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General editor: David Tuckett

The Theatre of the Dream

SALOMON RESNIK

Translated by
ALAN SHERIDAN

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The Theatre of the Dream

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To

Aldo Pellegrini, doctor, poet, critic, and friend, who has helped me to discover the metaphors of night...

Wilfred Ronald Bion, psychoanalyst, master, and friend, who conveyed through his teaching profound sensibility and humanity. He guided me in the understanding of the dream metaphors of day: day-dreaming...

Introduction

This book has as its background Venice: the scene is set in Venice, a dream city in which dream and reality, the two modes of the real, cohabit. On these same spaces and on these same stages, in the Venice of the sixteenth century, Giulio Camillo Delminio conceived his dream of constructing the theatre of memory and bringing together the traces of the 'drama' of man and the universe: 'The wisest and most ancient authors were always wont to reveal in their works the secrets of God, but these were hidden by very dark veils.'¹ The visions of the prophets and mystics, myths, dream (a personal myth, according to Freud) constitute, for some cultures, messages of a divine origin that reveal the secrets of being behind dark veils.

For Freud, dreams are traces, a phylogenetic and ontogenetic memory, an experience of life, a way of thinking and personifying unconscious fantasy, largely veiled from consciousness. The actors of the dream move within a 'theatrical' space-time: from a physical point of view, the dream landscape fulfils the same function as that of the chorus in Greek tragedy.

The dream stage is three-dimensional in form, but the content of what is acted out on it is multidimensional. The dream stage is like a signifier undergoing constant transformation. It may be flattened, enlarged, blown up out of all proportion until it loses its outlines. In the chapters in which I speak of the dream and of madness, I stress this absence of outlines and boundaries. The dream territory penetrates this space of the world in the form of a language that is different from that of the waking state. The space-time of the dream does not necessarily coincide with existing 'scientific' notions and raises the problems of mental space and of the 'locus' of thought. My work on psychosis, psychotic thought, and the dream have led me to conceive of a multiple, complex topology that is 'metadimensional' (Bion) or 'adimensional' (Matte Blanco).² Utopia, the nowhere of Campanella's *City of the Sun*, corresponds to a conception of ideal space-time that is not that of either natural man or cultural man. Utopia possesses a place in the 'nowhere' and it may be conceived as a different dimensional register. However, what is sometimes met with in both dream thought and in insane thought may not correspond to the usual idea of place, of dimension and time, but be constituted as another, atypical and achronic reality.

This book is an attempt at critical reflection, through clinical experience, on the difficulty of interpreting the dream phenomenon. In the narration of this experience, stress has been laid on the restrictive, phenomenological process and on the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience, *qua* discourse and style of the dream, is representative of a structuring, creative process on the part of the unconscious. The interpretation of dreams is a maieutics, a dialogue, an art. The oneiromancers of antiquity were skilled in the 'divinatory' art that made it possible to unveil hidden 'truths'.

In a way, Freud takes up the idea of the vocation of oneiromancer who enlightens the consciousness concerning what is hidden in the darkness of the unconscious. This book is offered as an open study, without denying possible contradictions, and its various chapters follow an order that does not always correspond to that of linear logic, for it belongs to a real, imaginary, labyrinthine adventure, experienced in the course of an encounter-seminar. In fact, this book is born out of that encounter; it is the result of it and its structure and spirit conform to the seminar.

The Latin word *seminarium* is made up of the word *semen* (seed) and the suffix *-arium* (the place where the seed is laid). Cultivating knowledge means growing and fructifying, producing fruit. Learning together becomes a co-birth, which means to be present at the gestation and discovery of the metaphor that heralds and illuminates, throws light on the unknown. Our search takes the form of a fruitful adventure, a state of waiting, an undertaking that does not exclude fear.

The world of dreams is a living forest in which fantasy dwells in a state of riddle; since antiquity the interpreter of dreams has embodied curiosity for the obscure, invisible forms of nature and being.

The members of this seminar were actors in a living, durable scenic experience that actively nourished the common *logos*, of which I have become the spokesman. I would like to thank:

Edith Aromando

Anna d'Amico

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Adele Pavia

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Cori Ranchetti

Tonci Zumaglini

Laura Tremelloni

and in particular

Ana Taquini-Resnik, who has closely followed my work, helping me with her suggestions and patience.

Notes

1 *L'idea del teatro*, Tutte le opere, Venice, 1552.

2 Ignacio Matte Blanco (*The Unconscious as Infinite Sets*, London, 1975) speaks of the dreamer who sees 'a multiple-dimensional world with eyes which are made to see only a three-dimensional world' (p. 418). According to Matte Blanco, the notion of multiple dimension was suggested by Freud himself in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when he speaks of trains of thought starting out from more than one sentence, though having points of contact.

Matte Blanco's book is a contribution of fundamental importance in the understanding of dream spatiality. The observer may assume different roles at the same time (Freud): for Matte Blanco this is a way of escaping the limitations imposed by three-dimensional space. 'We may establish a correspondence between contradiction and interpenetrability. Finally we arrive at a very interesting aspect of the dream, i.e. that frequently the images appear nebulous and not well delimited' (p. 421).

1

The stage and the dream

‘We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.’

(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*)¹

Man is made up of dreams and the dream is a latent, profound reality. The dream is a mask that, in enveloping wakefulness, denotes its uncertain but real presence; it is the path that drives man to rediscover his own essence; it is the primordial ‘stuff’ that turns ‘the unconscious’ into discourse; it is manifested to the consciousness and to ‘the reality of the body’ as an ambiguous presence, both internal and external. The man who dreams, surrounded by a kind of fog, makes the boundaries between life and death uncertain, but true. It is not only man, says Prospero, that lives in dreams:

‘The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve.’²

The man who dreams, the places where his dreams take place, the great palaces, the solemn temples, his experiences, inherited and acquired, form part of the same fog that is constantly forming and dispersing.

Existence is a dream-life, a path, an interpretation of that permanent stuff that is the dream, a stuff woven in the unconscious, the centre and starting-point of any psychoanalytical semantics of dreams: for Sigmund Freud the interpretation of dreams was the highway that brings man to a knowledge of the fundamental riddles that inhabit his mysterious reality.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud studies the unconscious aspect of the dream world and tries to develop a cryptological methodology and an ‘epistemology’ of the unconscious.

If the conscious is a mediation between the unconscious and relational life (Freud situates the ‘origin’ of speech between the unconscious and the preconscious), *qua* language it articulates the structures of the unconscious and those of the preconscious with the conventional rules of ‘rational’ language.³

The language of the dream is primitive and universal; to become manifest, it uses specific principles, rules, and laws that give rise to a specific system of values and a specific spatio-temporal perspective: the dream world.

Freud seems to deny the temporal and spatial dimension of dream experience. As a result the structures of the unconscious unveiled in the dream sometimes seem detached from the 'corporeal reality' in which they live. The theatre of the dream, the title of this book, implies not only an idea of organization, but also the idea of adventure; this dream adventure is played out in a 'formal' way in a three-dimensional space (like the body and like the stage of a theatre) and in an informal way within bi-logical dimensions (Matte Blanco), which are difficult to specify. To speak of the 'theatre of the dream', of its theatrical 'representation', already suggests an idea of spatio-temporal organization different from that of *objective reality*. The vicissitudes of the dream unfold, like life, according to a rhythm and to grammatico-oneiric rules that are difficult to decipher. The interpretation of dreams is an art, a technique. To decipher the secret of the dream, to make it apparent, is a challenge, a risk, a 'transgression'; to penetrate the stuff of dreams is a vocation, a desire, a curiosity for the hidden truth.

For Freud the 'reading' of dreams emerged from a profound personal experience bound up with his self-analysis, while working on his own dreams in order to try to recreate and to understand his relationship with his dead father.

The pain caused by his father's death, the ambivalent nature of the loss of the loved object, Freud's difficulty in working through the process of mourning, find expression in his work as an essential ontological problematic of his own existence.

In a letter to his friend Fliess, Freud writes of his father, who had just died:

'By one of those dark pathways behind the official consciousness the old man's death has affected me deeply. I valued him highly, understood him very well, and with that peculiar mixture of deep wisdom and fantastic light-heartedness he had a significant effect on my life. By the time he died, his life had long been over, but in [my] inner self the whole past has been reawakened by this event. I now feel quite uprooted... I must tell you about a nice dream I had the night after the funeral. I was in a place where I read the sign: "You are requested to close the eyes."⁴ I immediately recognized the location of the barbershop I visit every day. On the day of the funeral I was kept waiting and therefore arrived a little late at the house of mourning. At that time my family was displeased with me because I had arranged for the funeral to be quiet and simple, which they later agreed was quite justified. They were also somewhat offended by my lateness. The sentence on the sign has a double meaning: one should do one's duty to the dead (an apology as though I had not done it and were in need of leniency), and the actual duty itself. The dream thus stems from the inclination to self-reproach that regularly sets in among the survivors.'⁵

Such a situation of ambiguity in pain is expressed through a resistance to facing reality, to opening his eyes, to acknowledging absence. The refusal to see is a way of opposing the idea of death and the 'duty' to assume mourning. The familiar super-ego criticizes Freud and makes him feel guilty for shutting his eyes to the reality of his father's loss.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud describes the same dream, but in a different way:

‘During the night before my father’s funeral I had a dream of a printed notice, placard or poster—rather like the notices forbidding one to smoke in railway waiting-rooms—on which appeared either

“You are requested to close the eyes”

“You are requested to close an eye”

or,

I usually write this in the form of

the

“You are requested to close **an** eye(s)”.’

Each of these two possibilities has its own meaning, which leads the interpretation of the dream in different directions:

‘I had chosen the simplest possible ritual for the funeral, for I knew my father’s own views on such ceremonies. But some other members of the family were not sympathetic to such puritanical simplicity and thought we should be disgraced in the eyes of those who attended the funeral.’

(S.E. pp. 318–19)

For Freud, guilt with regard to public opinion and the opinion of his family takes the form, on the one hand, of ‘shutting his eyes’ to a painful reality, despatching things as simply and quickly as possible, and, on the other, ‘closing one eye’, entering into complicity with an indulgent side of himself—monocular vision is two-dimensional, while binocular vision is stereoscopic and three-dimensional. The classic theory of the dream in Freud uses the notion of the dream screen. In this book, on the other hand, I speak of ‘stage’ and of ‘theatre’: the same dream is a film or theatre stage depending on whether one dreams with one eye or with both eyes. The person recounting the dream becomes the theatrical director who, on waking, will re-create the new version of the dream: it is another stage, another space-time (the ‘transference’ in analytical experience). The narrative of the dream is a dramatization, a different interpretation: thus the scene that appears in the letter to Fliess is not the same as that described in the ‘book of dreams’.

For Freud the ‘dream work’ does not manage to become integrated; it remains ambiguous, ambivalent, and bi-valent: two different approaches to the same phenomenon.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud dates the dream cited above from the night preceding his father’s funeral, whereas, in the letter to Fliess, the dream takes place afterwards. The transformation of the dream in the version intended for Fliess seems to be influenced by Freud’s unconscious need not to assume responsibility for mourning (‘closing his eyes’). In *The Interpretation of Dreams* there is an alternative: one may either deny mourning or sustain a manipulative alliance with oneself in order to avoid a confrontation. In the first few pages of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud speaks of hypermnestic dreams:

‘I may mention a dream of my own, in which what had to be traced is not an impression, but a connection. I had a dream of someone who I knew in

my dream was the doctor in my native town. His face was indistinct, but was confused with a picture of one of the masters at my secondary school, whom I still meet occasionally. When I woke up I could not discover what connection there was between these two men. I made some enquiries from my mother, however, about this doctor who dated back to the earliest years of my childhood, and learnt that he had only one eye. The schoolmaster, whose figure had covered that of the doctor in the dream, was also one-eyed. It was thirty-eight years since I had seen the doctor, and so far as I know I had never thought of him in my waking life.'

(p. 76)

It is difficult not to take into consideration these two 'monocular' characters without linking them to the dream of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: 'to close one eye' means to identify oneself with the physician-father and the teacher-father who represent the monocular or 'flat' position of the dream. From the phenomenological point of view, the three-dimensional version is affectively more vivid; it even attains colour and sound in the dream. (In a conversation, Borges also talked to me about the sound dreams of the blind.) On the other hand, in cases of depression or excessive emotional blockage (psychosis), both dreams and the emotional world are flattened; there is a correspondence here with certain individuals' 'monotonous', detached tone of voice.

The significance of the eye, the act of looking, of visualizing the father's absence are expressed for Freud in two different states of mind. In the letter to Fliess, which precedes *The Interpretation of Dreams* by three years, the text is highly personal: Freud confesses to his friend how affected he was by his father's death, how difficult it was for him to assume the pain of that loss, and how a whole past history had been reopened for him.

Freud was so attached to his father that he did not want to leave Vienna at the time of his death, even to the extent of giving up the pleasure of meeting his friend Fliess. In the version to be found in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he accuses himself of wishing to 'close one eye', criticizes his negligent, self-indulgent side, and tries to justify his position with regard to the reality personified by the family.

The excessive simplicity Freud wanted to give the funeral and which his family did not accept apparently accorded with the father's wishes; and he used every possible reason to simplify the ritual of mourning. From a rational point of view, he is concerned with his behaviour and confronts here the problem of self-criticism and self-reproach. Freud was to speak later of the problems of 'self-reproach' at the psychopathological level, in 'Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence'. In 'A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytic Theory of the Disease', he studies the relationship between self-accusation and projection.

In the case of paranoia, projection would seem to derive from the attempt to redirect self-accusation out into the world; thus one gets rid of self-reproach but, while the reproach disappears, the external world becomes inhabited by allo-accusations or hetero-accusations. The price to be paid for avoiding self-criticism is to create by projection an allo-critical situation: the externalization of the 'critical sense' is placed here at the service of the negation of one's own 'guilt' and one's own pain. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, written in 1899, seems on the face of it to be dedicated to Freud's father and to be an act of reparation for the father's death: to interpret one's own dreams is for Freud a

way of re-creating a paternal image, a 'guide' who points the way in order to understand and to give meaning to his relations with all those who belong to his 'private' life.

In the letter to Fliess (no. 48), which precedes his father's death by some months, Freud confesses to his friend that he is not entirely convinced by the theory of repression and that he is waiting impatiently to discuss the matter with his friend, for he is sure that in this way he will be able to find a secure foundation, not only in psychology, but also in physiology, for his theories.

Freud's attachment to Fliess, which for him represents the fraternal aspect of the medico-scientific world, which he admires and respects, seems to have the character of dependence and reparation.

Furthermore, because of the medical world's criticism of his scientific discoveries and theories, he 're-creates' the conflictual vicissitudes with the father, as well as his own ambivalence with regard to his relations with his father. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is surely his most important contribution to the theory of unconscious thought. In the first chapter of his book Freud recapitulates the pre-scientific and scientific literature concerning the interpretation of dreams.

For Freud the most original and most representative author is Artemidorus of Daldis: 'To interpret dreams', Daldis writes, 'is merely to gather together similar things.' And Freud, who knew Artemidorus only through the writings of T.Gomperz, warns: 'An insuperable source of arbitrariness and uncertainty arises from the fact that the dream-element may recall various things to the interpreter's mind and may recall something different to different interpreters.'

Later Freud was to add: 'The technique which I describe...differs in one essential respect from the ancient method: it imposes the task of interpretation upon the dreamer himself.'⁶

The interpretation of dreams is a search by two persons into the past-present of the individual and of the culture; it has something of the character of an anthropo-archaeological research. Freud was very fond of archaeology, the 'logos of the arche' (*ἀρχή*); he liked to discourse on what was old and hidden in our culture and in each of us. In a definition that became famous, he stressed the interrelationship between the personal dream and culture: 'The dream is personal myth and myth is the dream of a culture.'

Thus to interpret a dream would have a cultural implication. The reading of a dream has the value of an anthropological, archaeological, and yet at the same time phenomenological experience.

In his hypothesis on the dream, Freud stresses the hallucinatory satisfaction of unconscious wishes—the basic notion of the genesis of dreams.

But this way of interpreting the reading becomes too 'reductive'; it neglects the fundamental heritage of the classic view, which conceives of 'the dream as a message', a complex, vital message. The technique of the ancient oneiromancers, including Artemidorus, consisted of translating into conventional, comprehensible language the hidden, 'mysterious' meaning of the dream discourse.⁷

The dream is a complex, profound, iconological whole. It is an articulated polysemic iconography. If the discourse is too extended, there is a danger that the interpreter will lose his bearings; on the other hand, he must also avoid another danger, that of reducing

the meaning overmuch in order not to get bogged down and thus to make the message univocal and rigid when it should not be so.

The hallucinatory satisfaction of unconscious wishes in dreams is a complex truth whose discourse remains open: it is a question of knowing who desires and what is desired. Who desires? The ego, the super-ego, the 'internalized' object, the instinct, or the drive?

A psychoanalytic reading of the dream phenomenon *qua* expression includes various possible points of view. Each interpretation is a point of view, a way of placing oneself, a choice from among a multiplicity of phenomena. The interpreter of dreams, like the ancient oneiromancer, often becomes involved in the dream himself and thus runs the risk of no longer being a true witness (which often happens in the analysis of psychotic patients). How does the 'oneiromancer-analyst' participate? Between the narrative of the dream and the dream itself, there is a gap of time between awaking and the analyst's experience of the narrative, a gap in which a whole series of perceptible transformations has taken place. In his *Matter and Memory* Bergson suggests that the images of the past are constantly mixed in the narrative with new perceptions deriving from the present, which may even go so far as to replace the preceding ones. This means that, if one recounts 'the experience of the night before', between yesterday and now, a whole experience of symbolic transformation appears and becomes established. The narrative of a dream is also a dramatization, a psycho-oneirodrama in which several objects belonging to the 'scenography' of the locus of the analysis play a part in the new representation of the dream.

For certain oneiromancers the interpretation of dreams was a true linguistic analysis of the narrative: the way in which the message was received and judged conditions the meaning of the interpretation (in ethnology, in field-work, the way of gathering the material together has a similarly interpretative character). Any interpretation is part of a 'technique' ('*techné*' means 'art' in Greek), but it is also part of an epistemology; to collect and classify the material of the narrative is an 'art', which tends to uncover the mystery of the dream, its 'laws', and its own syntax.

The language of the dream is symbolic. Any mental symbol is a representation. Freud draws a distinction between *Repräsentanz*, *Vorstellung*, and *Darstellung*. (*Stellung* means that which is placed, which stands up and confronts us.) Presentation is what is offered to us, whereas representation is a 'new presentation'; the notion of representative image implies a 'new presentation' in thought of what is presented before us (*Vorstellung*). Representation is an intentional impression: it leaves its personal trace. For Spinoza representation is a sensory apprehension different from the conceptual. For Leibniz it is different from perception and, in Locke and Hume, from the notion of ideas. For Kant representation is an intuitive, conceptual, or ideal apprehension. It is the reproduction of an object presented as present, past 'in the depths of the present', or as 'to come' when a project experienced in the present.

Representation is a mediation: it represents a person, a thing, an idea, a memory, a hope, an ideal. Taine gives the notion of representation a particular sense:

'It seems that nature has taken it upon herself to set up within us "representatives" of those events.... External facts, present, past or future, particular or general, simple or complex, have their internal

“representatives”, and this mental representative is always the same internal event, composed, repeated, and disguised to a greater or lesser degree.’⁸

For Melanie Klein the internal world appears as peopled by internal representatives that she calls ‘internal objects’.

In waking or in dream, the internal object is an actor that ‘represents’ mentally or ‘somatically’ (a hysterical conversion, hypochondria, and somatic phenomena in general) a role, a situation, or an idea on the inner stage. In the transition from presentation to representation, a certain space-time is crossed. This crossing implies changes, ‘transformations’, which make the difference between the object perceived and its ‘presentification’ in thought: the thing perceived is an object that exists as an image (an internalized object).⁹

Freud may well have been influenced by the Herbartian notion of a ‘mechanics of representations’ (*Vorstellungsmechanik*), which he integrates into his notion of ‘unconscious representations’. For Freud *representation* is what is inscribed of the object in memory (the mnestic system). For him, memory is not a mere receptacle of images: in ‘A Note upon the “Mystic Writing-Pad”’ (1924), he suggests that the psychical apparatus may give new life to and elucidate through affective evocation what was imprinted and repressed in the unconscious as a mnestic trace. Freud speaks of the representation of words (*Wortvorstellung*) and of the representation of things (*Sachvorstellung* or *Dingvorstellung*). In his article ‘Repression’ (1915), Freud speaks of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the representative of the representation, when speaking of the content of the unconscious, but also of its constitutive aspects. Freud accepts the existence of a primary repression and a psychical representation of the drive, as well as of an inscription or ‘fixation’ of the representative perception in the psychical apparatus. This involves several layers of inscriptions for signs (*Niederschriften*). In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) there is the hypothesis of a change of inscription that may be manifested for certain representations, going from one system to another. The notion of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is also present in the texts in which Freud provides the definition of the relationship between the somatic and the psychical, especially in his metapsychological works of 1915 (‘Repression’ and ‘The Unconscious’). For Freud the drive is somatic; he speaks of a psychical representation of the drive, which also seems to be somatic, and of the representation of the affect, stressing their different roles. Laplanche and Pontalis, following Freud, speak of a *representative of the drive* (*Triebrepräsenz*), which suggests the way in which the drive finds its psychical expression.¹⁰ Sometimes this word is synonymous with *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*; at others, it has a much wider sense, taking in the affect, the affect ‘quantum’ (*Affektbetrag*). This interpretation by Freud stresses the affect.

Psychoanalytic experience is an experience of life, and therefore a relational one. If there is no affective charge, if there is no relationship, if space and time are experienced as trapped, blocked, denied, then the psychoanalytic discourse also comes to a stop. This is the problem with certain obsessional neuroses and certain psychoses.

Freud considers that we always think with words at the level of the consciousness and that non-verbal conscious thought—as in dream or day-dreaming—is an ‘experienced

intuition' of the unconscious. In schizophrenics we often notice the absence of affect in the representation of words, which are perceived by the patient as 'things'.

Melanie Klein's notion of the internal object poses the problem of the three-dimensional representation of that object and of its way of experiencing internal space, the 'internal world'. In this book I use the notion of internal object, *Darsteller* (actor), which has an imaginary body and an imaginary space, which loves, hates, moves in psychical and 'somatic' space, lives in day-dreaming, dreams, or the waking state, and becomes assimilated with the world of objects and with the inner stage, whether real or oneiric. In psychopathology the immobilized and often unassimilated (Paula Heimann) internal object is 'isolated, dissociated from the rest'.

The internal world lives in representation, in *Vorstellung*: *Vorstellung*, then, is a theatrical representation; the stage is that part of the theatre where the actors (*Darsteller*) act and where the sets that create the atmosphere of the production are placed. The dream stage may be vast, tiny, superficial, or deep... The characters of the dream, the actors, come on to the stage and present themselves to public view. The dreamer is also the public that sees, listens, and perhaps even recounts, if he remembers it, the representation of his dream. The actors of the dream make their exits and their entrances, appear and disappear as on the stage of a theatre. The sets are the landscape of the dream, and its shape and colours form part of the *Bildsprache*. A dream may be divided into several scenes, which may all take place at the same time, as in Leonora Carrington's play *The Flannel Shirt*, in which diachrony is synchronic.

'The theatrical production begins with life,' writes Gémier: 'One is not only performing before a visitor, a friend, a relation, one is also performing before oneself.'¹¹ The dream is a performance in which all the actors are part of the world of the dreamer, who, in the multiplicity of his roles, becomes at the same time the producer and the public. The dream is a performance before oneself... The preparations for the production, as in the theatre, consist of whole series of perceptual and imaginative experiences in a waking state: several real or imaginary places will appear on the dream stage, but the director will add his own 'ideas', transforming them and adapting them to the argument of the dream.

The production of the dream belongs to the art of the 'animator': gesture, silence, words, the way the protagonists walk about the stage and make their exits are part of a general and specific rhythm.

Linguistic research on the dream implies a revision of the notion of perception and imagination. Perception is not a mechanical apprehension of things; *percipere* means to grasp with the senses, to take with the senses, it is a way of com-prehending; *capere* means to grasp, to capture with the head. Comprehending is an instinctual-reflexive apprehension of the thing perceived: to take with..., 'to dialogue with the object'.

In his studies on symbolic forms and mythical thought, Ernst Cassirer attributes prime importance to the transforming, creative function of the 'intelligence'.¹²

W.R.Bion suggests that any description or transmission, whether on the part of the patient or on the part of the analyst, operates in a 'mutative' way according to the 'private' and cultural ideology of the individual. The world of ideas is made up and developed according to sets or 'transformation groups'.¹³

The object perceived, the sense-perceptible, extra-corporeal, or intra-corporeal thing is transformed into a representative image, as the result of a spatial movement through

experienced time. Each movement in space has a duration. The Bergsonian notion of space and experienced time and Minkowski's remarks on psychopathology are of fundamental importance.¹⁴

Freud deepened the concept of the symbol and studied the particularities of the dream symbol, which he defined as an 'oneiric distortion'. In dreams, too, there is a critical psychological function, always exercised by the super-ego, which 'awakes' in dreams to censure and impose its cultural rules.

In order to avoid criticism, the ego works out a strategy to mask the individual's unconscious wishes and needs. For Freud the disguise of wishes played an important role in the theory of symbolism and in the relationship that it has with the super-ego: in order to avoid the censorship of the super-ego, the figure on whom the individual's wishes are directed is masked. The 'vocation' of desire cannot be expressed directly: the symbol is an indirect expression, a manipulatory 'solution' in order to avoid the criticism of 'society', which is always present, 'suffering from insomnia' and disguised as the super-ego (the super-ego is also, for Melanie Klein, an internalized object). What the super-ego censors in the super-ego-dominated mentality of Freud and his time is above all sexuality: the Victorian society of Freud's day demanded that 'desire' be hidden. The symbol is the privileged mediation—and mask—of desire. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud considers the dream symbol and its mediating function as the product of a distortion characteristic of the modalities of the dream world. Disguise and transformations of both the form and content of the dream symbol are based on the need to communicate while avoiding the demands and opposition of the super-ego.

In the dreams related by Freud concerning his father's death (which inspired his theory of dreams), the super-ego appears in a critical way, apparently hidden, but often in complicity with Freud's defensive ego: pain and guilt close his eyes.

On the other hand, the super-ego cathected by Freud's guilt-laden intentionality forms an alliance with him by suggesting to him that he should not open his eyes. The reality of the father's loss is too painful to assume and the super-ego assumes a defensive role in the service of negation, as if he were saying: 'My son, you must not look beyond what is necessary, what is permitted'. This 'limit' imposed by the super-ego is to be found in several myths: beyond certain limits, Narcissus must not look at himself in the pool and Oedipus must not look too closely into the abyss of his origins.

In Ovid's version Narcissus is the product of a violent copulation between a river, Cephissus, and the stream Lyriope. Narcissus, then, is the son of water, beloved of the nymphs (aquatic creatures), and he wants to look at and return to his origins. He wants to transgress the law, *dike*, but he is punished for wanting to see the moment at which he was conceived—the primal scene.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche speaks of Oedipus as a hero who wanted to look into the depths of the abyss and who had to pay a price, his eyes, for doing so.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* Jocasta expresses herself in two ways on this matter. First, she expresses relief at the announcement of the death of Polybius, king of Corinth and Oedipus' presumed father: 'Great eye open is the paternal tomb'. The Greek expression 'tafos', meaning tomb, might be translated as funeral, which allows us to use Sophocles' text again for a reading of Freud's dream concerning his father's death.¹⁵ Second, Jocasta says to Oedipus, who wants to know at all costs the truth about his past: 'By all the gods, do not seek further, if you love life, my pain must be enough for you'. Like Narcissus,