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## THE TISSUE OF POIETIC DREAMING (I)

*On the moving stone of sleep...*  
– André Breton

The translator of the French “poètes maudits,” Emanuel Lešehrad (1948), once remarked, in a footnote to his introduction to Mallarmé’s work, that the word for “poetry” in German is the polysemous “Dichtung,” which implies more than just the composing of poetry, its conception, invention, imagining, fabling, it also implies a condensation, compaction, packing in; “erdichten” therefore indicates fabrication, simulation, thinking out. In Czech, the word for creating poetry is *básnění*, a word formed of “ba” (indeed) and “snění” (dreaming). This indicates that the act of creating poetry is closely associated with: a) the mechanism of dreams; b) dream thought; and c) mental activity that involves the psychic representation of what has yet been unrepresented.

It is these last two aspects that I would like to highlight. By reflecting on the sources and functions of *poietic* dreaming I demonstrate the parallels between the surrealist conception of poetic thought and Wilfred Bion’s view that “dreaming” remains active even during the waking state.

In their poetry as in their lives poets such as Nerval, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and, above all, the surrealists in general and Breton in particular, were led in their quest for the sources of poetic inspiration and imagination to places where two worlds, the operation of two mental states, *sleeping* and *waking*, intersected (mingled). They found themselves in a *dreaming space*, and in the grips of the dreaming-power of this interspace they became its soundboard, its voice, and its unwitting mouthpiece.



*Beyond Futility*, collage, František Dryje, 1999

I refer to this *dreaming space* simultaneously as: (a) the link between sleeping and waking; (b) the *third mental state* (in the sense of what is called paradoxical sleep by neurophysiologists, paradoxical thought by Michel de M'Uzan, psychic automatism by André Breton, preconscious dream by Zbyněk Havlíček, and what Wilfred Bion calls the alpha-functions of dreaming); (c) in the topical sense of a *fissure* between unconscious and preconscious systems, in which by the creative blending of both

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Paul Delvaux's

### *The Village of the Mermaids*

After *The Village of the Mermaids* by Paul Delvaux was acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago, the museum curators were intrigued by the scene depicted in this painting and wrote to the artist, asking for information about its meaning.



*The Village of the Mermaids*. Oil on canvas, 1942

In response, Paul Delvaux sent the following letter:

May 17, 1956

Dear Sir,

*I have received your kind letter of May 7th. I will try to give you the information you ask for on the subject of the Village of the Mermaids. I was inspired for this subject by a dream:*

*In a strange street, there was a succession of closed doors. In front of each door, seated on a chair in the fake style of Louis XVI, in gilded wood, sits a woman dressed in a long robe with a high collar. The woman sits absolutely motionless with her hands on her knees like a doorkeeper. Each woman wears a robe of different color, each has long hair of different color, blonde or brown, and each chair is different from the other. The street extends far into the background and leads to a beach, which is surrounded by white mountains.*

*What is going on here? The women in their long robes and long hair, who were sitting in front of their doors just a moment ago, are transported to the beach and freed from their robes, and are suddenly revealed as beautiful mermaids, who are plunging into the waves, where they disappear for good.*

*All of this is found in the picture, and yet I was hoping to preserve the complete mystery, the big women with their long hair have moved towards the beach and dropping their long robes are plunging into the water, which is green and transparent, and then—that's all. The beach is deserted and so is the street with the closed doors.*

*Here then are some notes, the charming story which I have attempted to put into a painting, as a composer might try to put to music a lovely poem.*

Sincerely,

Paul Delvaux



# Bottled Dreams

A walk through the countryside, along a river where regattas are competing. Various skiffs go at full speed, down to the sea. There are motorboats and other boats made of empty red wine bottles provided with a propeller (they are one-liter bottles mounted by the competitors and which, seen from afar, are equivalent in volume with real one-liter bottles seen up close).

Michel Leiris, dream of May 14-15, 1934,  
*Nuits sans nuit et quelques jours sans jour*



"Three bottles of thinner", Petra Mandal, dream from the 1980s



While taking a trip, I get to a North-Bohemian *Sudetes village*, perhaps somewhere near Ústěk. The place is full of big and opulent houses abandoned by the Germans that are partly empty today. I walk about, checking the houses and I am perhaps interested in one of the houses.

I come across a little store or a pub where they serve beer with a color vignette of the Marseille tarot card *Maison Dieu*.

Martin Stejskal, dream of September 11, 1996



My father has a bottle of vodka with a label saying "Vol. 1"  
Dan Stanciu, dream of February 18-19, 1974

I arrive to some kind of a bar, where D.K. is seated at a table in the company of L, her brother. L. asks me if I want something to drink, I say yes, and he takes out a beer bottle from a cooler. He doesn't know how to open it, and I tell him to let me do it. I take the bottle from his hand and throw it up in the air. What follows seems to happen in slow motion. The bottle flies through the air, I hit it lightly with the edge of my hand (like a gentle karate chop), with other fantastic juggling I bring it in the wanted position and, with a final blow, I remove its cap. Then I catch it and fill my glass.

Dan Stanciu, dream of April 6, 1980





*I am writing the word "Impossible" using figural bottles from my collection as letters. For the double "s" I use two bottles shaped like fish (I know I have two of them in reality).*

Sasha Vlad, dream of February 9, 1998

I'm at someone's house in the countryside. In the yard I find three figural bottles for my collection. I find the first one, which is in the shape of a teapot, on a table next to a tree. I find the other two in a different place, but also next to a tree: one of them is smaller and is in the shape of a dove, while the other one is monstrously big and seems to represent several objects displayed on a table.

Sasha Vlad, dream of February 12, 2003



I see a bottle in the shape of flames (like the burning bush from the Bible).

Sasha Vlad, dream of July 5, 2003



I see a very big bottle in the shape of a bust of Vlad the Impaler.

Sasha Vlad, dream of September 17, 2005

This is a story happening in a small port town. A former captain of a ship appears there unexpectedly. He looks vaguely like Maxim Gorky, doesn't speak to anyone, and is rather mysterious. He starts making bottles out of ice, similar to the bottle in the shape of Vlad the Impaler (that I dreamed of previously), but smaller. He makes lots of such bottles and keeps them in a bathtub. I know that he wants to use them to take revenge on some people in that town who murdered the crew of his ship. In the end, he does take revenge (I don't know how), after which he disappears like a ghost.

Sasha Vlad, dream of April 19, 2016

underlying currents (the unconscious and preconscious) and in their clash with outer reality *dream and imaginative forms emerge and vanish, where meaning fades away and arises, where the figure and speech* representing the experience of alienness and the uncanny in us and beyond us, anxiety and desire - in other words, of what remains hidden, unfulfilled, lost, displaced and never imagined, comprehended, thought - *is deconstructed and recovered, is sought and reinvented.*

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900) rehabilitated the dream and its connection with waking experience. One of his objectives, which corresponded to the poet's work, was to demonstrate that dream as a psychological structure is a bearer of meaning. He reiterated that the dream must be placed in connection with psychological life, the mental activity of the waking state, that the dream is a train of meaning that should be connected with other psychic activities in a "psychic chain." Opposing the view that the mental activity of the waking state did not carry over into dreaming, he demonstrated that what we experience during the day becomes woven into a succession of dreams, that our inner psychic lives are entwined with the impulses and interests of our waking lives, that thought during the waking state is connected to thought during the dream state. Freud established that it is possible to "interpret" the dream, that is, determine its "meaning" by substituting for it something that represents a solid link in the chain of our psychic activities. In other words: the dream, created from extremely complex psychological activity, is for Freud a fully valid psychic phenomenon, a specific, veiled fulfillment of certain desires, and it can "be assigned a specific place" in the psychic activities of the waking state, which we are then able to comprehend.

Even so, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) was largely focused on achieving other objectives: a) "I shall further endeavor to elucidate the processes to which the strangeness and obscurity of dreams are due and to deduce from those processes the nature of the psychical forces by whose concurrent or mutually opposing action dreams are generated"; b) to use the knowledge acquired about dream processes to elucidate the psychopathological structures of neurotic states, and their potential treatments, and more generally to formulate his own theory of the psyche and unconscious mental processes.

In Freud the scientist prevailed over the poet. Let the following comparison serve as an example.

For the Gérard de Nerval (1855) dream is "a second life," an "invisible world," a "vague underground cavern," from which we are separated by gates of ivory or horn. He is fascinated by the dream experience, the reality of the dream overflowing into the reality of the waking state. His poetic *self* becomes embodied in the dream processes, or in an extreme "fall into the abyss," in which the "meaning and context of images" are lost.

In comparison – or in parallel – the interpretation of dreams for Freud was the "royal road" to the unconscious. Intrigued by looking for the latent meaning of the dream, Freud bumps into those very gates of ivory or horn on the road to his unconscious and to the unconscious of his patients: censorship, resistance,

repression; forces that distort unconscious desires and dream-thoughts in a process of dream formation. Freud tries to reconstruct this process in reverse. For Freud, the dream is a pictorial rebus that is to be deciphered by the technique of free association on the side of the dreamer and a freely floating attention and interpretative work on the side of the analyst. In other words, the dream is more an object of analysis than a subject of experience.



Collage, František Dryje

Freud translates the unknown into the known, while the poet remains spellbound by the mesh of correlations between oneiric and waking thought, its interweaving, allowing it to enter his life.

Up to now we have been able to view dreams as an object "made up of a mixture of pictographic, phonetic, and ideogrammatic elements" (Perelberg, 2000) each of which we might subject to a different level of analysis to get at its meaning. This is largely the position taken by Freud the "interpreter," no matter how difficult and multilayered an activity is dream interpretation, and no matter how fundamentally different a "live" dream analysis is, during a psychoanalytic session, from its "paper" analysis outside the session.

Compared to Freud's era, psychoanalysts today, according to Perelberg (2000), are not exclusively focused on dream content and its translation, but are more interested in the form and function of dreams in the analytical process. The present understanding of dreams is unthinkable without a close connection to an analyst's sensitive attention to his experience with the analysand and the analysand's experience with him, and this is reflected in the reality of transference and counter-transference. The ability to spot and identify the intersecting psychic realities of both actors in the analytic process, to tolerate this reality, experience it and process it, the ability to listen to the echoes of the analysand's unconscious in his own unconscious and give oneself up to "reverie," is one of the important keys in the analyst's hands in interpreting a dream and frequently, (in patients who have difficulty in dreaming and the psychological processing of their inner states), the key to unlocking the space of their imagination and ability to dream as such. What remains of the dream today is its content and symbolic aspect. Yet in addition, the dream may also perform a defensive function. It can be the locus of psychic transforming or evacuation (not psychic transformation) of the "undigested" parts of inner reality – a lost or disrupted capacity for dreaming is here a synonym for the inability to psychically transform inner and outer stimuli into meaningful experience. The dream may become an enactment of inner urges. The dream, its character, and the general ability to dream, the way of telling the dream and its use in analytic sessions might mirror the capacity to bind up a drive energy, to process and symbolize psychic events (conflicts, traumas, etc.), and the like. All of this needs to be taken into account when interpreting dreams. The dream and its interpretation has in current psychoanalysis also become the common experience of the dreamer and the analyst, which according to Perelberg (2000) allows a closer understanding of "the ways in which analysands conceived of their own mental lives, particularly their experiences of their inner world of thoughts and feelings."

But above all! We might attribute to the dream and dream work a *transformative* power and capacity to create a specific mental space, a space of imagination, experience, and thought. It is a *zone*, the heart of the *poietic dreaming self*. It is a zone whose anaesthetization or incompleteness results in serious mental disturbance. Let us examine the approaches that André Breton, a poet, and Wilfred Bion, a psychoanalyst, took in relation to this zone and the transformational nature of dream and dreaming.

(to be continued)

## ONEIRIC ECHOES

As an addendum to the section devoted to dreams about Marcel Duchamp in Dreamdew # 4, here are two more dreams from Bruno Jacobs:

I see Duchamp walking down the street dressed in a suit. I think that we are in Brussels, and I am amazed by his physical condition as I figure that he is well over 90 years old. And so it struck me that the day he would die would mean big headlines and colossal news given his importance. Then I see a cross-shaped arrangement printed on several orange colored sheets of paper glued together and supposedly done by him. I think that it is a wonderful oneiric object and start reading the words (which I unfortunately have forgotten), and notice that the font isn't anything that I have and that it isn't an oneiric object dreamed by me but done by another person, a woman, and so I throw it away, much disappointed.

Dream of February 15, 2016

Southern France. Duchamp, dressed in a casual jacket, is smoking and commenting about mopeds, something that he apparently always has liked. A carnival is about to start and I am wondering if this one will be like other such events everywhere else, and Duchamp confirms it disdainfully: yes, "une grande foire"...

Dream of February 21, 2016