

Freud and the Scene of Writing

Introductory Note

Jacques Derrida's philosophical essays have focused on the meaning of writing *per se* in the history of Western thought. Within that tradition—the “logocentric enclosure” referred to in our essay—writing has regularly been regarded as secondary, mediate, and debased in relation to a supposed primacy, immediacy, and plenitude of the spoken word. Concomitant with the metaphysics of presence has been a relegation of the *difference* implicit in writing to an auxiliary status: as signs of signs. Derrida's effort has been to show that the play of difference, which has generally been viewed as *exterior* to a (spatial or temporal) *present*, is, in fact, always already at work *within* that present as the condition of its possibility. Whereby the very distinction between inner and outer is thrown into question . . .

The essay on Freud will move principally through the following texts: *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “The Unconscious,” *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and finally, (de)centering the entire corpus in what at first might seem the most marginal of texts, “The Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad.” It will eventually demonstrate that within the apparent simplicity of *representation* (*Darstellung*), the elementary activity of ideation, an elaborate drama (*représentation*, performance) is being silently played out, and that this drama is best understood in terms of a bizarre mode of writing.

As an aid to the reader we shall comment on several key terms in the text:

a) *Scène*. We have translated the French *scène* alternately as scene (with its accent on visibility) and stage (accent on conflict). Derrida presses in the direction of a theatre of writing by translating the metapsychological term *representability* (*Darstellbarkeit*; Laplanche and Pontalis: *figurabilité*) as *aptitude à la mise en scène*.

b) *Représentation* (*Darstellung*, but also *Vorstellung*). We have translated: representation, a term whose theatrical resonances are, of course, far more pronounced in French.

c) *Frayage* (*Bahnung*). In the *Project*, Freud speaks of the wearing away or breaking down of “contact-barriers” between neurones. The psychical would be constituted by the differences (in resistance overcome) between such paths. Although the Standard Edition translates *Bahnung* as *facilitation*, we have chosen the term *fraying*. For *facilitation* presents the act as a function of its placid end, whereas *fraying* captures the violence of the movement of this rudimentary form of writing or “inscription.” In light of Derrida's analysis,

future translators of the *Project* might do well to translate *Bahnung* as *fraying*: the word wears remarkably well.

d) *Différance* is a neologism—by virtue of the *a*—combining the temporal (*différer*, to defer) and spatial (*différer*, to differ) modes of difference in a movement which is neither active nor passive. It is this differential play, (re)producing the present secondarily as its effect, which is the (utopian) focus of Derrida's undertaking. We have retained the French neologism in our translation.

e) *Supplément*. The untranslatable verb *suppléer* means at once to complete (or supplement) and to replace (an absence). In Rousseau's writing, in which Derrida has delineated most extensively the logic of the *supplément*, there is something inherently awry in the author's use of the word *suppléer* (*De la grammatologie*, Paris, 1967). For the kind of plenitude which a completing supplement might bring is incompatible with the secondary status implied by any "replacement." To rephrase the paradox in Rousseau's terms: it is as though the "obstacle" were already intrinsic to a primal "transparency."

Were we, like the dream-work, to forge our own idiomatic translation of *suppléer*, it might be the condensation of *completed* and *replace*: to *complace*. This activity of *complacing* (or movement of *différance*), upon repression, would degenerate into a blind *complacency* (a reasonable translation for Rousseau's *amour propre*); the "displacement" in the heart of every plenitude would pass unperceived. Derrida's (Rousseau's? Freud's?) intellectual task would then be to revive the scandal of *différance*, to *dislocate* a meta-physical, "phonological" *complacency*.

For the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (*après coup*, *deferred action*), to which Derrida assimilates the supplement, see the entry from the *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* below.

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—J. M.

Worin die Bahnung sonst besteht, bleibt dahingestellt.
In what the fraying *does* consist remains an open question. (*Project for a Scientific Psychology*, 1895)

Our aim is limited: to locate in Freud's text several points of reference and to isolate, on the threshold of a systematic examination, what in psychoanalysis can be contained but with difficulty by the logocentric enclosure, as it limits not only the history of philosophy but the orientation of the "human sciences," notably of a certain linguistics. If the Freudian breakthrough is historically *new*, it is not by virtue

of its peaceful coexistence or theoretical complicity with that linguistics, at least in its congenital phonologism.¹

Now it is not accidental that Freud, in the decisive moments of his itinerary, has recourse to metaphorical models which are borrowed not from spoken language or verbal forms, nor even from phonetic writing, but from a script which is never subject, extrinsic, and posterior to the spoken word. Freud invokes signs which do not transcribe living, whole speech, master of itself and self-present. In fact, and this will be our problem, Freud *does not simply* use the metaphor of non-phonetic writing; he does not deem it expedient to manipulate scriptural metaphors for didactic ends. If such metaphors are indispensable, it is perhaps because they illuminate in return the meaning of a *trace* in general and eventually, in articulation with it, the meaning of writing as commonly conceived. Freud, no doubt, is not using metaphors, if to use a metaphor means to allude with the known to the unknown. Through the insistence of his metaphoric investment, he renders enigmatic, on the contrary, what we believe we know by the name of writing. A move unknown to classical philosophy is perhaps undertaken here, somewhere between the implicit and the explicit. From Plato and Aristotle on, scriptural images have regularly been used to *illustrate* the relationship between reason and experience, perception and memory. But a certain confidence has never stopped being reassured by the meaning of the familiar term: writing. The gesture sketched by Freud interrupts that assurance and opens up a new kind of question about metaphor, writing, and spacing in general.

Let us follow in our reading this metaphoric investment. It will eventually invade the entirety of the psyche. *Psychical content* will be *represented* by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic. The *structure* of the psychical *apparatus* will be *represented* by a writing machine. What questions will these representations impose on us? We shall have to ask not if a writing apparatus—for example, the one described in the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad”—is a *good* metaphor for representing the working of the psyche; but rather what

¹ For a discussion of Saussure’s “phonologism” and the role it plays in (his) linguistics, see *De la grammatologie*, p. 46.—Ed.

apparatus we must create in order to represent psychical writing, and what the imitation, projected and liberated in a machine, of something like psychical writing might mean. Not if the psyche is indeed a kind of text, but: what is a text, and what must the psyche be if it can be represented by a text? For if there is neither machine nor text without psychical origin, there is no psyche without text. Finally, what must the relations among psyche, writing, and spacing be for such a metaphoric transition to be possible, not only (nor primarily) within theoretical discourse but within the history of psyche, text, and technics?

Fraying and Difference

From the *Project* (1895) to the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925), a strange progression: a problematic of fraying is elaborated only to conform increasingly to a metaphysics of the written trace. From a system of traces functioning according to a model that Freud would have preferred natural and from which writing is entirely absent, we proceed toward a configuration of traces which can no longer be represented except by the structure and process of writing. At the same time, the structural model of writing, which Freud invokes immediately after the *Project*, will be persistently differentiated and refined in originality. All the mechanical models will be tested and abandoned until the discovery of the *Wunderblock*, a writing machine of marvelous complexity, into which the whole of the psychical apparatus will be projected. The solution to all the previous difficulties will be presented in it, and the “Note,” indicative of an admirable tenacity, will answer precisely the questions of the *Project*. The *Wunderblock*, in each of its parts, will realize the apparatus which Freud, in the *Project*, judged “at present unimaginable” (“We are at present unable to imagine an apparatus which would accomplish so complicated an operation”) and which he replaced (*suppléé*) at that time by a neurological fable whose scheme and intention, in certain respects, he will never abandon.

In 1895, it was a matter of explaining memory in the manner of the natural sciences, “proposing psychology as a natural science, that is, representing psychical events as states quantitatively determined by distinct material particles.” Now, “one of the principal properties of nervous tissue is memory, that is, most generally, the capacity to be altered in a lasting way by events which occur only once.” And “any psychological theory worthy of attention must propose an explanation of ‘memory.’” The crux of such an explanation, what makes such an apparatus unimaginable, is the necessity of accounting simultaneously, as the “Note” will do thirty years later, for the permanence of the trace and the virginity of the receiving substance, for the engraving of the tracks and the perennially intact bareness of the perceptive surface: in this case, of the neurones. “Thus the neurones would appear to be both influenced and also unaltered, ‘unprepossessed’ (*unvoreingenommen*).” Rejecting a distinction which was common in his day between “sense cells” and “memory cells,” Freud then forges the hypothesis of “contact-barriers” and “fraying” (*Bahnung*), of the breaking of a path (*Bahn*). Whatever may be thought of the continuities and breaks in what will follow, this hypothesis is remarkable as soon as it is considered as a metaphorical model and not as a neurological description. Fraying, the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path. Which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to the effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, frayed. Now there would be two kinds of neurones: the permeable neurones (ϕ), offering no resistance and thus retaining no trace of impression, would be perceptual neurones; other neurones (ψ) would oppose contact-barriers to the quantity of excitation and would thus retain the printed trace: they “thus offer a possibility of representing (*darzustellen*) memory.” First representation, first staging of memory. (*Darstellung* is representation in the weak sense of the word but also frequently in the sense of visual depiction, and sometimes of theatrical performance. Our translation will vary with the inflexion of the context.) Freud attributes psychical quality only to these latter neurones. They are the “bearers of memory and thus probably of psychical events in general.” Memory is thus not a

psychical property among others; it is the very essence of the psyche: resistance and precisely thereby an opening to the effraction of the trace.

Now assuming that Freud here intends to speak only the language of full and present quantity, assuming, as at least appears to be the case, that he intends to situate his work in the simple opposition between quantity and quality (the latter being reserved for the pure transparency of a perception without memory), we find that the concept of fraying reveals itself intolerant of this intent. An equality in resistances to the fraying or an equivalence in the forces fraying would eliminate any *preference* in choice of itinerary. Memory would be paralysed. It is the difference between frayings which is the real origin of memory and thus of the psyche. Only that difference frees a "preference of path" (*Wegbevorzugung*): "Memory is represented (*dargestellt*) by the differences in the frayings between the ψ -neurons." We must then not say that fraying without difference is insufficient for memory; it must be stipulated that there is no pure fraying without difference. A trace as memory is not a pure fraying that might be retrieved at any time as a simple presence, it is the impalpable and invisible difference between frayings. We thus know already that psychical life is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference in the exertion of forces. As Nietzsche had already said.

That quantity becomes *psychē* and *mnēmē* through differences rather than through plenitudes will be continuously confirmed in the *Project* itself. *Repetition* adds no quantity of present force, no *intensity*; it reproduces the same impression: yet it has the power of fraying. "Memory, the force (*Macht*), perennially at work, of an experience, depends on a factor called the quantity of the impression and on the frequency with which that same impression is repeated." The number of repetitions is thus added to the quantity (Q_{η}) of the excitation, and these two quantities are of two absolutely heterogeneous types. Repetitions can exist only as discrete and can act as such only through the diastem which maintains their separation. Finally, if fraying can supplement a quantity presently at work or be

added to it, it is because it is definitely analogous to quantity but different as well: a quantity "can be replaced by a quantity in addition to the fraying which results from it." Let us not hasten to define this *other* of pure quantity as quality: we would be transforming mnemonic energy into present consciousness and translucent perception of present qualities. Thus, neither the difference between full quantities, nor the interval between repetitions of the identical, nor fraying itself may be thought of in terms of the opposition between quantity and quality.² Memory cannot be derived from it and escapes the grasp of "naturalism" as well as "phenomenology."

All these differences in the production of the trace may be reinterpreted as moments of deferment. In accordance with a motif that will continue to dominate Freud's thinking, this movement is described as the effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* a dangerous cathexis, that is, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*). The threatening expense or presence are deferred with the help of fraying or repetition. Is this not already the circuitous path (*Aufschub*) instituting the relation of pleasure to reality (*Jenseits, G. W.*, xiii, p. 6)? Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, *différance*, repetition, reserve? For repetition does not *happen to* an initial impression; its possibility is already there, in the resistance offered *the first time* by the psychical neurones. Resistance itself is possible only if the opposition of forces lasts and is repeated at the beginning. It is the very idea of a *first time* which becomes enigmatic. What we are advancing here does not seem to contradict what Freud will say further on: "... fraying is probably the result of the single (*einmaliger*) passage of a large quantity." Even assuming that this affirmation does not lead us little by little to the problem of phylogenesis and hereditary fraying, we

² Here more than elsewhere, concerning the concepts of difference, quantity, and quality, a systematic confrontation between Nietzsche and Freud is called for. Cf. for example, among many others, this fragment from the *Nachlass*: "Our 'knowing' is limited to the establishment of 'quantities'; but we cannot help feeling these differences-of-quantity as *qualities*. Quality is a truth of *perspective* for us; not 'in itself' . . . If our senses were to become ten times sharper or duller, we would be submerged: that is, we too feel *relations-of-quantity* as qualities in relating them to the existence they make possible for us" (*Werke*, III, p. 861).

may still maintain that in the *first time* of the contact between *two* forces, repetition has begun. Life is already threatened by the origin of the memory which constitutes it and by the fraying which it resists, by the effraction which it can contain only by repeating it. It is because fraying fractures that Freud, in the *Project*, accords a privilege to pain. In a certain sense, there is no fraying without a beginning of pain and “pain leaves behind it particularly rich frayings.” But beyond a certain quantity, pain, the threatening origin of the psyche, must be deferred, like death, for it can “ruin” psychological “organization.” Despite the enigma of the “first time” and of originary repetition (needless to say, before any distinction between “normal” and “pathological” repetition), it is important that Freud attributes all this work to the primary function and excludes any derivation of it. Let us observe this non-derivation, even if it but renders more dense the difficulty of the concept of “primariness” and the timelessness of the primary process, and even if that difficulty never stops thickening in what follows.

In this connection we are reminded (almost involuntarily) of the primary effort of neuronic systems, retained through all their modifications, to avoid being burdened with quantity ($Q\eta$) or to diminish it so far as possible. Under the pressure of the exigencies of life, the neuronic system has been obliged to lay up a store of quantity ($Q\eta$). For this purpose it has had to increase the number of its neurones and these have had to be impermeable. But it now avoids, to some extent at least, being filled with quantity ($Q\eta$)—avoids cathexis, that is,—by setting up frayings. It will be seen, therefore, that *frayings serve the primary functions*.

No doubt life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance*. But we must be wary of this formulation: there is no life present *at first* which would *then* come to protect, postpone, reserve itself in *différance*. The latter constitutes the essence of life. Or rather: *différance* not being an essence, it *is not* life, if being is determined as *ousia*, presence, essence/existence, substance or subject. Life must be thought of as trace before being may be determined as presence. This is the only condition on which we can say that life *is* death, that

repetition and beyond the pleasure principle are native and congenital to that which they transgress. When Freud writes in the *Project* that “frayings serve the primary function,” he already forbids us to be surprised by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He complies with a dual necessity: recognizing *différance* in the origin and at the same time crossing out the concept of *primariness*: we will be no more surprised by the *Traumdeutung*, which defines that concept as a “theoretical fiction” in a paragraph on the “deferment” (*Verspätung*) of the secondary process. It is thus the postponement which is in the beginning.³ Without which, *différance* would be the delay which a consciousness accords itself, a self-presence of the present. *Différer* can thus not mean to retard a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible. That possibility is possible only through a *différance* which must be conceived of in other terms than as a calculus or mechanics of choice. To say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why “originary” must be understood as *crossed out*, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary.

Rather than abandon it, we ought perhaps then to rethink the concept of “*différer*.” This is what we should like to do, and it is possible only if *différance* is determined outside of any teleological or eschatological horizon. It isn’t easy. Let us note in passing: the concepts of *Nachträglichkeit* and *Verspätung*, concepts which govern the whole of Freud’s thought and determine all the other concepts, are already present and called by their name in the *Project*. The irreducibility of the “effect of deferment,” such is no doubt Freud’s discovery. Freud exploits that discovery in its ultimate consequences and beyond the psychoanalysis of the individual. The history of culture, he thought,

³ These concepts of originary *différance* and delay are unthinkable within the authority of the logic of identity or even within the concept of time. The very absurdity betrayed by the terms provides the possibility—if organized in a certain manner—of thinking beyond that logic and that concept. By the word delay, something other than a relation between two “presents” must be thought; the following model must be avoided: what was to happen (should have happened) in a (prior) present A occurs only in a present B. The concepts of originary “difference” and “delay” revealed their urgency to us in a reading of Husserl (*Introduction à l’Origine de la géométrie*, 1962, p. 170-171).

ought to confirm it. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1937), the efficacy of deferment is at work over large historical intervals (*G. W.*, xvi, p. 238-9). The problem of latency, moreover, is in highly significant contact, in that text, with that of oral and written tradition (p. 170 sq.).

Although at no moment in the *Project* is fraying named writing, the contradictory requirements which the *Mystic Writing-Pad* will fulfill are already formulated in terms which are literally identical: "to retain while at the same time remaining capable of receiving."

Differences in the work of fraying concern not only forces but locations. And Freud already wants to think force and place simultaneously. He is the first one not to believe in the descriptive value of his hypothetical representation of fraying. The distinction between the categories of neurones "has no recognized foundation, at least in so far as morphology (i. e., histology) is concerned." It is the index of a topographical description which familiar, constituted, external space, the exterior of the natural sciences, cannot contain. This is why, under the rubric of "the biological standpoint," a "difference in essence" (*Wesensverschiedenheit*) between the neurones is "replaced by a difference in the *milieu* to which they are destined" (*Schicksals-Milieuverschiedenheit*): pure differences, differences of situation, of connection, of localization, of structural relations more important than their supporting terms, and for which the relativity of outside and inside always prevails. The thinking of difference can neither dispense with topography nor accept the current models of spacing.

This difficulty becomes more acute when it is necessary to explain those pure differences *par excellence*: differences of quality, that is, for Freud, of consciousness. He must explain "what we know enigmatically (*rätselhaft*), thanks to our 'consciousness.'" And "since this consciousness knows nothing of what we have taken into consideration up until now [the theory] should explain to us that ignorance itself." Now qualities are clearly pure differences:

Consciousness gives us what we call *qualities*, a great variety of sensations which are *other* (*anders*) and whose *otherness* (*Anders*) becomes differentiated (*unterschieden wird*) in relation to the external world. In this *otherness* there

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are series, similarities and so on, but there is nothing quantitative about them. We may ask *how* these qualities originate and *where* they originate.

Neither outside nor inside. They cannot be in the external world, where the physicist recognizes only quantities, “masses in motion and nothing else.” Nor in the interiority of the psyche (i. e., of memory), for “reproduction and recollection” are “devoid of quality (*qualitätslos*.)” Since rejecting the topographical model is out of the question, “we must summon up enough courage to assume that there is a third system of neurones—‘perceptual neurones’ they might be called—which are excited along with the others during perception but not during reproduction, and whose states of excitation give rise to the different qualities—are, that is to say, conscious sensations.” Foreshadowing the interpolated sheet of the Mystic Writing Pad, Freud, annoyed by his “jargon,” tells Fliess (Letter 39; 1/1/96) that he is inserting, “slipping” (*schieben*) the perceptual neurones (ω) between the ϕ - and ψ -neurones.

This last bit of daring results in “what seems like an unheard of difficulty”: we have just encountered a permeability and a fraying which proceed from no quantity at all. From what then? From pure time, from pure temporalization in its conjunction with spacing: from periodicity. Only recourse to temporality and to a discontinuous or periodic temporality, will allow the difficulty to be resolved, and we must patiently consider its implications. “I can see only one way of escape. . . . Hitherto I have regarded the passage of quantity only as a transference ($Q\eta$) from one neurone to another. It must have another attribute, however, of a temporal character.”

If the discontinuity hypothesis “goes further,” Freud emphasizes, than the “physical clarification” through its insistence on periods, it is because in this case differences, intervals, and discontinuity are registered, “appropriated” without their quantitative support. Perceptual neurones, “incapable of receiving quantities, appropriate the *period* of an excitation.” Pure difference, again, and difference between diastems. The concept of a *period in general* precedes and conditions the opposition between quantity and quality and all which that op-

position governs. For “ ψ -neurones too have their period, but it is devoid of quality, or, to put it more accurately, monotonous.” As we shall see, this insistence on discontinuity will faithfully return in the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad”: as in the *Project*, it will be a last bold move resolving a final logical difficulty.

The rest of the *Project* will depend in its entirety on an incessant and increasingly radical invocation of the principle of difference. Beneath the neurological indications, which play the representational role of an artificial model, we find repeatedly the persistent attempt to account for the psyche in terms of spacing, a topography of traces, a map of frayings; an attempt to locate consciousness or quality in a space whose structure and possibility must be rethought; and to describe the “functioning of the apparatus” in terms of pure differences and locations, to explain how “quantity of excitation is expressed in ψ by complexity and quality by topography.” It is because the nature of this system of differences and this topography is radically new and must not allow any of itself to be left out that Freud, in his model of the apparatus, multiplies “acts of boldness,” “strange but indispensable hypotheses” (concerning “secreting” neurones or “key” neurones). And when he renounces neurology and anatomical localizations, it will be not in order to abandon but to transform his topographical preoccupations. Writing will then enter on the scene. Trace will become *gram*; and the region of fraying a ciphered spacing.

The Print and the Original Supplement

A few weeks after the *Project* is sent to Fliess, during a “night of work,” all the elements of the system arrange themselves into a “machine.” It is not yet a writing machine: “Everything fell into place, the cogs meshed, the thing really seemed to be a machine which in a moment would run of itself.”⁴ In a moment: in thirty years. By itself: almost.

⁴ Letter 32 (10-20-95). The machine: “The three systems of neurones, the ‘free’ and ‘bound’ states of quantity, the primary and secondary processes,

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A little more than a year later, the trace starts becoming writing. In Letter 52 (6/12/96), the entire system of the *Project* is reconstituted in terms of a graphic conception as yet unknown in Freud. It is not surprising that this coincides with the transition from the neurological to the psychical. At the heart of the letter: the words “sign” (*Zeichen*), inscription (*Niederschrift*), transcription (*Umschrift*). Not only is the connection between trace and deferment (i. e., a present which does not constitute, but is originally reconstituted from memory “signs”) explicitly defined, but verbal phenomena are assigned a place within a system of stratified writing which they are far from dominating:

As you know I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come about by a process of stratification (*Aufeinanderschichtung*); the material present in the shape of memory traces (*Erinnerungsspuren*) is from time to time subjected to a *rearrangement* (*Umordnung*) in accordance with new relations to a transcription (*Umschrift*). Thus, what is essentially new in my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is registered (*niederlegt*) in various species of ‘signs’... I cannot say how many of these inscriptions (*Niederschriften*) there may be: at least three and probably more... The different transcripts are separated (though not necessarily in topography) in respect to the neurones which are their vehicles... *Perception*. These are neurones in which perception appears and to which consciousness is attached but which in themselves retain no trace of what happens. *For consciousness and memory are mutually exclusive. Sign of perception*: the first inscription of the perceptions; it is quite incapable of being conscious and is arranged according to associations of simultaneity... *Unconscious* is a second inscription... *Preconscious* is the third inscription, linked to verbal images corresponding to our official ego... This secondary thought consciousness is secondary in time and probably connected with the hallucinatory activation of verbal images.

This is a first move toward the “Note.” From now on, starting with the *Traumdeutung* (1900), the metaphor of writing will dominate *simultaneously the problem of the psychical apparatus in its structure and of the psychical text in its fabric*. The solidarity of the two

the main trend and the compromise trend of the nervous system, the two biological rules of attention and defence the indications of quality, reality, and thought, the state of the psycho-sexual group, the sexual determination of repression, and finally the factors determining consciousness as a perceptual function—the whole thing held together, and still does. I can hardly contain myself with delight. If I had only waited a fortnight before setting it all down for you...”

problems should make us even more attentive: the two series of metaphors—text and machine—do not enter on the scene at the same time.

“Dreams generally follow former frayings,” said the *Project*. Topographical, temporal, and formal regression in dreams must thus be interpreted henceforth as a path back into a landscape of writing. Not of a writing which simply transcribes, the stony echo of muted words, but of a preverbal lithography: metaphonetic, non-linguistic, a-logical. (Logic obeys consciousness, or preconsciousness, the site of verbal images, as well as the principle of identity, the founding expression of a philosophy of presence. “It was only a logical contradiction, which does not have much import,” we read in *The Wolf Man*.) With dreams displaced into a forest of script, *The Traumdeutung*, the interpretation of dreams, will no doubt be, initially, an act of reading and decoding. Before the analysis of the Irma dream, Freud engages in considerations of method. In one of his familiar gestures, he opposes the old popular tradition to so-called scientific psychology. As always, it is in order to justify the latent intention which inspires the former. Tradition may, of course, err, when, according to a “symbolical” procedure, it treats dream content as an indivisible and unarticulated whole, for which a second, possibly prophetic whole may be substituted. But Freud is not far from accepting the “other popular method”: “It might be described as the ‘decoding’ method (*Chiffriermethode*), since it treats dreams as a kind of secret writing (*Geheimschrift*) in which each sign is translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key (*Schlüssel*).” (*G. W.* II/III, p. 102). Let us retain the allusion to a permanent code: it is the weakness of a method to which Freud attributes, nevertheless, the merit of being analytic and of spelling out the elements of meaning one by one.

A strange example is chosen by Freud to illustrate this procedure: a text of phonetic writing is cathected and functions as a discrete, specific, translatable and unprivileged element in the overall writing of the dream. Phonetic writing as writing within writing. Assume, for example, says Freud, that I have dreamt of a letter (*Brief/epistola*), then of a burial. Open a *Traumbuch*, a book in which the keys to

dreams are recorded, an encyclopedia of dream signs, the dream dictionary which Freud will soon reject. It teaches us that letter must be translated (*übersetzen*) by spite and burial by marriage engagement. Thus a letter (*epistola*) written with letters (*litterae*), a document composed of phonetic signs, the transcription of verbal discourse, may be translated by a non-verbal term which, inasmuch as it is a determined affect, belongs to the overall syntax of dream writing. The verbal is cathected, and its phonetic transcription is bound, far from the center, in a web of silent script.

Freud then borrows another example from Artemidorus of Daldis (second century), the author of a treatise on the interpretation of dreams. Let it be a pretext for recalling that in the 18th century an English theologian, unknown to Freud, had already invoked Artemidorus with an intention, no doubt, worthy of comparison.⁵ Warburton describes the system of hieroglyphics and discerns in it (rightly or wrongly; it is of no concern to us here) various structures (hieroglyphics strictly speaking or symbolical ones, each type being either curiological or tropological, the relation here being of analogy or of part to whole) which ought to be systematically confronted with the mechanisms of dream-work (condensation, displacement, overdetermination). Now Warburton, interested for apologetical reasons in demonstrating, against Father Kircher, “the great antiquity of this Nation,” chooses the example of an Egyptian science all of whose resources lie in hieroglyphic writing. That science is *Traumdeutung*, also known as oneirocriticism. When all is said and done, it was only a science of writing in priestly hands. God, the Egyptians believed, had made man the gift of writing just as he inspired dreams. Interpreters, like dreams themselves, had then only to draw in the curiological or tropological treasure. They would readily find there the

⁵ Warburton, the author of *The Divine Mission of Moses*. The fourth part of his work was translated in 1744 under the title: *Essai sur les Hiéroglyphes des Egyptiens, où l'on voit l'Origine et le Progrès du langage, l'Antiquité des Sciences en Egypte, et l'Origine du culte des Animaux*. This work, which we shall discuss elsewhere, had a considerable influence. All thought of that era about language and signs bore its mark. The editors of the *Encyclopedie*, Condillac, and, through him, Rousseau drew specific inspiration from it, borrowing in particular the theme of the originally metaphorical nature of language.

key to dreams, which they would then pretend to divine. The hieroglyphic code itself served as a *Traumbuch*. Alleged gift of God, in fact constructed historically, it had become the common source on which the dream discourse drew: the setting and the text of its *mise en scène*. Since dreams are constructed like a form of writing, the kinds of transposition in dreams correspond to condensations and displacements already performed and registered in the system of hieroglyphics. Dreams would only manipulate elements (*stoicheia*, says Warburton, elements or letters) contained in the thesaurus of hieroglyphics, somewhat as written speech would draw on a written language: "It is a matter of examining what basis the interpretation given by the Oneirocritic might have had, when he told someone who consulted him on one of the following dreams that a *dragon* meant royalty; that a *serpent* indicated sickness . . . ; that *frogs* signified impostors . . ." What then did the hermeneuts of that age do? They consulted writing itself:

Now the first interpreters of dreams were by no means knaves and impostors. It was simply their lot—as it was that of the first legal astrologers—to be more superstitious than the other men of their day and to fall prey to illusion earlier. But even if we assume that they had been as knavish as their successors, they still needed proper materials to work with; and those materials could never be such as to stir in so strange a manner the imagination of each individual. Those who consulted them must have sought a familiar analogy, which might serve as a basis for decyphering; and they themselves must have had recourse to a known authority in order to sustain their science. But what other analogy and what other authority could there have been than the *symbolic hieroglyphics*, which had become a sacred and mysterious thing? Such is the natural solution to the problem. The science of symbols . . . served as a basis for their interpretations.

It is here that the Freudian break occurs. No doubt Freud conceives of the dream's displacements as a new form of writing, placing words on stage without becoming subservient to them; no doubt he is thinking here of a model of writing irreducible to speech and including, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic and phonetic elements. But he makes of psychical writing so ordinary a production that writing such as we believe to be designated in the

literal sense of the word—a script which is coded and visible “in the world”—would be only its metaphor. Psychical writing, for example the kind we find in dreams, which “follows earlier frayings,” a simple moment in a regression toward “primary” writing, cannot be read in terms of any code. No doubt it works with a mass of elements which have been coded in the course of an individual or collective history. But in its operations, lexicon, and syntax, a purely idiomatic residue is irreducible and is made to bear the burden of interpretation in the communication between unconscious. The dreamer invents his own grammar. No meaningful material or prior text exists which he might *simply use*, even if he never deprives himself of them. Such is, despite their interest, the limitation of the *Chiffriermethode* and the *Traumbuch*. As much as of the generality and the rigidity of the code, that limitation is a function of an excessive preoccupation with *contents*, an insufficient concern for relations, locations, processes, and differences: “My procedure is not so convenient as the popular decoding method which translates any given piece of a dream’s content by a fixed key. I am rather inclined to think that the same piece of content may hide a different meaning when it occurs in various people or in various contexts” (p. 109). Elsewhere, in support of that statement, Freud thinks it proper to adduce the case of Chinese writing: “The [the dream symbols] frequently have multiple meanings: so many, in fact, that, as in Chinese writing, only the context allows a correct interpretation in each case” (p. 358).

The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code means that in psychical writing, which thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified is never radical. Unconscious experience, prior to the dream which follows earlier frayings, does not borrow but produces its own signifiers; does not create them in their materiality, of course, but produces their status-as-meaningful [*signifiance*]. And if such be the case, they are no longer, properly speaking, signifiers. And the possibility of translation, if it is far from being eliminated—for between those points of identity or adherence of signifier to signified, experience is perpetually stretching distances—is nevertheless in principle and by definition

limited. Such is perhaps Freud's understanding, from another standpoint, in the article on "Repression": "Repression functions in an *entirely individual way*." (*G. W.*, x, p. 252). (Individuality here refers not to that of individuals but to that of each "derivative of the repressed, which may have its own destiny.") Translation, a system of translation, is possible only if a permanent code allows a substitution or transformation of signifiers while retaining the same signified, always *present*, despite the absence of any specific signifier. This fundamental possibility of substitution would thus be implied by the coupled concepts: signified/signifier, consequently by the concept of the sign itself. Even if we join Saussure in envisaging the distinction between signified and signifier only as the two sides of a sheet of paper, nothing is changed. Ordinary writing, if there is any, must produce the space and the materiality of the sheet itself.

It will be said: and yet Freud translates all the time. He believes in the generality and the fixity of a specific code for dream writing:

When we have become familiar with the abundant use made of symbolism for representing sexual material in dreams, the question is bound to arise of whether many of these symbols do not occur with a permanently fixed meaning, like the 'grammalogues' in shorthand; and we shall feel tempted to draw up a new *Traumbuch* on the decoding principle (II/III, p. 356).

And, in fact, Freud never stopped proposing codes, rules of great generality. And the substitution of signifiers seems to be the essential activity in psychoanalytic interpretation. Of course. Freud nevertheless stipulates an essential limitation on this activity. Or rather, a double limitation.

If we consider first verbal expression, as it is circumscribed in the dream, we observe that its sonority, the materiality of the expression, does not disappear before the signified or at least is not traversed and transgressed as it is in conscious speech. It acts as such, with the efficacy Artaud assigned it on the stage of cruelty. Now the materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into a different language. It is precisely that which translation relinquishes. To relinquish materiality is even the driving force of transla-

tion. When that materiality is reinstated, translation becomes poetry. In this sense, since the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of every dream scene, dreams are untranslatable: "Indeed, dreams are so closely related to linguistic expression that Ferenczi has truly remarked that every tongue has its own dream-language. It is impossible as a rule to translate a dream into a foreign language, and this is equally true, I fancy, of a book such as the present one." What is the case for a specific national language is the case *a fortiori* for a private grammar.

Moreover, this horizontal impossibility of translation without loss has its basis in a vertical impossibility. We refer to the way in which unconscious thoughts become conscious. If a dream cannot be translated into another language, it is because within the psychological apparatus as well there is never a relation of simple translation. We are wrong, Freud tells us, to speak of translation or transcription in describing the transition of unconscious thoughts through the pre-conscious toward consciousness. Here again the metaphorical concept of translation (*Übersetzung*) or transcription (*Umschrift*) is not dangerous because it refers to writing, but because it presupposes a text which would be already there, immobile: the serene presence of a statue, of a written stone or archive whose signified content might be transported without harm into the element of a different language, that of the pre-conscious or the conscious. It is thus not enough to talk of writing in order to be faithful to Freud; it is then that we may betray him more than ever.

This is explained to us in the last chapter of the *Traumdeutung*. An entirely and conventionally topographical metaphor of the psychological apparatus is to be completed by invoking the existence of force and of two kinds of processes of excitation or modes of its discharge:

So let us try to correct some images [intuitive illustrations: *Anschauungen*] which might be misleading so long as we looked upon the two systems in the most immediate and crudest sense as two localities in the mental apparatus, images which have left their mark in the expressions 'to repress' and 'to force a way through'. Thus we may speak of an unconscious thought seeking to convey itself after translation (*Übersetzung*) into the pre-conscious so as to be

able then to force its way through into consciousness. What we have in mind here is not the forming of a second thought situated in a new place, like a transcription (*Umschrift*) which continues to exist alongside the original text; and the notion of forcing a way through into consciousness must be kept carefully free from any idea of a change of locality.⁶

Let us interrupt our quotation for a moment. The conscious text is thus not a transcription, because there is no text *present elsewhere* as unconscious to be transposed or carried over. For the value of presence as well may dangerously affect the concept of the unconscious. There is then no unconscious truth to rediscover because it would be written elsewhere. There is no text written and present elsewhere which would then be subjected, without being changed in the process, to an operation and a temporalization (the latter belonging to consciousness if we follow Freud literally) which would be external to it, floating on its surface. There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present. The text is not thinkable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already woven of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united; a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferment, *nachträglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*: for *nachträglich* also means *supplementary*. The appeal of the supplement is primal here and breaks open what will be reconstituted by deferment as the present. The supplement, which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude, is as well that which compensates for a lack [*qui supplée*]. “*Suppléer*: 1. To add what is missing, to supply a necessary surplus,” says Littré, respecting, like a somnambulist, the strange logic of that word. It is within its logic that the possibility of deferred action [*après coup*] should be thought, as well, no doubt, as the relationship between the primary and the secondary on all levels.

⁶ (p. 615) *The Ego and the Id* (G. W., xiii, ch. 2) also underscores the danger of a topographical representation of psychical facts.

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Let us note: *Nachtrag* has a precise meaning in the realm of letters: appendix, codicil, postscript. The text we call present may be deciphered only at the bottom of the page, in a footnote or postscript. Before that recurrence, the present is only the call for a footnote. That the present in general is not primal but reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present, such is the theme—formidable for metaphysics—which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. That intellectual effort is no doubt unique in being contained by neither metaphysics nor science.

Since the transition to consciousness is not a derivative or repetitive writing, a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing, it occurs in an original manner and, in its very secondariness, it is originary and irreducible. Since consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world, it is here that instead of reading the metaphor in its usual sense, we must rather understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphic, of the literal, of the literal becoming literary, etc.) in terms of that exertion of writing which circulates like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious. The “objectivist” or “worldly” consideration of writing teaches us nothing if it is not referred to a space of psychical writing (we might say: of transcendental writing in the event that, along with Husserl, we would see the psyche as a region of the world. But since it is also the case for Freud, who wants to respect simultaneously the Being-in-the-world of the psyche, its Being-in-space, and the originality of a topology irreducible to any ordinary intra-worldliness, we perhaps should think that what we are describing here as the exertion of writing obliterates the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world. Obliterates it while producing it: the medium of the dialogue and misunderstanding between the Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts of Being-in-the-world).

Concerning this non-transcriptive writing, Freud adds a fundamental specification. It will reveal: (1) the danger involved in immobilizing or freezing energy in a naïve metaphoric of place; (2) the necessity not of abandoning but of rethinking the space or topology of that writing; (3) that Freud, who still insists on *representing* the psychical apparatus in an artificial model, has not yet discovered a mechanical model adequate to the graphematic conceptual scheme he is already using to describe the psychical text.

When we speak of a preconscious thought being repressed or driven out and then taken over by the unconscious, these images, derived from a metaphoric (*Vorstellungskreis*) relating to a struggle for a piece of ground, may tempt us to suppose that it is in fact true that a grouping (*Anordnung*) in one locality has been brought to an end and replaced by a fresh one in another locality. Let us replace these analogies by something that seems to correspond better to the real state of affairs, and let us say that some particular mental grouping has had a cathexis of energy (*Energiebesetzung*) attached to it or withdrawn from it, so that the structure in question has come under the sway of a particular agency or been withdrawn from it. What we are doing here is once again to replace a topographical way of representing things by a dynamic one. What we regard as mobile (*das Bewegliche*) is not the psychical structure itself but its innervation . . . (*Ibid*).

Let us once more interrupt our quotation. The metaphor of translation as the transcription of an original text would separate force and extension, maintaining the simple exteriority of the translated and the translating. That very exteriority, the static and topological bias of the metaphor, would assure the transparency of a neutral translation, of a phonomic and non-metabolic process. Freud emphasizes this: psychical writing does not lend itself to translation because it is a single energetic system (however differentiated it may be) and covers the entirety of the psychical apparatus. Despite the difference of agencies, psychical writing in general is not a displacement of meanings in the limpidity of an immobile, pre-given space: the blank neutrality of speech. Of a speech which might be coded without ceasing to be diaphanous. Here energy cannot be reduced and does not limit meaning but rather produces it. The distinction between force and meaning is derivative in relation to an *arch-trace*; it be-

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longs to the metaphysics of consciousness and of presence, or rather of presence in the word, in the hallucination of a language determined on the basis of the word or verbal representation. Metaphysics of preconsciousness, Freud might say, since the preconscious is the place he assigns to the verbal. Without that, would Freud have taught us anything new?

Force produces meaning (and space) through the power of “repetition” alone, which inhabits it originally as its death. This power, that is: this lack of power, which opens and limits the exertion of force, institutes translatability, makes possible what we call “language,” transforms an absolute idiom into a limit which is always already transgressed: a pure idiom is not language; it becomes so only through repetition; repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time. In spite of appearances, this does not contradict what we said earlier about untranslatability. At that time it was a question of recalling the origin of the movement of transgression, the origin of repetition, and the becoming-language of the idiom. If one limits oneself to the *datum or effect of repetition*, to translation, to the obviousness of the distinction between force and meaning, not only does one miss the originality of Freud’s aim, but the sting of the relation to death is obliterated in the process.

We ought thus to examine closely—an impossibility in this forum—all that Freud invites us to think concerning writing as “fraying” in the *psychical* repetition of that previously *neurological* notion: opening up of its own space, effraction, breaking of a path against resistances, rupture or irruption becoming a route (*rupta, via rupta*), violent inscription of a form, tracing of a difference in a nature or a matter which are thinkable as such only in their *opposition* to writing. The road (*route*) is opened in nature or matter, forest or wood (*hylé*) and institutes a reversibility of time and space. We should have to study together, genetically and structurally, the history of the road and the history of writing. We are thinking here of Freud’s texts on the work of the memory-trace (*Erinnerungsspur*) which, though no longer the neurological trace, is not yet “conscious memory,” (“The Unconscious,” *G. W.*, x, p. 288), of the *itinerant*

work of the trace, producing and not following its route, of the trace which traces, of the trace which frays itself its path. The metaphor of the frayed path, so frequent in Freud's descriptions, is always in communication with the theme of the *supplementary delay* and the reconstitution of meaning through deferment, after a slow mole-like advance, after the subterranean toil of an impress. The latter has left a laborious trace which has never been *perceived*, lived as present meaning, i.e., as consciousness. The postscript which constitutes the past present as such is not satisfied, as Plato, Hegel, and Proust perhaps thought, with reawakening or revealing it in its truth. It produces it. Is sexual deferment the best example here or the essence of this movement? A bad question, no doubt: the (presumably known) *subject* of the question—sexuality—is determined, defined or undefined only in return and by the answer itself. Freud's answer, in any event, is trenchant. Take the Wolf Man. It is by deferment that the perception of the primal scene—whether it be reality or fantasy is unimportant—is lived in its meaning, and sexual maturation is not the accidental form of this delay. "At age one and a half, he received impressions the deferred understanding of which became possible for him at the time of the dream through his development, exaltation, and sexual investigations." Already in the *Project*, concerning repression in hysteria: "We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has become a trauma only after the event (*nur nachträglich*). The reason for this state of things is the retardation (*Verspätung*) of puberty as compared with the remainder of the individual's development." That should lead, if not to the solution, at least to a new way of posing the formidable problem of the temporalization and the so-called "timelessness" of the unconscious. Here more than elsewhere the gap between Freudian intuition and concept is apparent. The timelessness of the unconscious is no doubt determined only in opposition to a common concept of time, a traditional concept, the metaphysical concept: the time of mechanics or the time of consciousness. We ought perhaps to read Freud the way Heidegger read Kant: like the *cogito*, the unconscious is no

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doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time.

Dioptrics and Hieroglyphics

Let us not conclude too quickly that by invoking an energetics as opposed to a topography of translation, Freud abandoned his efforts to localize. If, as we shall see, he persists in giving a projective and spatial—indeed, purely mechanical—representation of energetic processes, it is not simply for didactic reasons: a certain spatiality, inseparable from the very idea of system, is irreducible; its nature is all the more enigmatic in that we can no longer consider it as the homogeneous and serene *milieu* of dynamic and economic processes. In the *Traumdeutung*, the metaphoric machine is not yet adapted to the scriptural analogy which already governs—as shall soon be clear—Freud's entire descriptive presentation. It is an *optical machine*.

Let us return to our quotation. Freud does not want to abandon the topographical model against which he has just warned us:

Nevertheless, I consider it expedient and justifiable to continue to make use of the intuitive representation [of the metaphor: *anschauliche Vorstellung*] of the two systems. We can avoid any possible abuse of this method of representation [*mode de mise en scène; Darstellungsweise*] by recollecting that representations [*Vorstellungen*], thoughts and psychical structures in general must never be regarded as localized in organic elements of the nervous system but rather, as one might say, *between* them, where resistances and frayings provide the corresponding correlates. Everything that can be an object [*Gegenstand*] of our internal perception is *virtual*, like the image produced in a telescope by the passage of light-rays. But we are justified in assuming the existence of the systems—which are not in any way psychical entities themselves [our underlining] and can never be accessible to our psychical perception—like the lenses of the telescope, which cast the image. And, if we pursue this analogy, we may compare the censorship between two systems to the refraction [the breaking of the ray: *Strahlenbrechung*] which takes place when a ray of light passes into a new medium (p. 615-616).

This representation already cannot be understood in terms of the spatiality of a simple, homogeneous structure. The change in medium

and the movement of refraction indicate this sufficiently. Whereupon Freud, in a further reference to the same machine, proposes an interesting differentiation. In the same chapter, in the section on "Regression," he attempts to explain the relation between memory and perception in the memory trace:

What is presented to us in these words is the idea of *psychical locality*. I shall entirely disregard the idea that the mental apparatus with which we are here concerned is also known to us in the form of an anatomical preparation [*Präparat*: laboratory preparation], and I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion. I shall remain upon psychological ground, and I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope, or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a place (*Ort*) inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated. I see no necessity to apologize for the imperfections of this or of any similar imagery (p. 541).

Beyond its pedagogical value, this illustration proves useful for its distinction between *system* and *psyche*: the psychical system is not psychical, and in this description only the system is concerned. Next, it is the operation of the apparatus which interests Freud, how it runs and in what order, the regulated timing of its movements as it is *caught* and localized in the parts of the mechanism: "Strictly speaking, there is no need for the hypothesis that the psychical systems are actually arranged in a spatial order. It would be sufficient if a fixed order were established by the fact that in a given psychical process the excitation passes through the systems in a particular temporal sequence." Finally, these optical instruments *capture* light; in the example of photography they register it.⁷ Freud already wants to

⁷ The metaphor of a photographic negative occurs frequently. Cf. "The Dynamics of Transference" (*G. W.*, xiii, p. 364-65). The notions of negative and copy are the principal means of the analogy. In the analysis of Dora, Freud defines the transference in terms of editions and reeditions: simple reprints or revised and corrected editions. In "Notes on the Concept of the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis," 1913 (*G. W.*, x, p. 436), Freud compares the relations between the conscious and the unconscious to a photographic process: "The first stage of the photograph is the negative; every photographic image must

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account for the photographic negative or inscription of light and here is the differentiation (*Differenzierung*) which he introduces. It will reduce the “imperfections” of his analogy and perhaps “excuse” them. Above all it will throw into relief the apparently contradictory requirement which has haunted Freud since the *Project* and will be satisfied only by a writing machine, the “Mystic Pad”:

Next, we have grounds for introducing a first differentiation at the sensory end [of the apparatus]. A trace (*Spur*) is left in our psychical apparatus of the perceptions which impinge upon it. This we may describe as a ‘memory-trace’ (*Erinnerungsspur*), and to the function related to it we give the name of ‘memory’. If we are in earnest over our plan of attaching psychical processes to systems, memory-traces can only consist in permanent modifications of the elements of the system. But, as has already been pointed out elsewhere, there are obvious difficulties involved in supposing that one and the same system can accurately retain modifications of its elements and yet remain perpetually open to the reception of fresh occasions for modification (p. 534).

Two systems will thus be necessary in a single machine. This double system, combining freshness of surface and depth of retention, could be represented by an optical machine only distantly and “imperfectly.” “By analysing dreams we can take a step forward in our understanding of the composition of that most marvelous and most mysterious of all instruments. Only a small step no doubt; but a beginning . . .” Thus do we read in the final pages of the *Traumdeutung* (p. 614). Only a small step. The graphic representation of the (non-psychical) system of the psychical is not yet ready at a time when such a representation of the psychical already occupies, in the *Traumdeutung* itself, a large area. Let us measure this delay.

We have already defined elsewhere the fundamental property of writing, in a difficult sense of the word, as *spacing*: diastem and time becoming space; an unfolding as well, in a new kind of site, of

pass the “negative” test, and those which have reacted well to that test are admitted to the “positive” process ending in the picture.” Hervey de Saint-Denys devotes an entire chapter of his book to the same analogy. The intentions are the same. They suggest a precaution that we will find again in the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad”: “Memory, compared to a camera, has the marvelous superiority of natural forces: to be able to renew by itself its means of action.”

meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could not but tend and (to a certain extent) fail to repress. In particular in so-called phonetic writing. The latter's complicity with the logos (or the time of logic), dominated by the principle of non-contradiction, the cornerstone of all metaphysics of presence, is profound. Now in this silent or not wholly phonic spacing out of meaning, concatenations are possible which no longer obey the linearity of logical time, the time of consciousness or preconsciousness, the time of "verbal representations". Between the non-phonetic space of writing (even "phonetic" writing) and the space of the stage [*scène*] of dreams the boundary is unsure.

We should not be surprised then if Freud, in order to suggest the strangeness of the logico-temporal relations in dreams, constantly adduces writing, and the spatial synopses of pictograms, rebuses, hieroglyphics, and non-phonetic writing in general. Synopsis and not stasis: stage and not tableau. The laconic, lapidary quality of dreams is not the impassive presence of petrified signs.⁸

Interpretation has spelled out the dream elements. It has revealed the work of condensation and displacement. It is still necessary to account for the synthesis which composes and stages the whole. The resources of the *mise en scène* (*die Darstellungsmittel*) must be questioned. A certain polycentrism of dream representation is irreconcilable with the apparently linear, unlinear unfolding of pure verbal representations. The logical and ideal structure of conscious speech must thus submit to the dream system and become subordinate to it, like a part of its machinery.

The different portions of this complicated structure stand, of course, in the most manifold logical relations to one another. They can represent foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter-arguments. When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together—almost like pack-ice—the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. What representation [*mise en scène*] do dreams provide

⁸ "Dreams are parcimonious, indigent, laconic" (*G. W.*, ii/iii, p. 284). Dreams are "stenographic" (cf. above).

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for 'if', 'because', 'just as', 'although', 'either-or', and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches? (p. 316-317).

This type of representation (*mise en scène*) may at first be compared to those forms of expression which are like writing in speech: the painting or sculpture of signifiers which inscribe in a common space elements which the spoken chain must suppress. Freud sets them off against poetry, "which can make use of speech (*Rede*)." But may the dream not as well use spoken language? "In dreams we see but we do not here," said the *Project*. In point of fact, Freud, like Artaud later on, meant less the absence than the subordination of speech on the dream-stage. Far from disappearing, speech then changes purpose and status. It is situated, surrounded, invested (in all senses of the word), constituted.⁹ It figures in dreams much as captions do in comic strips, those picto-hieroglyphic combinations in which the phonetic text is secondary and not central in the telling of the tale: "Before painting became acquainted with the laws of expression by which it is governed, . . . in ancient paintings small labels were hung from the mouths of the persons represented, containing in written characters (*als Schrift*) the speeches which the artist despaired of representing pictorially" (p. 317).

The overall writing of dreams exceeds phonetic writing and puts speech back in its place. As in hieroglyphics or rebuses, voice is circumvented. From the very beginning of the chapter on "The Dream-Work," no doubt is left us on this subject, although Freud still uses that concept of translation on which he will later on cast suspicion.

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content (the latent and the manifest) are presented to us like two versions [*mises en scènes*] of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transference (*Übertragung*) of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script (*Bilderschrift*),

⁹ One meaning of the French *investissement* (*Besetzung*) is, of course, *cathexis*.—Ed.

the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts.

Bilderschrift: not an inscribed image but a figurative script, an image inviting not a simple, conscious, present perception of the thing itself—assuming it exists—but a reading.

If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation (*Zeichenbeziehung*), we should clearly be led into error . . . A dream is a picture puzzle (*Bilderrätsel*) of this sort and our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition.

The figurative content is then indeed a form of writing, a signifying chain in scenic form. In that sense, of course, it summarizes a bit of speech, it is the *economy of speech*. The entire chapter on “Representability” (*Aptitude à la mise en scène; Darstellbarkeit*) shows this quite well. But the reciprocal economic transformation, the total reasimilation into speech, is, in principle, impossible or limited. This is first of all because words are also and “primarily” things. Thus in dreams they are absorbed, “caught” by the primary process. It is then not enough to say that in dreams, words are condensed by “things”; that inversely non-verbal signifiers may be interpreted to a certain degree in terms of verbal representations. It must be seen that words, in so far as they are attracted, lured into the dream, toward the fictive limit of the primary process, tend to become pure and simple things. An equally fictive limit, moreover. Pure words and pure things are thus, like the idea of the primary process and, consequently, the secondary process, “theoretical fictions.” The interval in “dreams” and the interval in “wakefulness” may not be distinguished *essentially* in so far as the nature of language is concerned. “Words are often treated as things in dreams and thus undergo the same operations as thing presentations.”¹⁰ In the *formal regression*

¹⁰ The “Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams,” 1916, (*G. W.*, ii/iii, p. 419) devotes an important development to formal regression, which, according to the *Traumdeutung*, entails the substitution of “primitive modes of expression and representation (*mise en scène*) for those we are accustomed to” (p. 554). Freud insists above all on the role of verbal representa-

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of dreams, words are not *overtaken* by the spatialization of representation (*la mise en scène*). The process could not even succeed, moreover, if words had not always been subject in their materiality to the mark of their inscription or scenic capacity, their *Darstellbarkeit* and all the forms of their spacing. This last factor could only have been repressed by so called living, alert speech, by consciousness, logic, the history of the language, etc. Spatialization does not surprise the time of speech or the ideality of meaning, it does not happen to them like an accident. Temporalization presupposes the possibility of symbolism, and every symbolic synthesis, even before falling into a space "outside," includes within itself a spacing as difference. Which is why the pure phonic chain, to the extent that it implies differences, is itself not a pure continuum or flow of time. Difference is the articulation of space and time. The phonic chain or the chain of phonetic writing are always already distended by that minimum of essential spacing on which the dream-work and any formal regression in general can begin to operate. It is not a question of a negation of time, of a cessation of time in a present or simultaneity, but of a different structure, a different stratification of time. Here once more a comparison with writing—phonetic writing this time—casts light on writing as well as on dreams:

They [dreams] reproduce *logical connection by simultaneity in time*. Here they are acting like the painter who, in a picture of the School of Athens or of Parnassus, represents in one group all the philosophers or all the poets who were never, in fact, assembled in a single hall or on a single mountain-top . . . Dreams carry this mode of representation [*mise en scène*] down to details. Whenever they show us two elements close together, this guarantees that there is some specially intimate connection between what corresponds to them among the dream-thoughts. In the same way, in our system of writing, 'ab' means that the two letters are to be pronounced in a single syllable. If a gap is

tions: "It is very remarkable how little the dream-work adheres to verbal representations; it is always ready to exchange one word for another till it finds the expression most favorable for plastic representation." This passage is followed by a comparison, from the point of view of word-representations and thing-representations, of the dreamer's language and the language of schizophrenia. It should be analyzed closely. We would perhaps find (against Freud?) that a rigorous determination of the anomaly is impossible. On the role of verbal representation in the preconscious and the (consequently) secondary character of visual elements, cf. *The Ego and the Id*, ch. 2.

left between the 'a' and the 'b', it means that the 'a' is the last letter of one word and the 'b' is the first of the next one (p. 319).

The model of hieroglyphic writing assembles more strikingly—though we find it in every form of writing—the diversity of modes and functions of signs in dreams. Every sign—verbal or otherwise—may be used at different levels, in configurations and functions which are never prescribed by its “essence” but emerge from a play of differences. Summarizing all these possibilities, Freud concludes: “Yet, in spite of all this ambiguity, it is fair to say that the productions [*mises en scène*] of the dream-work, which, it must be remembered, *are not made with the intention of being understood*, present no greater difficulties to their translators than do the ancient hieroglyphic scripts to those who seek to read them” (p. 346-347).

More than twenty years separate the first edition of the *Traumdeutung* from the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad.” If we continue to follow the two series of metaphors—those concerning the non-psychical system of the psychical and those concerning the psychical itself—what happens?

On the one hand, the *theoretical* import of the *psychographic* metaphor will be increasingly refined. A methodological inquiry will, to a certain extent, be devoted to it. It is with a *graphematics* still to come rather than with a *linguistics* dominated by an aged *phonologism* that psychoanalysis sees itself as destined to collaborate. Freud recommends this *literally* in a text from 1913, and in this case we have nothing to add, interpret, alter.¹¹ The interest which psychoanalysis brings to linguistics presupposes a “transgression” of the habitual meaning of the word “language.” “By the word ‘language’, in this case, we ought not to understand simply the expression of thought in words, but the language of gestures as well, and every other form of expression of psychical activity, such as writing.” And

¹¹ “The Interest in Psychoanalysis,” *G. W.*, viii, p. 390. The second part of this text, devoted to “non-psychological sciences,” is concerned first of all with the science of language (p. 493)—before philosophy, biology, history, sociology, pedagogy.

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having recalled the archaic character of expression in dreams, which accepts contradiction¹² and valorizes visibility, Freud specifies:

It seems to us more accurate to compare dreams to a system of writing than to a language. In fact, the interpretation of a dream is thoroughly comparable to the deciphering of an ancient figurative script, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics. In both cases, there are elements which are not determined for interpretation or reading, but, in their role as determinatives, are there simply in order to assure the intelligibility of other elements. The ambiguity of the different elements of a dream has its counterpart in these ancient systems of writing . . . If until now this conception of dream production (*mise en scène*) has not been exploited it is because of a situation which is easily understandable: the point of view and body of knowledge with which a linguist would approach the subject of dreams are totally alien to a psychoanalyst (p. 404-5).

On the other hand, the same year, in the article on "The Unconscious," the problematic of the *apparatus* itself will begin to be taken up in terms of scriptural concepts: neither, as in the *Project*, in a topology of traces without writing, nor, as in the *Traumdeutung*, in the operations of optical machines. The debate between the functional hypothesis and the topographic hypothesis concerns the locations of an *inscription* (*Niederschrift*):

When a psychical act (let us confine ourselves here to an act of representation [*Vorstellung*. Our underlining]) is transferred from the system Ucs into the system Cs (or Pcs), are we to suppose that this transposition involves a fresh fixation, comparable to a new inscription of the representation in question, situated, moreover, in a fresh locality in the mind and side by side with which the original unconscious inscription continues to exist? Or are we rather to believe that the transformation consists in a change in the state of the representation, involving the same material and occurring in the same locality? (*G. W.*, x, p. 272-3).

The discussion which follows does not concern us directly here. Let us simply recall that the economic hypothesis and the difficult concept

¹² As is known, the note on "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" (1910) tends to demonstrate, after Abel, and with a great abundance of examples borrowed from hieroglyphic writing, that the contradictory or undetermined meaning of primal words could be determined, receive its difference and conditions of operation only through gesture and writing. On this text and Abel's hypothesis, cf. E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, ch. vii.

of anti-cathexis (*Gegenbesetzung*: “the sole mechanism of primal repression,” p. 280), which Freud introduces after refusing to decide, do not eliminate the topographical difference of the two inscriptions.¹³ And let us note that the concept of inscription still remains simply the graphic *element* of an apparatus which is not itself a writing machine. The difference between the system and the psychical is still at work: the graphic register is reserved for the description of the psychical content or of an element in the machine. We might think that the machine itself is subject to another principle of organization, another destination than writing. This is perhaps the case as well because the guiding thread of the article on “The Unconscious,” its *example*, as we have emphasized, is the destiny of a *representation* after it is first registered. When perception—the apparatus which originally registers and inscribes—will be delineated, the “perceptual apparatus” will no longer be able to be anything but a writing machine. The “Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” twelve years later, will describe the perceptual apparatus and the origin of memory. Long disjoined and out of phase, the two series of metaphors will then be united.

Freud's Slab of Wax and the Three Analogies of Writing

In this six page text, the analogy between a certain writing apparatus and the perceptual apparatus is gradually demonstrated. Three stages in the description result each time in an increase in rigor, inwardness, and differentiation.

As has always been done—at least since Plato—Freud first considers writing as a technique subservient to memory, an external, auxiliary technique of psychical memory and not memory itself: *hypomnēsis* rather than *mnēmē* said *Phaedrus*. But here—something not possible for Plato—the psychical is caught up in an apparatus, and what is written will be more readily represented as a “materialized” part extracted from the apparatus. Such is the *first analogy*:

¹³ p. 228. This is the passage we quoted earlier, and in which the memory-trace was distinguished from “memory.”

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If I distrust my memory—neurotics, as we know, do so to a remarkable extent, but normal people have every reason for doing so as well—I am able to complete and guarantee (*ergänzen und versichern*) its working by making a written trace (*schriftliche Anzeichnung*). In that case the surface upon which this trace is preserved, the pocket-book or sheet of paper, is as it were a materialized portion (*ein materialisiertes Stück*) of my mnemonic apparatus (*des Erinnerungsapparates*), the rest of which I carry about with me invisible. I have only to bear in mind the place where this ‘memory’ has been deposited and I can then ‘reproduce’ it at any time I like, with the certainty that it will have remained unaltered and so have escaped the possible distortions to which it might have been subjected in my actual memory (*G. W.*, xiv, p. 3).

Freud’s theme here is not the absence of memory or the primal and normal finitude of the mnemonic faculty; even less is it the structure of the temporalization which grounds that finitude or its essential relationship to censorship and repression; nor is it the possibility and the necessity of the *Ergänzung*, the *hypomnemonic supplement* which the psychical must project “into the world”; nor what is required in the nature of the psyche for that supplementation to be possible. At first, it is simply a question of considering the conditions which customary writing surfaces impose on that operation. Those conditions fail to satisfy the double requirement defined since the *Project*: a potential for indefinite preservation and an unlimited capacity for reception. A sheet of paper preserves indefinitely but is quickly saturated. A slate, whose virginity may always be reconstituted by erasure, (thus) does not conserve its traces. All the classical writing surfaces offer only one of the two advantages and always present the complementary inconvenience. Such is the *res extensa* and the intelligible surface of classical writing apparatuses. In the processes which they substitute for our memory, “an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces seem to be mutually exclusive.” Their extension belongs to classical geometry and is intelligible in its terms as pure exterior without relation to itself. A different writing space must be found; writing has always claimed it.

Auxiliary apparatuses (*Hilfsapparate*), which, Freud notes, are always constituted on the model of the supplementary organ (e.g., spectacles, camera, ear-trumpet) thus seem particularly deficient when it comes to memory. This remark makes even more suspect the earlier

reference to optical apparatuses. Freud recalls, nevertheless, that the contradictory requirement he is presenting had already been recognized in 1900. He might have said: in 1895.

As long ago as in 1900 I gave expression in the *Traumdeutung* to a suspicion that this unusual capacity was to be divided between two different systems (or organs of the mental apparatus). According to this view, we possess a system Pcpt.-Cs., which receives perceptions but retains no permanent trace of them, so that it can react like a clean sheet to every new perception; while the permanent traces of the excitations which have been received are preserved in 'mnemic systems' lying behind the perceptual system. Later, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), I added a remark to the effect that the inexplicable phenomenon of consciousness arises in the perceptual system *instead of* the permanent traces.¹⁴

A double system contained in a single differentiated apparatus: a perpetually available innocence and an infinite reserve of traces have at last been reconciled by this "small contrivance" placed "upon the market some time ago under the name of the Mystic Writing-Pad," and which "promises to be more efficient than the sheet of paper and slate." Its appearance is modest, "but if it is examined more closely, it will be found that its construction shows a remarkable agreement with my hypothetical structure of our perceptual apparatus." It offers both advantages: "an ever-ready receptive surface and permanent traces of the inscriptions that have been made on it." Here is its description:

The Mystic Pad is a slab of dark brown resin or wax with a paper edging; over the slab is laid a thin transparent sheet, the top end of which is firmly secured to the slab while its bottom end rests upon it without being fixed to it. This transparent sheet is the more interesting part of the little device. It itself consists of two layers, which can be detached from each other except at their two ends. The upper layer is a transparent piece of celluloid; the lower layer is made of thin translucent waxed paper. When the apparatus is not in use, the lower surface of the waxed paper adheres lightly to the upper surface of the wax slab. To make use of the Mystic Pad, one writes upon the celluloid portion of the covering-sheet which rests upon the wax slab. For this purpose no pencil or chalk is necessary, since the writing does not depend on material being deposited upon the receptive surface. It is a return to the ancient

¹⁴ p. 4-5. Cf. chapter iv of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

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method of writing upon tablets of clay or wax: a pointed stylus scratches the surface, the depressions upon which constitute the 'writing'. In the case of the Mystic Pad this scratching is not effected directly, but through the medium of the covering-sheet. At the points which the stylus touches, it presses the lower surface of the waxed paper on to the wax slab, and the grooves are visible as dark writing upon the otherwise smooth whitish-grey surface of the celluloid. If one wishes to destroy what has been written, all that is necessary is to raise the double covering-sheet from the wax slab by a light pull, starting from the free lower end.¹⁵ The close contact between the waxed paper and the wax slab at the places which have been scratched (upon which the visibility of the writing depended) is thus brought to an end and it does not recur when the two surfaces come together once more. The Mystic Pad is now clear of writing and ready to receive fresh inscriptions (p. 5-6).

Let us note that the *depth* of the Mystic Pad is at once a depth without bottom, an endless reverberation, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to self, whose inside, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. It joins the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of a grounding.

Neglecting the device's "slight imperfections," interested only in the analogy, Freud insists on the essentially protective nature of the celluloid sheet. Without it, the fine waxed paper would be scratched or ripped. There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, *to protect against itself*, against the writing by which the "subject" is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as he exposes himself. "The layer of celluloid thus acts as a protective sheath for the waxed paper." It shields it from "injurious effects from without." "I may at this point recall that in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,¹⁶ I showed that the perceptual apparatus of our mind consists of two layers, of an external protective shield against stimuli whose task it is to diminish the strength of excitations coming in, and of a

¹⁵ The *Standard Edition* notes here a slight infidelity in Freud's description. "The principle is not affected." We are tempted to think that Freud inflects his description elsewhere as well in order to suit the analogy.

¹⁶ This is still in Chapter iv of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

surface behind it which receives the stimuli, namely the system Pcpt.-Cs" (p. 6).

But as yet this concerns only reception or perception, the openness of the most superficial surface to the incision of a scratch. There is as yet no writing in the flatness of this *extensio*. We must account for writing as a trace which survives the scratch's present, punctuality, and *stigmē*. "This analogy," Freud continues, "would not be of much value if it could not be pursued further than this." This is the *second analogy*:

If we lift the entire covering-sheet—both the celluloid and the waxed paper—off the wax slab, the writing vanishes, and, as I have already remarked, does not re-appear again. The surface of the Mystic Pad is clear of writing and once more capable of receiving impressions. But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights.

The contradictory requirements are satisfied by this double system, and "this is precisely the way in which, according to the hypothesis which I mentioned just now, our psychical apparatus performs its perceptual function. The layer which receives the stimuli—the system Pcpt.-Cs.—forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, supplementary, systems." Writing supplements [*supplée*] perception before the latter even appears to itself. "Memory" or writing is the opening of that process of appearance itself. The "perceived" may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it.

Whereas other writing surfaces, corresponding to the prototypes of slate or paper, could represent only a materialized part of the mnemonic system in the psychical apparatus, an abstraction, the Mystic Pad represents the apparatus in its entirety, not simply in its perceptual layer. The wax slab, in fact, represents the unconscious, "I do not think it is too far-fetched to compare the wax slab with the unconscious behind the system Pcpt.-Cs." The becoming-visible alternating with the disappearance of what is written would be the flickering-up (*Aufleuchten*) and passing-away (*Vergehen*) of consciousness in the process of perception.

This introduces the *third and final analogy*. It is no doubt the most interesting. Until now, it has been a question only of the space of writing, its extension and volume, reliefs and depressions. But there is as well a *time of writing*, and it is nothing other than the very structure of what we are now describing. We must come to terms with the temporality of the wax slab. For it is not outside the slab, and the Mystic Pad includes in its structure what Kant describes as the three modes of time in the *three analogies of experience*: permanence, succession, simultaneity. Descartes, when he wonders *quaenam vero est haec cera*, may reduce its *essence* to the timeless simplicity of an intelligible object.¹⁷ Freud, reconstructing an *operation*, can reduce neither time nor the multiplicity of sensitive layers. And he will link a discontinuist conception of time, as the periodicity and spacing of writing, with a whole chain of hypotheses which stretch from the *Letters to Fliess* to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and which, once again, are constructed, consolidated, confirmed and solidified in the Mystic Pad. Temporality as spacing will be not only the horizontal discontinuity of a chain of signs, but writing as the interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels: the remarkably heterogenous temporal fabric of psychical work itself. We find neither the continuity of a line nor the homogeneity of a volume; only the differentiated duration and depth of a stage [*scène*], its spacing:

But I must admit that I am inclined to press the comparison still further. On the Mystic Pad the writing vanishes every time the close contact is broken between the paper which receives the stimulus and the wax slab which preserves the impression. This agrees with a notion which I have long had about the method in which the perceptual apparatus of our mind functions, but which I have hitherto kept to myself (p. 7).

That hypothesis posits a discontinuous distribution—through rapid periodic impulses—of “cathectic innervations (*Besetzungsinervationen*), from within toward the outside, toward the permeability of the system Pcpt.-Cs. These movements are then “withdrawn” or “removed.” Consciousness fades each time the cathexis is thus withdrawn.

¹⁷ The reference—“but what is this piece of wax”—is to the discussion of primary and secondary qualities in Descartes’s second *Meditation*.—Ed.

Freud compares this movement to the feelers which *the unconscious* would stretch out toward the external world and withdraw when they had sampled the excitations coming from it and warned the unconscious of any threat. (Freud had no more reserved the image of the feeler for the unconscious—we find it in Chapter IV of *Beyond . . .*¹⁸—than he had the notion of cathectic periodicity, as we noted above.) The “origin of our concept of time” is attributed to this “periodic non-excitability” and this “discontinuous method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs.” Time is the economy of writing.

This machine does not run by itself. It is less a machine than a tool. And it is not held with only one hand. Its temporality is marked thereby. *Its maintenance* is not simple. The ideal virginity of the present [*maintenant*] is constituted by the work of memory.¹⁹ At least two hands are needed to make the apparatus function, as well as a system of movements, a coordination of independent initiatives, an organized multiplicity of origins. It is on this stage [*scène*] that the “Note” ends: “If we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind.”

Traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure. From the beginning, in the “present” of their first impression, they are constituted by the double force of re-

¹⁸ We find it again, the same year, in the article on *Verneinung*. In a passage which concerns us here for its recognition of the relation between negation in thought and *différance*, delay, detour (*Aufschub, Denkaufschub*) (*différance*, union of Eros and Thanatos), the sending out of feelers is attributed not to the unconscious but to the ego (*G. W.*, xiv, p. 14-15). On *Denkaufschub*, on thought as retardation, postponement, suspension, respite, detour, *différance* as opposed to, or rather *différente* (deferring, differing) from the theoretical, fictive, and always already transgressed pole of the “primary process,” cf. all of Chapter VII (V) of the *Traumdeutung*. The concept of “circuitous path” (*Umweg*) is central to it. “Thought identity,” entirely woven of memory, is an aim always already substituted for “perceptual identity,” the aim of the “primary process,” and *das ganze Denken ist nur ein Umweg . . .* (“All thought is only a circuitous path,” p. 607). Cf. also the *Umwege zum Tode* in *Jenseits*, p. 41. “Compromise,” in Freud’s sense, is always *différance*. But there is nothing before the compromise.

¹⁹ The present participle of the verb *maintenir* (to maintain, from *manu-tenire*, to hold with a hand) is *maintenant* (now).—Ed.

petition and erasure, readability and unreadability. A two-handed machine, a multiplicity of agencies or origins; is this not the originary relation to the other and the temporality of writing, its "primary" complication: originary spacing, deferring (*différance*), and obliteration of the simple origin, polemical on the very threshold of what we persist in calling perception. The scene of dreams, "which follow former frayings," was a scene of writing. But this is because "perception," the first relation of life to its other, the origin of life, had always already prepared the representation. We must be several in order to write and already to "perceive." The *simple* structure of maintenance and manuscryption, like every originary intuition, is a myth, a "fiction" as "theoretical" as the idea of the primary process. For that idea is contradicted by the theme of primal repression.

Writing is unthinkable without repression. Its condition is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship. It is no accident that the metaphor of censorship should come from the area of politics concerned with writing in its deletions, blanks, and disguises, even if Freud, at the beginning of the *Traumdeutung*, seems to make only a conventional, didactic reference to it. The apparent exteriority of political censorship gives way to an essential censorship which binds the writer to his own writing.

If there were only perception, pure permeability to fraying, there would be no fraying. We would be written but nothing would be recorded; no writing would be produced, retained, repeated as readability. But pure perception does not exist: we are written only by writing [*en écrivant*], by the instance within us which always already governs perception, be it internal or external. The "subject" of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a *system* of relations between strata: of the Mystic Pad, of the psyche, of society, of the world. Within that scene the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found. In order to describe that structure, it is not enough to recall that one always writes for someone; and the oppositions sender-receiver, code-message, etc., remain extremely coarse instruments. We

would search the “public” in vain for the first reader: i.e., the first author of a work. And the “sociology of literature” is blind to the war and ruses—whose stakes are the origin of the work—between the author who reads and the first reader who dictates. The *sociality* of writing as *drama* requires an entirely different discipline.²⁰

That the machine does not run by itself means something else: a mechanism without its own energy. The machine is dead. It is death. Not because we risk death in playing with machines, but because the origin of machines is the relation to death. In a letter to Fliess, it will be recalled, Freud, evoking his representation of the psychical apparatus, had the impression of being faced with a machine which would soon run by itself. But what was to run by itself was the psyche and not its imitation or mechanical representation. For the latter does not live. Representation is death. Which may be immediately transformed into the following proposition: death is (only) representation. But it is bound to life and the living present which it repeats originally. A pure representation, a machine never runs by itself. Such at least is the limitation which Freud recognizes in his analogy with the Mystic Pad. Like the first paragraph of the “Note,” his gesture then is extremely Platonic. Only the writing of the soul, said the *Phaedrus*, only the psychical trace is able to reproduce and represent itself spontaneously. Our reading had skipped over the following remark by Freud: “There must come a point at which the analogy between an auxiliary apparatus of this kind and the organ which is its prototype will cease to apply. It is true, too, that, once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot ‘reproduce’ it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that.” Abandoned to itself, the multiplicity of layered surfaces of the apparatus is a dead complexity without depth. Life as depth belongs only to the wax of psychical memory. Freud, like Plato, thus continues to oppose hypomnemic writing and writing *en tei psychēi*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of a present truth outside of time. From then on, separated from psychical responsibility, the Mystic Pad, as

²⁰ The targets of Derrida’s polemic in this paragraph are Sartre, Jakobson, and Lucien Goldmann.—Ed.

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a representation abandoned to itself, still participates in Cartesian space and mechanics: *natural* wax, exteriority of the *aid to memory*.

All that Freud had thought about the unity of life and death, however, should have led him to ask other questions here. To ask them explicitly. Freud does not examine explicitly the status of the “materialized” supplement which is necessary to the putative spontaneity of memory, even if that spontaneity were differentiated in itself, thwarted by a censorship or repression which, moreover, could not act on a perfectly spontaneous memory. Far from the machine being a pure absence of spontaneity, its *resemblance* to the psychical apparatus, its existence and its necessity bear witness to the finitude of the mnemonic spontaneity which is thus supplemented [*suppléée*]. The machine—and, consequently, representation—is death and finitude *within* the psyche. Nor does Freud examine the possibility of that machine, which, in the world, has at least begun to *resemble* memory, and resembles it increasingly and better and better. Much better than the innocent Mystic Pad: the latter is no doubt infinitely more complex than slate or paper, less archaic than a palimpsest; but compared to other machines for storing archives, it is a child’s toy. That resemblance—i. e., necessarily a certain Being-in-the-world of the psyche—did not occur from without to memory any more than death surprises life. It grounds memory. Metaphor—in this case the analogy between two apparatuses and the possibility of that representational relation—raises a question which, despite his premises and for reasons which are no doubt essential, Freud failed to make explicit, at the very moment at which he had brought it to the threshold of its theme and urgency. Metaphor as a rhetorical or didactic device is possible here only through the solid metaphor, the “unnatural,” historical production of a *supplementary* machine, *added to* the psychical organization in order to supplement [*suppléer*] its finitude. The very idea of finitude is derived from the movement of this supplementarity. The historico-technical production of that metaphor which survives individual (or even generic) psychical organization is of an entirely different order from the production of an intrapsychical metaphor, assuming that the latter exists (to speak about it

is not enough for that), and whatever bond the two metaphors may maintain between themselves. Here the question of *technics* (a new name must perhaps be found in order to remove it from its traditional problematic) may not be derived from an assumed opposition between the psychical and the non-psychical, life and death. Writing is here *technè* as relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses. It opens up the question of technics: of the apparatus in general and of the analogy between the psychical apparatus and the non-psychical apparatus. In this sense writing is the stage [*scène*] of history and the play of the world. It cannot be exhausted by a simple psychology. That in Freud's discourse which opens onto its theme results in psychoanalysis's being not simply psychology—nor simply psychoanalysis.

Thus are perhaps augured, in the Freudian break-through, a beyond and a beneath of that enclosure we might term "Platonic." In that moment of world history "subsumed" by the name of Freud, traversing an unbelievable mythology (be it neurological or metapsychological: for we never dreamed of taking seriously, outside of the question which disarticulates and disturbs its literalness, the metapsychological fable, which marks perhaps only a minimal advance beyond the neurological tales of the *Project*), a relation to self of the historico-transcendental scene of writing was spoken without being said, thought without being thought: written and simultaneously erased, metaphorized; designating itself while indicating intra-worldly relations, it was *represented*.

This may perhaps be recognized (*as an example and let this be understood prudently*) in so far as Freud also, with admirable scope and continuity, *performed for us the scene of writing*. But we must think of that scene in other terms than those of individual or collective psychology, or even of anthropology. It must be thought in the horizon of the scene of the world, as the history of that scene. Freud's language is *caught up* in it.

Thus Freud performs for us the scene of writing. Like all those who write. And like all who know how to write, he let the scene duplicate, repeat, and betray itself within the scene. It is then Freud

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whom we will allow to say what scene he has played for us. From him that we shall borrow the hidden epigraph which has silently governed our reading.

In following the advance of metaphors of path, trace, fraying; of the slow march opening a track by effraction through neurone, light or wax, wood or resin, in order to mark nature, matter, matrix violently; in following the untiring reference to a dry stilus and a writing without ink; in following the inexhaustible inventiveness and dream-like renewal of mechanical models—that metonymy perpetually at work on the same metaphor, obstinately substituting trace for trace and machine for machine—we wondered what Freud was doing.

And we thought of those texts where, better than anywhere else, he tells us *worin die Bahnung sonst besteht*. In what the fraying consists.

Of the *Traumdeutung*: “It is highly probable that all complicated machinery and apparatus occurring in dreams stand for the genitals—and as a rule the male ones—in describing which dream-symbolism is as indefatigable as the joke-work (*Witzarbeit*)” (p. 361).

Then, of *The Problem of Anxiety*:

“If writing—which consists in allowing a fluid to flow out from a tube upon a piece of white paper—has acquired the symbolic meaning of coitus, or if walking has become a symbolic substitute for stamping upon the body of Mother Earth, then both writing and walking will be abstained from, because it is as though forbidden sexual behavior were thereby being indulged in.”

Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman