

Heidegger, Freud, and the other clearing

“I begin the psychoanalytic treatment by assuring him that when he closes his eyes he will see images, or ideas will come into his mind which he should tell me.” The fourteen-year-old analysand closes his eyes and recalls his last activity before the session with Freud began:

“He had been playing a board game with his uncle, and now sees the board in front of him. He considers various positions that are favourable or unfavourable, moves that one should not make. Then he sees a dagger lying on the board, an object which his father owns, but which his imagination has removed onto the board. Then there is a sickle on the board, then it is joined by a scythe, and now the image of an old farmer makes its appearance, mowing the grass in front of the boy’s faraway home with a scythe.”¹

Why did the youth see images (*Bilder*) instead of nothing at all, mere darkness? Freud knew what to expect when a patient closes his eyes – he *assures* the boy (*ich ihm versichere*) that images or ideas (*Einfälle*) will come to him. Freud insists that in such circumstances “a complete absence of any ideational subject-matter is quite impossible.”²

Corresponding to Freud’s assurance that ideation will happen in the session is Heidegger’s assurance that the as-structure is always with us, sustaining world. He says,

“We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things . . . rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things [*von den Dingen weghören*], divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly.”³

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1899] (tr. Joyce Crick 1999) 410; *ich ihm versichere, er werde nach dem Augenschluss Bilder sehen oder Einfälle bekommen*. Once again thanks to Richard G. Klein for his bilingual publication of Freud’s works, here: <https://www.freud2lacan.com/>

² *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume V: On Dreams (1901)* (ed. James Strachey, American ed. 1952) 635; *ein solches Ausbleiben eines Vorstellungsinhaltes sei ganz unmöglich*.

³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (tr. Albert Hofstadter 1971) 25-26.

In a familiar case, however, we **do** really first perceive a throng of sensations. Close your eyes and what do you see? Darkness, right, but not uniform, mere, bare darkness. The darkness has perceptible texture. There are lighter bits or bands, and these slowly change. You can watch these – attend them – but they’re unengaging, boring. After a brief time you become aware that you are no longer seeing sensations and that images and thoughts are occurring to you; your attention is now in a mode altogether distinct from watching the textured darkness which was there when you closed your eyes. The textured dark is no longer there, meaning is there.

The phenomenon is easy to summon when you’re already a little drowsy. Try it at night when you close your eyes to sleep. Make yourself look at the darkness behind your eyelids and watch it. Soon attention slips and imagery begins. One can retain just enough awareness to realize the changeover **has** taken place, and note it. This noticing cuts off the flow of imagery and returns the mind to wakefulness; then the whole process can start over.

The imagery that begins in falling asleep is designated ‘hypnagogic experience.’⁴ James Joyce depicts it happening to Leopold Bloom at about 9 o’clock in the evening soon after Bloom’s “rite of Onan” on Sandymount strand. Leaning back against a rock Bloom thinks, “Short snooze now if I had. . . . Just close my eyes a moment. Won’t sleep, though. Half dream. It never comes the same. Bat again. No harm in him. Just a few.” Then:

O sweetie all your little girlwhite up I saw dirty bracegirdle made me do
love sticky we two naughty Grace darling she him half past the bed met
him pike hoses frillies for Raoul de perfume your wife black hair heave
under embon Seniorita young eyes Mulvey plump bubs me breadvan
Winkle red slippers she rusty sleep wander years of dreams return tail
end Agendath swoony lovey showed me her next year in drawers return
next in her next her next.⁵

⁴ Copious references in Valdas Noreika *et al.*, “Intrusions of a drowsy mind: neural markers of phenomenological unpredictability,” 6 *Frontiers in Psychology* 202 (2015); <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00202/full>

⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922); ‘Nausicaa,’ lines 18205-18217 here: <http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/~rac101/concord/texts/ulysses/files/ulysses13.html#18211>

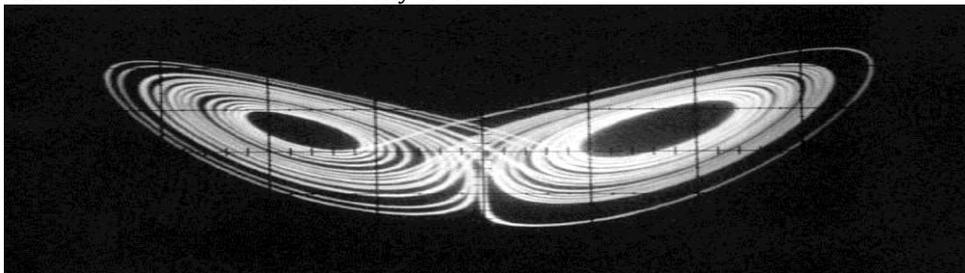
Bloom's desire and his wife's infidelity form two foci of a chaotic attractor⁶ structuring his 'half dream;' which Joyce renders as a swirling flotsam of words—words we have read in Bloom's encounters and thoughts and memories as we've tagged along with him through the "long day I've had;" fragments Freud calls *Tagesreste*, the day's debris.

Heidegger remarked to Medard Boss that "The dream world cannot be separated as an object domain unto itself, but rather the dream world belongs in a certain way to the continuity of being-in-the-world. It is likewise a being-in-the-world."⁷ The psychiatrist glossed Heidegger's remark a few years later: "At one time, a person exists as a dreaming being (*Wesen*); at other times, as a waking being. Being awake and dreaming: two equally autochthonous—though very different—ways or possibilities of existing on the part of an always unitary human Dasein."⁸

If the dream world is likewise a being-in-the-world then, so the guess goes, the dreamwork is its taking-as and the unconscious its clearing.

Freud evidently believed the unconscious to be the dimension of a care-dynamic distinct from that of conscious life. The latent states of mental life (*die latenten Zustände des Seelenlebens*), he writes, "can be described using all the categories we apply to conscious psychic acts, such as ideas, aspirations, resolutions [*Vorstellungen, Strebungen, EntschlieÙungen*] and so on. Indeed, we have to say of some of these latent states that the only way they differ from conscious ones is precisely in their not being conscious."⁹ Freud's unconscious in Lacan's view "is not at all the romantic unconscious of imaginative creation. It is not the locus of the divinities of night. . . . To all these forms of unconscious, ever more or less linked to some obscure will regarded as primordial, to something pre-conscious, what Freud opposes is the revelation that at the level of the unconscious there is something at all points homologous with what occurs

⁶An instance of the Lorenz 'butterfly' attractor:



⁷ *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters* [1959-1972] (ed. Medard Boss, tr. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay 2001) 229.

⁸ Medard Boss, "Dreaming and the Dreamed in the Daseinanalytical Way of Seeing," 60 *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 235, 236 (1977).

⁹ "The Unconscious" [1915] in Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious* (tr. Graham Frankland 2005) 51-52.

at the level of the subject—this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege.”¹⁰

Freud writes of “a topographical separation” of the unconscious and conscious systems.¹¹ Though we must also say of the unconscious that it “remains active through its so-called derivatives [*Abkömmlinge*], that it is open to influences from life, and that it constantly influences – and, conversely, is even subject to influences from – the pre-conscious [part of the conscious system].”¹² Topographically separated, functionally connected.

Apt here is Thomas Sheehan’s trope that we are “a hermeneutical field of force, like a magnet that draws things together into unities of sense insofar as these things are connected with a possibility of ourselves as the final point of reference.”¹³ So Freud’s conception of a topographical separation suggests the image of the clearing and the unconscious as each the attractor fundamental to its respective realm. Or, echoing Boss now, that each is a focus, like the mutualistic pair in the Lorenz ‘butterfly,’ of the single chaotic attractor that is human sense-making. The Freudian unconscious is then the co-ordinate second situs of ontology, the other clearing.

Freud writes that “recognition of the unconscious by the ego is always expressed in negative formulations.”¹⁴ The negative, diffident formulations at the beginning of Heidegger’s meditation on “a well-known painting by Van Gogh” recognize the need for an understanding proceeding from elsewhere, from ‘away.’ So long as we

“simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they merely stand there in the picture, we shall never discover [*nie erfahren*] what the equipmental being of the equipment in truth is. From Van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell [*nicht einmal feststellen*] where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding [*herum ist nichts*] this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil [*nicht einmal Erdklumpen*] from the field or the field-path sticking to them, which would at least hint at their use. A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more [*und nichts weiter*]. And yet—”¹⁵

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* [Seminar XI] (ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Alan Sheridan 1977) 24.

¹¹ “The Unconscious” 58.

¹² *Id.* 73.

¹³ *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (2015) 125.

¹⁴ “Negation” [1925] in *The Penguin Freud Reader* (ed. Adam Phillips, tr. Graham Frankland 2006) 99; *die Anerkennung des Unbewußten von seiten des Ichs sich in einer negativen Formel ausdrückt.*

¹⁵ “The Origin of the Work of Art” 32-33.

With the phrase “And yet” (*Und dennoch*) Heidegger signals twice in the essay that some changeover is about to happen. “And yet” in this first instance dissolves into this shot:

“Out of the dark opening [*Aus der dunklen Öffnung*], out of the inside of the shoe which some woman has worn to equip herself outside gapes the burden of labour [*die Mühsal der Arbeitsschritte*]. In the roughness and heaviness of the shoes is stored up the existence of a dogged figure walking slowly across the ploughed fields, which stretch out into the distance, with their unvaryingly straight furrows, in a raw wind. The leaden damp of the soil is on the leather. Beneath the soles you can feel the loneliness of the path across the fields stretching out as the evening closes in. In the stuff of the shoes the buried call of the earth is audible again, you can feel its silent gift of ripening wheat and experience the mystery of its self-renunciation in the fallow bleakness of the fields in winter. What this stuff gives off is the fear of those who never complain about where the next loaf of bread will come from, their silent joy when once more they survive a time of need, their trembling before a birth and their shivering in the presence of death.”¹⁶

All that “out of the dark opening.” The equipment-being of the shoes was found, Heidegger says, not by description, report, or observation, “but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh’s painting. This painting spoke [*hat gesprochen*]. In the vicinity [*in der Nähe*] of the work we were suddenly somewhere else [*anderswo*] than we usually tend to be.”¹⁷ As he says in an earlier lecture course of such experience, we were ‘away.’ And “this *potential* to be away ultimately belongs to the way in which human being is in general.”¹⁸

In Heidegger’s re-creation of being-away (*Weg-sein*) we see images of a peasant woman’s life; images accrued from motifs Heidegger had encountered in other paintings by van Gogh. Lesley Chamberlain cites a letter Heidegger wrote to his wife from Amsterdam in August, 1931:

“I spent a whole morning at the van Goghs – almost the entire exhibition from the autumn is there – what you can see in them is the sharp development after 1888. . . . One only realizes the whole luminosity and

¹⁶ Lesley Chamberlain’s translation in *A Shoe Story: Van Gogh, the Philosophers and the West* (2014) 33.

¹⁷ “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Hofstadter’s translation at 34-35.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (tr. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker 1995) 63.

life of the pictures when one sees them after the grim and somber ones from the Brabant time.”¹⁹

The Origin of the Work of Art takes the painting of the shoes as gravid with somber van Goghs: desolate wheatfields, peat fields, winter scenes; peasants working their plots, trudging along the rows, or sitting with head held in sorrow; peasant women digging potatoes, binding sheaves, carrying coal, gleaning a field. Heidegger has only to stare into *der dunklen Öffnung* and the darkness gapes onto scenes of peasant life in van Gogh’s Brabant idiom.

“The burden of the nothing” pervades the Brabant idiom. As Heidegger wrote in 1929, “Negation should not be seen as the only (much less the primary) activity in which openness [Dasein] relates to and is shaken by the action of the nothing. Cruel hostility and the sting of hatred go deeper than the formalities of mental negations. Painful denial and ruthless refusal are closer to—and bitter privation is a greater burden of [*Lastender ist die Herbe des Entbehrens*]—the nothing.”²⁰

As it was Joyce’s so also language is Heidegger’s medium of expression. He *narrates* the phenomenon of the painting’s opening up (*Eröffnung*), the unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) of the shoes’ meaning. Hugh Kenner identifies the relevant principle at work in the language of *Ulysses*, namely: *the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s*. Joyce’s words are in such delicate equilibrium, Kenner writes, “like the components of a sensitive piece of apparatus, that they detect the gravitational field of the nearest person.” Joyce’s words attune the narrative voice to the character moving in its field. Kenner notes this as “something apparently new in fiction, the normally neutral narrative vocabulary pervaded by a little cloud of idioms which a character might use if he were managing the narrative;” “one person’s sense of things inconspicuously giving place to another’s.”²¹ In Kenner’s terms while Heidegger stands in the nearness of the painting his sense of it is pervaded by the little cloud of idioms stirring in his memory of other van Goghs; his describing-reporting-observing self gives place to another.

¹⁹ *A Shoe Story* 49.

²⁰ Thomas Sheehan, “Reading Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’,” 1 *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 181, 195(2001); https://religiousstudies.stanford.edu/WWW/Sheehan/pdf/heidegger_texts_online/1929%20WHAT%20IS%20METAPHYSICS.pdf

²¹ Hugh Kenner, *Joyce’s Voices* (1978) 16-17.

Freud's prescription for the attunement required of the analyst is likewise to let one sense of things give place to some other:

"he should orientate [*zuwenden*] his own unconscious, as a kind of receptive organ, towards the communicative unconscious of the patient, attuning himself to the analysand [*auf den Analysierten einstellen*] as the receiver of a telephone is attuned to the disc [*zum Teller eingestellt ist*] . . . so, from the derivatives [*Abkömmlinge*] of the patient's unconscious which are communicated to him, the unconscious of the doctor is enabled to re-create [*wiederherzustellen*] the unconscious that has conditioned the patient's associations [*welches die Einfälle des Kranken hat determiniert*]." ²²

"All that goes on between analyst and patient," Freud informs us, "is that they talk to each other."²³ Yet the patient's talk must not conform to the norms of ordinary connected speech. The analysand's talk must follow instead the only rule of psychoanalysis—speak all that comes to mind.

"Your narrative should be different in one respect from ordinary conversation. Quite rightly, you would normally try to hang on to the threads which hold your account together, and avoid being distracted by intrusive notions and irrelevant thoughts, so that you don't get carried away, as they say [*um nicht aus dem Hundertsten ins Tausendste zu kommen*]. But here you are meant to proceed differently. You will notice that during your narrative a number of thoughts will occur to you, which you would like to reject because of certain critical objections. You will be tempted to say that this or that does not fit in here, it's completely unimportant, or it's pointless, therefore you don't need to say it. Don't give in to this criticism, but say it anyway, precisely because you are averse to doing so. You will learn and appreciate the reason for this prescription later; it is in fact the only one you have to follow. So you should say everything that comes into your head. [*Sagen Sie also alles, was Ihnen durch den Sinn geht*]." ²⁴

The speaker is to let herself get carried away – "it is a matter of producing in the psyche a condition sharing a certain similarity . . . with the condition present just before falling asleep."²⁵ And by way of all that away-saying there will come to light relations of

²² "Advice to Doctors on Psychoanalytic Treatment" [1912] in *Wild Analysis* (tr. Alan Bance 2002) 37.

²³ "The Question of Lay Analysis" [1926] in *Wild Analysis* 98-99.

²⁴ "On Initiating Treatment" [1913] in *Wild Analysis* 55-56.

²⁵ *The Interpretation of Dreams* 82.

meaning – “new-found material for self-awareness.”²⁶ Over the course of analysis these meaningful connections will emerge as the *topoi* of an entire hidden dimension of intelligibility. Having discovered this second situs of meaning Freud was concerned to explore its topography, as he called it, in himself and in his patients (“*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*”).

That exploration, so thought Wittgenstein, is liable to produce myths. “Analysis,” Wittgenstein said, “is likely to do harm.”

“Because although one may discover in the course of it various things about oneself, one must have a very strong and keen and persistent criticism in order to recognize and see through the mythology that is offered or imposed on one. There is an inducement to say, ‘Yes, of course, it must be like that’. A powerful mythology.”²⁷

Heidegger, too, warned that psychoanalysis can mislead us by inducing its own, so to speak, metaphysics of psychic causality. He wrote to Boss that “Dreams are not symptoms and consequences of something lying hidden behind, but they themselves are in what they show and *only* this. Only with *this* does their emerging essence [*Wesen*] become worthy of questioning.”²⁸

For Heidegger the most worthy of questioning about any phenomenon is why phenomena; why does intelligibility, meaningfulness, the as-structure occur at all? He approaches this fundamental issue in *The Origin of the Work of Art* by resuming the mode of negative diffidence:

“There is much in being that man cannot master. There is but little that comes to be known. What is known remains inexact, what is mastered insecure. What is, is never of our making or even merely the product of our minds, as it might all too easily seem. When we contemplate this whole as one, then we apprehend, so it appears, all that is—though we grasp it crudely enough.”

Signaling the emergence of the photographic negative of *der dunklen Öffnung* he goes on: “And yet—

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (ed. Cyril Barrett n.d.) 51-52.

²⁸ *Zollikon Seminars* 245.

“beyond what is, not away from it but before it, there is still something else that happens. In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know. That which is can only be, as a being, if it stands within and stands out within what is lighted in this clearing. Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are. Thanks to this clearing, beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees.”²⁹

Heidegger never stopped questioning this ‘before what is.’ “The clearing is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent. . . . But where does the clearing come from and how is it given? What speaks in the ‘There is/It gives?’”³⁰

In 1929 he ventures that *das Nichts selbst nichtet*, “the nothing itself ‘nothings’.”³¹ Heidegger’s ‘*das Nichts*’ is not, any more than his ‘*Sein*,’ a physical or ontological term. Both are phenomenological terms. *Das Nichts* designates not ‘the vacuum’ or ‘the void’ but the absurd, the meaningless, the senseless, the nonresponsive-to-human-concerns; “the incomprehensible pure and simple,” as Heidegger characterizes nature: *das Unverständliche schlechthin*.³² The action of *das Nichts* “pushes us back and directs us toward the beings that are slipping away as-a-whole, and in so doing it discloses these beings in their full and heretofore hidden strangeness as the radically other, i.e., other than the nothing [*als das schlechthin Andere – gegenüber dem Nichts*].”³³ As meaningful, radically other than meaningless.

Freud points to something like the revelation of the nothing with his image of the dream’s navel, invoking it twice in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In chapter VII on the psychology of the dream-processes Freud brings together “a number of somewhat disconnected points” among which is that

²⁹ “The Origin of the Work of Art” 51.

³⁰ “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (ed. David Farrell Krell, tr. Joan Stambaugh 1977) 384, 392. *Die Lichtung ist das Offene für alles An- und Abwesende. . . . Woher aber und wie gibt es die Lichtung? Was spricht im Es gibt?*

³¹ “Reading Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’” 193.

³² *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (tr. Theodore Kisiel 1985) 217. As Lacan says we are “up against the wall of language. . . . There is nothing that is anything but outer darkness to us beyond this wall.” “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (tr. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg 2006) 260.

³³ “Reading Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’” 193.

“The best-interpreted dreams often have a passage that has to be left in the dark, because we notice in the course of interpretation that a knot of dream-thoughts [*ein Knäuel von Traumgedanken*] shows itself just there, refusing to be unraveled, but also making no further contribution to the dream-content. This is the dream’s navel [*der Nabel*], and the place beneath which lies the Unknown [*die Stelle, an der er dem Unerkannten aufsitzt*].”³⁴

He first mentions this point in a footnote to the analysis of his dream of ‘Irma’s injection’ in chapter II, the core of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and précis of psychoanalysis. There he says “Every dream [*Jeder Traum*] has at least one place where it is unfathomable [*unergründlich*], the navel, as it were, by which it is connected to the unknown [*mit dem Unerkannten zusammenhängt*].”³⁵

Lacan and Derrida take this image in a *Nichts*-like way.³⁶

Lacan interprets *l’ombilic du rêve* as “this abyssal relation to that which is most unknown, which is the hallmark of an exceptional, privileged experience. In which the real [*un réel*] is apprehended beyond all mediation, be it imaginary or symbolic.” Such privileged experiences “are characterized by the relation which is established with an absolute other [*un autre absolu*], I mean an other beyond all intersubjectivity [*un autre au-delà de toute intersubjectivité*].”³⁷

Derrida suspects the navel of the dream is the point of ultimate resistance to analysis, the non-analysable. All other resistance encountered in analysis

“has meaning. And truth. By overcoming resistances, we accede to oneiric formations full of meaning (*sinnreiche*). Progress is an approach to, an approximation of this meaning (*Ahnung dieses Sinnes*). Resistance must be interpreted; it has as much meaning as what it opposes; it is just as charged with meaning and thus just as interpretable as that which it disguises or displaces: in truth, it has *the same meaning*, but dialectically or polemically adverse, if one can say that.”³⁸

³⁴ *The Interpretation of Dreams* 341.

³⁵ *Id.* 88.

³⁶ See David Sigler, “The Navel of the Dream: Freud, Derrida and Lacan on the Gap where ‘Something Happens,’” 39 *SubStance* 17 (2010).

³⁷ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955* (ed. J.-A. Miller, tr. Sylvia Tomaselli 1988) 176-177.

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Resistances” in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (tr. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas 1998) 13.

Resistance signifies. But the navel of the dream? Does this resistance like all other psychoanalytic resistance belong, “along with what it resists, to the order of sense, of a sense whose secret is only the hidden secret, the dissimulated meaning, the veiled truth: to be interpreted, analyzed, made explicit, explained”? Derrida questions whether the “in-soluble knot, the umbilicus, is of the stuff of sense or whether it remains radically heterogeneous, in its very secret, to signifiable sense;” “a resistance that *has no meaning*—and that, moreover, is not a resistance.”³⁹

Heidegger speaks of *das Nichts* as an intrinsic pulsion:

“The nothing does not draw us into itself; rather, its essence is to push us away [*ist wesentlich abweisend*]. In pushing us back away from itself [*Abweisung von sich*], it directs us to the receding beings that it lets slip away in terms of their whole . . . this is the *essence* of the nothing [*das Wesen des Nichts*], the *action* of the nothing [*die Nichtung*].”⁴⁰

“The action of the nothing consists in directing us to [the being of] what-is, and it does this constantly [*das Nichts nichtet unausgesetzt*], whether or not our everyday knowledge is actually aware of the occurrence.”⁴¹ We become explicitly aware – seldom and briefly – of the nothing through dread; “dread is required to disclose it in an originary way.”⁴²

The nothing connected to the dream’s navel is not only the limit of analysis; another image of Freud’s suggests it is the impeller of the dynamics of dreaming. That is, the nothing **acts** in the unconscious as Heidegger says it acts without letup in everyday waking life. Immediately after the image of the dream’s navel blocking further analysis Freud continues,

“Indeed, the dream-thoughts we come upon as we interpret cannot in general but remain without closure, spinning out on all sides into the web-like fabric of our thoughts. Out of a denser patch in this tissue [*Aus einer dichteren Stelle dieses Geflechts*] the dream-wish then arises like a mushroom from its mycelium.”⁴³

³⁹ *Id.* 10, 16, 23.

⁴⁰ “Reading Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’” 192-193.

⁴¹ *Id.* 194.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *The Interpretation of Dreams* 341.

Freud's analysis of 'Irma's injection' shows the dream was, in Heidegger's phrase, "saturated with its relation to the nothing."⁴⁴ In the dream Freud's only words to Irma, whom he had after all been engaged to cure, are to reproach her (*ihr Vorwürfe zu machen*): "if you still get pains, it's really only your fault;" *Wenn du noch Schmerzen hast, so ist es wirklich nur diene Schuld*. The whole dream is a game of pass the buck. The dream ends with 'Otto' as the culprit by fantasizing that this long-time friend and junior colleague of Freud's had carelessly injected Irma with a dirty syringe, thus causing the pains which have not been relieved by Freud's treatment. Not until 1909 does Freud add that the patient in fact was suffering from undiagnosed gallstones.

At least *some* dreams are in Heidegger's terms a possibility of relating to the nothing, "powerful ways in which openness [Dasein] puts up with [*trägt*] but never masters its thrownness."⁴⁵ We vaguely sense the nothing in hostility, hatred, denial, refusal, privation, etc.; the dream of Irma's injection mushrooms from 'reproach,' *Vorwurf*. The story of that dream is the attempt to escape undeserved reproach: *dann bin ich der Vorwürfe ledig, die ich nicht verdient haben will!* "Undeserved," however, takes as given what must be established; a wish within a wish.

Freud tells us in the preamble that Otto paid him a visit. Otto had been staying with Irma's family in the country. When Freud asks him how she fares Otto replies that she is better but not completely well. The ever tetchy Freud writes that something in Otto's words or tone annoyed him. "I believed I detected a reproach [*einen Vorwurf*] in them." Irma, although relieved of hysterical anxiety, continues to have physical symptoms. In those early days Freud believed the cure was accomplished by imparting an etiology to the patient. He had proposed such a treatment-solution to Irma, a solution which did not seem acceptable to her (*die ihr nicht annehmbar erschien*); a reluctance to accept the proffered myth.

Freud – still in the factual preamble – does not respond to Otto's subtle disapproval, but instead "that same evening I wrote out Irma's case history, with the idea of giving it to Dr. M. [Josef Breuer];" i.e., justifying to an authoritative colleague the therapy administered to Irma. That night Freud has the dream.

In the analysis Freud writes that the day previous to the dream "my wife had told me that she expected a number of friends, including Irma, would be coming out to visit us on her birthday." A living reproach to Freud's nascent method of psychotherapy is

⁴⁴ "Reading Heidegger's 'What is Metaphysics?'" 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

imminently to return in the midst of his family's circle of friends, several of whom are his professional brethren.

In the dream Freud takes Irma aside at the party and, blaming the sufferer, reproaches *her* in a preemptive strike. And so on through the variations by which the dream seeks to shift the *Schuld* to any cause or agent apart from Dr. Freud's treatment. The dream is none other than the pleading of an advocate (*Das ganze Plaidoyer – nichts anderes ist dieser Traum*); a 'plea in avoidance.' Freud remarks that in the primary psychic process, the process unique to the unconscious, "a single word, especially suitable due to its multiple connections, can come to represent a whole train of thought."⁴⁶ The single word *Vorwurf* forebodes the ultimate catastrophe – that psychoanalysis should turn out to be nonsense – and spins out an elaborate dream in reaction to this avatar of the nothing.

Bernard Williams observes that "A man may have, for a lot of his life or even for just some part of it, a *ground* project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life." That is, his ground project provides "the motive force which propels him into the future, and gives him a reason for living."⁴⁷ Freud was such a person.⁴⁸ By 1895, the year of the dream, he has staked his future on the project of psychoanalysis; "putting a great deal on a possibility which has not unequivocally declared itself."⁴⁹ His joint work with Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, has only just appeared in May of that year, two months before the dream, but Breuer is already "withdrawing from the collaboration." In these days the intellectually lonely Freud must keep turning to the only person who responds to his ideas with sympathetic understanding, the Berlin crank Wilhelm Fliess. And Freud still needs a lot of cocaine.⁵⁰ Collapse now of the inchoate project of psychoanalysis would, in Williams's phrase, "remove meaning" for Freud; and a person may feel upon the collapse of his ground project "that he might as well have died."⁵¹ So the dream-wish of

⁴⁶ "The Unconscious" 81.

⁴⁷ Bernard Williams, "Persons, character and morality" in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (1981) 12-13.

⁴⁸ "a man like me cannot live without a hobbyhorse, without a consuming passion, without—in Schiller's words—a tyrant. I have found one. In its service, I know no limits." Letter of May 25, 1895 in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* (ed. tr. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson 1985) 129.

⁴⁹ Williams, "Moral Luck," *op. cit.* 23.

⁵⁰ "I need a lot of cocaine." Letter of June 12, 1895; *Complete Letters to Fliess* 132.

⁵¹ "Persons, character and morality" 13.

'Irma's injection' is a wish in the same sense as is leading a valued goat to the desert for Azazel to devour: 'take this, spare me.'⁵²

Thrownness, *Geworfenheit*, manifests to the unconscious in the action of the nothing and must be withstood *there*. The point, intimated by many common phenomena of meaning – not only dreams but also “our most personal daily experience” which “acquaints us with ideas that come into our head we do not know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how”⁵³ – is that the unconscious is the other 'there' of Dasein. There are two theres hereabouts, each taking-as 'like a house afire;' the two-lobed organ of hypervariation.

DCW July 24, 2017: Feast of Irma the Injected; anniversary of *Was ist Metaphysik?*

⁵² “Nobody knows who Azazel is.” Azazel “stands for the ‘other’ side in opposition to Jahve and his people, as the desert is the opposite of man’s fertile fields, *erga anthropōn*, as the Greeks say.” Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (1979) 64. Cf. Heidegger’s assertion that beings show up as “the radically other, i.e., other than the nothing [*gegenüber dem Nichts*].” Yet Nietzsche advises caution in asserting oppositions; for instance that death is the opposite of life. *Hüten wir uns, zu sagen, dass Tod dem Leben entgegengesetzt sei. Das Lebende ist nur eine Art des Todten, und eine sehr seltene Art.* “Let us beware of saying that death is the opposite of life. The living is only a type of what is dead – and a very rare type.” *The Gay Science* (tr. Walter Kaufmann 1974) Book 3, sec. 109. If the meaningful is to the absurd – *Sein to das Nichts* – as the living to the dead, then with the appropriate substitutions Nietzsche’s caveat goes: “Let us beware of saying that sense is the radically other of absurdity. The meaningful is only a type of what is meaningless, and a very rare type.” Heidegger said it: Hegel’s conclusion that “Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same” is “quite right” because “being itself is essentially finite and shows up only in the transcendence of openness, held out into the nothing.” “Reading Heidegger’s ‘What is Metaphysics?’” 197. *Bedeutsamkeit* is an evanescent variant of *Sinnlosigkeit*. Under Heidegger’s questioning “The nothing ceases to be the vague opposite of what-is; instead it is seen to belong to the very being of what-is.” *Ibid.* This, too, is “the language of psychoanalysis,” which “abolishes the differences and spaces that separate terms and concepts; it transforms oppositions into repetitions, and threatens to reduce discourse to a numbing display of redundancies.” Leo Bersani, “Introduction” to Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* [1930] (tr. David McLintock 2002) xx.

⁵³ “The Unconscious” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV: Papers on Metapsychology* 166-167.