

WISHING FOR A NETWORK:

Sigmund Freud's Autoanalytic Conceptions between Vienna and Paris

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¹ Freud, Sigmund: *Gesammelte Werke [GW]*. Ed. by Anna Freud et al. Vol. II/III. London: Imago 1942; Freud, Sigmund: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works [SE]*. Vol. V. London: Hogarth 1958. – My translations throughout this article modify those of the *Standard Edition of Sigmund Freud's works*, with further recourse to the renderings by Brill, A.A. (Ed. and transl.): *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Random House 1938 and by Crick, Joyce (tr.): *Sigmund Freud: The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oxford: Oxford UP 1999. Here: SE V, p. 525; GW II/III, p. 530.

² Cf. Kudzus, W.G.: *Irma's Skin: Freud's Dream Poetry*. In: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 7 (2002), pp. 127-129.

³ Cf. Deleuze, Gilles/Guattari, Félix: *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. Mille Plateaux. Paris: Minuit 1980, pp. 9-37.

»In the most thoroughly interpreted dreams«, Freud writes in a pivotal passage in *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

one often has to leave a spot in the dark, because during the work of interpretation one becomes aware that at that point a tangle [»Knäuel«] of dream thoughts arises which resists being disentangled [»der sich nicht entwirren will«] and which moreover makes no further contributions to the dream content. This then is the dream's navel, the spot where it sits upon the unrecognized. After all, the dream thoughts which one encounters in the course of interpretation have to – as a general rule – remain without closure, and they must branch out toward all sides into the net-like entanglement [»netzartige Verstrickung«] of our world of thought. It is from some denser spot of this network [»Geflechts«] that the dream wish then arises like a mushroom from its mycelium.¹

»Mycelium«, the web of hairlike fibers in the mushroom's underground, a web that with certain mushrooms may stretch for miles and miles – this mycelium is closely tied here to the »net-like entanglement« of our cognitive world. In their interweaving with the world of dreams, cognitive efforts take on metaphoric and poetic forms. The network, *Geflecht*, spawns the dream wish »from some denser«, »dichteren«, spot, a place in the proximity of *Dichtung*, poetry.²

In Freud's topography of entanglement, the specific place at which the dream wish parts from the underlying network remains unmapped. This elusive spot resists pinpointing, an articulation on a trajectory from here to there, from a point of origin to a target. Somewhere in the metaphorically and poetically inflected mushroom underground, the dream wish separates from the mental network.

This network precedes the image of the navel. Tied to the distinct event of birth, the navel does not encompass the range of meanings, complications, and indeterminacies involved in the *Geflecht*, the network's interentangled weave. Freud characterizes the navel as the point of entry into the network in whose depths and expanses the dream wish is beginning to take its mental shape. In its specificity and centrality, its clearly discernible presence, this navel marks the place of a secondary birth, away from the locus of dream desire in its early, poetically inflected form. The intricate network that expands beyond and before the navel is thoroughly decentralized and asymmetrical: a decisive event might occur anywhere in its borderless terrain. The thoughts running through the interconnected pathways of this network hardly have a chance to come upon the early appearance of the wish that animates them, that *dichtere*, »denser«, spot beyond the realm of concrete perception.

If the image of a rhizome, in which any point is connected to any other,³ emerges in Freud's dream network, it does so for an instant only: Freud insists on a material density of the *Geflecht*, and the dream wish »arises« from the network as a tree does from its system of roots. A hierarchical, arborescent model remains in place. Fittingly, the network in Freud's text connects with the dream's navel in a sedentary image. Occupying a certain spot on top of the underground network, this navel contributes to a firmly marked division between certainties of interpretation and an underlying, elusively complex region.

In this division as well as in the density of the *Geflecht*, the tangle's compact nature, Freud hardly makes room for spaces between threads, for signs of decomposition, let alone for an absence of substance and signification. He holds on to the navel as it were, that marker of birth, and to a dream wish tied to a particular, densely substantial spot. Yet in spite of this effort at territorial signification, no specific topographical result comes forth. The navel, to be sure, designates a central place between clearly discernible dream thoughts and elusively complex entanglements. Yet the early emergence of the dream wish occurs somewhere to the side, somewhere along the threads of the network, away from the navel's tangible presence.

In this occurrence at the side, the network's aterritorial potential registers in contradistinction to Freud's quest for material density and conceptual inscription. The network does not have a central spot. In this, as well as in its metaphoric and poetic dimensions, the network resists Freud's search for a conclusion, »Abschluß« (GW II/III, p. 530).

4 In his insightful analysis, Solms, without focusing on the conception of the network, emphasizes the far-reaching significance of Freud's scientific writings. Cf. Solms, Mark: *Une introduction aux travaux neuroscientifiques de Sigmund Freud*. In: Geerardyn, Filip/van de Vijver, Gertrudis (Eds.): *Aux sources de la psychoanalyse. Une analyse des premiers écrits de Freud (1877-1900)*. Paris: L'Harmattan 1998, pp. 23-42. – For a variety of recent investigations of early Freud cf. Geerardyn/van de Vijver 1998 as well as van de Vijver, Gertrudis/Geerardyn, Filip (Eds.): *The Pre-Psychoanalytic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. London: Karnac 2002.

5 London: Imago 1952.

6 Cf. Deleuze/Guattari 1980, pp. 434-527.

7 London: Hogarth 1962.

8 Cf. Didier Anzieu: *Créer/Détruire*. Paris: Dunod 1996, pp. 9-25.

9 Cf. Grinstein, Alexander: *Sigmund Freud's Dreams*. New York: International UP 1980, p. 434.

It is no coincidence that in his attempt at conceptualizing dream interpretation Freud employs the notion of the network. His early scientific publications, well before the beginnings of explicit psychoanalytic thought, abound with the vocabulary of the network. The seemingly factual descriptiveness of Freud's early scientific writing is strongly suggestive of his future, more theoretical work.⁴ In the notion of the network and in its various realizations, transformations, and permutations, key ingredients of psychoanalytic exploration begin to appear long before the latter's perceived onset.

Freud's earliest scientific publication (1877) investigates the »tissue components« (SE III, p. 227) – »gewebliche Zusammensetzung« (GW I, p. 463)⁵ – of sex organs in eels. His second 1877 publication analyzes »root-fibres« (SE III, p. 228) – »Wurzelfasern« (GW I, p. 464) – in fish larvae. In 1878, Freud expands on this investigation of early development in fish. His considerations draw on the vocabulary of the network in a manner structurally analogous to the mycelium passage in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Twenty-one years will pass before the publication of *Die Traumdeutung* in November 1899, but the language of the network and of the difference between an arborescent centrality and intensely rhizomorphic, if tightly checked tendencies is already there. »Transitioning« – »durchziehende« (GW I, p. 464) – fibers are to be distinguished from those that are »adjoining« – »angelehnte« (ibid.). The latter ones, Freud formulates in a nomadically⁶ inflected fashion, »merely mingle with« – »sich [...] bloß beimengen« – the root elements – »Wurzelemente« (GW I, p. 464). These »elements of the roots« (SE III, p. 229)⁷ appear in the immediate proximity of the adjoining fibers, but for the moment the arborescent metaphor does not take over Freud's discourse. For a moment, arborescence itself seems destabilized: although in the service of structural cohesiveness, the »durchziehende« – »transitioning« – fibers share a nomadic quality with their commingling pendants.

For a moment, then, the network enters into an uncertain space between a world of roots, trees, hierarchical order, and a realm of »scattered cells« (SE III, p. 229) – »versprengten Zellen« (GW I, p. 464). These cells, whose exact location remains unknown, function as an interweavement – »Verknüpfung« (GW I, p. 464) – in the region of the spinal cord. The network implicit in this interweavement surfaces in the final sentence of Freud's text, in which fibers branch out in a variety of ways, forming forks and pathways, and finally a »very fine nerve-net« (SE III, p. 229) – »Nervennetz« (GW I, p. 465). Yet at this final point, Freud once again casts his net tightly. The scattered cells give way to distinctly organized and clearly visible roots and branches. The »very fine nerve-net«, Freud observes, can be stained with »gold chloride« (SE III, p. 229).

Throughout Freud's early scientific publications, the language of the network with its fibers and interweavements continues to appear, and so does the tension between arborescent and rhizomorphic conceptions. Very fine distinctions remain the explicit target of Freud's scientific enterprise, and very intricate interweavements and resistances, much like the »scattered cells« (ibid.), destabilize his effort at achieving such certainty.

The notion and the language of the network and of its divergent manifestations in hierarchical and decentralized forms not only pervades, but – more formatively – underlies Freud's early scientific and subsequent psychoanalytic work. Elusively patterned interweavements appear, for example, in the inceptions of psychoanalytic procedures between Vienna and Paris, in intercultural spaces of translation that defy topographically static definitions.

In these intercultural and interlinguistic spaces, the network exhibits holes, charged thoroughfares in its weave; Freud's prose then chokes on its more assertive pronouncements, lets go of its material fixations in flows and evacuations whose disgusting aspects illuminate and inspire a megalomaniac vision in which the text moves from the frustrations of the lecture hall in Vienna to the heights of Notre Dame from where Rabelais' Gargantua urinates onto Paris. A certain lecture in Vienna had seemed worthless to Freud, he relates in the segment on affects in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It had been a »Vorlesung« (GW II/III, p. 473) on the connection between hysteria and the perversions, something in the manner of a reading off of material that had been there to begin with. His scholarly pronouncements, Freud feels, had been »void« or rather »disrobed« – »entkleidet« (ibid.) – »of all value«, and in this mood he visits a »Café« (ibid.) with its *accent aigu*, a nuance worth noting in light of Didier Anzieu's observations on the appearance of French inflections at the onset of psychoanalytic thought.⁸ Having »choked« on his »Kipfel« (ibid.) in this café, Freud that night looks at Garnier's illustrations of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and reads Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's novella *Die Leiden eines Knaben* with its setting at the royal court in France. Freud's dream that night – in July or August 1898⁹ – reads as follows:

¹⁰ Cf. Kudsus, W.G.: The Process of Translation in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 6 (2001), pp. 191-193.

A hill, and on this something like an outdoor toilet, a very long bench, at its end a large toilet hole. The edge in the very back is thickly covered with heaps of excrement of all sizes and degrees of freshness. Behind the bench some bushes. I urinate onto the bench; a long stream of urine washes it all clear, the pats of excrement detach themselves easily and drop into the opening. As if at the end there was something left. (GW II/III, p. 472)

The feeling of »disgust« (ibid.), which Freud in his commentary imputes to this dream's readers, contrasts with his own lack of disgust, which he emphasizes in his subsequent dream analysis. There Freud writes of the »intimate associative linkage« – »innige assoziative Verkettung« (GW II/III, p. 474) – through which a particular oneiric affect can connect with opposite feelings and thus produce a new emotional tonality. His dream thoughts lead Freud to feelings of grandeur, »Übermensch« (GW II/III, p. 472) feelings in which he adopts Gargantua's urinary action against the Parisians from the top of Notre Dame as his own. The »intimate associative linkage«, through which disgust turns into Freud's megalomaniac dream associations, proceeds along an intercultural course between his Viennese and Parisian activities. Conversely, the grandiose dream thoughts, which reflect Freud's desired escape from Vienna, are hidden from view and conscious censorship in the dream's disgusting content. In the configuration of the dream network, then, the disgusting dream appears in upper layers of the connective tissue, a relatively accessible location, so that Freud can write of a specific chain of associations, a »Verkettung« (GW II/III, p. 474) through which elation turns into disgust.

Yet immediately below this upper layer, and literally in the text below Freud's dream account, the network's interweavements turn more complex as they enter into the lower reaches of the dream mycelium. Language now turns increasingly ambivalent, intercultural, and fluid in movements of translation and intense vacuity. Already the »large toilet hole«, which turns into »the opening« toward dream's end, suggests a point of entry for the urinary productions of Freud's Gargantuan dream wish. In the course of Freud's dream analysis, his intercultural and interlingual network acquires a decentralized complexity, a rhizomorphic, unruly quality in which events do not link conclusively, but in tentative, momentary, inexplicable ways. »As if at the end there was something left«, he writes – but has not just »all« been washed clear? In his explicit formulations, Freud continues to negate this residue. »That all excrement vanishes that quickly under the stream«, he asserts, »that is the motto: *Afflavit et dissipati sunt*, which one day I will use as the heading for the chapter on the therapy of hysteria« (GW II/III, p. 473).

In the now Latinized interlinguistic network, a Freudian slip, *Fehlleistung*, occurs with the superfluous »Af-« in »*Afflavit*«, suggesting an adjoining phenomenon reminiscent of the scattered, adjacent fibers in Freud's early work. Earlier in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud gives the correct quote with »*Flavit*«, but performs – again without correction – another *Fehlleistung* that again opens up a tightly structured configuration. His dream thoughts between German, French, Spanish, Latin, and English arrive at the following »chain of associations«, »Assoziationsreihe«: »*Huflattich – lattice – Salat – Salathund [...]*« (GW II/III, p. 218). »*Lattice*« – »*Git-terwerk*« in the German equivalent of Freud's English association – appears erroneously instead of »lettuce« – »*Salat*« – here, presenting a richly allusive, patterned opening instead of the dog's specific nutrition.¹⁰

Against the grain of his explicit argumentation, Freud's writing reflects the incongruity and perforations of an underlying network. Again an interlinguistic flow adjoins the opening, as in the dream between Vienna and Paris: »*Huflattich*«, Freud translates, means »*pisse-en-lit*«. »I do not know if I do so correctly«, he comments on this particular rendering (GW II/III, p. 218). In the realm of *Fehlleistung* and of the network, correct knowledge disappears. And in any particular language, the network that temporarily energizes, and in the end absorbs such knowledge remains mostly invisible. In the error-laden movements of cultural transfer and translation, a wish arises as from the mushroom's mycelium, somewhere to the side, in the density of an entanglement.

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