficult for me to remember and I did not note it down until a week later based on what came back to me[109]. There was, in a later part of the dream and in a different location (I think I was in my father's office) a colleague of my father's who had received some sort of package from him; it was in a padded envelope, the sort with bubble wrap. He said that it was some sort of message from my father and I got the impression that it related to work, that it allowed work to continue, though I didn't know or see what it was. This colleague also gave me the impression that he thought it was typical of my father to run off – he didn't approve but also had a kind of amused detachment about him, as if he was saying 'what can you expect – he's just being who he is'.

Associations:

The first association I had was from the clean simplicity of the space in the kitchen in the dream, to the clutter in my own flat. I am not an especially tidy person and nor is my partner, and we intermittently resolve to clean up but invariably don't make much progress doing so. In particular we have recently been intending to

[109] Freud would think this delay significant. He says: "It not infrequently happens that in the middle of the work of interpretation an omitted portion of the dream comes to light and is described as having been forgotten till that moment. Now a part of a dream that has been rescued from oblivion in this way is invariably the most important part; it always lies on the shortest road to the dream's solution and has for that reason been exposed to resistance more than any other part" (1900, pp.518-519).

clear the flat up so that we can put it on the market and move to a larger place. This is partly just down to a desire to have more space for ourselves, but is also associated with the idea that we may have children and so need more space. I have for a long time had considerable anxiety associated with the idea of starting a family, which stems in part from difficult childhood experiences of my own, many of which were due to my father who was a difficult man when he was younger; one of his worst habits was to fly into a rage and disappear from the house for days or weeks at a time. The clean empty space in the kitchen I associated partly with the 'day's residues' – when we had arrived at the Inn where we were staying I had placed my toiletries onto a shelf in the bathroom and had noted to myself in passing how clean and tidy it was and how nice it was to have space to spread out – which contrasted partly with life in our flat at home but also with the somewhat cramped conditions in Mrs Y's guest bathroom. At home my piles of clutter are often paperwork, and many of them concern my father's affairs, as he now has Alzheimer's disease and I am largely responsible for his care and his finances. The absence of human traces in the 'clean shelves' of the dream also connects back to my waking reflection on what Mrs Y might think if her shelves were cleaned out whilst she was still living there.

Further 'day's residues' were evident in that the empty space was also like an art installation we had seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, by Donald Judd, of brushed aluminium boxes (wall-mounted with single shelves at odd angles and perspex backing where they meet the wall); I had initially felt nothing about this piece but had walked back to look at it and try to understand it. In the artwork some of the shelves are angled so they are fairly useless as shelves, and they differ from one box to the next, so they are unique – but the Perspex backing reflects your own image back as you look in at the shelves, but dimly, so that in trying to understand the art you are seduced into examining yourself.

[Donald Judd's artwork in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, photos by the author]

Thinking this over I wondered if there was a wider theme in the dream of trying to understand something, and 'get a look at myself'.

The dresser which my father had removed in the dream was one I remembered from a time when I was very small. As I said I used to climb up onto it to raid the cooking chocolate that was kept there. This prompted an association to a

photograph I had seen a few weeks before of myself as a very young (possibly two-year-old) child, having climbed up onto a work surface in the kitchen very near one of those old-fashioned rotary meat-slicers that has a circular blade turned by a handle, used to cut meat very thin. I was looking at the time for some old photographs to take to my father to try to stimulate memories, and I joked to my partner that the photo was a prime example of irresponsible 70's parenting, and thought it amusing that my parents would photograph me rather than rush to remove me from the danger. I also mused that my parents were probably aware of this irony themselves when they took the photo.

[The author aged two]

This sense of identity or understanding, of symmetry between my own situation and my father's, is already evident and was explicit in the dream, where I clearly felt some understanding of my father as an individual with his own needs as well as feeling anger at abandonment. The hooks and holes in the wall where the dresser had been removed reminded me immediately of where the pots and pans were hung up in Mrs Y's kitchen and connect with my unease over their slightly unhygienic nature, as they are difficult to clean and provided a hiding place for bugs. This discomfort also leads back to my thought that it would be good if someone tidied the kitchen, which was swiftly followed by a realization that this might be distressing for Mrs Y; so in fact several feelings are mixed – mild disgust,

compassion for the situation of an elderly person (and reflection on mortality) and guilt at having wished to 'tidy away' someone's life to alleviate my own passing mental discomfort.

The last and most indistinct part of the dream about the colleague of my father's and the package, I associated to a package I saw left on the mat of another resident in Mrs Y's building during our stay. I noticed it had been left one day and a day or two later it was still there – it caused me mild anxiety as I thought that the person may have gone away and that the package may be stolen, as a package might be if it was left outside my door at home. I wondered on seeing it the second time if I should give it to the doorman or say something about it – again a mild sense of responsibility (and a mild sense of guilt since in fact I did nothing).

## Associations and Interpretation

The dream was fairly brief and in two parts. The first part really comprised only two images, though they were clear, and an awareness of my own thoughts in reflecting wryly on my father's behaviour. The second part was really just the image of one situation, of my father's colleague with the envelope. The manifest dream is entirely about my father and his behaviour, and my feelings about it. Though not an actual historical situation it represents an analogue of one, in that my father abandoned myself and my mother on regular occasions. Although he did not clean up after himself when he did so, as in the dream, he was a fastidious man and would often be found wiping down surfaces, especially in the kitchen. My anger at, and disillusionment with him is evident in the manifest dream. There was an odd double signification of the empty space in the kitchen in the dream which I have noted - both comforting and orderly but also clinical and without human traces. In some ways this captures my feeling about my father – comfortingly familiar, and for certain he provided me with a clean, comfortable place to live when I was a child. But he could also be oddly, inhumanly cold, as when he abandoned us, withdrawing his love absolutely (or so it felt). The dream also shows something of the adult development of my feelings about him, and perhaps

the mastery (or attempted mastery) of some of them, in that I am able to reflect with wry humour on his character even as he abandons me. The manifest content of the second dream in a way is a continuation of this process, since in that section I have placed a character who is openly expressing a tolerant, understanding amusement at my father's behaviour, even as he decries it.

More focussed attention on the manifest dream in psychoanalytic circles is to be welcomed since there is clearly a great deal of information here about my life and circumstances, which is not at all hidden. Blechner (2013a) comments that: "most psychoanalysts that I know have rejected the idea that all dreams involve a transformation from latent content to manifest content, and that to understand every dream, we must reconvert the manifest content to latent content" (p.166). In a similar vein Fosshage (2013) remarks: "I do not assume ubiquitous defensive/disguising functioning in dream formation and, thus, eschew the manifest/latent content distinction and simply refer to dream content". He continues:

> The analytic aim in understanding a dream is not to get "underneath" the manifest content. Instead, the aim is to understand the dream content within the context of the dream narrative that more directly, coherently, and metaphorically reveals what the dreamer is experiencing and thinking about. (2013, p.254)

Blechner (2013b) goes as far as asserting "we do not need the dreamer's associations to understand most dreams" (p.264 – see also Ullman 1996). Experimental psychologists such as Hobson, Cartwright and Lewis frequently do not even consider associations to dreams, treating the manifest content as the only content (Cartwright 2010, pp.162-164) when interpreting dreams. Yet I hope it is clear, not just from my argument about the nature and function of dreams, but also from the sample dream I have related, how much would be lost if we did not associate to the dream; attempting to locate the 'latent content' if you will (although I also hope that it is clear by now that I do not imply by that term that there is any fixed content, linguistic or otherwise, that will give a simple answer as to what our dreams really 'mean').

It *is* possible to locate a wish in my dream; the wish to be free from responsibility, or the wish to absolve myself of the guilt I felt in leaving Mrs Y alone, guilt which found an analogue in the anxiety I felt over whether I was doing a good enough job of looking after my father. In the dream I do appear to be moving towards self-forgiveness, by way of a less harsh judgement of my father – even if I did have to assign that role to someone else (his colleague). And so, the classical Freudian theory can provide an account of the dream; a perceptual identity, where the day's residues (looking around Mrs Y's kitchen) triggered an identification with some situations reminiscent of looking after my father, and through this found the 'hidden' wish to be free of responsibility for him, and gave it disguised expression. However, aside from the fact that we have now assembled many theoretical reasons to reject such a narrow account, it doesn't ring true to me even in this case, though it could be forced to fit the facts. To begin with, if that *were* the wish driving the dream it has been very poorly disguised, since my father has been assigned a starring role and straightforwardly enacts a version of the supposed animating desire. Indeed, the nakedness of intention in this sort of dream might go some way to explaining why many people these days (analysts and non-analytically minded folk alike) see no reason to go beyond the manifest. Furthermore the strongest image in the dream kitchen was one which reminded me of the art installation in the Metropolitan Museum. This image appears to be about reflection and self-examination (a level of abstract sophistication not emphasised in the classical analysis) and connects more strongly to Mrs Y's situation in Manhattan than my father's back in England. Why should this be at the forefront of the dream imagery?

My associations to the dream took me to the untidiness in my own home, and the fact that much of it is paperwork related to my father; from there, to the idea of responsibility for him. I wondered also if (although I would dearly love a tidier life) the piles of clutter are also my way of making a statement about my existence, of announcing my presence. In the double signification that I spoke of, the desire for a 'clear space' also speaks of a (soothing, calming) desire to be free of responsibility – and if one is being really Freudian, perhaps also to be 'free' of my father in an Oedipal sense. A really substantial theme in my life is responsibility, and this theme emerges in the dream, as in musing over my father's own irresponsibility

(implicitly but also explicitly in the dream) I am also struggling with my own responsibility for my father. And my worries about whether I am responsible enough to be a parent myself are also expressed. Of course our presence in Cold Spring was in order to get some time away from Mrs Y, whom I obviously felt we were abandoning in some (possibly irresponsible) way – whilst we were staying with her in Manhattan we were at pains to strike a balance between going out to enjoy ourselves but also spending enough time at home with her, since her mobility was limited so trips out were difficult. The photograph which I associated to really condenses many of the issues about responsibility: I only found it when looking for something to entertain and communicate with my father now he has dementia, so it speaks of my responsibility to him; the photo itself is emblematic of a kind of parental irresponsibility, though also contains the possibility of an ironic humour which acknowledges poor parenting (i.e. not addressing the risk to me in the photo) and a limit to parental responsibility.

Thinking further about the last part of the dream it occurred to me that in a way I take multiple positions[110]; so that I might be thought to be both the father who has left and the colleague who is attempting to shrug off the absence and 'carry on with the work' despite the anxiety that the 'left package' produces. The deepest resonance of that being the idea that I might finally be ready to 'carry on the work' of reproducing despite the many bad associations I have with my own childhood (perhaps feeling like a 'left package' might be one of them). These however have recently been attenuated by way of a greater empathy for my father and time spent wondering how he came to be the way he is, and the formative experiences in his own childhood. All of this content, which appears to me to be extremely rich and relevant to understanding my situation and perspective, would be lost without investigating my associations to the dream. Clinically, therapeutically, it seems to me vital to follow these leads. It may be hard to fully appreciate for those who have not had the experience of free-associating to a dream, but I can bear witness that there can be a clear feeling of subjective certainty when the correct association is arrived at. I don't feel that I'm speculating when I identify the image in the dream

[110] As Freud says: "Astonishment is sometimes expressed at the fact that the dreamer's ego can appear two or more times in the manifest dream, once as himself and again disguised behind the figures of other people" (1923c, p.120).

of the hooks and holes, with the cabinet taken by my father, with the photograph of myself as a child, with the space in Mrs Y's kitchen – I am as sure of the connection (identity, really) between these ideas as I am of anything else in my own mind.

Most relevant to my own thesis though, is the process that I see at work. Why would I dream of my father abandoning me at that specific point in time – when I am upstate with my partner, on holiday in the USA[111]? I had not been thinking consciously of my father since I had been in America. As far as I can remember I had not thought of him that day, nor thought about my childhood. The associations to the kitchen of my childhood tell me that when I walked into Mrs Y's kitchen in Manhattan and looked around, I was processing the information I took in, in terms of past experience – the kitchen that I grew up knowing. And the fact that the question of inter-generational responsibility was represented so strongly in the dream tells me that when I interacted with Mrs Y I perceived the symmetry between her situation and that of my father – more than that, I perceived *her in terms of* my father's situation. I did not know anything about her essentially or fundamentally, but saw her in terms of differences from and similarities to the person she most resembled in my experience (my father) – the person from whom the fewest, or most efficient, transformations would be required to construct my idea of her. A serious consideration of the very idea of perceptual identity ought already to have given us a clue that this process was taking place. How could a perceptual identity be recognized if the mind was not constantly scanning the environment, assessing it in terms of prior experience? If Freud's 'feelers' were not constantly reaching out through perception from the unconscious, structuring our experience?

The consequence of this nocturnal process of integration of new material into the network of transformations that produces my mental objects is that when I returned to Manhattan I was interacting with the people and environments there differently. They had been reconciled with my memories and personal history so

[111] With the contemporary (e.g. post-Kleinian) emphasis on the transference in analysis in mind, it is worth pointing out that this took place during a break in my own analysis and the separation from my own analyst – a man- is no doubt relevant. However it seemed to me that it would broaden the discussion too far to consider this in detail, so this I'm afraid this footnote will have to represent my own gesture towards the 'navel of the dream' (Freud 1900, p.111).

they were meaningful to me anew. The 'dream-work' as I see it, had woven new detail into the tapestry of my experience so that I could more deftly navigate the emotional charge of dealing with Mrs Y's needs and moods, and balance my own wishes with my sense of responsibility. The similarities and differences in her situation and environment which related it to one I knew more intimately (my father's) had been thoroughly explored, thrown into relief and put into context so that my feelings were appropriately modulated and my thoughts clearer and more direct. And it is my belief that this process would have taken place whether or not I had become conscious of the mental process that underlay my dream at the Pig Hill Inn. In fact, were I not disposed to associate to and interpret the manifest dream I would, I suppose, be in largely the same position as if I had not remembered my dream – certainly I would not be aware that somewhere in my mind an equivalence had been noted between my feeling of responsibility for Mrs Y, my feeling of responsibility for my father, and my father's irresponsible behaviour towards me as a child. However that equivalence *had*, nonetheless, been noted and I believe would have informed my thoughts, feelings and actions henceforth regardless. In short, the contents of my experience had been rendered meaningful.[112]

*

As mentioned earlier, de Monchaux's (1978) conception of the dream encompasses the idea that it must be experienced and told in order to serve its function, and as such departs widely from mine. However her comments on the symbolic function of the dream and the relationship to pathology are worth mentioning here as she nicely encapsulates some of the themes I have been exploring (albeit to a different end). Here she is talking about the idea of the reduction of dimensions in a dream – referring to the epistemic flatness we spoke of earlier, which she takes to be a necessary part of dreaming in order to render the dream 'digestible' to the dreamer:

[112] I'm aware that this conception of how meaning is created has echoes in other psychoanalytic theories, not least Lacan's – the idea that a structure is created in the unconscious underpinning metaphor and hence generating meaning. I hope also that the many *differences* between my position and Lacan's are also evident; but if not I will explore them further in Chapter 8.

> The idea of variations in dimensionality has significance in the theory of symbolization. De-differentiation between the things symbolized and the symbol is the basis for the concrete thinking of the schizophrenic: for the cathexis of words, for instance, as if they were objects, as Freud argued… In accepting less, the symbolizer gains both in sense of mastery, since his symbol is his creation, differing from the original in ways he has effected, and in the applicability of the symbol to serve as a substitute for missing imagos. The range of application of the symbolic representation is much wider than that of the symbolic equation, and like Winnicott's (1953) concept of the transitional object, an early and concrete form of it, can be used as a substitute in many different bad moments. You can suck, stroke, kick, sit on or dismember a teddy bear, and you can be sure he is yours, and no-one else's. So it is with the dream text: what the ego loses in its not being veridical, it gains in its power of possession, privacy, flexibility, ambiguity, reversibility and multiplicity of condensed meanings. (1978, p.451)

Aside from the great differences in our understanding of how the dream comes about and what its purpose may be[113], there is much to agree with here. Indeed, one of the consequences of successful dreaming is integration of new material into the corpus of experience such that it is 'yours' and hence of greater use psychologically. The creation of meaning is empowering in just the way de Monchaux describes here, and as she also notes, the corollary is the concrete thinking of the schizophrenic, where this flexibility and reversibility is not attained. This suggests a failure of the process I have been describing.

Someone who explored in an innovative way both the process of dreaming and the consequences of the failure of the dream process was the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. In the next two chapters I will investigate how my proposed alterations to Freud's metapsychology help us to understand and discriminate between different psychoanalytic theories. First of all I will look at Bion's idea of the 'dream-work alpha' and find many points of agreement with my own thinking; those who are

[113] Which may in themselves be attributed to the metaphysics of presence – many of de Monchaux's conclusions are close to mine though she continually reverts to the idea of a present perceiving subject, 'alive to itself', to process and benefit from dreaming.

familiar with Bion's work may already have found many echoes of it here, however I believe that my Fractal Image Compression model will help to explain and more fully describe aspects of Bion's thinking than has previously been possible. It will also lead to the refinement of some of his ideas. Then, finally, I will look at the work of Lacan and explain why my model leads me to question many of his conclusions.

*

Before we move on I'd like to quickly review the conclusions and speculations that my revisions to Freudian metapsychology have prompted, and the overall picture of the nature and function of dreaming that has emerged. I have argued that dreams are meaningful, and that moreover they give us (in conjunction with the Fractal Image Compression metaphor) substantial evidence to allow us to understand the process by which meaning is made in waking life. The meaning of dreams doesn't lie in the 'latent' content or any specific 'dream thoughts', linguistic or otherwise. Rather, it lies in the whole sequence of transformations that construct the mental objects which populate the dreamer's mind; examining these transformations reveals the concerns of the dreamer, and these can be traced through the associations made to the dream. Philosophical, practical and scientific arguments have led us away from the idea of the dream solely as the expression of a repressed wish; we can begin to trace the outlines of unconscious structures not necessarily formed by or dependent on repression, such as those revealed in metaphor. Repression may still take place, but it is not necessary to think in terms of it in order to understand the 'bizareness' of dream content.

I've suggested that the dream-work, as I conceive of it, constructs a mental landscape in accordance with affect, and in doing so makes meaning for the dreamer. I've speculated that like Fractal Image Compression the reconciliation of experience is an asymmetric (labour intensive) process and this may go some way to explaining why it occurs at night, when resources are free from daytime demands. I have argued that it's important to distinguish between having dreams and experiencing them, and that the metapsychology aligned with the image compression metaphor can help to explain why dreams are experienced consciously, when they are. These last few points are speculative and are intended

to show how a more rigorous metapsychology can help to discriminate between theories and suggest new avenues for research. I have identified weaknesses in Freud's separation of perception and memory following from adherence to the metaphysics of presence, and have suggested that my metaphor helps us to see how these faculties can work together to serve the ends Freud identified in the *Project*, of simultaneous registration and openness to new impressions. My metaphor also harmonizes with the modern neuroscientific conceptions of perception as hallucinatory, and the brain's activity as predictive.

I have reviewed some of the psychoanalytic accounts of the function of dreaming and argue that my view supports the idea that the dreaming process helps to integrate new information into the self-concept, that it helps to process affect and develop the ego; but perhaps most of all that it processes experience to generate an internal picture of the world that enables one to engage in life with psychological cohesion and emotional stability. It's possible that the dream process is also implicated in planning for the future, problem solving, and threat simulation – I don't make any specific claims for any of these areas. In investigating dream bizarreness I also don't really touch on the important area of secondary revision and dream narrative, a topic that is worthy of further research. Finally I have observed that my research has covered many areas touched upon by Bion in his work; I believe that my revisions to metapsychology can help us to understand Bion's conclusions with regards to dreams, and extend them. It is to this task that I will now turn.

# 7

# Bion - To Dream, Perchance to Sleep

"An emotional experience occurring in sleep, which I choose for reasons that will presently appear, does not differ from the emotional experience occurring during waking life in that the perceptions of the emotional experience have in both instances to be worked upon by α-function before they can be used for dream thoughts."

(Bion 1962b, p.6)

"But are not
all Facts Dreams
as soon as
we put
them behind
us –"

(Emily Dickinson, A843, 2016)

Wilfred Bion's work as a psychoanalytic theorist combined remarkable insight with sometimes arcane theoretical formulations. Whilst certain of his ideas, such as the 'container-contained' (see for instance 1963) and the idea of alpha-function (e.g. 1962a, b), have gained currency in parts of the psychoanalytic community (Grotstein 2007, Levine and Brown 2013), his sometimes gnomic presentation has arguably meant that his written work has not always had the recognition it deserves. Bion himself, at the beginning of *Attention and Interpretation* says: "I doubt if anyone but a practising psycho-analyst can understand this book although I have done my best to make it simple" (1970, p.1). Part of the problem with understanding his work is that Bion, in a very Derridean vein, was acutely aware of the baggage and restrictions imported into any debate with the terms used. Ogden remarks:

> Bion believed that psychoanalytic terminology had become so saturated with 'a penumbra of associations' (1962, p. 2) that, in order to generate not only fresh ideas but genuinely new ways of thinking psychoanalytically, it was necessary to introduce a new set of terms. (2003, p.17)

Consequently not only does Bion introduce new terms and new distinctions, but he redefines and re-works existing terms to attempt to clarify them or endow them with new meaning. A rigorous concern with the process by which knowledge can be acquired pervades his work, with references to the philosophy of science common throughout. Bion often presented his thoughts in a framework which attempted to make his assumptions and procedure as transparent as possible, with an admirably reflexive awareness that the problems of thought he adumbrated with respect to his patients would also affect his own clinical thinking. His concern with not just the application and origin of psychoanalytic concepts but the very beginnings of thought arguably positions him as a philosopher as well as a psychoanalyst:

> The claim is often rightly made, further, that Bion's work is not just influenced by epistemology; it is itself partly philosophico-epistemological

> in nature (See, for example Fischbein and Miramón, 2015; Sandler, 2006). (Sandford 2017 p. 103)

In some ways then it is no surprise to find echoes of our previous discussion in Bion's work, since we appear to share a common purpose. The specific idea of Bion's that has relevance to this thesis is the idea of 'dream-work-alpha'. In short, dream-work-alpha appears to be the mental process by which alpha-function is established in the mind. Bion used 'function' in a technical sense. He says: "I shall suppose that there are factors in the personality that combine to produce stable entities which I call functions of the personality" (1962b, p.1). To some extent Bion intends to leave the content of the term function empty in his account – to 'fill in' the meaning through his investigation. As he says:

> Nevertheless I am not discussing whatever it is that the function may become; my use of the term is intended to indicate that whether the person observed is performing a mathematical calculation, a walk with a peculiar gait, or an envious act, all are for me functions of the personality. (1962b, vi)

The specific term 'alpha function' then, is as Bion says "intentionally devoid of meaning" (p.3), at one remove from any commonplace linguistic usage that might prejudice us or predispose us to hastily define the phenomenon before it has been investigated. In practice the idea of alpha function in Bion's thinking appears to become a kind of emotional capacity to process sense experience and its attendant emotion. Alpha function operates on 'beta elements' ("sense- impressions related to an emotional experience" 1962b, p. 17), irreducible chunks of experience derived from our perception of the world, in order to render them useable in thought as part of the unconscious. Ogden explains:

> Bion hypothesizes that "α-function" (1962/1975c, p. 6) (an as-yet unknown, and probably unknowable, set of mental operations) serves to transform beta-elements into α-elements that can be linked to form dream-thoughts. Dream-thoughts are the symbolic representation of the disturbing experience that was originally registered primarily in sensory terms (i.e., as

> beta-elements). The capacities for α- function, dreaming, thinking, and remembering are "called into existence to cope with thoughts" (2008, p. 22)

This slightly paradoxical formulation – that thinking is called into existence to deal with thoughts – is typical of Bion's unusual expression and his willingness to break with convention in order to attempt to reach understanding in the face of entrenched habits of thought. In *A Psychoanalytic Theory of Thinking* (1962a) Bion hypothesises that the mother processes the infant's projective identifications, using her alpha-function to digest these elements and return them to the infant where, ideally, they are reintrojected in more manageable form. Assuming that the mother is receptive, capable of reverie, and that the infant does not have excessive envy or omnipotence, this process can calm the infant and aid in the development of its own alpha-function, as it moves from the paranoid-schizoid to depressive positions (Klein 1946). Thus the successful development of alpha-function is implicated in both cognitive development and emotional maturation.[114]

## Dream-work-alpha

Over time and through his writing some of the attributes of alpha function seem to migrate to what Bion calls 'dream-work-alpha', perhaps owing to a growing interest in the function and uses of dreams. He begins by describing dream-thoughts as being produced by the alpha function, and dreams as helping to establish and maintain a 'contact-barrier' between conscious and unconscious (1962b, p.17). It's not long before the dream itself begins to sound like the barrier between states:

> A man talking to a friend converts the sense impressions of this emotional experience into alpha-elements, thus becoming capable of dream thoughts and therefore of undisturbed consciousness of the facts whether the facts are the events in which he participates or his feelings about those events or

[114] Understanding the psychoanalytic account of emotional maturation in the context of cognitive development as it is understood by cognitive scientists would be a useful exercise that I believe would benefit both disciplines. See Hopkins 1987 for a rare example of this practice.

> both. He is able to remain "asleep" or unconscious of certain elements that cannot penetrate the barrier presented by his "dream". Thanks to the "dream" he can continue uninterruptedly to be awake, that is, awake to the fact that he is talking to his friend, but asleep to elements which, if they could penetrate the barrier of his "dreams", would lead to domination of his mind by what are ordinarily unconscious ideas and emotions. *The dream makes a barrier* against mental phenomena which might overwhelm the patient's awareness that he is talking to a friend, and, at the same time, makes it impossible for awareness that he is talking to a friend to overwhelm his phantasies. (1962b, p.17, my emphasis)

Despite his care over the snares of language there are many pitfalls even here. For one thing the phrase 'makes a barrier' is ambiguous between 'comprises a barrier' and 'generates a barrier'. For another he is (albeit deliberately) using the term 'dream' in a loose sense to describe waking phenomena. This description of dreams and the dream-thoughts leads to Bion's characteristic inversion of the usual account that has it that sleep is necessary for dreaming – he maintains, rather, that dreams are needed in order to be able to sleep, and wake up, and know the difference between the states. Shortly after in the same text Bion says that it is necessary to 'dream' waking emotional experiences, presumably in order to process them. Note that he has already specified in the above passage that the dream *makes* the barrier between states, and depending on how you interpret this statement, it may seem to represent quite rapid 'mission creep' for the idea of the dream (which was first the product of alpha-elements, then a barrier between alpha and beta, and finally the mechanism for producing alpha-elements); we do need to delay judgement on his linguistic strategies however, since reading Bion in good faith requires one to tolerate uncertainty and 'not knowing' (Ogden 2004) to reap the benefits of his work.

I hope by this point that, if it hadn't struck the reader before, Bion's ideas are resonating with the arguments of this thesis. Bion is claiming that a dream-like state is responsible for a type of emotional processing of information which helps to create a barrier or distinction between conscious and unconscious. If we think of such a barrier as less a distinct entity in its own right (a wall or partition) and

more the observance of a liminal point, a transition between different kinds of substance (say, water and oil) or process, then I think we are already in a very similar place to that we arrived at in the last chapter. Under my interpretation of the Fractal Image Compression metaphor, I viewed the operations discernable in dreams as being understandable as a kind of ordering of experience according to emotion, which would then produce a 'meaningful' unconscious realm of emotionally charged connections or 'transformations' linking our registrations of the external world as they appear to us – as mental objects. This understanding can help us to parse some of Bion's (perhaps superficially) puzzling assertions. Is the dream a barrier? Perhaps not in any literal sense, but if the dream-work produces a collection of mental objects which are linked emotionally and are meaningful through that connection, it has effected a de facto separation between what Bion would call 'beta-elements' (which we may recognize and even name but which have not yet taken place in the interwoven emotional network in our minds) and mental objects which are not only complete in themselves (have some stability and integrity in our minds) but are complete also through their connection to other objects of our understanding and our apprehension of their affective salience – in other words, mental objects, thoughts and ideas capable of being used for unconscious processing (which Bion would therefore call alpha-elements). Bion says the dream is a barrier against 'mental phenomena' that may overwhelm the patient's awareness of his everyday waking consciousness (that he is talking to a friend), and, at the same time, stops awareness of his everyday activities overwhelming his phantasies. To take the second part of this assertion first, we might now say that connections in the mind might be pursued unconsciously without having to trouble conscious awareness – in other words, allowing the operation of unconscious phantasy. My understanding of unconscious phantasy may be somewhat different from other commentators' – I am thinking of something like patterns of association made unconsciously in the manner of the movements of metaphorical connection we examined in the last chapter. Again this may be closer to Bion's ideas than, say, a classical Kleinian conception of phantasy. Discussing Isaacs' seminal 1948 development of Klein's ideas about unconscious phantasy Ogden remarks:

> …her [Isaacs'] concept of phantasy activity is, I believe, akin to Bion's α function, i.e. phantasying is a mental function (a form of thinking) that transforms sense impressions associated with instinct into a mental form that can be linked to create personal, psychological meaning. An important difference between Isaacs's concept of phantasying and Bion's α function lies in the fact that, for Isaacs, the raw sense impressions that are transformed derive largely from instinct, while, for Bion (1962a), the raw sense impressions derive from lived emotional experience in the internal and external world. (Ogden 2011, p. 934)

As we saw in the previous chapters, I have begun to offer an account where structured unconscious (memory) contents can inform both perception and cognition. As I have been arguing, complex registrations of states of affairs in the world (drawn from 'lived emotional experience in the internal and external world') seem to be able to be both reflected on consciously and stored (and used for cognition) unconsciously; the significant issue with whether they can be used unconsciously seems to be less to do with their connection with 'instinct' and more about the extent to which they are integrated into the existing corpus of emotional memory. For this reason I think it is necessary to engage with a concept of mental representation that goes beyond 'drive representation', and I believe the FIC metaphor gives us the means to understand how we can find a meeting point between Kleinian phantasy and dream-work alpha; a more thoroughly fleshed out notion of mental representation is an arena where we can begin to conceptualize how instincts and affects can be organized in concert with the structured products of sense-perception, to produce mental objects.

So in regard to Bion's claim that the dream is a barrier 'against mental phenomena which might overwhelm the patient's awareness that he is talking to a friend', in accordance with the arguments I presented in the last chapter we can see that disturbing or powerfully cathected parts of perception have had their charge ameliorated by their allocation of a place in a network of transformations. To give this abstract formulation substance, I refer for instance to a situation akin to the one where I returned from my trip upstate (as described earlier) and was able to interact with Mrs Y and her environment without perceiving similarities which

triggered unexpected and confusing feelings of guilt or anger (related ultimately back to my father). Bion of course famously worked with, and wrote about, many psychotic patients and would have been very familiar with a situation where unexpected and confusing, emotionally charged responses to stimulus (for instance, interpretations) would take place, and as he would say, a beta-element would force its way into an exchange in the consulting room having been used in projective identification; the inability to process such objects was in his view characteristic of psychosis and would lead to his analysands producing utterances and behaviour which appear at first to be meaningless. They are of course 'meaningless' in the sense described here, in that the beta-elements projected by the psychotic have not been organized into a system of transformations which produces what we ordinarily think of as meaning – or at least, as meaning is constituted in my account. I will return to the issue of psychosis later on.

Bion did expand on the process or mechanism through which meaning was established; one of the more illuminating discussions is again to be found in his notes, as reproduced in *Cogitations*. Here's a long but important passage (couched in the racist language of his time), as he discusses the idea of mental 'ideograms':

> Last night, as I was trying to understand a passage in Quine's Mathematical Logic (p.31) in which 'negative' occurred, I had a dream – having fallen into a sleep or doze – in which a negro appeared. The dream, I thought as I wakened, was associated with 'neg' being both negro and negative. But why did I not write it down then? And now I think of negative and native: 'natives' is associated with memories of India, my mother, and natives as being coloured people like Indians who were 'inferior'. Also 'dative' as being a present, and dates which I liked. 'Ablative', to lift off or take away. Negro, as he appeared in the dream, now seems to me to be not a real person about an ideogram. My theory is that this ideogram has enabled me to store all these ideas which I am now producing – maybe because I am a dreamer… What do I mean by saying that the negro in the dream was not a real person? Of course he was not. But I suppose that while I was asleep and in that part of mind, if any, in which I am still asleep, he must have been thought of as just a real person, a face, what I have called an 'undigested'

> fact. But now I regard him as an ideogram, and this means that some fact has been 'digested' and that the visual image of the negro, which I am now recalling, is a significant element in the process of (the mental counterpart of) digestion. Are 'undigested facts' then used in the process of 'digesting' other facts? (1992, pp.51-52)

Once again I hope the parallels with my account are clear, given a little perspective shift. Bion is surmising that some process of digestion is taking place in which the 'negro' of his dream-state is produced as an ideogram. From having been in some way the representation of a perception of a real person, this ideogram now represents the nexus of connections between a particular set of ideas. He suggests that representing such a nexus in the form of the idea of a person enables him to store ideas which he is now producing. This is ironically a sort of 'reversible perspective'[115] (ironic because Bion exploited the idea of reversible perspective in his own work) on my own theory. The key difference being the ontological insight made possible by the FIC metaphor: that the ideas 'condensed' into the idea of the 'negro' are not just *stored* this way, but are *produced* or exist fundamentally (in whatever sense they can be said to do so) through this process of association and transformation. Accepting this, it is still in a way correct to say that ideas are 'stored' in this manner, since they would not be preserved in the mind without such a process taking place. However my analysis of the situation opens up different possibilities. For one thing we are not led to look for the substantive ideas that are being 'linked' in this way elsewhere in the mind, which may be of use in attempting to establish the neurological correlates of thought. For another, the inversion of perspective that I am suggesting invites us to see that the 'ideogram' of bizarre dream imagery is not really the functional unit here; the ideogram (Freud might perhaps say 'nodal point') is principally of use since probing it allows us to see the different elements that are woven together to produce meaning for us. Something like the metaphysics of presence may be at work here in that Bion is attempting to identify *locations* which guarantee memory; but I am arguing that it is the *distributed* nature of our understanding which actually results in our

[115] In the most usual sense 'reversible perspective' meaning the optical illusion where perception of an image (such as the Necker cube) catastrophically or suddenly switches between two contrasting interpretations of the information given.

memory and experience being meaningful, not the specification of any kind of terminating formation (i.e. the ideogram). Of course I agree that the dream is significant in creating both meaning and identity, or as Ogden says:

> The work of dreaming, for Bion, is the psychological work by means of which we create personal, symbolic meaning, thereby becoming ourselves. (Ogden 2008, pp. 24-25)

As with the analysis of a piece of bizarre dream imagery, we can learn a lot about Bion from his ideogram, from his concern with formal reasoning, to his colonial past, to the inherently racist ideas of the time of his upbringing about the 'inferiority' of native peoples which seem to drive the identity between negro, native and negative. And so we begin to see the way in which words, ideas and mental images are imbued with associations (the echoes of the transformations which make them) which lend them their meaning: we see also how this is both culturally determined and at the same time intensely personal.

## Day and Night

Another feature of Bion's account that can be clarified by my metaphor, though not fully supported by it, is Bion's development of the idea of the dream to understand the emotional processing of experience as a phenomenon that takes place *constantly* in the mind, including during waking life. In the passage quoted earlier we saw how he had begun to use the term 'dream' as though it could describe a process taking place in waking exchanges with a friend. In *Cogitations*, drawn from Bion's notes posthumously, he comments "Dream-work-alpha is continuous night and day. It operates on the receipt of stimuli arising within and without the psyche" (1992, p.63). Schneider (2010) expands:

> In a significant break from Freud, Bion contends that there is no difference between unconscious processing of experience while we are awake and unconscious processing of experience while we are asleep; we are always

> dreaming our emotional experience… That is, both waking and sleeping experiences are subjected to the same unconscious thinking process by which psychological work is done. The non-psychotic part of the personality is always making meaning of internal and external experience as it (1) transforms beta into α elements, (2) links α elements in the formation of dream-thoughts, and (3) thinks one's dream-thoughts in the form of dreaming. (p.531)

I'd like to hold on to the central insight here – which I would characterize as recognition that it is a mistake to think of the dream as a phenomenon entirely isolated in sleep, with the dream-work a stranger to waking life – whilst not accepting the terms in which it is framed. Whilst I can accept that Bion's refashioning of language can sometimes extend meaning or enable new understandings of phenomena, perhaps we should not entirely ignore the 'commonsense' parameters of our understanding of dreams – that they are nocturnal, emotional, hallucinatory phenomena for instance. I agree that parts of the dream-work can be seen to be taking place during waking hours; but important detail will be lost if we fail to understand that there is a reason why our traditional 'folk-psychology' understanding of dreams has them confined to sleep. Let's probe this distinction further.

In her paper 'Freud, Bion and Kant: Epistemology and anthropology in The Interpretation of Dreams' (2017) Stella Sandford has engaged with a project similar in spirit to my own – to identify the philosophical commitments of Freud's work and moreover to show how differing commitments lead to different metapsychological conclusions. She sees a Kantian strain of thought in Freud's work on dreams but also a split between two different readings of Freud, as they cleave variously to different emphases in Kant's writings. In places she identifies what she sees as the result of an 'epistemological' way of thinking which supports the explicit conclusion which dominates *The Interpretation of Dreams*: that dreams are utterly different from waking cognition, that they are pathological in nature and represent something like a form of defective thinking. On the other hand, the movement she sees in Freud that derives from Kant's 'anthropological' writing has it that dreaming is a function of the imagination, which is ever-present but simply

obscured during the day by sensory input. Despite Freud's explicit conclusions resisting this idea, there is, as Sandford points out, much implicit evidence in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as well as Freud's other works that he sees the dream-work operating both during wake and sleep. Aside from the "especially egregious" (Sandford p.105) example of secondary revision, which Freud himself says is a "psychical function that is akin to waking thought" (1900, p. 490), Sandford also argues that:

> It can easily be demonstrated, with examples from Freud himself, that each of the four factors in the dream-work can be seen at work in waking thought too: in jokes, in the "linguistic tricks of children [*die Sprachkünste der Kinder*]" (1900, p. 303), in parapraxes, literary forms and visual art, symptoms, and so on. To cite just one other work, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life contains a discussion of the process of displacement in misremembered names, even using the same image of a rebus or picture-puzzle (1901, p. 5) used to characterize dreams in the earlier book. (2017, p.105)

Thus, Sandford claims, the Freud who continues the 'anthropological' trajectory of Kant's thought also offers a view of the dream-work that harmonises with Bion's work. In fact, she says:

> …dream-work-alpha… appears to combine the epistemological function Kant assigned to the a priori aspects of the faculties of sensibility and understanding (giving form and intelligibility to the 'material' supplied by sensibility) and the 'anthropological' insight into the functions that cut across dreaming and waking thought. (2017, p.103)

It seems to me that Sandford is potentially giving slightly more credit here both to Freud and to Bion than they are due. It's true that in Bion's thinking dream-work-alpha does give 'form and intelligibility' to perceptual material and that both Freud and Bion recognized (at times, at least) that functions of the dream-work cut across sleeping and waking; but I think that the extent to which the mind is ordering reality in initial perception is underestimated by both thinkers. This is

where I claim my revised metapsychology can be useful. In earlier chapters I identified a gap in Freud's account in that he needs a more robust description of how a perceptual identity would come about, and at the same time the separation of perception, memory and cognition he postulates doesn't really hold up – it appears at least that something like unconscious secondary process thinking is needed[116]. Bion in turn admits that he doesn't know how dream-work-alpha works (he says at times that he thinks we may never know owing to inherent limits on our cognition, see 1992, p. 95) but he certainly doesn't describe the possibility that in dream-work-alpha the mind is proactively seeking similarities in the environment. One of the key issues here is our understanding of the point at which the mind lends form to our perceptions. As we saw in Bion's (slightly vague) example earlier he suggested that a man talking to a friend could in some sense 'dream' the encounter as it happened, during waking hours. But it seems to me that the facts available speak to a more complicated situation obtaining in reality: if such 'dreaming' takes place continuously, why do we perceive it operating with especial intensity during sleep? And why does sleep deprivation produce learning deficits, confusion and emotional instability? And the corollary of this, why does experimental and anecdotal evidence suggest that we are better able to understand a situation and manage our emotions after a good night's (dreaming) sleep?[117] Bion's conclusions and my own converge on the idea that something like the 'dreaming' of an experience must take place before that experience is really understood, but the ascription of all unconscious processing to a single, *continuously occurring* faculty or process lacks important nuance. Alternatively let's consider a version of events drawn from my metaphor: that the mind is continuously making predictions about, and attempting to interpret, the perceived environment (in a mode of operation which may be largely hallucinated based on prior experience) in terms of memory – in my terms, attempting to find the most efficient transformations from past experience to register the new. This waking unconscious action, which could be thought to be the waking component or stage of the dream-work, I take to be analogous to the Kantian a priori. This is not a widely held view but neither is it one that I can lay unique claim to. Discussing the 'predictive processing' paradigm in cognitive neuroscience (which has parallels

[116] As Bass (2000) has also concluded, see the previous chapter.
[117] See previous chapter for references.

with the picture of mental operation that emerges from my Fractal Image Compression metaphor), Clark (2015) remarks that "perception involves the use of a unified body of acquired knowledge (a multi-level 'generative model') to predict the incoming sensory barrage" (p.5). Swanson (2016) notes that in many respects Kant can be seen to have anticipated such a model:

> Predictive processing (PP)… is often regarded as a fresh and possibly revolutionary paradigm shift, yet a handful of authors have remarked that aspects of PP seem reminiscent of the work of 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant (accessed online, June 2018)

I believe that it does make sense to interpolate such a process into the Freudian model in order to connect it with Bion's ideas – but I also think that some considerable labour is required to flesh out Freudian metapsychology at this juncture. Not that Freud didn't consider the role of hallucination, but in his understanding it was confined to early infancy and thereafter, pathological situations, and therefore wasn't as fully developed as I think it needs to be for our current purposes. The benefit of a FIC-informed metapsychology is that it allows us to see how insights from different disciplines can converge – the 'bricolage' I spoke of in the introduction. So, given the evidence we have seen of specialized mental processes occurring during sleep (e.g. Stickgold 2003, Cartwright 2010, Diekelmann and Born 2010) and the alignment of this with the asymmetric process specified by the FIC metaphor, we can propose the following: if the transformations needed to relate current perception to memory are few or small and there is a low degree of cognitive 'surprise'[118] then perhaps they can be effected during wake – but if not they are likely accomplished at night during dreams, and in any case need to be consolidated then (Stickgold 2005, Lewis and Durrant 2011, Lewis 2013). So in this 'two-stage' process, the unconscious is indeed at work during waking hours, and employing mechanisms similar to the dream-work: attempting to identify which patterns are familiar from existing experience, and which are not, by 'unpacking' the condensed registrations of memory. The fact that new situations are perceived in the light of past experience

[118] See for instance Friston (2012) as well as previous chapters for full description of the posited mechanisms

helps to show how the phenomenon of transference might be enacted (not to mention déjà vu, which we will return to later). But the 'heavy lifting' of integrating complex information or challenging emotion into the memory (and idea of self) would then be a second stage, mostly undertaken at night. This is of course speculation and the detail must be worked out clinically and experimentally; for the purposes of this thesis the point is that the Fractal Image Compression metaphor and associated metapsychology opens a theoretical perspective which invites us to consider why we traditionally understand dreams as a distinct nocturnal phenomenon, and how they interact with unconscious waking processes, and provides a mechanism by which we can understand the difference between waking and sleeping processes. At the same time though, it does not require us to jettison valuable clinical insight provided by Bion. Certainly I would defend Bion's conviction that unconscious processes are continuously at work shaping our thoughts and actions. Sandford again:

> If we say, therefore, that the 'dream-work' is as much a part of waking life as of the sleeping dream, *we say no more* than that unconscious psychical processes are at work in waking thought. And where is the analyst who would disagree with that? (2017, p.108, my emphasis)

That the dream-work is in operation in waking hours is indeed a less ambitious (and more specific) claim than Bion's idea of 'dreaming' waking experience. I would however say that it is still a stronger, and more specific claim than merely asserting that *unconscious psychical processes* are at work. Does the 'dream-work' as Freud described it appear to function during waking life? Taking the four specific 'factors' of the dream-work in turn, we have first 'displacement and condensation'. As I have argued I don't regard these two mechanisms as sufficiently distinct to warrant separate analysis; as far as displacement goes it's not clear to me that it's at work in any substantial way during waking hours – it would be extremely confusing if we continually exchanged or condensed together objects of perception (though potentially this is a description of altered states characteristic of dementia or psychosis). As I have said, I would regard it as plausible that the inverse is occurring, that is, that the condensed and interconnected pre-existing registrations in the mind are being 'unpacked' to some

extent to find points of similarity. To take one of Sandford's examples from everyday life, I would say that the parapraxis or slip of the tongue is usually due to such an 'unpacking' process not taking place thoroughly, or in other words, not all the transformations necessary to find the target 'object' or word having been effected satisfactorily. Consequently I'd say this is in fact an argument for an *asymmetry* between day- and night-time mental functioning. The second factor in the dream-work, the need to avoid the censor, is moot for my purposes.[119] The third, 'considerations of representability', strikes an ironic note in the context of my thesis. This is because, having conjectured that an abstract associative process such as that revealed in dreams is in fact an ordinary mode of operation for the mind, I have argued that it's not necessary for any 'selection' of symbolic representations or conversion into such to take place for the purposes of dreaming, as was supposed by Freud; however, one might say that it's a fair description of the unconscious process that I suggest takes place during *waking* hours – the assessment of pre-existing mental structures to see if they are suited for use in understanding and registration of waking perception. And finally, 'secondary revision': secondary revision does appear to be a special case. It does not impact on the key points of my argument so I have not treated it in depth, but it seems uncontroversial to say that the attempt to impose a rational narrative on dream events is carried out by a mechanism that appears to be in operation during the day; there is potentially more of an argument to be had over whether it operates as part of the night-time dream process at all (see for instance Wittgenstein 1953, Malcolm 1959/1962, Dennett 1976, Windt 2013)[120]. In sum then, I'd say that my model suggests that there are indeed unconscious processes at work during the day, and although some of them are akin to the dream-work, there is also some asymmetry between day- and night-time processes.

[119] Again see Ch.4 for my argument that we should not think primarily in terms of censorship when considering the dream-work.

[120] If the 'skeptical' view is correct and dreams are not experiences in sleep, we might potentially regard them as constructed on waking by something like secondary revision – at least in as far as their phenomenal content goes.

## Emotional Processing and 'Failed Dreams'

So far we have accepted that there is some continuity between a certain reading of Freud, and Bion's ideas about dream-work-alpha. I have argued that in order to fully understand this continuity we need a development of the psychoanalytic metapsychology similar to the one I have been proposing. This development then allows us to see that, though we might accept many of Bion's ideas about 'alpha-function' we still require a distinction (and more fully fleshed-out account of the difference) between sleeping and waking unconscious processes. Sandford locates the key point of dissonance elsewhere:

> Of course, one major difference between Bion's theory of dreaming and the received view of Freud's theory still remains. This concerns the function attributed to dreaming, and is often identified as the most significant point of divergence between the two thinkers (Meltzer, 2009; Schneider, 2010). Whereas Freud specified the function of dreams as being "the guardians of sleep" (1900, p. 678), necessitating the disguise of ideational material through the dream-work, Bion suggests that dreaming is the fundamental way in which we process our emotional experience. And certainly it is true that the idea of dreaming as such emotional processing does not ever seem to have been part of Freud's explicit thinking. (2017, p.108)

Though it is accurate to say that Freud did not see emotional processing as the purpose of the dream, as we saw in the last chapter psychoanalytic practice as it has evolved in the clinic (and accordingly in some psychoanalytic theory) has certainly come to take account of the possibility that a good deal of emotional work is being done by dreams, or during dreaming sleep. An advantage of Bion's conception of dreaming (and my metapsychological 'supplement') is that it can help us to understand better what happens when such work fails, or goes wrong in some way. In the context of looking at what he thought of as rare exceptions to the 'wish-fulfillment' hypothesis, Freud commented about post-traumatic dreams: "With the traumatic neuroses things are different. In their case the dreams regularly end in the generation of anxiety. We should not, I think, be afraid to

admit that here the function of the dream has failed" (1933 p. 29). Though Freud saw traumatic repetitive dreams very much as a special case there is still the implicit acknowledgement here that the 'function' of these dreams is emotional processing – reducing or managing strong emotion and anxiety – a function that they have manifestly failed to fulfill. In like manner Bion considered at one point in his notes that dreams as experienced may not represent emotional processing but rather represent the *failure* of such processing. Schneider comments:

> However, in the last paragraph of his 10 August 1959 entry in Cogitations, Bion speculates that this conception of dreaming may be entirely wrong. Perhaps our dreams are comprised exclusively of emotional experiences that we have been unable to think about unconsciously, and which we are therefore evacuating through projective identification in the form of dreams… Rather than representing healthy emotional processing, the dream brought to the analyst, even by a relatively healthy patient, may in part represent the breakdown of emotional processing resulting in the use of "visual imagery in the service of projective identification," i.e. a form of visual hallucination. Dreams may reveal stalls and limitations in the unconscious thinking process. (2010, p.533)

Bion thought that taking seriously the possibility that a dream was a symptom of failed dream-work might mean revising *all* of his thinking on dream-work-alpha (1992, p.68). However I think that Bion's momentary vacillation here is due to a failure to make the distinction I was pressing earlier, between *having* dreams (or dream-like processes in the mind) and *experiencing* them. At this point in history it's easier for us to make such a distinction, accepting the neuroscientific data that points to dreams occurring throughout the night, whether we remember them or not - and having done so it is open to us to speculate whether the few dreams that we remember might be the ones that have been in some way more difficult to process (I will expand on this thought in conclusion). Thus Bion's theory need not be entirely reworked in the face of the suggestion that *remembered* dreams represent some failure of dream-work-alpha. Even with regard to remembered dreams, I don't think we can regard them as representing complete failure of dream-work-alpha, for the simple reason that it is frequently possible for the

dreamer to free-associate to dream-elements on waking, which according to my metapsychology would suggest the work of psychic and emotional integration was substantially complete. This same logic would suggest that the elements of the dream which represent some kind of failure of processing are those to which no associations can be found. In discussing the famous dream of his own, 'Irma's injection', Freud remarked on the occasional inability to follow associations to dream elements:

> There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable - a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown. (1900, p.111)

Viewing dreams as comprising both 'processed' and 'unprocessed' elements is more or less the position Schneider (2010) arrives at in his thinking on Bion, which leads him in his clinical practice to attempt to continue to 'dream' the patient's experience together with them in their analytic sessions, in order to help deal with the hallucinatory 'undigested' (Ibid., p.533) elements. What happens when that failure of digestion is more complete? Bion's clinical career involved working with a good number of psychotic patients, who frequently deploy what Bion thought of as these 'undigested' elements in their thought processes and communications with the analyst. Here Bion spells out how he understands the difference between beta- and alpha-elements, and how it feels to encounter this form of expression:

> There have been occasions when a patient has spoken of a sensation in a way that made me think it might be an example of a mental phenomenon before it had been transformed by α. There have been instances, as I shall show, where the patient speaks of, say, a table in a way that makes it clear that he is not meaning of expressing what is ordinarily meant or expressed when the word is used. The difference usually lies in the fact that for different people the same words have, in addition to their common meaning, a different penumbra of associations. But in the instances that I have in mind the difference lies in what seems to be a *lack* of associations. It is as if the word were a counterpart of the pure note in music, devoid of

> undertones or overtones; as if, meaning nothing but 'table', it came near to meaning nothing at all. (Bion 1992, p.63)

My own conclusions approach this same understanding, namely that a substantial component of linguistic meaning is the ability to work through a series of transformations which generate mental objects, and an awareness of the accompanying affective patchwork (i.e. awareness of the affective currents or feelings that guide those transformations). Bion speaks in terms of associations between objects or perceptions, whereas the philosophical perspective I prefer is to see that there is no difference between understanding that objects are associated in our mind, and understanding that those objects are *created* by the associations in our mind (the association between objects is simultaneously the mode of their construction). The lack of such a set of transformations or associations is then felt by the analyst (or hearer more generally) as some kind of absence or distortion of meaning. It's worth noting that this kind of account is very different from that traditionally favoured by philosophers where ideas of reference contribute heavily to the concept of meaning. Bion's idea (and mine) of meaning has far more of a structuralist flavour in that the meaning of a term is determined (created) by the associations to it, or its position in a network of ideas, rather than what the term 'points to', indicates, or refers to.

## Psychosis and Meaning

As Bion shows, when the 'normal' process of developing meaning (for Bion, through alpha-function) goes awry, it isn't simply that terms are denuded of meaning; in psychotic forms of expression it can seem that a very great investment (of some kind) has been made in a linguistic term or idea, but that same investment may be both idiosyncratic and inflexible. It might naïvely seem that the existence of a greater 'penumbra' of associations would render a given word or idea vague, or make it less useful for communication (if the speaker's and hearer's respective 'penumbrae' did not align); however the reverse seems to be true in that, lacking both the linguistic specificity afforded by the multiple connections in a

network, and the fluidity of an understanding that words and ideas can symbolize as well as refer, communication can become very odd and stilted. Here's an example from Bion's clinical practice:

> He replied that he had placed his gramophone on the seat, which was his way of indicating that my interpretation combined the characteristics of a recording with which he was familiar and a defecation. I had reason, very shortly after that, to suppose that this response was far more than a mere criticism… My suspicion was that when he said he had placed his gramophone on the seat he was denying me life and independent existence in the analytic chair and treating my interpretations as auditory hallucinations. (1958, pp.344-345)

It's clear from this that in one sense the analysand's cryptic utterance was filled with meaning, though a meaning that is not easily accessible in a public manner. A good deal of aggression towards Bion is evident in the absolute denial of his autonomy that the image of the gramophone encapsulates. In addition one might see a measure of childish or crude mocking humour in managing so efficiently to accuse Bion of being repetitive and unoriginal, and at the same time alluding to defecation as a way of showing contempt. The peculiarity of this kind of communication is that it is opaque both to the hearer and to the speaker, since a difficulty in symbolizing has arguably generated the unusual expression in the first place[121]. In this sense the psychotic 'wears their unconscious on the outside' since it is inaccessible to them (or more correctly, not usable by them) but publicly available. I say 'not useable by them' rather than inaccessible since in principle the unconscious may be inaccessible to anyone; but in the case of psychosis it seems to be the case that the unconscious connections between ideas and feelings (and in my terms, the connections that *produce* ideas) that are used to defuse emotion, order cognitive processes and relate the self to others are not available, or have not been developed; in Bion's terms, the beta-elements of perception have not been worked on by dream-work-alpha to produce alpha-elements suitable for

[121] This kind of idiosyncratic expression is sometimes referred to as 'concrete' (see for instance Searles 1962), which I have always found misleading – the example in question shows how extremely abstract the deployment of language can be.

thought. Hartmann (1976) has also approached the connection between psychosis, memory, and the way in which recall is used to subsequently process new sensory input:

> I have recently reviewed the psychological literature on the possible basic deficit in schizophrenia, and have come to the conclusion that the psychological findings are entirely compatible with the presence of one basic deficit in feedback processing—a deficit somewhere in the chain which normally allows input to be filtered, then to be centrally processed and stored in memory in such a way that the memory can then again be used to properly handle and filter input in a subsequent environment. (p.333)

This description fits neatly with my Fractal Image Compression metaphor: I have argued that dream processes allow the production of mental objects by way of ordering mental transformations in line with affect – and in this way produce a consistent sense of self. I have also touched upon the way in which unconscious patterns drive cognition (as in the metaphoric structuring observed by Lakoff and Johnson, and Boroditsky). It should be clear from my FIC model therefore why a failure to make the appropriate transformations would engender disorders relating to self-image, thought, and language concurrently. The end result of a failure to make such transformations appears to be a difficulty that manifests on two interlinked fronts: both as an inability to locate a word or idea within a network, or understand it as connected to multiple other ideas; and simultaneously as an inability to tolerate the ambivalent state of accepting an idea as both having inherent value and at the same time being able to function symbolically, or 'mean' something else. The employment of the FIC metaphor and a close attention to the metaphysics of presence helps us to unravel this situation though, since I am proposing that words or ideas cannot be 'located' anywhere since they have their existence in a distributed fashion 'in between' parts of a network. On this description the same process would simultaneously produce an idea (as an identifiable singular entity) and at the same time allow for it to be used symbolically, as these are facets of the *same* moment of creation; the corollary of which is that the failure of this process would mean both that a given concept

would be unstable but also unavailable for associative symbolic representation. The clinical consequence of which being that mental objects that would be understood by most of us to be part of our thought process that denote or pick out items in the world, but also operate symbolically, have none of these qualities. Instead they become 'bizarre' objects, which Bion describes here:

> In the patient's phantasy the expelled particles of ego lead an independent and uncontrolled existence, either contained by or containing the external objects… the patient feels himself to be surrounded by bizarre objects whose nature I shall now describe. Each particle is felt to consist of a real object which is encapsulated in a piece of personality that has engulfed it. The nature of this complete particle will depend partly on the character of the real object, say a gramophone, and partly on the character of the particle of personality that engulfs it. If the piece of personality is concerned with sight, the gramophone when played is felt to be watching the patient; if with hearing, then the gramophone when played is felt to be listening to the patient. The object, angered at being engulfed, swells up, so to speak, and suffuses and controls the piece of personality that engulfs it: to that extent the particle of personality has become a thing. Since *these particles are what the patient depends on for use as the prototypes of ideas - later to form the matrix from which words should spring* - this suffusion of the piece of personality by the contained but controlling object leads the patient to feel that words are the actual things they name and so adds to the confusions, described by Segal, that arise because the patient equates, but does not symbolize. (1957, p.268, my emphasis)

The ontological confusion Bion describes here (the feeling that words are actual things) is equally revealing about the non-pathological process of developing meaningful mental objects, since it is congruent with the picture I have been describing, of transformations guided by affect. The 'feeling of meaning' is our guide through conscious experience, but here is seen to go awry. It is characteristic of those diagnosed with schizophrenia (or psychosis more generally) that they feel strongly that ideas, objects and patterns of association which appear neutral to the outside observer, are significant (O'Brien 1975, Jackson and Williams 1994). In this

pathological situation the transformations appear to construct an object (for instance, the analysand's gramophone) which is isolated from other ideas and accordingly carries even greater affective charge (possibly because that charge is not spread further out across a network). I have emphasized the section of this passage which makes clear that Bion and I have a very similar idea about the relative significance and causal priority of language, since I would view the transformations that produce words as being in general subsequent to non- or pre-linguistic unconscious associative processes. With the unusual use of language we are discussing it appears that in a sense words are employed too soon, before there is an unconscious network of associations to ground their use; words seem to be fixed on prematurely in an attempt to anchor meaning. One is put in mind of Bion's development of the idea of negative capability (1970), the ability to tolerate the anxiety of not-knowing in order to reach understanding; in this case something appears to have provoked a premature fixation on a linguistic term of reference. For Melanie Klein (e.g. 1946) the ability to tolerate ambivalence, specifically the idea that the good- and bad-breast coexist in a single independently existing object, is characteristic of the maturational achievement of moving from the paranoid-schizoid- to the depressive-position. This emotional and cognitive development does appear to be pivotal to the process under discussion, since the ability to recognize that the mother is also both the good breast and the bad breast could be considered the archetypal case of 'ambivalent recognition', being able to identify an object but also understanding it in association to other ideas or as picked out by other descriptions – the necessary conditions for symbolization. In contrast, the inability to do so and the continuation of 'splitting' characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position would mean that individual objects (or part-objects) were identifiable in some sense, but were not associated with other parts or characteristics of the same object, and therefore were not recognizable as coherent, mind-independent, discrete parts of the world[122]. Much of this will not be new territory for Kleinians but once again, my interest is in finding common ground between different theoretical innovations, which I believe my metaphor allows us to do. Klein says:

[122] This would agree with Bion's (1958) observation that: 'The hysterical hallucination contains whole objects and is associated with depression; the psychotic hallucination contains elements analogous to part-objects." p.348

> Ferenczi holds that identification, the forerunner of symbolism, arises out of the baby's endeavour to re-discover in every object his own organs and their functioning. In Jones' view the pleasure-principle makes it possible for two quite different things to be equated because of a similarity marked by pleasure or interest. Some years ago I wrote a paper, based on these statements, in which I drew the conclusion that symbolism is the foundation of all sublimation and of every talent, since it is by way of symbolic equation that things, activities and interests become the subject of libidinal phantasies. I can now add to what I said then and state that, side by side with the libidinal interest, it is the anxiety arising in the phase that I have described which sets going the mechanism of identification. Since the child desires to destroy the organs (penis, vagina, breast) which stand for the objects, he conceives a dread of the latter. This anxiety contributes to make him equate the organs in question with other things; owing to this equation these in their turn become objects of anxiety, and so he is impelled constantly to make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in the new objects and of symbolism. *Thus, not only does symbolism come to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, upon it is built up the subject's relation to the outside world and to reality in general*. (1930, pp.25-26, my emphasis)

Although I would broadly agree with Klein's conclusions here I'm not sure I support all of her logic. I have shown how I believe that the transformative processes which underpin symbolism do in turn support the operations of what we might call unconscious phantasy, and how my description therefore agrees with Bion's in significant areas. My understanding converges with Bion's in the description of what happens when the processing of emotional experience goes wrong. But this quote from Klein suggests that tracing the evolution of symbolic associative connection opens the possibility of a really fascinating connection between anxiety, identification and differentiation, symbolism, and knowledge - which Klein probes and which we will return to in the conclusion. As Bass says, we are concerned with the questions "how does psychoanalysis repeat metaphysics, and how does psychoanalysis challenge metaphysics? How does the overall

conception of metaphysics itself… help to explicate psychoanalysis to itself?" (1993, p.198). Klein and Bion's concern with how the human being generates knowledge and understanding foreshadow my own feeling that, in conclusion, we may reflect on what psychoanalysis can tell us about what we can know, and how.

# 8

# Lacan: The Unconscious is Not Structured Like a Language

"…it is in the realm of experience inaugurated by psychoanalysis that we may grasp along what imaginary lines the human organism, in the most intimate recesses of its being, manifests its capture in a symbolic dimension"

(Lacan 1972, p.39)

This thesis in many ways resembles Lacan's project: he engaged in a re-reading of Freud in the light of Saussurean structural linguistics, or to be more precise, he adapted Saussure's insights in order to fashion his own theory of signification. His texts are deeply philosophical, dealing with questions of meaning and subjectivity. And Lacan excavated the radically postmodern Freud whose works seem to pave the way so convincingly for our poststructuralist discourse. Nobus describes Lacan's efforts:

> Armed on the one hand with the idea that the signifier prevails over the signified and on the other with the formula that the unconscious is structured (as a language), Lacan devoted all his energy during the 1950's and 60's to the careful deployment of a version of Freudian psychoanalysis which simultaneously vindicated its loyalty to the founder's original inspiration and justified its enlightened character through the principles of structural linguistics. (2003, p.58)

Lacan ceaselessly pressed the case for recognition of the radical potential inherent in Freud's work, arguing that the Saussurean approach to language, which he himself employed so centrally, enabled the modern reader to more clearly appreciate the conception which Freud's work made possible; that of a de-centred subject, alienated from itself (and we might say, from meaning) by its entry into language. Lacan seeks to articulate the unthinkable, as Jean-Luc Nancy and Philip Lacoue-Labarthe explain in *The Title of the Letter*, their classic commentary on *The Agency of The Letter*:

> …what is at stake here is a whole practice of reading governed by the motif of the *unthought*. Just as Heidegger attempts to decipher the unthought of philosophy, Lacan endeavours to locate, in Saussure and Freud (and in a few others as well), the common unthought which founds the possibility of their relation. (1992, p. 136)

Lacan himself suggested that the 'poststructuralist' Freud he sought to bring to light had previously been consistently *misrecognized*:

> Yet from the beginning there was a general *meconnaissance* of the constitutive role of the signifier in the status that Freud from the first assigned to the unconscious and in the most precise formal manner. There are two reasons for this, of which the least obvious, of course, is that this formalization was not sufficient in itself to bring about a recognition of the agency of the signifier because the *Traumdeutung* appeared long before the formalizations of linguistics for which one could no doubt show that it paved the way by the sheer weight of its truth. (Lacan 1977, pp.178-179)

Whether Lacan's emphasis was explicitly philosophical is a matter for debate: Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe (henceforth NLL) think so, announcing that "...this text is proposed straightaway and openly as a *philosophical* text" (1992, p.23). Bernard Burgoyne disagrees, saying: "Nothing could be wider of the mark. Lacan's strategy is very clear: he gives priority to psychoanalysis" (2003, p.71). Lacan clearly touches on some issues of profound philosophical importance, and the issue of meaning is central in both *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious* and *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* or 'Rome discourse' (both in the *Ecrits*, 1977). Here Lacan intends to approach the question of signification in a manner that will not lead him to "the heresy that leads logical positivism in search of the 'meaning of meaning'" (1977, p. 166). The heresy in question, I believe, being the age-old philosophical 'mistake' of ascribing some kind of inherent value to the signifier, referential or otherwise. He is further aware that such intervention will have profound philosophical consequences:

> …the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier, in this case in the procedures of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the moorings that anchor his being. It is precisely in this that Freudianism... is seen to have founded an intangible but radical revolution. (1977, p. 192)

I will concentrate on these texts as they are significant examples of the intervention Lacan makes using Saussurean linguistics and thus resemble, if superficially, an expression of the interest I have in utilizing some of the principles

of linguistics to understand the workings of the mind, by way of Freud. However it is my intention to demonstrate here that I differ from Lacan in both the mode of appropriating linguistic insight and the conclusions that are reached. I will argue that the Lacanian 'diversion' of linguistics (to use NLL's term) is flawed and ultimately incoherent. I also support Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's conclusion in *The Title of the Letter* that Lacan "paradoxically reinscribes... a number of philosophical motifs that he had sought to subvert" (translator's foreword, 1992, p. viii) and that ultimately he relies on a notion of presence which is elided in the text.

## The Primacy of the Signifier

Lacan opens the Agency of the Letter by suggesting that the emergence of linguistic science is marked by the formulation of the 'algorithm' S/s, that is, signifier (with a capital 'S') over signified (with a small 's') with a bar separating the two component parts. Lacan credits Saussure with this algorithm although this particular expression of it is his own and he makes very particular use of it: in fact in Saussure's original formulation the signifier appears *under* the bar (cf. Saussure 1966, p.114), and significantly there is also an ellipse surrounding the two terms which symbolizes the unity of the two terms, which is removed by Lacan. These three actions, the inversion of the terms, the removal of the ellipse and the emphasis on the bar between the terms, together have considerable implications for linguistic theory. NLL refer to this as a *detournement*, which has been translated by Raffoul and Pettigrew as 'diversion'. The translators note that:

> This translation, indeed, accurately captures the sense of a subversion or perversion in *detournement*. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, indeed explicitly identify *detournement* as a gesture of disruption, perversion, suvbersion, as well as, indeed, destruction. (1992, foreword, p. xx)

Let us examine why these changes are disruptive as well as, possibly, perverse. Firstly, removing the ellipse clearly suggests that the two elements of the sign, signifier and signified, are no longer a sealed unity but separate entities which can

have some sort of independent existence and function. This observation for Lacan 'goes well beyond the discussion concerning the arbitrariness of the sign' (1977, p. 165), that is, the insight that the allocation of any particular signifier to any particular signified is arbitrary and changeable. Lacan is here beginning to guide us away from the notion of *reference*, or the idea that any term has a fixed or transparent meaning. He is very careful about the use of the word 'sign' which for him implies some kind of direct access to the signified (1977, p. 91). Lacan wishes to confine the use of the term ‘sign’ to a very specific representational or indexical function where there is an obvious reference or denotation. NLL comment:

> He goes so far as to identify the sign with a simple *signal*, or simple *index*, in the Peircean sense. The sign here is pure reference, that is to say, that against which the resistance of the bar was posited, with the autonomy of the signifier. (1992, p. 64)

Lacan's concern here is to mark some kind of distinction between a 'sign' in the sense of a 'symbol', that is, a communication which is inherently meaningful, and forms of linguistic signification which are purely tokens of exchange in a system and are marked only by their differences from other tokens (Wilden in Lacan 1981, p.240). This movement away from the notion of reference is not marked explicitly in Lacan's text but is, I believe, highly significant. The second of Lacan's diversions, the emphasis on the bar between signifier and signified as a 'barrier resisting signification', carries this process further. After introducing his 'algorithm' as the founding gesture of linguistics Lacan remarks:

> The thematics of this science is henceforth suspended, in effect, at the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification. And that is what was to make possible an exact study of the connections proper to the signifier, and of the extent of their function in the genesis of the signified. (1977, p. 165)

There are three things to note here. By telling us that the thematics of the science (of linguistics) are suspended there is a sort of implicit command not to challenge these foundations. Secondly, we are being told explicitly that the function of the

bar is to resist signification. Lastly, we are told that the connections of the signifier are implicated in the *genesis* of the signified, which carries the inescapable implication that the signifier is in some sense *prior to* the signified. Taking these points in reverse order, we should first simply observe that Lacan has assumed his conclusion here, that of the primacy of the signifier; this is the last part of his diversion, placing the signifier (with a capital 'S') above the signified. Then, what does it mean to say that the bar 'resists signification'? Assuming that the sign as a whole does signify, that is, that it does carry meaning, the 'resistance to signification' must suggest some obstacle hindering a movement from signifier to signified. NLL say:

> In accordance with the literality of the signifier, the production of meaning must occur without the signified being taken into account. It is thus necessary to understand, in the formula that opens this part of the text, that 'to pass over to the level of the signified'' is always, and perhaps can only be: to pass to *the limit* of the signified, in other words, without crossing that limit. (1992, p. 62)

They are suggesting that in Lacan's account the signified is *necessarily* excluded from the production of meaning, an exclusion guaranteed by the bar separating signifier and signified. My intention here is first to identify the manoeuvre by which Lacan banishes the signified, in order to question it; because I believe that this elision forecloses on a number of crucial issues for the generation of meaning, and in fact, makes it impossible to understand how meaning emerges. However, this is not to say that I wish to reify the signified; the status of mental objects is precisely what is in question in my enquiry, and we can easily see how the signifier/signified binary invites a theory of correspondence whereby we look for an *object* (signified, concept, idea, mental representation...) to marry up with the *word* (signifier). I have argued that this is an effect of language and that there is no substantive mental 'object' relating to each word that we use: we may therefore wish to reject the conceptual apparatus (i.e. the signifier/signified binary) of the Saussurean schema, but we should also be very wary of attempting to discuss language and meaning without at least accounting for the key elements of reference, and mental representation.

In fact I believe that we can say that Lacan is *deferring* the question of the signified, although not explicitly, in the same way that meaning is deferred. He is deferring the question of the meaning of meaning, and in the meantime, furnishing an explanation which relies on the 'pure operativity' (NLL, 1992, p. 49) of the signifier. Lacan is very much aware of the continuous, restless sliding of the signifier in pursuit of meaning: "For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it" (1977, p. 169). His challenge is to somehow account for the production of meaning in the knowledge that he cannot arrest this movement in the text. NLL suggest that he attempts to do so by developing a *system*, a combination of borrowed ideas and influences which inform and support each other; in some cases, like that of linguistics, there is a diversion of the borrowed term which influences the outcome of the system as a whole. Lacan's strategy, they claim, is to develop such a system without explicitly acknowledging it as such:

> Thus, strategy is to be understood here as a technique, or an 'art' of systematization - a systematization that does not reveal its own law of composition as an architectural law. (1992, p. 88)

NLL discern a kind of circular schema in Lacan's work, a self-enclosed and self-sustaining exchange between these 'borrowings'. They suspect that 'it may well be... that as Lacan conceives it, the text is nothing but discourse itself, *impeccable and circular*' (1992, p. 92, my emphasis). *Impeccable* because perhaps Lacan is attempting to establish a logic, a way of describing language, meaning and the subject which is flawless in itself, that is, a logic which does not refer outside of itself in order to explain - a *circular* logic.

Is this what Lacan believes himself to be doing, and is it in fact possible to construct such a logic? Although Lacan expressly recommended NLL's analysis of his work as a 'model of good reading' (1998b, p. 62) he did not support their conclusions. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe were working in a deconstructive tradition, very much inspired by Derrida. In keeping with this tradition, and faced with an apparently self-sufficient structure, they sought a centre or foundation,

like the keystone that allows the arch to hold itself up. Through the course of their essay they unearth a good deal of evidence for a commitment to a very traditional logocentric metaphysics in Lacan's work, and a 'centre' to his system, anchoring its meaning, in the form of the bar resisting signification (from his 'algorithm'):

> *At least* as a system, Lacan's discourse, as we hope to have just shown, reduces the gaps that it hollows out and comes to a halt on its own sliding (or stops its sliding by giving it the form of the circle). In this stopping, it centres itself - and this centre is the bar itself, whose thickness serves thus to conceal a point. This is the very point of the system, its punctuation: that is, the *concept* from which it is possible to order the elements and the relations of *a logic of the signifier* which is, thus, without diversion, a *logic* pure and simple. One must recognize in this punctual (and punctuating) value of the bar what Lacan's discourse has posited as a principle: the bar is *foundational* or *originary*. (1992, p. 112)

We have seen how, from the introduction of the bar as a barrier resisting signification, there is a definite movement in Lacan's text away from the idea of reference. It does seem that the notion of the bar functions in some sense as an anchor or fixed point around which the discourse can be moved. In my terms, the 'point' concealed by the thickness of the bar is that we are leaving the idea of reference and any traditional theory of meaning behind (and as we have seen, an understanding of consciousness). Or, to put it another way, we are packing a good deal of necessary conceptual work up and hiding it behind the bar, including the need to explain how language refers and also why we *feel* as though language has meaning (even if one accepts that we are somehow alienated from the world by our use of language). This 'hidden' or elided material continues to exert pressure on Lacan's explanation and in places emerges in the text where oblique references to truth, presence, depth or anchoring surface. For instance, at the climax of their argument NLL point us to Lacan's closing statement in the *Agency of the Letter*:

> Finally, if I am to rouse you to indignation over the fact that, after so many centuries of religious hypocrisy and philosophical bravado, nothing has yet

been validly articulated as to what links *metaphor to the question of being and metonymy to its lack*... (1977, p. 193, emphasis NLL's)

Here is the 'paradoxical reinscription' of a logocentric metaphysics. The opposition of presence to absence which is exploited by Lacan is indisputable even if, as NLL remark (1992, p.140), it is within a system where presence is exposed as problematic and access to the signified is questioned.

## Ladies and Gentlemen...

Early on in the *Agency of the Letter* Lacan offers us an elegant example of how his 'diversion' of linguistics alters Saussure's schema. First of all he reproduces what he refers to as 'the classic, yet faulty illustration' (1977, p. 166) which consists of the word 'Tree' above a picture of a tree, with a bar or line separating the word from the image. This is a representation of the Saussurean schema, and the image of the tree could be taken to represent either a real tree or a concept or mental representation of a tree, as per the inconsistency referred to earlier. Lacan replaces this illustration with another; in his version the words 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' are present above the bar, and directly below each word there is a drawing of a door. The two doors are indistinguishable from each other, and are meant to represent the doors of public lavatories. A great deal of information is packed into this little diagram, so let us analyze it in more detail.

First of all, Lacan makes a remark about 'silencing the nominalist debate' (1977, p. 167) with this example. I take it that he means that he has illustrated that language learning is not a simple matter of pointing at an object and uttering a name, since in this example there is no difference between the objects in the world (the lavatory doors), though the names appended to them mark a difference, and so such a 'nominalist' strategy would fail, or at the very least, be utterly confusing. Indeed, as Wilden points out such a theory of language acquisition is naive in the extreme since it tacitly presupposes a linguistic structure, an: "anterior knowledge of language as a context, a system of relationships, without which naming would be

impossible" (1981, p. 221). Lacan goes on to say that his further purpose is to show 'how in fact the signifier *enters the signified*, namely, in a form which, not being immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality' (1977, p. 167, my emphasis). What does it mean to say that the signifier 'enters the signified'? If the diagrams of lavatory doors are taken to represent real doors in the world then it seems meaningless. If we are somehow talking about the whole 'compound' of signifier and lavatory door then the phrase might have some meaning in the sense of the signifier 'entering in' to the whole context and allowing us to understand its meaning: for instance, how we should behave when confronted with this type of signification. However if we strictly preserve the parallel with Saussure's original diagram we must observe the bar between word and picture and conclude that Lacan is trying to draw a more systematic distinction between signifier and signified as separate kinds of entities (and not a single unified context), which seems to leave us with the conclusion that the pictures, standing for signifieds, represent concepts or mental representations of some sort. Note what an impoverished account of our mental contents Lacan is offering here: the two lavatory doors are utterly identical and nondescript. Lacan, with a good deal of humour, is clearly distancing himself from traditional accounts of meaning, where the richness of the concept in the mind of the individual is often thought to be what guarantees meaning. Not so here, where we can see that there is literally no difference between what might be thought to be the internal component of meaning for each of two signifiers; what determines meaning in this case is the *material* function of the signifier - 'material' in that it is purely the physical, mechanical differences associated with the letter(s) which drive signification. Furthermore, behind the signifier there is a universe of social convention which dictates 'urinary segregation' and Lacan is trying to show how these social laws, operating through the material *agency of the letter*, serve to create a situation in which meaning is apparent, though in order to grasp it we have apparently not had to discuss the psychology of the individual nor the workings of the mind. So perhaps this is what Lacan means by the signifier 'entering in' to the signified. We have somehow arrived at meaning, though the 'signified' seems featureless and consequently powerless to furnish meaning, or at least it would do under any 'internalist' or psychologistic theory of meaning. Lacan next reinforces and expands on this example by relating an anecdote:

> A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. 'Look', says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!'; 'Idiot!' replies his sister, 'Can't you see we're at Gentlemen'. (1977, p. 167)

It is true that with this example Lacan manages to capture something of both the opacity and the slipperiness of signification. The signifiers in this example clearly do not transparently reveal their meaning, and the humour stems in part from the fact that we can understand how easily this mistake has been made, that is, how easy it is to exchange one signifier for another. Lacan goes on to use this example to illustrate how the signifier plays a role in constructing sexual difference (it is no accident that the boy stops in front of 'Ladies' and vice-versa). NLL say:

> We understand better now what the signifier means to Lacan... It is no longer the other side of the sign in relation to the signified, and consisting only in this association, but rather it is that order of spacing, according to which the law is inscribed and marked as difference. (1992, p. 46)

This inscription of the law (the social order) is, according to Lacan, taking place without any connection to the signified. In fact, as NLL report, Lacan says that "the anecdote of the two children... would remain true even if they had no possible access to the signified - if we assume that Men/Women was written in an unknown language" (1992, p. 66). This last point illustrates why I find Lacan's example a curious one. It is true that it would make no difference to the point of the story if the inscription on the lavatory doors was in an unknown language, but it seems to me that the humour in the story comes from the fact that the children are not competent language users. They mistake Ladies/Gentlemen for a place name because they confuse the conventional labelling of lavatory doors with the convention of place names being displayed on station platforms. They do not have access to the signified, and hence do not realize their mistake, but that is precisely why they are not really using language competently, nor are they in command of its meaning. What they are lacking, we might say, is the dimension of reference, of

any way of determining that 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' *refers* to the facilities that lie behind the doors and not to the place they have arrived at. Their lack of access to the signified here is precisely what leads us to conclude that they do not know the *meaning* of the language they are using.

If we leave the anecdote and return to Lacan's original reworking of the Saussurean diagram, we might think that we do not encounter the problem of reference. The 'signified' in this case appears to be entirely neutral, entirely interchangeable: a blank door. But behind this door Lacan is hiding a great deal of relevant information, about *reference*, as he sidesteps the question of mental representation. A competent language user who knows the meaning of the terms 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' in this context will know various things: that behind each door they are likely to find slightly different facilities, for example, or that they are likely to meet with a degree of social opprobrium if they do not use the door marked with the name of their gender. The *reference* embedded in each term is not primarily to an object (physical or mental), although part of the value of the terms in this example is that they *denote* certain physical objects necessary for the satisfaction of bodily needs; but largely relates to a body of contextual knowledge that must be present in the mind of the language user to enable them to function in society. To try to be more precise we might say that the relevant knowledge concerns how to use certain objects in accordance with the dictates of society. It is true that these dictates are culturally specific and determined from the outside - by the Other, perhaps - but a significant part of what enables us to understand the use and meaning of the term is internal to the individual, and has an essential referential component. In my terms, the language user must have knowledge of how to *navigate* the culturally determined system of differences which governs his or her toilet habits, in order to satisfy their bodily needs: and, I am tempted to say, what could be more meaningful than that? These fundamental, *affect-laden* and *embodied* experiences are then internally represented by way of being woven into a network of associations, as we saw in the last chapter. This type of representation is a good deal richer than an internal ‘picture’ of a blank lavatory door, or a simple placeholder for a connection to a network of external (and externally determined) signifiers.

Indeed I think Lacan struggles to make sense, in his own terms, of how to account for meaning, or to put it another way, how the signifier accesses the signified. Returning to the Saussurean diagram illustrating the sign 'Tree', Lacan says:

> Let us take our word 'tree' again, this time not as an isolated noun, but at the point of one of these punctuations, and see how it *crosses the bar* of the Saussurean algorithm. (1977, p. 170, my emphasis)

He then proceeds to offer a lengthy exploration of the associations conjured up by the word 'tree', using poetic language himself and quoting the verse of Paul Valery. I will reproduce only a small section of it here to provide a flavour:

> Drawing on all the symbolic contexts suggested in the Hebrew of the Bible, it erects on a barren hill the shadow of the cross. Then reduces to the capital Y, the sign of dichotomy which, except for the illustration used by heraldry, would owe nothing to the tree however genealogical we may think it. Circulatory tree, tree of life of the cerebellum, tree of Saturn, tree of Diana... (1977, p. 171)

I can only believe that this poetic chain of associations is supposed to demonstrate that we somehow have access to meaning, since so much is evoked by the simple word 'tree'. Concluding his poetic interval Lacan continues:

> But this whole signifier can only operate, it may be said, if it is present in the subject. It is this objection that I answer by supposing that it has passed over to the level of the signified. (1977, p. 171)

As an explanation this is woefully inadequate though, since this whole passage was intended to demonstrate how we move across the bar to the signified, as explicitly promised by Lacan. The word 'suppose' in the most recent quote seems apposite since no argument has been offered to support Lacan's response to the objection; it appears he believes that poetry has somehow taken us across the bar to the level of the signified. However we are, as yet, none the wiser as to the *mechanism* by which this has been accomplished. Firstly, do we accept that poetic language is an

unmistakeable or paradigmatic example of meaningful language? It is clear that it is particularly rich in associations, but is Lacan claiming that there is some order of meaning present in poetry that is not present in ordinary statements? Lacan surely cannot be claiming that ordinary statements are not meaningful, so his point must be that the richness of associations in poetic language makes it *apparent* how meaning emerges. And his answer, specifically, is that it emerges through metaphor. He says that 'metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense' (1977, p. 175). NLL have this translated as 'metaphor occurs at the precise point where meaning occurs in non-meaning' (1992, p. 75). This is surely the crux of all our investigations: the moment at which meaning emerges from the material, mechanical operations of the mind; or in Lacan's account, from the agency of the letter. NLL frame metaphor as being at the heart of both Lacan's explanation and his technique:

> Lacan's literary references, style or rhetoric are shown to be not merely ornamental, but to belong to the most decisive constitution of his discourse. His discourse - which while determining the theoretical agency of metaphor, at the same time invites its reader (its auditor) to 'produce... a glittering web of metaphors' - is a discourse itself woven through and through from a poetics of metaphor. (1992, p. 74)

So Lacan uses poetry to demonstrate beyond doubt the presence of meaning in language; this meaning is, in some way, introduced or guaranteed through the mechanism of metaphor.

## Metaphor: Heart of the Matter, or the Root of our Problems?

In fact Lacan identifies two rhetorical devices which he believes interact to allow for signification, metaphor and metonymy. Metonymy he says is based in a 'word to word connexion' (1977, p. 173) and shortly afterwards he says '*One word for another*: that is the formula for the metaphor' (1977, p.173). Superficially there does not appear to be a great deal of difference between these two definitions.

However the key is in the difference between 'word *to* word' and 'word *for* word'. The 'to' suggests a simple exchange, a movement or sliding along a 'chain' of signification, a mechanical movement based only on contiguity. 'For' is a more heavily freighted conjunction, suggesting purpose, intention and therefore the presence of a subject. NLL express this very clearly:

> One word *for* another, this means a word *in place* of another - a substitution of signifiers - but also one word *in view* of another - a sort of internal teleology of the signifying order. This metaphorical teleology is that through which the *subject* insists in the signifier, since it is, we know, 'what a signifier represents *for* another signifier' - even if this teleology is bound to perpetuate itself without ever arriving at the *telos* of a substantial subject, a master of meaning. Metaphor gathers in itself, then, the function of the subject and that of the word. (1992, p. 75)

This representation, perpetually *for* something or someone else, cannot terminate, since just as there is no perfectly transparent form of signification there is no subject who is a 'master of meaning'. The explanation we seek, how meaning is produced, has now been passed on (deferred) yet again, to be located in the idea of the *subject*.

Lacan introduces the following 'algorithm' to represent metaphoric structure (1977, p.181):

$$f\left(S'/S\right)S \sim/= S(+)s$$

Where the S'/S indicates that a signifier has been substituted for another signifier, the ~/= indicates congruence or agreement and the (+) 'represents here the crossing of the bar' (1977, p.181). This is a statement, then, to the effect that where we have metaphor (one signifier 'for' another) we 'cross the bar' and signify: meaning is produced. We may still feel unenlightened as to the mechanism of signification; yet this algorithmic movement, which apparently assists us with understanding the emergence of signification without recourse to the psychology

of the individual or the notion of reference, is no sooner introduced than Lacan continues:

> This crossing expresses the condition of passage of the signifier into the signified that I pointed out above, although provisionally confusing it with the place of the subject. It is the function of the subject, thus introduced, that we must now turn to since it lies at the crucial point of our problem. (1977, p.182)

The restless movement of the text continues in the next passage as the question of the subject leads us swiftly to the question of *being*. Here the question of being takes the form of identifying the locus where meaning emerges, as Lacan asks whether the subject is able to ground meaning. The coupling of meaning and presence is obvious, since Lacan speaks as though the place where *I am* is necessarily identical to that place where meaning emerges. The question of where I am, in the sense of the Cartesian *cogito* (linking meaning not only to being but yet again, to consciousness) is treated as not only the self-evident object of our enquiry but also something which can in principle be recognized with an indubitable intuitive immediacy:

> …if, turning the weapon of metonymy against the nostalgia that it serves, I refuse to seek any meaning beyond tautology... I decide to be only what I am, how even here can I elude the obvious fact that I am in that very act? And it is no less true if I take myself to the other, metaphoric pole of the signifying quest, and if I dedicate myself to becoming what I am, to coming into being, I cannot doubt that even if I lose myself in that process, I am in that process. (1977, p.183)

Yet this elusive recognition of being, which as we have seen, Lacan has aligned with the question of the origin of signification, continues to hover tantalisingly out of reach. For Lacan it is something of a mirage, since the 'origin' of signification is itself illusory and where we would seek an origin we find only the relentless movement of signifiers in the Other:

> This signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there. (1977, p. 183)

The self is, impossibly, assumed to exist at the point where the 'match' between metaphor and metonymy is 'called' but also not to exist there, since as we have seen the match is never 'called'. For Lacan this is an argument for a fragmented, alienated, ex-centric self, the product of signifiers communicating with one another. We might discern here once again the double movement that pervades the *Agency*: it seems that when we examine metaphor we are directed to the subject, but once at the subject we are sent back to metaphor. It is a restless and confusing journey through Lacan's circular universe of discourse, driven by a desire to describe a closed 'signifying game' that nonetheless refers back to the idea that 'I am' somewhere in some terminating sense. This impossible conjunction generates a perpetual movement since it cannot settle, its two opposing aims being simultaneously unsatisfiable.

I believe that I have shown in some detail why Lacan's 'closed' system or circular logic cannot satisfy us as a substantial philosophical enquiry into the origins of signification, or meaning. His insistence on the bar resisting signification, and his emphasis on the primacy of the signifier, forecloses on any idea of reference (or any internal component) as significant in the production of meaning. This draws our attention to the role of external, cultural, structural forces in shaping meaning, which is arguably a productive manoeuvre. However this elision leaves his diversion of linguistics an unstable edifice, perpetually in motion to avoid collapsing around the gap left where reference, and the internal processes of the individual, should be. It is of course possible to claim that in this way the Saussurean re-reading of Freud that Lacan offers is a deliberate analogue of the processes of the unconscious: slippery, tricky, and issuing from an originary lack. In response I say that the nagging sense of incompleteness which attaches to his use of linguistics is not due to the resonant way in which he summons the metonymic processes of desire, nor the 'elusive ambiguity' necessarily

characteristic of the 'ring of meaning' (Lacan 1977, p. 183) slipping away from us; it is just that his Saussurean *diversion* is an incomplete, insufficient explanation.

## Reference: The Return of the Repressed

The difficulty I have with Lacan's appropriation of linguistics is that he uses the division between signifier and signified to do away with the notion of reference altogether. Having thus dispensed with it his system is unstable but as we have seen he hypostasizes this lack and it becomes the (impossible) centre of his work, a hidden force driving the metonymic chain of desire. Like Lacan I question the status of the signified: I have shown how Freud's work can help us to reconsider the status of mental objects, and as with Lacan, as we saw in the last chapter, that has brought us back to the question of the emergence of the subject. However I don't agree that this revision requires us to bypass our mental content, nor accept that it is determined externally by language.

The challenge, which I have begun to engage with through my FIC metaphor, is to find a way to conceptualize mental representation in a coherent and relatively systematic way. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Lakoff and Johnson (1999, 2003) have done a good deal of work to show how systems of metaphors can help to encode meaning which ultimately stems from the embodied experience of the individual. The use that I wish to make of metaphor is significantly different from Lacan's, however. Rather than being a poetic anomaly within language, as Lacan sometimes seems to be implying, "Our everyday conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, p. 3). Furthermore metaphors 'refer back' to the experience of the language user, for instance many systems of metaphors derive from the simple spatial orientation of the language user (*happy is up*, *the future is forward*, *bigger is better* etc.). This 'referential' function is a crucial difference, as there is no 'bar to signification' to be crossed in my account; I agree with Lacan that we must challenge the status of the signified but although there are no substantive mental objects (signifieds) in my account, the signifier gains meaning nonetheless. Not

simply through metaphor, but through a mechanism which has linguistic metaphor as one marker (or trace) of its operation. Meaning for Lacan – or at least the 'feeling of meaning', allied with consciousness, is an *imaginary* function:

> …either there is a neutral recording apparatus, which constitutes *a reflection of the world, which we call, with Freud, conscious*, or there isn't. Except, in man, it becomes visible with the particular configuration we call consciousness, in as much as the imaginary function of the ego comes into play. Man gets to see this reflection from the point of view of the other. He is an other for himself. This is what gives you the illusion that consciousness is transparent to itself. (1988b, p.112, my emphasis)

In this brief, dense, statement Lacan argues that the feeling of meaning (the illusion that consciousness is transparent to itself, so often assigned to presence) is derived from the illusory specular identification during the mirror stage that forms the Imaginary; he ties this to consciousness and also to an idea of mental representation – which he characterizes as functioning through correspondence (reflection). In contradiction to this, as we have seen, I have postulated a recording apparatus that does not reflect the world but derives from it nonetheless and allows us to navigate by reference to it. Consequently meaning (and the feeling that we have that our experience is meaningful) is not an alienating illusion but the sense of a real connection with the world through lived experience. Contra Lacan, I am arguing that our internal world is structured primarily through physical being in the world, not an encounter with the symbolic. The differing ways in which we conceive of the operation of metaphor underscore this difference.

Lacan has a tendency to talk about metaphor (and metonymy) as though the conditions that govern our use of metaphor *as a rhetorical device* somehow also govern thought. Given his view that the unconscious is structured through language by way of the Other, this is at least consistent. However I proceed, as it were, in the other direction: rather than start from our understanding of the linguistic figure of metaphor I emphasize that metaphor is a pattern in language that is evidence of certain thought processes. Lakoff and Johnson's insistence that metaphors are ubiquitous in our conceptual schemes helps make clear that our

*concepts* are not substantial entities in their own right but more like patterns of association. Therefore I claim that Lacan's order of explanation is the wrong way around: he takes linguistic structure to be something that can be employed to explain the structure of the unconscious. A case in point is his use of metaphor and metonymy. Using them to explain the Freudian mechanisms of condensation and displacement, he says:

> …'condensation', is the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field... In the case of *Vershiebung*, 'displacement', the German term is closer to the idea of that veering off of signification that we see in metonymy... What distinguishes these two mechanisms, which play such a privileged role in the dream-work, from their homologous function in discourse? Nothing, except a condition imposed upon the signifying material, called *Rucksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*, which must be translated by 'consideration of the means of representation'. (1977, p.177)

Lacan is explicit here: *nothing* distinguishes metaphor and metonymy from their psychic analogues, except the conditions of representability which are themselves determined by the language of the Other. Hence the structures we perceive to be operating within the mind are determined by, and thus identical to, the structures within language. Yet metaphor and metonymy are not that easily distinguished, by Lacan, nor, it seems, by most of the commentators in this field. NLL comment:

> In Lacan's presentation of these two tropes, we will first take note of what can be designated either as a certain conflation between the taxonomy of classical rhetoric on the one hand, and a Jakobsonian analysis of the two 'aspects of language' on the other hand, or as a figurative usage in Lacan's discourse of the terms of metonymy and metaphor. Neither, as we will see, is understood within a strict rhetorical sense, nor even an easily discernible one. (1992, p.71)

They are not satisfied either with Lacan's example of metonymy ('thirty sails' for thirty ships) or that of metaphor ('His sheaf was neither miserly nor heinous' from

Hugo). They further point out that only a few years earlier in *The Function and Field of Speech and Language* metonymy and metaphor were grouped together as semantic condensations, whilst ''syntactic displacements' were illustrated by another list of rhetorical terms' (NLL, 1992, p.73)[123]; this reclassification might suggest that perhaps the logic underpinning this particular taxonomy is not very robust. However Lakoff and Johnson fare little better. In their discussion of metonymy, in a passage laudable for the way in which it renders its own internal contradictions transparent, they say:

> Metaphor and metonymy are different *kinds* of processes. Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding. (2003, p.36)

So, paraphrasing, we have learned that metonymy uses one entity to stand for another, and aids understanding, whilst metaphor is a way of conceiving of one entity (thing) in terms of another, and aids understanding. It seems all this clarification is not getting us very far! Let's consider this further with the aid of an example, borrowed in part from Lakoff and Johnson. Compare:

> "The cherry pie is waiting to pay the bill"
> and
> "Love is cherry pie"

The first, in the context of a diner in a restaurant, is metonymic. The words 'cherry pie' are being used to refer to a customer who has eaten cherry pie. 'Cherry pie' has taken the place of another description, or name, for the diner. The second is metaphoric. Love is being explained in terms of a foodstuff, on the basis that it may be thought to share some of the same characteristics: being nourishing, warm, comforting, reminding one of home, etc. Whilst these examples obey a kind of linguistic organization, can they be consistently separated? Using Lakoff and

[123] Lacan 1977, pp.63-4

Johnson's differential, metonymy has a greater referential component and metaphor is used more to aid understanding. These phrases fit that bill fairly well. Changing the diner's name for 'cherry pie' doesn't (at first glance) tell us a great deal more about him or her, while associating love with cherry pie might be said to help one understand the emotion (however in/accurately). However on reflection the same logic could be reversed. Referring to the diner in this way could be said to be dismissive and patronising, and speaks of a power relation between waiting staff and customer (that is, it *aids understanding*), while the association between love and pie has a referential component - it tells us of a connection between two *objects*, each of which might be used to explain the other (though one may be harder to find!). If speaking of love as an object seems problematic, consider that our acceptance of the metaphor tells us that this is exactly how we do think of it, as something bounded, locatable, reproducible, with physical and sensory characteristics (consider also that I'm sure the use I just made of a spatial/object metaphor - *'finding* love' - was not problematic). The lesson from Lakoff and Johnson is that this is how we are *obliged* to view abstract phenomena, in terms of other, perhaps more concrete phenomena in our experience, by way of metaphor. But I would like to take this further, and urge that even as we find the figure of metaphor useful, we do not hypostasize it and treat it as something real in the world, with strictly definable properties we then seek in the mind (as Lacan has done).

I have emphasized the similarities between metaphor and metonymy to call into question the status of both concepts in order to remind us that as linguistic objects they do not have essential properties which we can locate exactly. In my view it might be more accurate to say that metaphor and metonymy are on opposite ends of a continuous spectrum, with metonymy occupying an end where there are fewer obvious associations between the objects involved (so the connection made seems primarily referential) and the crudest form of metaphor at the other end, where the associations are easier to make and see (and so seem more obviously explanatory). The more vague or poetic form of metaphor might hover in the middle, where explanatory connections can be seen, though at first glance they seem more referential. What is significant is a structure of pure difference; fully- or partially-hypostasized and poorly understood concepts (such as metaphor) simply

confuse the issue. Though metaphor and metonymy might have value as linguistic constructs they are, I contend, secondary to the organizing principles of the mind.

## Against 'Standing For': Metaphor and Symbol

The idea of the *symbol* is often taken to do some of the work that Lacan is asking metaphor to do, furnishing or enriching meaning. It is characterized as one thing standing for another, a description also used for metaphor, and once again that little connective 'for' implicates the present, conscious subject who can interpret such conjunctions (as we saw above, for Lacan metaphor can operate only in tension with the subject, and vice-versa). Freud says that dreams exploit the particular properties of symbols:

> …there is no necessity to assume that any peculiar symbolizing activity of the mind is operating in the dream-work, but that *dreams make use of any symbolizations which are already present in unconscious thinking*, because they fit in better with the requirements of dream-construction on account of their representability and also because as a rule they escape censorship. (1900, p.349, my emphasis)

Is it correct to say that symbolizations are already present in unconscious thinking? Or rather, if a symbol is something that has been chosen to stand in for some one or several other things, is that a process that has already taken place for the contents of the unconscious, which are employed in dreams? To put it another way, the images in dreams, drawn from the unconscious, may be seen as symbolic but are they *already* functioning as symbols in the unconscious before the dream 'uses' them?

Michael Robbins is a prominent American psychoanalyst and author who has written extensively on schizophrenia, language, dreams and the unconscious (see for instance 2018). In this quote (which I have chosen because it allows us to directly access the issues at stake), taken from a 2004 paper on dreaming and the

relationship between primary and secondary process, Robbins appears to take a contrary position to Freud on the use of symbols (note also the use of 'concrete' in relation to our discussion of the previous chapter):

> Of words and speech, in particular, Freud says "it is true in general that words are treated in dreams as though they were concrete things" (p.295). Kraepelin (1906), who made a decade-long study of his own dreams, made a similar observation. I dreamed I was trying to find the social security number of someone quite close to me. On reflection I contextually deduced that I had actualized the sophisticated metaphor about "getting someone's number" (i.e, establishing a sense of who they are). A portion of a friend's dream involved going into a field. As she reflected that the overall theme of the dream was her concerns about her choice of career, she realized that the dream had actualized a waking metaphor: her field of work. It is not the case, however, that in the context of the dreams themselves the number search and the field image were symbolic. (2004, p. 366)

The move Robbins makes here is reminiscent of what I regard as Lacan's mistake in hypostasizing metaphor and installing it as a fundamental faculty of mind – in reversing the likely causal priority of the situation. At first glance it looks as though the mind is engaged in an extraordinary creative endeavour in rendering the idea of 'entering a field' by the literal ('concrete') picture of walking into a field, as though the metaphor as a linguistic structure came first in our understanding – but consider the alternative: that the situation is represented in the mind *in the first instance* as a structure, or image, reminiscent of walking into a field, and the linguistic formation 'entering a field' comes later. The fact that there is a pre-existing mental picture/structure is the *reason* the linguistic metaphor later has meaning. The meaning is underwritten by the memory of the embodied experience of physically entering into a new situation which is unfamiliar, and in some way challenging – the affect that attached to the original experience of this situation is what translates across between situations and is the identity recognized by the mind (of course the dreamer does not have to have had an originary experience of literally walking into a field – but will likely have had an experience of entering a new space, which will be sufficiently similar to the experience of walking into a

field for there to be an identity between the situations). If we believe that our thought processes have an underlying structure similar to metaphor there does not have to be any translation from linguistic metaphor to image; since causation has proceeded in the other direction, the original structure/image is always available as the basis for thought. This is superficially similar to Freud's observation that dreams 'make use of pre-existing symbolizations'; however the fine but fundamental distinction is in seeing that thought does not 'regress' from a more refined secondary process language 'filled' with meaning to convenient symbolic 'nodal points' – but rather that it continuously operates through image and association in a manner reminiscent of metaphor. Freud's tendency, as we saw in Chapter 4, is to habitually fall back on the metaphysics of presence, and in the case of symbols this takes the form of an unreflective use of the term which implies a kind of immanent plenitude of signification. As we have just seen Robbins also can be read as suggesting that what makes something 'symbolic' is somehow immanent within the mental image, word, etc. But I have argued that what makes something symbolic is the mechanical, material fact of whether it has been placed in a network of associations. An image in a dream may of course have such connections: but what renders something symbolic is not an intrinsic property of the thing itself but the extended mechanism or process that enables us to understand the multi-faceted nature of the thing under consideration, a process like that of 'dream-work-alpha' as seen in the previous chapter. Conceptual problems ensue when the spatially and temporally extended mechanism that renders something meaningful or symbolic has been 'rolled up' into the idea of a symbol (or frequently in Freud's texts, a word), which is then treated as 'containing' the full and present meaning. What results then appears to me to be an inversion of reality, where the linguistic marker of a distilled idea is treated as the 'full and present' part of our engagement with reality. I believe that this is probably why in Freud's writing (and in writing about the psychology of consciousness more generally, with few exceptions) the linguistic is unreflectively associated or conflated with consciousness, as though verbal expression was a sufficient and self-explanatory token for that phenomenon.

To look at it yet another way, consideration of the waking state regards the system as a whole[124], including our reflexive capability: we can 'read' ourselves, though we do not necessarily (or instinctively) do so; regarding dream content as symbolic or metaphoric is not something people automatically do (as dreams have been taken in many different ways through history, as concrete, or prophetic). Freud's adherence to the metaphysics of presence and his inability to see that language becomes meaningful through a structural relationship to the bodily registration of experience is also shown through his idea that dreams lack some of the grammar of waking language; that they cannot express negation (e.g. 1900 p.318), conditional propositions or past tense. This is a superficially convincing idea but I don't think it holds up on further examination. Take the apparently simple idea of negation, expressed in the word 'no'. A child will quickly learn that this word represents (or can represent and be associated with) disappointment, frustration, the cessation of a pleasurable activity, a change of plans, a re-evaluation of how to proceed: all of these things can be, and frequently are, experienced in dreams with all their attendant emotional force. The idea that the linguistic marker for this complex set of situations and emotions is richer than their dream representation (or their contextual enactment) seems almost a wilful inversion, the metaphysics of presence at work once again, locating meaning in a symbol to resolve the anxiety of the overflowing possibilities it is supposed to encapsulate[125]. Yet though dream representations are very rich and in this way show us the components that underpin linguistic meaning, they do differ in some way or have a different 'epistemic level' to waking: in other words they are characteristic of a different kind of consciousness. As we have seen, the FIC metaphor, along with the work of Bion, enables us to understand how the experience of the dream can be seen as the operation of establishing associative connections between ideas and affect which later allows for the emergence of 'symbols'. Failure of this process may mean that words, ideas and images remain 'concrete' – that their associative resonance is not recognized by the subject and they cannot be used productively in communication or intrapsychically. This state of affairs is characteristic of psychosis, which Lacan

[124] See also the discussion of Searle's 'Chinese room' argument.
[125] One is put in mind of Freud's observation in Beyond the Pleasure Principle "The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps of nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli" (1920, p.55). One might say: to reduce anxiety by simplifying.

would describe as a refusal of the paternal signifier (the Law) (Lacan 1988a). Though our accounts have many similarities the crucial difference in emphasis should now be clear: where Lacan sees the alienating entry into the symbolic as decisive, I insist on recognition of the idiosyncrasies of embodied experience, which, though it is importantly scaffolded by language, is not overridden; nor in my account does language form a 'cut' (Lacan 1977 p.331, 1998a p. 206), which separates us from the world.

Though Lacan has, in his own way, sidestepped the metaphysics of presence I see in his work a denigration of mental representation that forecloses on attempts to better understand the workings of the mind. Moreover there is a fascination with lack and alienation (at times approaching a fetishization[126]), which I have argued is at the cost of valuable nuance in forming an appreciation of human subjectivity. I have attempted to show how a different reworking of Freudian metapsychology can restore some of that nuance and harmonize with other psychoanalytic theories such as Bion's. In closing I will consider the wider implications of this endeavour for philosophy and psychoanalysis.

[126] Zizek says: "Lacan hypostasizes some historically contingent formation (even if it is Lack itself) into a proto-transcendental presocial formal a priori" (2002, p.71).

# 9

# Conclusion

"I submit for your consideration the following hypothesis: a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself. If remarks of belonging belong without belonging, participate without belonging, then genre-designations cannot be simply part of the corpus."

(Derrida 1980, p.65)

I chose to start this chapter with Derrida's quotation on genre since this thesis has proceeded with what perhaps appears to be an unusual disregard for 'genre' or disciplinary boundaries. First of all this is because there is a recursive relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis as identified by Derrida (as in the quote which began this thesis, when he remarked that 'That which, in Freud's discourse, opens itself to the theme of writing results in psychoanalysis being not simply psychology – nor simply psychoanalysis" (Derrida 1978, p.278)) that requires nimble movement between these fields. Keeping my focus on meaning and mental representation rather than working my way through a textual canon has also resulted in a synthesis of ideas from disparate origins. And I believe the ability to produce such a synthesis is the test of a useful metapsychology, which it was my intention to work towards. Derrida has already remarked on the multifarious nature of the outcome of this kind of investigation:

> Such a radicalization of the *thought of the trace* (a *thought* because it escapes binarism and makes binarism possible on the basis of *nothing*), would be fruitful not only in the deconstruction of logocentrism, but in a kind of reflection exercised more positively in different fields, at different levels of writing in general, at the point of articulation of writing in the current sense and of the trace in general. These fields, whose specificity thereby could be opened to a thought fecundated by psychoanalysis, would be numerous. (1978, p.289)

Ultimately though it is my hope that this text has demarcated itself, as it gropes towards what Derrida might describe as a 'psychoanalytic graphology' (see 1978 p.290 and below), or even, with my tongue slightly in my cheek, as a 'positive science of grammatology' (see Kirby 2016 though on the dangers and ambiguities inherent in making such a claim, after Derrida 1976).

My intention in this thesis has been to pursue an intuition shared by Freud and myself (see Ch. 3), that his work contained radical potential that was never fulfilled. I attempted to answer the question, what would happen if we read Freud through Derrida and deconstruction? Is it possible to carry Freud's work further,

to develop his metapsychology in a philosophically and clinically fruitful direction, by challenging the metaphysical presuppositions that both shaped and limited his texts, especially *The Interpretation of Dreams*? I began from a position of informed enthusiasm for psychoanalysis, both as a therapeutic practice and as a method of enquiry about the mind, and yet I have always maintained a critical distance: though convinced of the importance of the unconscious as a concept, and the worth of the idea of unconscious phantasy, I am agnostic about many of the specific theoretical postulates of psychoanalysis, not least because they do not seem to hang together as a coherent body of theory.

In the first two chapters I argued that psychoanalysis has evolved in a fragmented and piecemeal fashion, and that this is due in large part to fundamental instability in Freudian metapsychology, which can be traced back to *The Interpretation of Dreams.* I proposed to address this instability by offering a new reading of the dream-book, informed by Derrida, with the intention of providing a revised metapsychology. This would serve as a theoretical framework that we could use as a tool to compare and evaluate different psychoanalytic theories, as well as providing a platform for a conversation with other disciplines which might drive further creative synthesis.

In Chapter 3 I argued that Derrida's work could be used as a guide and basis for a method. I explored the interlinked ideas of consciousness, meaning and mental representation and discussed the ways in which the 'metaphysics of presence' as described by Derrida is a useful idea in disentangling some of the confusions in Freud's work. I suggested that a new metaphor for mind could serve as a kind of Zen *koan*, helping us to think about mental representation in a way which sheds light on questions of meaning and consciousness without falling into familiar aporias.

Chapter 4 examined the mechanisms of dream construction as detailed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and considered how Freud's investment in the metaphysics of presence was expressed in problematic theoretical gestures that have been recapitulated in psychoanalytic theory up to the present day. I showed how throughout the dream-book Freud wrestled with the absence at its heart, the

(unacknowledged) lack of an adequate conception of consciousness and any attendant theory of meaning. I proposed that dreams should be considered not as a production for an audience, nor as a means to manage the threat of the emergence of repressed material, but as a window into a process of mental organization.

In Chapter 5 I discussed Derrida's review of metaphors for mind in Freud, and put forward an original metaphor of my own, using the idea of Fractal Image Compression to understand mental representation. I then explained how this would account for some of the clinical data presented by Freud in his reports of his own and his patients' dreams. Chapter 6 went into more detail on how my model explains dream phenomena and where it agrees, and does not agree, with theories about dreaming in the psychoanalytic literature. I examined a dream of my own at some length, demonstrating that my model accounts for and largely supports many of the conclusions drawn by psychoanalysts about dreams in the time since Freud. Since the purpose of my metaphor was to help develop a metapsychology, and the purpose of this in turn was to put psychoanalysis on a surer theoretical footing, I had no expectation that my model would produce entirely new results in terms of dream interpretation. On the contrary, I regard it as support for, and evidence in favour of, my model that my approach suggests approaches that in many ways are in line with the tried and tested methods of clinicians.

However part of my contribution is to provide a clear framework for understanding why we should employ certain theoretical constructs and why certain practices should be supported, when others should not. For instance, the Fractal Image Compression model for mental representation in conjunction with the idea of predictive processing (see Chapter 7) clearly demonstrates how our memories are alive in our perceptions and as such may underpin an understanding of why the phenomenon of transference[127] is a fundamental part of our lived

[127] As noted earlier Frosh (1987) has remarked that there are differences of definition when it comes to transference (see p.239). I would argue that this is yet another area where weaknesses in the metapsychology of the dream-book have bequeathed theoretical instability and fragmentation. Thus I should make clear that I am talking about transference in the restricted sense of the implication of past experience in present perception, a use of the term which may strictly apply only to the earliest Freudian theorizing. I am aware that following Melanie Klein (e.g. 1952) contemporary analysts may say that transference is to do with the reactivation of object relations that have nothing do with events encoded in memory, for instance. In this thesis I have argued for a wider conception of phantasy as generalized unconscious activity of mind, continuous with

experience, and why it is so central to psychoanalytic therapy. As explored in Chapters 4 and 6 my model clarifies why it is important to distinguish between *having* dreams and *experiencing* them, and helps to suggest why only certain dreams are consciously experienced. My approach makes clear that it is essential to consider the 'latent' content (although latent content assumes a somewhat different meaning under my model) but also makes explicit that this content is not (necessarily) occluded because it is forbidden or repressed in some way. Rather what we can say about it is that it is emotionally salient to the analysand. What dreams allow us to do therefore is build a picture of the emotional and cognitive landscape of the dreamer: this process may reveal thoughts and patterns that have been unconscious not because they were repressed but simply because they have never been 'read' in this way, from this perspective, before. Looking at the analysis of dreams in this way – suggesting that it does not involve 'recovering' previously coherent conscious ideas but is a process of constituting a new form of subjectivity – emphasizes that a great deal of what we think and do (or the basis for that action) is unconscious. Freud would have agreed with this of course and we have him to thank for initiating this debate. But despite his insight, and his appreciation (1915c, 1917a) that consciousness was a fleeting and unreliable phenomenon[128], owing to the metaphysics of presence he continued to default to a view of the mental which privileged the conscious and linguistic, as we saw in Chapter 4.

The idea of the metaphysics of presence is a lever to open the question of the privileging of certain terms in our discourse, and we have seen how the privileging of the conscious and the linguistic, and the supposition that something like coherent propositional formulations underpin thoughts, dreams and symptoms, is the inverse of the picture that I put forward: where thought is predominantly unconscious[129], and where a linguistic formation is the occasional result of a

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memory, supported by the FIC model. Such a conception might begin to dissolve the opposition between differing understandings of transference inasmuch as they rely on differing understandings of the role of memory. At the very least I would say that my model can be used to help understand the development of transference metapsychology in Freud's texts since *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

[128] "mental processes are in themselves unconscious and only reach the ego and come under its control through incomplete and untrustworthy perceptions" [1917a, p. 143]

[129] A prime example of how we are continually hemmed in by the in-closure of metaphysics. 'Predominantly unconscious' reifies the binary distinction between cs. and ucs. and implies that there is a distinct change of state between the two. Rather I am arguing that the area designated

particularly fine-grained set of mental transformations. On this picture, the exaltation of the linguistic and the association of linguistic productions with consciousness is, as Derrida says, an *effect* (1979, p.140): an effect of the weight of transformations that lie behind each word, the awareness of the connections that underwrite meaning and produce identity, and the relief of resolving the matrix of experience and affect into stable, material language.

Mapping this theoretical picture onto existing psychoanalytic literature (and thereby learning how my metaphor and metapsychology could be used as a tool to discriminate between different psychoanalytic viewpoints) was the subject of chapters 7 and 8. In chapter 7 the understanding of the network of connections that issues from the Fractal Image Compression metaphor (and how they might be seen as being knitted together through affect in dreams) was compared to, and used to interpret, Bion's writings on dream-work alpha. My model largely supports Bion's ideas, with the exception that under my interpretation it is important to observe distinctions between waking and dreaming function, and preserve terminology accordingly. Chapter 8 discussed the materiality of language and Lacan's attempt to displace the signified from the production of meaning. Lacan would agree that the subject is an effect of signification, determined by the materiality of the signifier – however absent a coherent theory of mental representation his account lacks any way to account for what one might think of as the dimension of reference or to really engage with embodied experience. To cope with this lack he is forced to do a great deal of labour to explain the production of meaning, in the process performing a sleight of hand which involves hiding essential explanatory mechanisms behind the 'bar' of signification. Despite, and perhaps because of, these intellectual contortions, too many unanswered questions remain and I cannot accept his account as a hermetically sealed and self-sufficient entity, endlessly moving and deferring the question of meaning. My model does not really confront Lacan's but rather furnishes a complete alternative which fleshes out mental representation and thus opens onto the dimension of embodied experience. In the process it illustrates why the formulation 'the unconscious is structured like a language' is not a particularly helpful, or accurate one. The

'conscious' is an effect of an arrangement of parts, an emergent perspective on a continuous landscape or field of operations.

privileging of the linguistic is, as we have seen, characteristic of the metaphysics of presence and encourages foreclosure on the other structuring elements in play: in some ways it is a distillation of Freud's original metaphysical confusion. There is undoubtedly a structuring tension between visual and other abstract structures and words, (which function as markers of difference, anchored in their materiality), but the picture which emerges from my metaphor is one in which abstract structures of difference and similarity (sometimes taking schematic visual or spatial form) often drive currents of thought quite independently of language – they have not been put into words and possibly cannot be, though sometimes the process of psychoanalysis involves attempting to do so. These structures of similarity seem to underpin what is represented as metaphor in language, which Lacan then re-inscribes retrospectively (and illegitimately) as the originary structuring principle of thought.

## Implications and Applications: Philosophy

In developing my Fractal Image Compression model I have provided an account of mental representation not previously available to psychoanalysis (Kristeva 2001, Erreich 2003[130]). This has both philosophical, and psychoanalytic implications. It seems to me that the most potentially far-reaching consequence of a theory of mental representation which does not simply *re-present* – that is, it does not suppose that what is registered in the mind is in any way isomorphic to what is *presented* to the mind – is that it dissolves any potential mind/world binary separation. We are part of the world and shaped by it, not standing in objective assessment or judgement. Questioning the ontological status of mental objects threatens Brentano's thesis, which has been the foundation for much philosophy of mind since its original statement in the 19th century. This is the idea that the characteristic mark of the mental is *intentionality*, or 'aboutness': that the mind is directed on an object:

[130] "Traditional psychoanalytic theory has had no competing concept for how to represent mental content other than unconscious fantasy" (Erreich 2003, p.545).

> Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation *something* is presented, in judgement *something* is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We could, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which *contain an object* intentionally within themselves. (Brentano, 1995, pp. 88–89, my emphasis)

There is no doubt much that could be said about how this statement of the thesis in itself embodies and reproduces the metaphysics of presence, enacting a kind of deferral by re-definition and installing a self-present perceiver at its centre. Setting this aside, I have queried the extent to which mental phenomena can be said to 'contain an object', and it is thus arguably incoherent to speak in terms of anything being *about* or *directed on*, such a (non) object or its (in) existence. Traditional questions of the fidelity of representation and indeed even truth must therefore be reformulated in other terms; precisely what these may be is a subject for further philosophical research, but I would expect that considerations of utility would come to the fore. Kirby says:

> Deconstruction offers a thorough challenge to the logic of representation, a logic that posits a second order system of substitution, a stand-in for a world whose ontological difference it can't access; indeed, deconstruction interrogates the very assumption that a methodology or model is an intervening instrument deployed by a subject to access an object. (2016, p.62)

The abstract challenge described here, offered by deconstruction, has been given specific form by my Fractal Image Compression metaphor and the theory I have

developed out of it. By way of my model we can now understand the dream phenomena reported by Freud as evidence of a structuring operation of the mind and doing so has the effect that it removes the temptation to see the dream as being 'presented' to a subject and thus raising the question of 'who' is doing the perceiving of the dream; instead we may understand the process of dreaming as being part of the construction of subjecthood, and consciousness as emerging once a sufficient number of connections have been 'written' in the mind (see Chapter 7). I am aware that Kirby's quote above highlights a reflexive irony in that I am offering a model, but at the same time one which questions the idea of a model as an intervening instrument: the difference here however is that the metapsychology that develops from the FIC metaphor is not one that requires a self-present or aware 'subject' as the terminating recipient of the perception of 'objects'; nor does it specify a category of mental content (mental object or representations) that need to subsequently be understood by a perceiving consciousness. Thus it neither perpetuates the deferral of a homuncular account of consciousness nor establishes a mind/world duality. Thinking consciousness in this manner is an unstable practice though, since the categories and terms of reference of philosophy depend on the metaphysics of presence and continually threaten to reinstall their structuring principles, namely the subject/object division and the pure perceiving consciousness, alive to itself. That is why I have offered my FIC model as a *koan*, to help us think about the mind in new ways: to the extent to which it can be imagined as a physical model in its own terms it may help us to peer beyond the veil of metaphysics; to the extent to which it must be described in the traditional language of philosophy, it must inevitably face its own limits.

Under my model it makes no sense to speak of anything either 'essential' or 'transcendental': for if our knowledge of the world comes from experience, and that experience is represented in the mind by way of transformations and structures of difference, there are clear implicit limits to what we can know. If, furthermore, our understanding develops through metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 2003) even the most sophisticated concepts and areas of knowledge are built up out of the sights, sounds, rhythms and 'sensorimotor schemas' (Piaget 1936, 1957) of our everyday contact with the world. In very plain language, all we ever know, and can ever know, about anything, is how much it is like or unlike

other things we have known previously; and those in turn are known through their differences from other things (I should really say '~~things'~~). This also specifies limits to our ability to reason on scientific or political subjects – all new information we take in will be understood in the context of past experience and in a manner derived from our individual experience, mediated by 'metaphorical' frames.

One thing to observe about this form of explanation, which sees 'sophisticated' conceptual and symbolic knowledge and thought as on a continuum with sometimes ineffable, associative registration of experience rooted in the body, is that it does not align with a particular theoretical gesture, repeated throughout the psychoanalytic literature: from Freud's (1900) division of conscious and unconscious, and primary and secondary process, to Lacan's (1988) separation between Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, to Kristeva's (1984) 'semiotic chora' preceding the symbolic, through to neuropsychoanalysis' (e.g. Turnbull et al. 2006) reliance on the division between implicit and explicit (procedural and declarative) memory. This is the 'splitting' (I use that word advisedly, with a nod to Melanie Klein 1946) of the mental in our understanding, into an understandable, rational, structured, knowable symbolic and an un-knowable, ir-rational (or possibly non-rational), ineffable pre- or extra-symbolic which is then taken as ground, origin, ballast or base for what we can consciously apprehend. This is not to say that there are not elements or dimensions of our symbolic structures that are themselves hard or impossible to describe - little understood non-linguistic contributors to meaning. But this kind of explicit division is a classic Derridean binary, repeated over and over, providing apparent stability to a conceptual structure but at the expense of generating a perennially un-knowable centre. It resolves anxiety but at the expense of continually deferring the possibility of understanding our psyche as a functional whole. In Derrida's words we look away 'when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself' the "formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity" (1978, p.370) which is life *beyond* the metaphysics of presence: the possibility of our existence as continuous parts of a world without the insulating illusion of full, present awareness, "the overvaluation of the property of being conscious" (Freud 1900 p. 612); a world that is all *object* and no *subject*; a world where there is no living present for us to inhabit.

A very recent manifestation of this gesture can be seen resulting from the 'turn to affect' (Leys 2011) in the humanities. As I touched upon in the introduction, there is a particular *noncognitive* or *anti-intentionalist* flavour to much of the work emerging from this tradition. Leys explains:

> For the past twenty years or more the dominant paradigm in the field of emotions, stemming from the work of Silvan S. Tomkins and his follower, Paul Ekman, assumes that *affective processes occur independently of intention or meaning*. According to that paradigm, our basic emotions do not involve cognitions or beliefs about the objects in our world. Rather, they are rapid, phylogenetically old, automatic responses of the organism that have evolved for survival purposes and lack the cognitive characteristics of the higher-order mental processes. (2011, p. 437, my emphasis)

This anti-intentionalism in the sciences of affect has now been taken up by theorists in the humanities and social sciences, such as Massumi, who asserts that affect is "irreducibly bodily and autonomic" (2002, p. 28), thereby establishing an 'explanatory' structure which I trust is familiar from our prior discussion (i.e. one where sophisticated 'higher order' symbolic processes are separated *ex hypothesi* from fundamental and inaccessible automatic 'black box' bodily processes). Though tracing the substantial body of theory that has recently been produced in this area is not my focus, I highlight it because I believe that one possible application of my thesis is to contribute to this conversation. Psychoanalysis by its nature operates in a region where cognition is conceptualized along with affect/emotion, but as Leys says "we are living today in a largely post-psychoanalytic age, and the new affect theorists tend either to ignore Freudian views or to reinterpret them along materialist lines, frequently in order to align Freud's thought with the latest neuroscientific findings." (2011, p. 469). My work occupies a unique position in this context, since it does seek to reinterpret Freud's work along materialist lines (not that it wasn't always materialist) but not simply to 'align' it with neuroscientific findings: I do not engage with neuroscience motivated by a "desire for a certain kind of revelation that science will be able to satisfy" (Papoulias and Callard 2010, pp.36-37) but in the full confidence that philosophical rigour is the necessary precursor to (or partner of) any productive

science, and the belief that philosophy in itself can be revelatory - it seems to me that neuroscience has at least as much to learn from (a philosophically rigorous) psychoanalysis as the other way around. Rather I have attempted to reimagine and extend Freud's conclusions, forging a genuine synthesis with the perspectives of other disciplines, resulting in a model that does not displace affect but insists on its centrality to *cognitive* organization. I have begun to illustrate in Chapter 7 how this works, but there is clearly potential for further research in developing an understanding of how an updated metapsychology describes the relationship between meaning and affect; and how this in turn speaks to those who would disavow such a connection. Leys laments the lack of input from philosophers in this area:

> Philosophers, too, tend to favour the cognitive position, but since with a few exceptions they are not interested in bringing their arguments to bear on the latest findings in the empirical sciences, their views can all too easily be ignored by affect theorists who believe it is important to integrate the latest neuroscientific results into their analyses. It is worth noting in this connection that another reason cognitive approaches are felt by many to be less gripping than noncognitive ones is that the former are often held to be captive to a version of cognition according to which it is associated with making propositions. (2011, pp. 469-470)

Although a great deal of work remains to flesh out how a mental model drawn from the Fractal Image Compression metaphor would work in detail, it is clear that it does not have the kind of rule-based or propositional emphasis often favoured by philosophers, and perhaps for this reason can help to overcome the resistance Leys speaks of here.

## Implications and Applications: Psychoanalysis

Beginning from a position as an admirer of psychoanalysis who maintains a critical distance, it is possible that I have been slightly rougher with central Freudian

precepts than would be usual in the psychoanalytic literature: certainly I do not treat any theoretical structures as 'articles of faith' and remain agnostic about all parts of the metapsychology until they have proven their usefulness and coherence.

As my emphasis is psychoanalytic, the body of this thesis has already spent some time illustrating the applications of the metapsychology I advocate. Having challenged the perspective encouraged by the metaphysics of presence, repression is no longer necessary to explain what makes the conscious, unconscious with the burden of explanation falling rather on understanding how it is possible for anything *at all* to be conscious. I make no claim about whether such a phenomenon as repression exists; it seems entirely possible that some memories are harder to access than others because of their negative associations, but whether, and how, this might take place is beyond the scope of this thesis. If it does occur it is further to the mechanisms implied by the model I propose. This is evidently quite a revision to psychoanalytic theory, though as I have noted in the introduction, in his later career (e.g. 1927, 1940)[131] Freud began to explore alternative models of defence. Disavowal, rather than repression, was used by Freud as an explanatory mechanism when discussing fetishism, as Hinshelwood (2008) and Bass (1997, 2000) have both noted:

> For whatever reason, Freud had toyed for some time with the possibility that the ego uses two separate forms of defence in fetishism. Only one is repression; alongside it is an early form of defence, disavowal.
> (Hinshelwood 2008, p. 507)

Bass has investigated the consequences of this theoretical departure quite thoroughly: in his model, which has a distinctly philosophical flavour, the perception of difference produces anxiety; in response to this it is possible for the psyche to defend against anxiety through negative hallucination, which suspends the difference between perception and memory and allows the hallucinatory

[131] "It may well be that, before its sharp cleavage into an ego and an id, and before the formation of a super-ego, the mental apparatus makes use of different methods of defence from those which it employs after it has reached these stages of organisation" (Freud 1927, p. 164)

perception of a scenario which represents "dedifferentiating wish fulfilment" (1997, p.208) sought by the 'concrete' patient and the fetishist alike. In other words, the troubling difference has been disavowed. But this entails a situation where the troubling perception has been unconsciously registered and then defended against, which is itself a substantial shift in theory requiring a change in technique:

> …if we follow Freud in beginning to conceptualize the generality of the processes that create fetishism (concreteness), and rethink the clinical approach to their change, we might also begin to see such processes as the most general ones in psychopathology. Then they would be the rule, rather than the troubling exception. In that case, we would open the possibility of continuing down an innovative path, only barely pursued by Freud, that can greatly expand our clinical and theoretical repertoire… Within this domain we deal with unconscious registration and repudiation of differentiating processes, and the consequent domination of consciousness by dedifferentiating primary process. To analyze such formations calls for the sea-change in basic theory and technique adumbrated in the literature on illusion, fetishism, concreteness, and enactment, and powerfully anticipated by Freud in his final works. This is the change from understanding defense directed against fantasy content, the original psychoanalytic stance, to understanding defense against ongoing, "silent and invisible" differentiating processes. (pp.680-681)

It's not my task here to assess Bass' theory, merely to observe that for similar reasons to my own, and in like manner, he is moving away from a metapsychology which is based primarily on repression; and his move also requires a reassessment of the mechanisms of perception, registration and memory. He has also taken a step towards what might be thought of as a 'science of grammatology' (Derrida 1976), the 'radicalization of the thought of the trace' (Derrida 1978, p.289) Derrida looked forward to at the end of *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, by exploring the connection between anxiety and psychic registration. We will return to this in a moment.

The intervention I have proposed, that of thinking the operation of mental representation by way of the Fractal Image Compression metaphor, contributes to a model of the mind where the mind is continually searching for identities and similarities with past representations in new perceptions, and seeking the most efficient transformations to render new memories by way of association with past structures. This identification takes place unconsciously and results in unconscious structures of association and similarity (some of which are later identifiable in patterns of metaphor) that underpin thought. These structures are analogous to the psychoanalytic idea of phantasy (in at least some of its incarnations) in that they are unconscious and shape and direct our conscious thought; moreover they contain or comprise patterns which are meaningful and can be interpreted and analysed, once they are brought to conscious awareness. However, crucially, where they differ from the psychoanalytic idea(s) of phantasy is that they are not linguistic (and may well be in existence prior to language), may never have been conscious, have not been repressed (though they may be quite sophisticated and highly structured) and are a generalized activity of mind rather than being tied to wish-fulfilment or drive representation. If this is a workable model and sufficiently analogous to the idea of phantasy it may substantially extend the range of ways in which phantasy can be understood to inform and direct our thoughts and behaviour. Moreover it will introduce some clarity to therapeutic practice. Thinking of Fonagy's (2003) complaint about the "difficulty in pinpointing the curative factors in psychoanalytic treatment" (p.74) referenced earlier, the theoretical picture I am advocating helps us to parse out some of the different functions of psychoanalytic therapy. There has at different times and in different traditions of psychoanalytic therapy been an emphasis either on interpretation (more usually in Freudian schools), the process of 'making the unconscious conscious'[132] in order to provide "a structured and organised conceptual and affective framework within which the patient can effectively place himself" as Sandler et al. describe it (1992, p.115); or on what might be called holding, or containment (post-Kleinian i.e. Bionian or Winnicottian schools of thought), whereby the analyst is the safe, stable, enduring recipient of the analysand's

[132] In accordance with Freud's famous statement: "Where Id was, there Ego shall be: it is a work of culture: not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee" (Freud 1933, p. 80). Or again: "psychotherapy can pursue no other course than to bring the Ucs. under the domination of the Pcs" (1900, p.578)

projections and communications. Frosh (1997) describes how this latter process might be enacted:

> By the end of the analysis… the fantasy figure of the analyst is taken in and identified with as a source of continuing nurture and goodness to be drawn on long after the therapy itself has ended. … What should be emphasised here is just how non-cognitive a process this is. Drawing benefit from psychoanalytic therapy does not depend on rational mastery of the unconscious. (pp.93-94)

Owing to the uneven development of psychoanalytic theory two modes of treatment have evolved with very different methods and emphases, one rational and one utterly non-rational (though as Frosh (1997, see especially Chapter 5) explains, the important tension and interrelationship between interpretation and containment has been explored by those such as Steiner). My model introduces some clarity into this picture by providing a conceptual framework in which we can understand these two different treatment modalities as operating on a continuum of mental processes. As discussed in the first two chapters, the division between schools on the nature of phantasy, initiated by Freud's flexible use of the term (Spillius 2001) has been compounded by a failure to agree on the nature of the concept (Bohleber et al. 2015). Since Isaacs' seminal 1948 paper the Kleinian usage of phantasy has been clearer but, perhaps owing to Klein's focus on child analysis and the Kleinians' subsequent emphasis on early object relations, there has been little development in terms of theory on how *adult* thought processes are the result of phantasy[133]. Or rather, because in Kleinian theory the emphasis is on phantasy as drive representation, there has been little attention paid to how it might be understood in wider terms as representing more complex thought processes, despite the Kleinian view that "regards the content of all unconscious mental processes, even the most primitive content, as fantasy" (Sandler and Nagera 1963, p.187). Across all psychoanalytic conceptions of phantasy there is a tendency to regard it as a specific *activity* of mind: as Hayman says, the "notion of

[133] "For Klein phantasy is an even more central concept than for Freud and it has continued to be used by her successors with only minor changes." Spillius 2001, p.371. Notwithstanding the attempts of writers such as Joseph (1985) and Feldman (1992) to refine the clinical application of Kleinian ideas.

phantasy, as imaginatively fulfilling frustrated wishes, is surely adhered to by all psychoanalysts" (1989 p.106)[134]. The implication of my theory however is that an associative process of mental representation would produce *effects* in many ways indistinguishable from psychoanalytic accounts of phantasy: but such a process would be part of the ordinary operations of the mind and not tied to specific activities, be they wish-fulfillments or drive representations (though it's possible that it may also serve these functions). According to the FIC model, once an experience has been registered, that registration is then used as the template to try to understand future situations: so that a novel situation is not just understood in terms of the mental transformations that would connect it to prior experience, but apprehension of the novel situation is literally *constituted* out of prior registrations, whose resonances are therefore at work; and moreover, the context, associations and logic of those former situations will be brought to bear on the novel situation, even if unconsciously. Hence, for instance, the logic of an unconscious 'phantasy' might bring one to a conclusion more appropriate to a past situation than the situation with which one is currently faced. As later registrations are effected by way of transformations away from earlier, the trace of earlier experiences will remain in all later ones, and will be more significant; for example, the registrations of the first caregivers will dominate and permeate all later perceptions of individuals. This is a way of understanding the phenomenon of transference but also develops a picture into which the clinical techniques of *interpretation* and *holding* both fit. Interpretation because on this view there will *always* be diachronic patterns as a fundamental part of our perception of the world, which may not be in any way pathological but the revelation of such will allow the analysand greater insight into their own psychology (and provide the 'organized conceptual and affective framework' of Sandler et al.); and holding because all of our interpersonal exchanges will be informed by early exchanges with parents and caregivers.[135] The 'shape' of all later registrations of individuals derives in some way from those first registrations, and is thus both pervasive and enduring. We might speculate that 'holding' over time permits the figure of the

[134] Despite Isaacs' neologism this may be because of the close linguistic association between phantasy/fantasy and the idea of a daydream (and of course Freud's original emphasis on wish-fulfillment in phantasy).

[135] This accords with Freud's contention that "Our theory of dreams regards wishes originating in infancy as the indispensable motive force for the formation of dreams" (1900 p.589)

analyst to be 'taken in' by way of repeated clinical encounters where the analysand's many 'person representations' are confronted in the transference and gradually altered, unconsciously, in the light of those confrontations. What the FIC-informed model allows us to see is not only why transference occurs but also why it is so very difficult and time-consuming to effect change: because it is not just a question of reaching back to past representations (though that is no doubt difficult enough in itself), but that all subsequent representations have been derived from past ones and those structures and representations are then all interdependent[136].

As an aside the FIC metaphor throws interesting light on some other memory-related phenomena. There is a curiously evocative quality when one is reacquainted with things from childhood after a long period – pictures, say, or songs and music that were early favourites. What my metaphor suggests is that it is not just that they evoke a period in time, but that they hold within them resonances of things that *came after* them in one's experience, which seems counter-intuitive: but because they formed a kind of template from which, and through which, later experience was understood, the later experience is summoned to mind on exposure to the earlier. In the reverse temporal direction, the phenomenon of déja vu also becomes less mysterious. If the mind is constantly seeking to understand present situations in terms of past ones, as it were 'looking through' memories, it is not surprising that it occasionally concludes that no further transformations are necessary to register the current situation – that it is a pattern that has exactly happened before or has already been seen. In particularly vivid déja vu the sense that what one is experiencing has been experienced before is so strong that one feels it should be possible to say what is going to happen next. Arlow (1959, 1969a) has followed Ferenczi (1912), Fenichel (1945) and Oberndorf (1941) in developing Freud's original idea that:

> …at such moments something is really touched on which we have already experienced once before, only we cannot consciously remember it because

[136] I am writing as though all memory construction observes a unidirectional chronology, as if it is only later memories that derive from earlier; but since memory is a construction and is reconstructed as it is used, it is entirely possible that earlier memories are affected by change to later ones: "Memory is constructive in nature; the act of recalling a memory renders it labile and highly susceptible to modification" (Ramirez et al. 2013 p.390)

> it has never been conscious. To put it briefly, the feeling of 'déjà vu' corresponds to the recollection of an unconscious phantasy. (1901, p.266)

We have contributed to this picture in extending the notion of unconscious phantasy and making clear why it would routinely be in operation during conscious waking life, as part of the essential and ongoing interconnection between memory, phantasy and perception. Coupled with the lack of a theory of consciousness, Freud's understandable desire to understand how internal and external processes could be differentiated led to his imposition of an overly rigid separation of perception and memory.

> Let us, furthermore, bear in mind the great practical importance of distinguishing perceptions from ideas, however intensely recalled. Our whole relation to the external world, to reality, depends on our ability to do so. (1917 p.231)

Perhaps because of the way in which he worked with the idea of hallucination, Freud clearly envisaged a situation where ideas or memories might have equal sensory vividness to perception, which would be extremely confusing. However his emphasis on the separation of faculties seems to have prevented him from considering the extent to which memory might inform perception. A change in emphasis such as that which I am suggesting has it that perception to some extent relies upon memory in order to be meaningful, and that the two are interdependent.

Resolving Freud's confused (and confusing) vestigial attachment to the idea of conscious verbal thoughts as both the origin and destination of mental activity has brought clarity over the positioning of consciousness as an effect rather than an initial condition of psychic function and dream life. Freud employed the idea of repression to help distinguish between the descriptive unconscious and the unconscious 'proper' (the dynamic unconscious), since some ideas can readily be brought into waking consciousness and given linguistic expression whilst others resist this process (1900, pp.614-615). But understanding that many of our mental contents might guide thought and behaviour whilst having never previously had

conscious linguistic form (instead potentially consisting in patterns derived from embodied experience and existing in abstract networks of association) obviates the need for repression as an hypothesis to explain how a practice like psychoanalysis can uncover patterns in behaviour and thought that the analysand has not previously been aware of; such patterns might resist expression simply because there is no established template or pathway for their rendering in language or even their recognition. The analysand may need to be taught how to 'read' them.

In some ways a view of the mind that challenges repression and hence erodes sharp distinctions between unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious is more congruent with the idea of the 'cognitive unconscious'[137] than traditional psychoanalytic approaches. However there are also psychoanalytic models which, while not explicitly dealing with the logical problems (such as those we have encountered) with the Freudian unconscious, do offer a picture of an unconscious which is a more complete store of information about the world, a creative resource and reference rather than a seething repository of repressed ideas. One such is Christopher Bollas' notion of the 'receptive' or 'received' unconscious. Nettleton (2017) comments:

> It is clear that the unconscious that does the dreamwork is neither a primitive physiological unconscious nor one whose activity is confined to the mechanisms of repression and symptom formation, or conflict and defence. Bollas points out that neither the topographical nor the structural model enables us to conceptualise the *unconscious creativity* implied by dreamwork. (p. 12)

Understanding the unconscious as a creative network of associations doesn't exclude the idea of repression, as one can easily conceive of certain pathways being favoured, or inhibited. But those repressed areas are just part of a much wider network of ideas, impressions and relationships which remain unconscious.

[137] From Jean Piaget's 1973 article "The affective unconscious and the cognitive unconscious: "I am persuaded that a day will come when the psychology of cognitive functions and psychoanalysis will have to fuse in a general theory which will improve both, through mutual correction" (p. 250)

Thinking in this way we may also set aside the perennial search for the hidden (but potentially self-present) component that will ground or complete the human subject.

In interpreting dreams psychoanalysis has us 'unpack' the condensation of the dream-work so that we can see the meaningful connections rendered by association: where we have substituted a trivial item from the 'day's residues' for a significant one from childhood; or where one person has been exchanged for another. Part of the richness of everyday experience that psychoanalysis has unlocked for us is the understanding that we see new experiences through the prism of past ones. In dreams that prism almost becomes visible, tangible; a psychoanalytic process of interpretation allows us to probe the connections that hold new experiences in tension with the past. Freud has given a name to what he regards as the key 'transformations' of the dream-work, namely, condensation and displacement. Through the FIC model we can see that the experience of a dream may be direct experience of the mechanism that both stores and organizes experience, and in doing so, produces meaning for us as human beings and simultaneously, the architecture of consciousness; on this reading, in experiencing dreams we are not viewing a coded message based on repressed material, but rather witnessing almost directly an essential mental act, as a new experience is integrated into the corpus of our memories, according to patterns of similarity and always governed by the affective currents which shape our understanding.

I would suggest that further enquiry is needed to determine whether repression remains necessary as an explanatory construct, and if so under what conditions. In fact many questions remain to be answered about how my model might engage with key psychoanalytic concepts such as drive, internal conflict, or the components of Freud's structural model, since my focus has been kept so closely to mental representation.

# Implications and Applications: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis

*Having read The Interpretation of Dreams* as an extended movement towards the consideration of the nature of consciousness, we can also see that Freud's work on dreams has (somewhat obliquely) initiated an enquiry into how it is that we are conscious at all: this in itself suggests a direction of research for both philosophy and neuroscience, in that dreams can be seen as case studies for the 'tipping point' between consciousness and its absence. Certain dreams become conscious experiences and understanding why and how this is so may throw light on the wider phenomenon of waking consciousness. I would argue that the work of this thesis has already begun to provide a basis for understanding consciousness independently of the metaphysics of presence: that is, not an immanent moment of clarity, but as an extended process; the result of an arrangement of parts, not a pure perceiving surface.

Looking at dreams that are experienced consciously in this way as anomalous, the few exceptions that satisfy the conditions for consciousness, allows us to ask why only certain dreams 'break through' in this way. My speculation is that these processes only become conscious experiences when they require so much effort that they draw our attention. The psychologist Daniel Kahneman has spent a lifetime investigating questions of attention. The idea that organisms orient themselves towards a new stimulus is well established in psychology. In his book *Attention and Effort* he says that the orientation response (or OR) focuses attention in the organism on novel stimulus (1973, p.49), in preparation for future events. He is referring here to perceptual attention, while I am referring to internal stimulus but I am surmising that the situation is analogous for internal events (such as dreams). Later on he emphasizes that as effort increases attention becomes focused and unified on whatever stimulus or activity requires the highest level of effort (Ibid., p.149). Or to roughly summarize: 'attention follows effort'. At the anecdotal level we will all have had the experience of finding that an on-going stimulus – an alarm, a burning smell, a biting insect – breaks through into conscious awareness as the need to attend to the stimulus, or the effort required to do so, becomes more insistent. My proposal, then, is that consciousness of the

dream follows this model and that we become aware of our dreams when the effort required to process them, either because of the amount or complexity of information, or the intensity of affect, becomes too great for distributed unconscious processes to handle. This may be the point at which the narrativizing 'secondary revision' is applied, when the more methodical systems of the conscious mind[138] are set in motion. The obvious endpoint of such a reaction would be the dream (or nightmare) that wakes us when the effort becomes too great and the full attentional resources of the waking conscious mind are required.

I am aware that in Chapter 4 I criticized Freud for employing the concept of attention, on the basis that it constituted a relatively unenlightening deferral of the question of consciousness. The difference here is that attention is considered as part of a process of constructing and connecting mental objects in a field of affect, and when that process is challenging it creates an economic demand (attention) which produces consciousness; not as an additional state, a perception, or epiphenomenon, but as a *description* of the *process as a whole* (a process which I believe my FIC metaphor and attendant developments to the metapsychology go some way towards fleshing out). Perception may create that demand owing to the sheer volume of information which has to be organized, compared with our pre-existing mental objects and the differences registered; dreams may create that demand when the work required to fit new information into existing patterns is great, owing to encounters with completely new paradigms, trauma, or challenges to self-image, for instance. The explanation for why some dreams become conscious, and are remembered, may then be isomorphic to the explanation for why anything is conscious at all. As I say, this is only speculation, but once again, the benefit of a more philosophically rigorous metapsychology is that it allows a different explanatory gestalt to hove into view; the removal of old edifices makes new features visible in the landscape, and we have a new language to help pick those features out.

[138] See also Kahneman's more recent 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' (2011).

# Psychoanalytic Graphology

I mentioned in the introduction Freud's ambition "to transform metaphysics into metapsychology" (1901, p.259), and on the same theme Derrida's pondering about whether it is possible to offer a "psychoanalysis of philosophy" (1978, p.246). Such metapsychological theorizing as we have been engaged in does tend towards a practice of this kind since it involves consideration of the mechanisms, and limits, of thought itself. Towards the end of *Freud and the Scene of Writing* Derrida speculates about positive developments issuing from Freud's work having 'opened itself to the theme of writing', and what shape further enquiries might take. He is, of course, alive to the difficulties of working beyond the constraints of the metaphysics of presence, and remarks of these new enterprises that the problem of their limits "could not be subsumed by any authorized conceptual opposition" (1978, p.290). Uncharted territory, indeed, yet these caveats do not prevent him from putting forward Melanie Klein's work as indicative of a "new *psychoanalytic graphology*". I take him to be suggesting that her research into "the form of signs, even within phonetic writing, the cathexes of gestures, and of movements, of letters, lines, points, the elements of the writing apparatus…" (1978 p.290) begins to show how meaning is 'written'.

In the previous chapter we have seen how both Klein and Bion have begun to sketch the connections between knowledge, anxiety, and mental structures such as phantasies. To my mind not enough consideration has been given to the *cognitive* achievement the depressive position represents (Hopkins 1987 being a rare attempt to consider the cognitive concomitants of emotional milestones in psychoanalytic accounts): namely, of understanding that an external object can persist and exhibit different characteristics. For obvious clinical reasons the emotional achievement of tolerating ambivalence often comes to the fore in Kleinian texts, but as I pointed out at the end of the last chapter, ambivalent recognition might also be thought of as the founding moment of a logical understanding of the world, and as the basis for symbolization, since it involves the understanding that the same referent can be understood in different ways and be seen to have different characteristics. This moment can also be thought of as the

point where *invariant representations* might come into being: these are mental objects which allow us to understand the persistence of objects in the 'external' world despite variations in context, perception etc. Hawkins (2004) has a detailed theory to explain how the mind produces invariant representations, and interestingly (and unusually) it involves *time* as an intrinsic factor (pp.114-116), with feedback as well as feed-forward being required to establish a stable representation. The ability to generate invariant representations allows us to engage with the world in a particularly productive way, and to make predictions about it.

In her early work (1921, 1928) Klein explored the notion of the epistemophilic instinct, a drive to understand and acquire knowledge, and considered how anxiety might interfere with learning; later on 'thinking' as such was not an explicit focus for her (Spillius 1983). As we have seen in Chapter 7, Bion thought very deeply about how knowledge was acquired and he developed his own understanding of the epistemophilic instinct in the idea of K, the predisposition towards learning (1962a, 1962b). Bion thought that alpha-function enabled the toleration of frustration involved in learning. It appears to me that the connection between anxiety, knowledge and logic is a rich vein which should be explored further: frequently during this thesis it has seemed that there is an intimate connection between anxiety and the metaphysics of presence. In his later work Freud began to revise his theory of anxiety and as we have seen, Bass has explored the implications of this in his investigations into the disavowal of difference:

> As he [Freud] makes clear in the revised theory of anxiety, the basic response to undue tension is to displace the fear of being overwhelmed by it onto an opposition between the *presence* of a perceptible object conflated with relief and the absence of this object conflated with danger. In this conception, differentiation unconsciously represents the threat of the "economic situation" of overwhelming tension. (1997, p.659-660, my emphasis)

In this paper Bass's concentration is on the clinical implications for pathological cases, yet it seems clear that the same considerations apply to 'ordinary' thought

and hence philosophy: the process he examines from Freud, above, is a more or less exact description of the metaphysics of presence as we have observed it in operation (and located it in Freud's texts). A desire for knowledge and an anxiety over its lack is resolved by the creation of a binary where presence (in whatever form) appeases the intellect, in the process reducing the apparent complexity of the situation. Putting this together with the earlier reflections in this thesis I would propose the following speculative picture: something like an epistemophilic instinct exists, and one of its key functions is to form invariant representations, which are in the first instance of 'external' objects but later may include more abstract objects (such as concepts). This instinct is regulated by, or may be constituted by, anxiety, which is resolved when the mind's predictions are matched by what it perceives; conversely, the more perceptions vary from prediction (which could possibly be construed in psychoanalytic terms as their being less ego syntonic) the more anxiety remains. Translating this into a psychoanalytic context one obvious application of this would be an alternative explanation for the repetition compulsion, where the psychic apparatus would be satisfied by familiarity (i.e. creating the conditions where perception matches an earlier invariant representation) even if that identity resulted in unpleasure. In philosophical terms the metaphysics of presence is clearly motivated by the drive to reduce complexity through producing invariant representations and (as per my FIC model) attempts to relate new information to prior representations, setting the stage for the recapitulation of the structures of metaphysics.

As we saw at the end of the chapter on Bion, Klein had her own speculations about the development of symbolic thought through anxiety, though as stated in the quote in that chapter from her 1930 *The Importance of Symbol Formation,* she saw anxiety as consequent on destructive urges. In this respect I do wonder if her perspective is circumscribed by what I think of as 'efficient cause'[139] explanations: in general in the current *episteme* we are more comfortable (arguably, excessively so at times) with 'final cause' or teleological arguments, of which the archetype is the idea that certain behaviours, mechanisms or structures are adaptive in an evolutionary sense. Therefore if we believe that intelligence and the ability to

[139] I am speaking loosely in terms of Aristotle's taxonomy of causes

symbolize are important to our survival we might more readily accept that anxiety exists to drive processes of identification and that the 'cause' of this affect in some sense is the adaptive advantage it ultimately confers. Nonetheless, I concur with Derrida that Klein's meditations on the shape of thought are invaluable, and it would be fascinating to consider more of them in light of the arguments of this thesis (Klein's conception of 'splitting' appears to align with many of the ideas put forward here).

## The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing (Caveat Lector)[140]

In his book *Deconstruction* Norris remarks on Derrida's critique of structuralism:

> Structuralism always asserts itself where thinking yields to the attractions of order and stability. Its achievements, however impressive, are intrinsically limited to 'a reflection of the accomplished, the constituted, the *constructed*' (Derrida 1978, p.5). What is suppressed by this static conceptualization is the 'force' or animating pressure of intent which exceeds all the bounds of structure. (1982, p.50)

Derrida's point is not to deny the achievements of structuralism but to recognize that they develop out of a necessary tension between structure and what exceeds it. Having followed a trajectory through structuralism to post-structuralism in my reading of Freud I have certainly been tempted by 'the attractions of order and stability'; arguably a PhD thesis is always an attempt to bring a kind of conceptual closure to an area of discourse. Yet as we see here something must always exceed the structure, resulting in the perennial possibility of an opening. Arguably what 'exceeds' in my thesis is the idea of affect or drive in psychoanalysis – the 'animating pressure of intent' would be a good description of drive as it is usually employed (Laplanche and Pontalis define it as "a pressure… which direct the organism towards an aim" (1973, p.214)). My dissatisfaction with the Freudian

[140] Section heading adapted from Chapter 1.1 *Of Grammatology.*

and Kleinian accounts of phantasy and primary process as drive representation led me to concentrate on developing a picture of mental representation, though in the process I have concentrated very little attention on the drive. The drive is clearly a vital part of psychoanalytic theory and my emphasis should not be taken to imply any intent to foreclose on the more dynamic aspects of the metapsychology; indeed, and as we have seen in Chapter 7, any consideration of consciousness must somehow address the meeting of the cognitive and the affective. One option is Mark Solms' (2013) approach as quoted in Chapter 1: to consider that affects are translated into objects by the cortex. The difficulty of characterizing affect phenomenologically and the necessity of recognizing it are both acknowledged in this formula: nothing is meaningful without affect but for it to become meaningful it must be encoded into a representation of experience. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for meaning. Perhaps even these terms insist on an unsustainable separation between affect and representation. André Green has protested such a separation and made a plea for an understanding of symbolization which does not enact it. The problem as he sees it is to understand how diffuse traces of affective experience can be reconciled with the representations of (external) sense-perception:

> Supplying content to what is experienced only in unrepresentable form, is a fundamental task of the psychic apparatus. If content is connected to sense, we must nevertheless remember that nonsense has two different meanings: chaos and nothingness. The confusion of these two is at the root of many of our misunderstandings.
>
> For sense to emerge from the dilemma requires us to abandon our theoretical preconceptions, which have now demonstrated their heuristic limitations. For my part, I see no way out of our difficulties except by research into what I call primary symbolization, where the matrices of experience, unaware of the distinction between affect and representation, are formed on the basis of a primary logic, the expression of a minimal unconscious semantic, where we would find the figures of psychoanalytic rhetoric: repetition-compulsion, reversal (turning into the opposite and turning against the self), anticipation, mirroring, inclusion, exclusion,

> formation of the complement, mediation between inside and outside, the emergence of the category of intermediary, the situation between the same and the other, the constitution of movable limits, temporary splitting, the creation of substitutes, the setting up of screens and finally projective identification. (1977, p.152)

In this thesis I have, I contend, at least helped to develop some of the parameters of research into 'primary symbolization'. Why affect takes 'unrepresentable form' is a deep question for philosophy, psychoanalysis and neuroscience. I will only say here that the lesson I have learned from deconstruction is that the desire to see 'behind' natural phenomena, to arrive at an explanation that is self-evident in its immediacy, is characteristic of the metaphysics of presence and both derives from and supports the illusory division between subject and object. All we can do is use the pre-existing objects of our experience to construct new objects which are slightly more robust in the face of examination (one might say, have more invariant character) and are more predictive, or generate wider-reaching explanations; whatever structures we create will contain the possibility of opening into other discourses (true 'invariance' also being an artefact of the metaphysics of presence). In this regard I understand affect to be a perception like any other, equally open to investigation and ultimately, equally resistant to an explanation which offers absolute closure or the arrest of the movement of thought. Where it differs from other perceptions seems to be in how it partakes of a temporal dimension. Vision appears to us to be static (though it is not), since light continuously reaches our eyes from the objects we see, its continual movement ironically creating the illusion of stasis. Smell and hearing, owing to their psychophysical mode of functioning, furnish perceptions that fade quickly and hence more obviously have duration. The internal perception of affect, especially pleasure and pain, speaks directly in the language of time: pleasure asks to prolong the stimulus, pain to shorten it. If we think in terms of Derrida's aphorism that "time is the economy of a system of writing" (1978, p.274), we might think of affect as a kind of notation within this system which shapes the text: write more of this, less of that. And dreams as a 'scene of writing' where the rough draft of the day is laid down according to these instructions.

I believe that Derrida was correct to say that Freud's texts opened themselves to the theme of writing and in doing so became more than psychoanalysis, or psychology. I hope to have helped to show how Freud's texts point beyond themselves, and indicated that this gesture is not merely of philosophical interest but generates a new set of possibilities that have their own practical application. One manifestation of these possibilities is a new metapsychological framework which makes it easier to find our way through complex and abstract psychoanalytic theory.

It seems appropriate to close by considering a warning from Derrida:

> The constitution of a science or a philosophy of writing is a necessary and difficult task. But, a *thought* of the trace, of différance or of reserve, having arrived at these limits and repeating them ceaselessly, must also point beyond the field of the epistémè. (1976, p.93)

*This* text has doubtless arrived at and repeated the limits of the episteme, but I console myself that it contains within itself its own opening, to possibilities unimaginable from this location.

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