

In the (Un)depths of Cognition or The Last is also the First

In anticipation of a basic principle of structural linguistics developing at the beginning of the 20th century, whereby a linguistic signifier only acquires its identity through differential referencing, i.e. only within its context with other signifiers, the German linguist Karl Abel ascertained in 1884 that in ancient languages not only can there be found a large number of words with two meanings, whereby one signifies the exact opposite of the other, but that there is also an abundance of compound words in which two words of opposite meaning are combined into a compound that has the meaning of only one of its two constituent parts. The explanation for this, and the further conclusion that in every language a large number of words originally existed which signified a thing and its opposite, was that concepts arise through comparison and that every concept is thereby the twin of its opposite. "Since one could not conceive of the concept of strength except in contrast to weakness, the word that signified 'strong' also contains a simultaneous memory of 'weak,' through which it first came into existence. In reality this word signified neither 'strong' nor 'weak' but the relationship and difference between the two which brought the two into being [...]." Even if in the further development of languages this concept of opposites was overridden by divisions, differentiation, and the splitting up of words so that modern vocabulary appears to be based on conceptual unambiguity, the antithetical double meaning has nevertheless still remained in some terms. Among many other Latin words such as *altus*, simultaneously meaning both "high" and "deep," or *sacer*, which means both "sacred" and "accursed," the English word *without* (or *with*, which originally meant "with" and "without") and the German word *Boden* (which signifies the highest and lowest points in a building) may be cited.

In 1910, Sigmund Freud picked up on these disquisitions on the opposite meanings of primal words in order to elucidate one of the results of his "Interpretation of Dreams" that had not so far been understood: the behavior of dreams as regards the category of opposite and contradiction so that opposites are preferably brought together or depicted in a unity or that

the dream takes the liberty of depicting an arbitrary element through its desired opposite. With recourse to Abel's theory, Freud could then find a linguistically based phylogenetic explanation for his notion of the regressive, archaic character of thought expression in dreams, according to which a repetition of a general linguistic evolution takes place in each individual and reappears under certain circumstances such as in the process of dreaming.

What artistic creativity more or less intuitively expresses in its manifold forms of appearance with diverse media and forms, what then the artistic subject brings to light from the (un)depths of the realm of human experience or, as the case may be, reveals to the senses from what is already imperceptibly there, is taken up by others, reconstructed, enjoyed, reflected upon, and partly captured in general rules and propositions. Here, the highest and the deepest, the human and the all-too-human simultaneously appear, which not least attracts interest in Lacan's well-known definition of (especially artistic) sublimation, according to which in sublimation the object is raised to the dignity of the Thing. The dilution of the Dionysian by the Apollonian completed in this sense, the taming of the act by the tranquility of the picture in the gentle current of discourse is work on myth, myth construction and myth destruction all in one. Art sublimates and illuminates and, taking this function into consideration, the artistic subject is always also connected to the motivational and situational contexts of scientific discovery.

Jacques Lacan, *Das Seminar über E. A. Poes „Der entwendete Brief“*. Schriften I, Olten, Freiburg: Olten-Verlag, 1973 (*The Seminar on "The Purloined Letter,"* in: Yale French Studies, 48 [1973]).

Jacques Lacan, *Funktion und Feld des Sprechens und der Sprache der Psychoanalyse*. Schriften I, Olten, Freiburg: Olten-Verlag, 1973 (*The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, London: Tavistock, 1977).

In Hans Schabus' project too, the generation of the "sensory appearance of the idea" (Hegel) entangles with its subversive deconstruction, with the latter expression generally known as a synonym for analysis. In that the artist identifies the last country in primal word terms simultaneously also as the first (incidentally: Austria erit in orbe ultima!), in that he leads into the depths of the mountain with obvious emphasis, he creates an area of reflection in which a discussion about mentality history perspectives of thought and cognition can open.

Recognizing writers and producers of art as "valuable allies" (Freud) and interlacing (interpretative) art and psychological science, psychoanalysis also endeavors to shine light into the darkness of the unfathomable and into the uncertainty of a mythical primeval time; a mythical time because, being beyond knowable history, it is connected with the origin and genesis of the human subject, before it came to itself. However, this is not the only function in this respect, because psychoanalysis also talks of the repressed, thereby the experienced private and individual myths which do not dominate only neurotic subjects with their familial complexes.

However, it cannot be ruled out that psychoanalysis itself, despite its demythologizing intention, in fact becomes a myth in that it is also this side of what is only comprehensible as myth, appears fantastic, can be formulated as fable and saga, and makes statements with only apparent rationality, whereby its purported reality finally proves to be an ideologem. As one of these, an analysis comes to mind that misses its object by relocating it in a deceptive place. In this respect, its adherence to the idea of depth (abyss, cave, hole, etc.) in which one must dig for treasure in order to bring it to the

shining heights of knowledge is particularly prevalent and familiar. In all this it has still to be shown that such a depth psychology fulfils at least twofold functions: defensively, it serves to defuse and disarm the Freudian *dispositif* of truth, and, positively, it bears hope for a (re-)discovery of the original, of the reference behind the sign, finally of the ultimate cause (Ur-Sache). It will also be necessary to consider to what extent Freud's archaeological metaphor is misleading in that in relation to its object, in its theory and method, psychoanalysis rather tends to come upon the depths than upon heterotopia.

It of course requires a wider concept of myth in order to be able to speak of a deep myth as the expression of a not necessarily conscious but also not hidden intention with a certain ideological direction. Roland Barthes' respective concept is defined as a statement, as a way of signifying, as a setting of idea in form the analysis of which presupposes a process that knows how to combine formal and historical achievement of cognition, semiology, and ideology. As paradoxical as it may appear, it here applies that the myth *conceals nothing*. Its function is to deform and not to make something disappear. In the same way as for Freud the latent meaning of behavior deforms its overt meaning (for example in that the human error, the neurotic symptom, etc. express a secret desire in a distorted way), in myth the concept deforms the meaning; a myth is neither a lie nor a confession; as a de-politicized statement, myth transforms history into nature.

Even psychoanalysis itself can be subject to mythologization in that its meaning is carried away in a new form and neutralized in another significance. From a psychoanalytical view, it can thereby be asserted that such attitudes are borne by defensive tendencies that divert the striving for knowledge from its aim and thereby, in the field of the perceptible, offer the truth a hiding place that is just as inconspicuous as it is safe. For example, as already suggested, a diversion into the depths, whereby the depth metaphor can be traced back to a particularly "Swiss" sense of depth. Thereby a common spatial visual model that is by all means present in Freud's thinking about psychic structures was tightened ideologically, whereby, without noticing it, one could fall back on the thought tradition of a whole culture, N.B. German-speaking culture.

We know that Freud only hesitantly followed the suggestion of the Zurich psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler to replace psychoanalysis with a term that would bring the method and area of knowledge close to speleology and diving. However, the two references also imply that depth and the asexual belong together and that the deliberation attributed to the Swiss psychiatrist in the creation of the term "depth psychology" was a further strategy to defuse the explosive power of psychoanalysis and make its teachings socially acceptable.

This corresponds to what Adorno very generally sees in his reflection on deep thought: "It follows for the concept of depth [...], that deep is what affirms the experience of the negative, the suffering in some way, while all opposing views should be flat. [...] In this scheme of thought there is something like the deepest rancor towards happiness: happiness is superficial.

Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974 (*Mythologies*, London: Cape, 1972).

Helmut Kindler, Die Schule Bleuler, in: *Die Psychologie des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 10, hg. von Uwe Henrik Peters, Zürich: Kindler, 1950.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Bd. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973.

Without doubt, this way of thinking is connected to the defamation of the senses and finally to the prevailing sexual taboos of our whole civilization and is reactive, as Nietzsche elaborated in detail. This means that what one must forbid oneself under the constraint of order is declared bad, superficial, banal, and trivial in itself."

As can be seen, the paradox of speaking of the depth in order to remain on the surface obviously has method in German thinking. Together with breadth and clarity, depth seems to determine the system of coordinates of the germ-free space of the great German philosophy. Bachelard is certainly also referring to the German depths when he writes, "Immensity is the movement of immobile man. Immensity is one of the dynamic aspects of peaceful daydreaming [...]." For Sonnemann, this is already a German cult, a "spectacle of fundamental ontological downward movements [...]. Authentic inwardness is all attention, encountering the world, engagement, the line of vision is the one from the inside to the outside: the attention which should encounter the world is diverted to the ability of encounter, the spring that does not flow is invoked; and the more it is invoked the less anything at all flows and the invocation becomes more insistent and more furious."

Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raums*, Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1975 (*The Poetics of Space*, New York: Orion Press, 1964).

Ulrich Sonnemann, *Das Land der unbegrenzten Zumutbarkeiten. Deutsche Reflexionen*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1963.

According to Hartwig, immateriality, greed for symbols, desire for order, fear of dirt and slime, and defamation of sensuality as characteristic features of an idea of depth have their origins in the influence of the mystics and Protestantism. The privatization of God and thereby of conscience by Luther has led to a *deus absconditus*, to an inner God operating in the darkness, in the depths, and in the abyss of the soul. So whoever searches for his God as a Protestant is referred to the inner depths and hardly to the Church. Organizing and controlling authority, state, power, and structure have taken its place. Since Renaissance times, the body has become more and more lost to the soul and the soul to the obligations which changed with capitalism as an internalization of forms of work.

In this sense the paradigm shift inaugurated by Freud is not so radical and abrupt. Still attached to profundity as a mark of the quality of scientific probity, still arming the eye with the microscope, his thought is initially directed downwards from above, and, in his urge for knowledge, he feels it necessary to climb down into an abyss and, in order to arrive at the knowledge requisite for his status of truth, he must still put his patients into a kind of deep sleep in order to put himself into the state of healing cognizance with respect to the private myths causing them unhappiness; at the beginning of "The Interpretation of Dreams" he pronounces his "*flectere si nequeo superos, acheronta movebo*" so as subsequently in the same work to show that the unconscious is neither a hole nor an abyss nor a cavity but "another place." One must of course read Freud's topical considerations more closely so as not to see the depth dimension as a mythical deviation but to understand in it the foundation of an intersystemic theory which attempts to overcome the thoughts of the hidden, the latent, and the veiled.

It is similar with the archaeology metaphor which Freud used and which must also be traced back to its reference point with care. Though, with

regard to construction or reconstruction in analysis, Freud asserts a broad correspondence between the work of an analyst and an archaeologist who excavates a ruined and crumbling dwelling or a building from the past, there are few references to digging work in his further remarks.

For, "Just as the archaeologist builds up the walls of a building from the foundations that have remained standing, determines the number and position of the columns from depressions in the floor, and reconstructs the mural decorations and paintings from the remains found in the debris, so does the analyst proceed when he draws his inferences from the fragments of memories, from the associations, and from the behavior of the subject of the analysis. Both of them have an undisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains." It is also similar on both sides with regard to sources of error, whereby on the one hand dating would be made difficult by shifting processes over a period of time and on the other by transcriptions of subsequent events in the sense of resentment. However, since in addition the analyst would have practically indestructible material available that, however distant in the past it might lie, reveals itself through continuous repetitions, the image of archaeology pales as a comparison in so far that it must orientate itself along the lines of searching, digging, and lifting in order to get hold of its material objects.

"I don't search, I find." The psychoanalytical process can hardly be more concisely and succinctly described than with this statement from Picasso. It leads us straight to Freud's contention that no mortal can keep a secret: "If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."

Thus, on the premise that the concept of depth is not regarded as a primal word that carries within it the dichotomy of down and up, of concealed and open, of past and scattered, and that repression is no synonym for suppression, the both symbolically and linguistically as well as imaginarily composed Freudian unconscious gives occasion for model notions and metaphor formations which orientate themselves more on phonetic literality on the one hand and on the pictorial on the other.

Lacan, for example, always held to a double inscription, informed by a palimpsest model, of an element in both systems subject to a process of repression, whereby one and the same signifier would be built in *at both places* in two different chains of signifiers. For this, he proposes imagery which is by all means also archaeological, which starts from a certain number of hieroglyphs on the surface of an obelisk, whereby the displacement of the characters to another side of the column would completely change the meaning of the text.

Generally speaking, the topic of the unconscious, the place of the other, the location of the other scene, appears to be determined by a heterotopy whose geography Lacan summarized as follows: "The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere: [...]"

Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbewußte. Gesammelte Werke X*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972 (1915, *The Unconscious*, in: Standard Edition, vol. 14, London: Hogarth Press 1995).

Sigmund Freud, *Konstruktionen in der Analyse. Gesammelte Werke XIV*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972 (1937, *Constructions in Analysis*, in: Standard Edition, vol. 23, London: Hogarth Press 1995).

Sigmund Freud, *Selbstdarstellung. Gesammelte Werke XIV*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972 (1925, *An Autobiographical Study*, in: Standard Edition, vol. 20, London: Hogarth Press 1995).

- in archival documents: these are my childhood memories, just as impenetrable as are such documents when I do not know their provenance;
- in semantic development: it corresponds to the stock and the use of vocabulary that is my own, as well as my lifestyle and my character;
- in traditions, too, and even in the legends which, in a heroicized form, bear my history;
- and, lastly, in the traces that are inevitably preserved by the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter to the chapters surrounding it and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis.”

If a collective unconscious can be spoken of in an offhand way, the coordinates of its clandestine whereabouts must be continually redetermined (ultimately, the unconscious has the tendency, like the god of the seas Proteus, of hiding itself in ever new transformations at always new locations). There has always been sufficient talk of the ancient myths and the ever newly forming myths of everyday life as unconscious preserves and reservations. The role of cultural and artistic production is no less important.

Like a gigantic ship, constructed in the shallows of the Adriatic lagoons, neither characterized by special heights nor depths, Venice represents the myth of man's domination of the water and the sea in what is probably its most magnificent form until now.

A special Venetian, coming from alpine Austria, who is no stranger to the canals of Vienna either and also knows how to navigate foreign waters with his boat, would, by giving mountainless Venice its first and perhaps last mountain, with emphasis and by means of contrast, point out that also the soul of the lagoon city is to be found neither in the eerie depths nor in the clear heights and (with Arthur Schnitzler in mind) outline it as a vast domain the breadth of which once even almost reached as far as the immeasurable.