

Roman Telerovský

THE TISSUE OF POIETIC DREAMING (II)

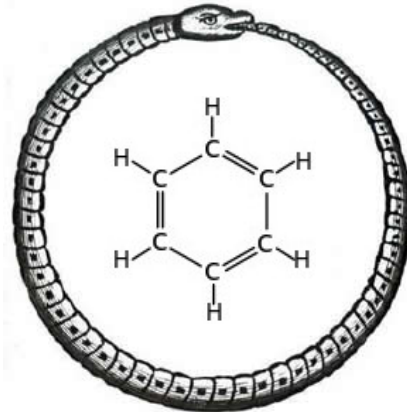
In Bion's tradition of psychoanalysis, dreaming is a continual process, taking place even in the waking state. Bion (1992) is convinced that "the dependence of waking life on dreams has been overlooked and is even more important." The tradition of surrealist thought grew out of a similar foundation. In the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) Breton puts forth the idea that waking is a sort of "phenomenon of interference" and that the human mind is ruled by "the suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night to which I commend it." And he continues: "Who can say to me that the angle by which that idea which affects it is offered, that what it likes in the eye of that woman is not precisely what links it to its dream."

In *Communicating Vessels* (1932) Breton makes a statement that clearly shows the importance he attached to the living exchange between the human being's internal and external reality: "It has seemed to me, and still seems to me ... that in closely examining the content of the most unreflective activity of the mind, if you go beyond the extraordinary and disturbing surface ebullition, it is possible to bring forth to the light of day a *capillary tissue* without which it would be useless to try to imagine any mental circulation. The role of this tissue is, as we have seen, to guarantee the constant exchange in thought that must exist between the exterior and interior worlds, an exchange that requires the continuous interpenetrations of the activity of waking and that of sleeping. My entire ambition in these pages has been to offer some glimpse of its structure." One can see here a parallel to Bion's emphasis upon the importance of balance between inner and outer worlds and his turn to a dialectical (binocular) model in psychoanalysis when examining sleep and waking, the unconscious and consciousness, primary and secondary processes (see Grothstein,



Ronnie Tjampitjinpa, *Fire Dreaming* (painting)

2009). Like Bion, Breton further stresses the importance of the dialectic of "permanent exchange" for establishing and maintaining a human being's mental life and its integrity: "Whatever the common claim to an integral consciousness and the slight habitual deliriums, no one can deny that this tissue covers a rather vast region. There it is that the permanent exchange of satisfied and unsatisfied needs is put in play for the human being; there it is that the spiritual thirst, which must be calmed and not assuaged, is exalted." Let me articulate Bion's thoughts on dreaming in order to illuminate what I consider as vivid in Breton's writing.



Dream of a Chemical Ouroboros

The German chemist August Kekulé (1829-1896) had tried for years to find a graphic representation of the molecular structure of benzene. Finally, in 1862, the ring structure was revealed to him in a dream.

In his 1890 speech to the German Chemical Society he described his dream as follows:

"...I was sitting writing on my textbook, but the work did not progress; my thoughts were elsewhere. Again the atoms were gamboling before my eyes. This time the smaller groups kept modestly in the background. My mental eye, rendered more acute by the repeated visions of the kind, could now distinguish larger structures of manifold conformation; long rows sometimes more closely fitted together all twining and twisting in snake-like motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. As if by a flash of lightning I awoke; and this time also I spent the rest of the night in working out the consequences of the hypothesis."

Another account of the same dream is the following:

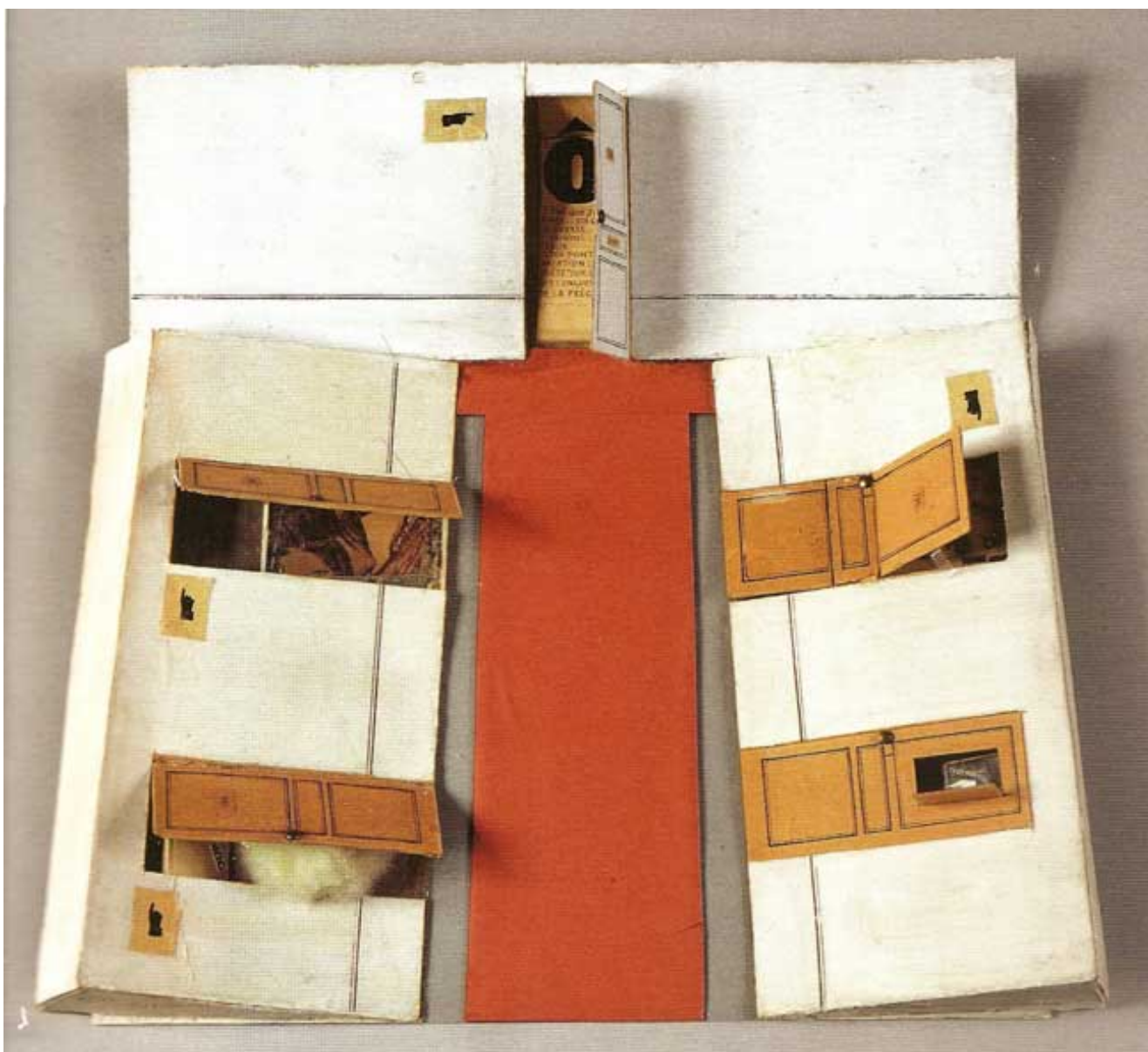
"Again the atoms were juggling before my eyes... my mind's eye, sharpened by repeated sights of a similar kind, could now distinguish larger structures of different forms and in long chains, many of them close together; everything was moving in a snake-like and twisting manner. Suddenly... one of the snakes got hold of its own tail and the whole structure was mockingly twisting in front of my eyes. As if struck by lightning, I awoke... Let us learn to dream, gentlemen, and then we may perhaps find the truth."

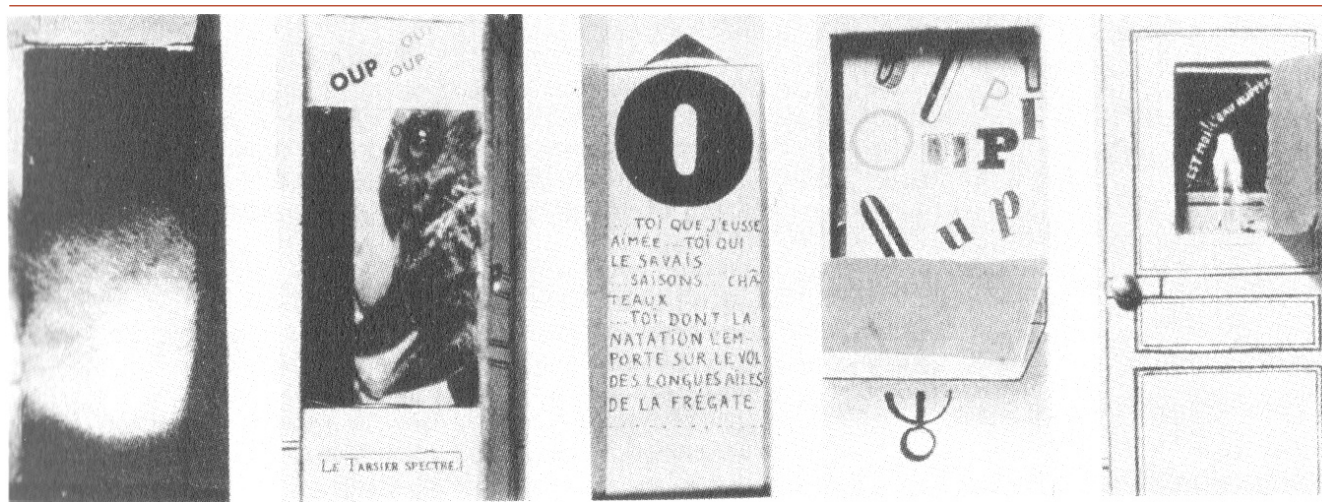
Grotstein (2009) repeatedly points to several aspects of Bion's theory on *dreaming*. The first is Bion's idea that we dream day and night, continuously, and that dreaming is a kind of mental metabolic transformation, process that mentalizes ("dreaming through") all entering stimuli and impressions from the external as well as internal world in order to sort out, encrypt, rearrange, mythify and reconjure according to the rules of unconscious *poietic* dreaming into a form suitable for unconscious thought, for creating dream thoughts, images, and memories. In these processes the "contact-barrier" is created, maintained, and strengthened, which is a selectively permeable membrane between the systems

(continued on page 4)

André Breton

Dream Object





From the need to bring into real existence certain uncommon objects seen in dreams (to reconstruct them concretely), need to which, in 1924, I drew attention in *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality*,¹ starts, as we know, one of the most remarkable lines of force of surrealism. This need can be indeed considered a generator of very distinct intellectual approaches that led to the creation of “surrealist objects” by Giacometti, Dalí, Valentine Hugo, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Tanguy, and Dominguez. For my part, it made me pursue, primarily, a totally objective representation (with physical evidence in support) of certain exceptional facts (*Communication Relating to Objective Chance*, in *Documents*, June 1934), as well as the realization of original “object-poems”—poems in which certain directly perceptible elements (a pocket knife, a plaster egg, two wings of grey porcelain) are combined with words. The dream object reproduced here can be considered a tentative synthesis of my preoccupations in this sense. It confirms, on the one hand, the idea put forth by A. Remizov at the end of his captivating study *Turgenev, Poet of Dreams* (Hippocrate, 1933), namely, that “it’s absolutely necessary to represent a dream through a drawing,” and, on the other hand, it tends to contradict the idealist assertion of this author, that I already refuted in *Communicating Vessels*, according to which “the dream, with all its inconsistencies, is not under the sign of Euclid” (at the very least, my object seems to gain considerably in clarity thanks to its three-dimensional representation).

A hotel corridor with five doors. A red path, leaving an empty disquieting space along the parallel walls (glass floor in the scale model). When ajar, the first door on the left reveals a green powder puff; the second, the image in a mirror of a spectral tarsier screaming “Oup.” The door at the end of the corridor, on which one can read the word “disappeared,” opens to reveal the invocatory “O,” such as it has the tendency to disappear from French poetry (three striking appeals to this word from the XIX century).² The next door, with panels that open, shows in the upper part the letters—uneven and in the process of dispersal—that compose the word “Oup” (O-U-P); the same letters reappear, more or less recognizable, in the lower part, in a drawing of the symbol of Neptune. An opening in the last door unveils the solution to the enigma: a shooting fountain says: “It’s me, the crested water!” (Let’s note in passing that the joyous tone of this last exclamation sheds light on the previous condemnation in the dream of the “o” with a circumflex accent, the “o” whose crest is upside down, the “o” falsely crested.)

Nothing more manifest than the persistence of the idea of water through the representations that I got, one by one, inside the five hotel rooms: the limits of the corridor rug, the green color of a powder puff, the view in a mirror of an animal, the sound of the vowel O, mentions of Lautréamont, Neptune, etc. My poem *The Air of the Water* had appeared at that time, and it was the very woman who inspired it who offered to represent this dream according to my indications.³

In *Cahiers d’Art*, No. 5-6, Paris, 1935

(Translation: Sasha Vlad)

¹ “Let’s not forget that the belief in a certain practical necessity prevents alone from assigning to the poetic testimony a value equal to that of an explorer, for example. Human fetishism, which needs to try on the colonial helmet and stroke the fur hat, listens in a completely different way to the accounts of our expeditions. It absolutely needs to believe that it *actually happened*. It is in order to satisfy this desire for perpetual verification that I recently proposed to fabricate, insofar as possible, certain objects that we approach only in dreams, and which seem no more useful than enjoyable.” André Breton, *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality*, 1924 [Translator’s Note]

² The full quotations are the following: “Ô toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais !” *À une passante* (“O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it!”) *To a Passerby* (Baudelaire); “Ô saisons, ô châteaux” (“O seasons, o castles”) (Rimbaud); “Ô toi, dont la natation l’emporte sur le vol des longues ailes de la frégate” *Les Chants de Maldoror* (“O you, whose swimming prevails over the frigate’s long wings”) *The Songs of Maldoror* (Lautréamont) [TN]

³ Jacqueline Lamba, André Breton’s second wife. [TN]

of consciousness and the unconsciousness that allows them to function dialectically as two cooperative, oppositional systems. He conflates primary and secondary processes of thought into a binary-opposition structure whose collaborative as well as oppositional but not conflictual interplay he terms the (dream-work) alpha-function – *dreaming*. Thus, the collaboration of the pleasure and reality principles determine the dreaming.

The second aspect is Bion's conception of psychopathology. For him, dreaming is not a form of thought, but a precondition of it and of all mental life as well. Dreaming protects us from the invasion of "indigestible" (unmentalized) sensory elements and allows us to be awake during the day and asleep during the night without falling into psychosis or a state of psychic death. In this sense, the psychotic person cannot be either awake or asleep because that "capillary tissue" has been torn away; the complementary and life-giving cooperation of conscious and unconscious systems has been disrupted. The meaning of things, words, and relationships becomes collapsed and he falls into a maelstrom of senseless events and nameless dread, into a flood of raw, meaningless tensions, impressions and mental fragments. By comparison, the neurotic symptom represents a point at which dreaming, as influenced by unconscious conflicts for a given area, comes to a stop or is incomplete (Ogden, 2004), but this is not a situation where the very function of dreaming has collapsed. Psychopathology results from a malfunctioning of the mind's "containing" *alpha-function* (the transformation of raw sensory stimuli into mentalized, meaningful, emotional elements or states) and an interruption of the ability to *dream* (dreaming complements the containing function and they partially overlap each other and so strengthen the mind in its ability to think and experience these emotional states). The function of dreaming is the emotional "containing" and binding of anxiety. Dreaming, therefore, not only represents a mental activity with its own mechanism, but it is also unconscious, emotional thinking capable of creating and experiencing meaningful psychic content.

The primary definition of Surrealism is: "*Psychic automatism* in its pure state, by which one proposes to express ... the *actual functioning of thought*. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. ... Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dreams..." (Breton, 1924). This is the well-known, often repeated definition whose satisfactory explanation has, for most, been reduced merely to describing the techniques of automatic writing or drawing, or even a superficial emphasis on surrealist "dreaminess." Verbal or graphic automatism and its products, ultimately rated as literary or artistic, clearly was not the actual objective of surrealist practice of poetry; automatism was not meant to be a means for creating works of literature or art from the outset. Surrealism as defined in the first Manifesto aims for a



Ronnie Tjampitjinpa, *Bush-Fire Dreaming* (painting)

process that would illuminate once dark images and symbols, which were hidden in the mind, sentences linked to visual imagery that is "knocking at the window". This is more a psychological than literary or style-creating ambition. Indeed, what Breton (1953) sought was, nothing less than the "rediscovery of the secret of language", its "prima materia".

In my opinion, psychic automatism could be understood as a psychic function, process, or realm in which images and the words of language germinate or crystallize. And the poet could be viewed as someone who accesses a peculiar state of "vision" or inspiration that affords him a peek behind the curtain, to experience and depict the flashes and flows of this realm. Thus the poet (as with the psychoanalyst in a different context) observes the *actual functioning of thought* (Breton), perceives in himself *paradoxical mental activity* (M'Uzan), and, despite being in the waking state giving free rein to the *alpha-function of dreaming* (Bion). At such a moment what suddenly appears, vanishes, metamorphoses are strange ideas, unexpectedly complete, at other times incomplete, fragmented or bizarre sentences, incomprehensible collocations, abstract definitions or phrases, vividly colorful images, more or less an elaboration of daydreams. These are images, words, and sentences that at other times come to us while in a state of half-sleep or waking, and surrealism's contribution is that it revealed their "continuity of flow" (Breton, 1924). Testimony to such continuity and interconnectedness is also found in the literature on psychoanalysis (M'Uzan, 1976, see also Telerovský, 2008).

(to be continued)

The possibility suggests itself that no dreams, however absurd or senseless, are wasted in the universe. Embedded in the dream is a hunger for its own reification, a demand that imposes an obligation on reality and that grows imperceptibly into a bona fide claim, a promissory note clamoring for payment.

Bruno Schulz, *The Republic of Dreams*, 1936



Petra Mandal, *21 clocks in a bag*, dream of 1987

ON E I R I C E C H O E S

As an addendum to the section devoted to dreams about Marcel Duchamp in Dreamdew #4 and to the section about oneiric bottles in Dreamdew #5, here are two more dreams recorded by Guy Girard:

A large room with walls uniformly covered with white tiles: it is a kind of refectory where mysterious diners eat silently at a table topped with a feast and on which there are silver candlesticks. At one end of the table sits Marcel Duchamp, who slowly rises to announce his upcoming suicide.

Dream of April 4, 2013

It is summer and I am walking on a small country road. I have to go to a party in an isolated house. Suddenly I meet Ayatollah Khomeini pedaling an old moped. I point out that the front wheel of his machine is lacking brakes and that it is dangerous to ride so, because of the wild beasts that roam around. Bottles of champagne suddenly clutter the landscape, roaring. Thus, very kindly, I install a disc brake on the moped, but before I finish, the Ayatollah has disappeared.

Dream of January 1, 1987

Guy Girard has published so far four chapbooks of dream accounts:

- Abrégé d'histoire naturelle vu en rêve, 2012
- Petit manuel de zoologie onirique 2012 - 2013
- Éléments pour une esthétique onirique, 2013
- Matériaux pour une onirochronique du surréalisme, 2015