

FREUD AND THE SCENE OF WRITING

Jacques Derrida

Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays



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Notes on the Author and Editor

Jacques Derrida teaches at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Among his works available in English are *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena*.

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Freud and the Scene of Writing

By Jacques Derrida

Worin die Bahnung sonst besteht bleibt dahingestellt [In what pathbreaking consists remains undetermined]. (*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, those elements of psychoanalysis which can only uneasily be contained within logocentric closure, as this closure limits not only the history of philosophy but also the orientation of the "human sciences," notably of a certain linguistics. If the Freudian breakthrough has an historical originality, this originality is not due to its peaceful coexistence or theoretical complicity with this linguistics, at least in its congenital phonologism.^[1]

It is no accident that Freud, at the decisive moments of his itinerary, has recourse to metaphorical models which are borrowed not from spoken language or from verbal forms, nor even from phonetic writing, but from a script which is never subject to, never exterior and posterior to, the spoken word. Freud invokes signs which do not transcribe living, full speech, master of itself and self-present. In fact, and this will be our problem, Freud *does not simply* use the metaphor of nonphonetic 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, inversely, the meaning of a trace in general, and eventually, in articulation with this meaning, may illuminate the meaning of writing in the popular sense. Freud, no doubt, is not manipulating metaphors, if to manipulate a metaphor means to make of the known an allusion to the unknown. On the contrary, through the insistence of his metaphoric investment he makes what we believe we know under the name of writing enigmatic. A movement 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 taking its assurance from the meaning of the well-known and familiar term: writing. The gesture sketched out by Freud interrupts that assurance and opens up a new kind of question about metaphor, writing, and spacing in general.

We shall let our reading be guided by this metaphoric investment. It will eventually invade the entirety of the psyche. Psychological *content* will be *represented* by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic. The *structure* of the psychological *apparatus* will be *represented* by a writing machine. What questions will these representations impose upon us? We shall not have to ask if a writing apparatus—for example, the one described in the “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad”—is a *good* metaphor for representing the working of the psyche, but rather what apparatus we must create in order to represent

psychical writing; and we shall have to ask what the imitation, projected and liberated in a machine, of something like psychical writing might mean. And 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 domain of the psychic without text. Finally, what must be the relationship between psyche, writing, and spacing for such a metaphoric transition to be possible, not only, nor primarily, within theoretical discourse, but within the history of psyche, text, and technology?

Breaching and Difference

From the *Project* (1895) to the “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925), a strange progression: a problematic of breaching^[2] is elaborated only to conform increasingly to a metaphoric of the written trace. From a system of traces functioning according to a model which Freud would have preferred to be a natural one, 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 functioning 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 its 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 the *Wunderblock*, 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 of which Freud said, in the *Project*: “We cannot off-hand imagine an apparatus capable of such complicated functioning” (SE, I, 299) and which he replaced at that time with a neurological fable whose framework and intention, in certain respects, he will never abandon.

In 1895, the question was to explain memory in the manner of the natural sciences, in order “to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles” (I, 295). Now, a “main characteristic of nervous tissue is memory: that is, quite generally, a capacity for being permanently altered by single occurrences” (I, 299). And a “psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of ‘memory’” (ibid.). The crux of such an explanation, what makes such an apparatus almost unimaginable, is the necessity of accounting simultaneously, as the “Note” will do thirty years later, for the permanence of the trace and for the virginity of the receiving substance, for the engraving of furrows and for the perennially intact bareness of the perceptive surface: in this case, of the neurones. “It would seem, therefore, that neurones must be both influenced and also unaltered, unprejudiced (*unvoreingenommen*)” (ibid.). Rejecting a

distinction, which was common in his day, between “sense cells” and “memory cells,” Freud then forges the hypothesis of “contact-barriers” and “breaching” (*Bahnung*, lit. pathbreaking), of the breaking open of a path (*Bahn*). Whatever may be thought of the continuities and ruptures to come, this hypothesis is remarkable as soon as it is considered as a metaphorical model and not as a neurological description. Breaching, the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path. Which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached. Now there would be two kinds of neurones: the permeable neurones (Φ), which offer no resistance and thus retain no trace of impression, would be the perceptual neurones; other neurones (Ψ), which would oppose contact-barriers to the quantity of excitation, would thus retain the printed trace: they “thus afford a possibility of representing (*darzustellen*) memory” (ibid.). This is the first representation, the 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 inflection of the context.) Freud attributes psychical quality only to these latter neurones. They are the “vehicles of memory and so probably of psychical processes in general” (1, 300). Memory, thus, is 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 within the simple opposition of quantity and quality (the latter being reserved for the pure transparency of a perception without memory), we find that the concept of breaching shows itself intolerant of this intention. An equality of resistance to breaching, or an equivalence of the breaching forces, would eliminate any *preference* in the choice of itinerary. Memory would be paralyzed. It is the difference between breaches which is the true origin of memory, and thus of the psyche. Only this difference enables a “pathway to be preferred (*Wegbevorzugung*)”: “Memory is represented (*dargestellt*) by the differences in the facilitations of the ψ -neurones” (I, 300). We then must not say that breaching without difference is insufficient for memory; it must be stipulated that there is no pure breaching without difference. Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches. We thus already know that psychic life is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference within the exertion of forces. As Nietzsche had already said. [\[3\]](#)

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 breaching. “The memory of an

experience (that is, its continuing operative power) depends on a factor which is called the magnitude of the impression and on the frequency with which the same impression is repeated" (I, 300). The number of repetitions is thus added to the quantity ($Q\eta$) of the excitation, and these two quantities are of two absolutely heterogeneous types. There are only discrete repetitions, and they can act as such only through the diastem which maintains their separation. Finally, if breaching can supplement a quantity presently at work, or can be added to it, it is because breaching -is certainly analogous to quantity, but is other than it as well: "*quantity plus facilitation* resulting from $Q\eta$ are at the same time something that can replace $Q\eta$ " (I, 300-301). Let us not hasten to define this other of pure quantity as quality: for in so doing we would be transforming the force of memory into present consciousness and the translucent perception of present qualities. Thus, neither the difference between full quantities, nor the interval between repetitions of the identical, nor breaching itself, may be thought of in terms of the opposition between quantity and quality.^[4] Memory cannot be derived from this opposition, and it escapes the grasp of "naturalism" as well as of "phenomenology."

All these differences in the production of the trace may be reinterpreted as moments of deferring. In accordance with a motif which 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 expenditure or presence are deferred with

the help of breaching or repetition. Is this not already the detour (*Aufschub*, lit. delay) which institutes the relation of pleasure to reality (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE, XVIII)? Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an *economy* of death, through deferment, 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 psychological 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: "Facilitation is probably the result of the single (*einmaliger*) passage of a large quantity." Even assuming that his affirmation does not lead us little by little to the problem of phylogenesis and of hereditary breaches, we 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 breaching which it resists, the effraction which it can contain only by repeating it. It is because breaching breaks open that Freud, in the *Project*, accords a privilege to pain. In a certain sense, there is no breaching without a beginning of pain, and "pain leaves behind it particularly rich breaches." 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 enigmas 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 that he excludes any possible derivation of it. Let us observe this nonderivation, even if it renders only more dense the difficulty of the concepts of “primariness” and of the timelessness of the primary process, and even if this difficulty does not cease to intensify in what is to come. “Here we are almost involuntarily reminded of the endeavor of the nervous system, maintained through every modification, to avoid being burdened by a $Q\eta$ or to keep the burden as small as possible. Under the compulsion of the exigencies of life, the nervous system was obliged to lay up a store of $Q\eta$. This necessitated an increase in the number of its neurones, and these had to be impermeable. It now avoids, partly at least, being *filled* with $Q\eta$ (cathexis), by setting up *facilitations*. It will be seen, then, that facilitations serve the primary function” (I, 301).

No doubt life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral). But we must be wary of this formulation: there is no life present *at first* which would *then* come to protect, postpone, or reserve itself in *différance*. The later constitutes the essence of life. Or rather: as *différance* is not an essence, as it is not anything, 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 the beyond of the

pleasure principle are native and congenital to that which they transgress. When Freud writes in the *Project* that “facilitations serve the primary function,” he is forbidding us to be surprised by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He complies with a dual necessity: that of recognizing *différance* at the origin, and at the same time that of crossing out the concept of *primariness*: we will not, then, be surprised by the *Traumdeutung*, which defines primariness as a “theoretical fiction” in a paragraph on the “delaying” (*Verspatung*) of the secondary process. It is thus the delay which is in the beginning.^[5] Without which, *différance* would be the lapse which a consciousness, a self-presence of the present, accords itself. To defer (*différer*) thus cannot 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 those of a calculus or mechanics of decision.^[6] To say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why “originary” must be understood as having been *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 this is possible only if *différance* is determined outside any teleological or eschatological horizon. Which is not easy. Let us note in passing that the concepts of *Nachtrdglichkeit* and *Verspatung*, concepts which govern the whole of Freud’s thought and

determine all his other concepts, are already present and named in the *Project*. The irreducibility of the “effect of deferral”—such, no doubt, is Freud’s discovery. Freud exploits this discovery in its ultimate consequences, beyond the psychoanalysis of the individual, and he thought that the history of culture ought to confirm it. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1937), the efficacy of delay and of action subsequent to the event is at work over large historical intervals. The problem of latency, moreover, is in highly significant contact with the problem of oral and written tradition in this text.

Although “breaching” is not named writing at any time in the *Project*, the contradictory requirements which the “Mystic Writing-Pad” will fulfill are already formulated in terms which are literally identical: “an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces” (SE XIX, 227).

Differences in the work of breaching concern not only forces but also locations. And Freud already wants to think force and place simultaneously.^[7] He is the first not to believe in the descriptive value of his hypothetical representation of breaching. The distinction between the categories of neurones “has no recognized foundation, at least insofar as morphology (i.e., histology) is concerned.” It is, rather, the index of a topographical description which external space, that is, familiar and constituted space, the exterior space of the natural sciences, cannot contain. This is why, under the heading of “the biological standpoint,” a “difference in essence”

(*Wesensverschiedenheit*) between the neurones is “replaced by a difference in the environment to which they are destined” (*Schicksals-Milieuverschiedenheit*) (I, 304): these are pure differences, differences of situation, of connection, of localization, of structural relations more important than their supporting terms; and they are differences for which the relativity of outside and inside is always to be determined. The thinking of difference can neither dispense with topography nor accept the current models of spacing.

This difficulty becomes more acute when it becomes necessary to explain those differences that are pure par excellence: differences of quality, that is, for Freud, differences of consciousness. He must provide an explanation for “what we are aware of, in the most puzzling fashion (*rätselfhaft*), through our ‘consciousness’” (I, 307). And “since this consciousness knows nothing of what we have so far been assuming—quantities and neurones—it [the theory] should explain this lack of knowledge to us as well” (I, 308). Now qualities are clearly pure differences: “Consciousness gives us what are called qualities — sensations which are *different* (*anders*) and whose difference (*Anders*, lit. otherness) is distinguished (*unterschieden wird*, lit. is differentiated) according to its relations with the external world. Within this difference there are series, similarities, and so on, but there are in fact no quantities in it. It may be asked *how* qualities originate and *where* qualities originate” (I, 308).

Neither outside nor inside. They cannot be in the external world, where the physicist recognizes only quantities, “masses in motion and nothing else” (I, 308). Nor in the interiority of the psyche (i.e., of memory), for “reproducing or remembering” are “without quality (*qualitätslos*)” (ibid.). Since rejection of the topographical model is out of the question, “we must summon up courage to assume that there is a third system of neurones— ω perhaps [perceptual neurones] — which is excited along with perception, but not along with reproduction, and whose states of excitation give rise to the various qualities —are, that is to say, *conscious sensations*” (I, 309). Foreshadowing in the interpolated sheet of the mystic writing-pad, Freud, annoyed by this “jargon,” tells Fliess (letter 39, 1 Jan. 1896) that he is inserting, “slipping” (*schieben*) the perceptual neurones (ω) between the φ - and ψ -neurones.

The last bit of daring results in “what seems like an immense difficulty”: we have just encountered a permeability and a breaching 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 out. ...So far I have regarded it [the passage of quantity] only as the transference of $Q\eta$ from one neurone to another. It must have another characteristic, of a temporal nature” (I, 310).

If the discontinuity hypothesis “goes further,” Freud emphasizes, than the “physical clarification” due to 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 QH [quantities], appropriate the *period* of the excitation” (ibid.). Pure difference, again, and difference between diastems. The concept of a *period in general* precedes and conditions the opposition between quantity and quality, and everything governed by this opposition. For “ ψ -neurones too have their period, of course; but it is without quality, or more correctly, monotonous” (ibid.). As we shall see, this insistence on discontinuity will faithfully become the occupation of the “Note on 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 upon an incessant and increasingly radical invocation of the principle of difference. Beneath an indicial neurology, which plays the representational role of an artificial model, we repeatedly find a persistent attempt to account for the psyche in terms of spacing, a topography of traces, a map of breaches; and we repeatedly find an attempt to locate consciousness or quality in a space whose structure and possibility must be rethought, along with an attempt to describe the “functioning of the apparatus” in terms of pure differences and locations, an attempt 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 of this topography is radically new and must not allow any omissions that Freud, in his setting up 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 his topographical preoccupations, but to transform them. Trace will become *gramme*; and the region of breaching 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.”^[8] In a moment: in thirty years. By itself: almost.

A little more than a year later, the trace starts to become writing. In letter 52 (6 Dec. 1896), 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 physical. At the heart of the letter: the words “sign” (*Zeichen*), registration (*Niederschrift*), transcription (*Umschrift*). Not only is the communication between trace and delay (i.e., a present which does not constitute but is originally reconstituted

from “signs” of memory) explicitly defined in this letter, but verbal phenomena are assigned a place within a system of stratified writing which these phenomena are far from dominating: “As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification (*Aufeinanderschichtung*); the material present in the form of memory-traces (*Errinerungsspuren*) being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* (*Umordnung*) in accordance with fresh circumstances to a *retranscription* (*Umschrift*). Thus, what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down (*niederlegt*) in various species of indications [*Zeichen*, lit. signs]... I cannot say how many of these registrations (*Niederschriften*) there are: at least three, probably more. ...The different registrations are also separated (not necessarily topographically) according to the neurones which are their vehicles. . . .*Perception*. These are neurones in which perceptions originate, to which consciousness attaches, but which in themselves retain no trace of what has happened. *For consciousness and memory are mutually exclusive. Indication of perception*: the first registration of the perceptions; it is quite incapable of consciousness and arranged according to associations by simultaneity. . . .*Unconscious* is a second registration. . . .*Preconscious* is the third transcription, attached to word-presentations and corresponding to our official ego. . . .This secondary *thought-consciousness* is subsequent in time and probably linked to the hallucinatory activation of word-presentations” (I,

235).

This is the first move toward the “Note.” From now on, starting with the *Traumdeutung* (1900), the metaphor of writing will *appropriate simultaneously the problems of the psychic apparatus in its structure and that of the psychic text in its fabric*. The solidarity of the two problems should make us that much more attentive: the two series of metaphors — text and machine — do not come on stage at the same time.

“Dreams generally follow old facilitations,” 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 a writing which simply transcribes, a stony echo of muted words, but a lithography before words: metaphonetic, nonlinguistic, alogical. (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, no doubt, on the first approach will be 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 profound intention which inspires the

former. Popular tradition may err, of course, 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 cryptography (*Geheimschrift*) in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key (*Schlüssel*)” (IV, 97). 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, the one chosen by Freud to illustrate this traditional 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 dreamed 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 engagement to be married. Thus a letter (*epistola*) written with letters (*litterae*), a document composed of phonetic signs, the transcription of verbal discourse, may be translated by a nonverbal signifier 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 eighteenth century an English theologian, known to Freud, had already invoked Artemidorus with an intention that is doubtless worthy of comparison.^[9] 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 reasons of self-justification, in demonstrating, against Father Kircher, “the high antiquity of Egyptian learning,” chooses the example of an Egyptian science which draws all its resources from 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 a gift of writing just as he inspired dreams. Interpreters, like dreams themselves, then had only to draw upon the curiological or tropological storehouse. They would readily find there the key

to dreams, which they would then pretend to divine. The hieroglyphic code itself served as a *Traumbuch*. An alleged gift of God, in fact constructed historically, it had become the common source from which was drawn oneiric discourse: the setting and the text of the dream's *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 enregistered in the system of hieroglyphics. Dreams would only manipulate elements (*stoicheia*, says Warburton, elements or letters) contained in the storehouse of hieroglyphics, somewhat as written speech would draw on a written language: "So that the question will be, on what grounds or rules of interpretation the Oneirocritics proceeded, when, if a man dreamt of a dragon, the Interpreter assured him it signified *majesty*; if of a serpent, a *disease*; a viper, *money*; frogs, *impostors*."^[10] What then did the hermeneuts of that age do? They consulted writing itself:

Now the early *Interpreters of dreams* were not juggling impostors; but, like the early judicial *Astrologers*, more superstitious than their neighbors; and so the first who fell into their own delusions. However, suppose them to have been as arrant cheats as any of their successors, yet at their first setting up they must have had materials proper for their trade; which could never be the wild workings of each man's private fancy. Their customers would look to find a known analogy, become venerable by long application to mysterious wisdom, for the groundwork of their deciphering; and the Decipherers themselves would as naturally fly to some confessed authority, to support their pretended Science. But what ground or authority could this be, if not the mysterious learning of *symbolic characters*? Here we seem to have got a solution of the difficulty. The *Egyptian* priests, the first interpreters of dreams, took their rules for this species of *DIVINATION*, from their *symbolic* riddling, in which they were so deeply read: A ground of interpretation which would give the strongest credit to the Art; and equally satisfy the diviner and the Consulter; for by this time it was generally believed that their Gods have given them *hieroglyphic writing*. So that nothing was more natural than to

imagine that these Gods, who in their opinion gave *dreams* likewise, had employed the same mode of expression in both revelations.^[11]

It is here that the Freudian break occurs. Freud doubtless conceives of the dream as a displacement similar to an original form of writing which puts words on stage without becoming subservient to them; and he is thinking here, no doubt, of a model of writing irreducible to speech which would include, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic, and phonetic elements. But he makes of psychical writing so ordinary a production that the writing we believe to be designated by the proper sense of the word—a script which is coded and visible “in the world”—would only be the metaphor of psychical writing. This writing, for example the kind we find in dreams which “follow old facilitations,” a simple moment in a regression toward a “primary” writing, cannot be read in terms of any code. It works, no doubt, with a mass of elements which have been codified 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 unconsciousnesses. The dreamer invents his own grammar. No meaningful material or prerequisite text exists which he might *simply use*, even if he never deprives himself of them. Such, despite their interest, is the limitation of the *Chiffriermethode* and the *Traumbuch*. As much as it is a function of the generality and the rigidity of the code, this limitation is a function of an excessive preoccupation with *content*, and 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, on the contrary, am prepared to find that the same piece of content may conceal a different meaning when it occurs in various people or in various contexts” (SE IV, 105). Elsewhere, in support of that statement, Freud thinks it proper to adduce the case of Chinese writing: “They [the dream symbols] frequently have more than one or even several meanings, and, as with Chinese script, the correct interpretation can only be arrived at on each occasion from the context” (V, 353).

The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code means that in psychic 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 old facilitations,” does not borrow but produces its own signifiers; does not create them in their materiality, of course, but produces their status-as-meaningful (*signifiance*). Henceforth, they are no longer, properly speaking, signifiers. And the possibility of translation, if it is far from being eliminated —for experience perpetually creates distances between the points of identity or between the adherence of signifier to signified —is nevertheless in principle and by definition limited. Such, perhaps, is Freud’s understanding, from another standpoint, in the article on “Repression”: “Repression acts, therefore, in a *highly individual* manner” (XIV, 150). (Individuality here does not refer

primarily to the repression practiced by individuals but to that of each “derivative of the repressed, which may have its own special vicissitude.”) 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, and would consequently be implied by the concept of the sign itself. Even if, along with Saussure, we envisage the distinction between signified and signifier only as the two sides of a sheet of paper, nothing is changed. Ordinary writing, if there is one, 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 by 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 short; and we shall feel tempted to draw up a new ‘dream-book’ on the decoding principle” (V, 351). And, in fact, Freud never stopped proposing codes, rules of great generality. And the substitution of signifiers seems to be the essential activity of psychoanalytic interpretation. Certainly, 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 cannot be traversed and transgressed as it is in conscious speech. It acts as such, with the efficacy Artaud assigned it on the stage of cruelty.^[12] The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation. And 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” (IV, 99, n. 1). What is valid for a specific national language is a fortiori valid for a private grammar.

Moreover, this horizontal impossibility of translation without loss has its basis in a vertical impossibility. We are speaking here of the way in which unconscious thoughts become conscious. If a dream cannot be translated into another language, it is because within the psychical 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 preconscious toward consciousness. Here again the

metaphorical concept of translation (*Übersetzung*) or transcription (*Umschrift*) is dangerous, not 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 harmlessly transported into the milieu of a different language, that of the preconscious or the conscious. It is thus not enough to speak of writing in order to be faithful to Freud, for it is then that we may betray him more than ever.

This is what the last chapter of the *Traumdeutung* explains. An entirely and conventionally topographical metaphor of the psychical 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 conceptions [intuitive illustrations: *Anschauungen*] which might be misleading so long as we looked upon the two systems in the most literal and crudest sense as two localities in the mental apparatus —conceptions which left their traces in the expressions ‘to repress’ and ‘to force a way through.’ Thus, we may speak of an unconscious thought seeking to convey itself into the preconscious 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; and the notion of forcing a way through into consciousness must be kept carefully free from any idea of a

change of locality" (V, 610).^[13]

Let us interrupt our quotation for a moment. The conscious text is thus not a transcription, because there is no text *present elsewhere* as an unconscious one to be transposed or transported. For the value of presence can also dangerously affect the concept of the unconscious. There is then no unconscious truth to be rediscovered by virtue of having been 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 conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave 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 deferral, *nachtraglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*: for the *nachtraglich* also means *supplementary*. The call of the supplement is primary, here, and it hollows out that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. The supplement, which seems to be added as a plentitude to a plentitude, is equally 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 sleepwalker, the strange logic of that word. It is within its logic that the possibility of deferred action should be conceived, as well as, no doubt, the relationship between the primary and the secondary on all levels.^[14] 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 the recurrence, the present is only the call for a footnote.^[15] That the present in general is not primal but, rather, 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. This pursuit is doubtless the only one which is exhausted neither within metaphysics nor within 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, is originary and irreducible. Since consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world, it is here that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphism, of the literal, of the literal becoming literary, etc.) in terms of the labor of the

writing which circulated like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious. The “objectivist” or “worldly” consideration of writing teaches us nothing if reference is not made 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 this is also the case for Freud, who wants to respect simultaneously the Being-in-the-world of the psyche, its Being-situated, and the originality of its topology, which is irreducible to any ordinary intraworldliness, we perhaps should think that what we are describing here as the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world. Erases it while producing it: the medium of the dialogue and misunderstanding between the Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts of Being-in-the-world.)

Concerning this nontranscriptive writing, Freud adds a fundamental specification. This specification will reveal: (1) the danger involved in immobilizing or freezing energy within a naive metaphoric of place; (2) the necessity not of abandoning but of rethinking the space or topology of this 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.

Again, we may speak of a preconscious thought being repressed or driven out and then taken over by the unconscious. These images, derived from a set of ideas (*Vorstellungskreis*) relating to a struggle for a piece of ground,

may tempt us to suppose that it is literally true that a mental grouping (*Anordnung*) in one locality has been brought to an end and replaced by a fresh one in another locality. Let us replace these metaphors 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 [V, 610-11].

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. This 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: psychic writing does not lend itself to translation because it is a single energetic system (however differentiated it may be), and because it covers the entirety of the psychical apparatus. Despite the difference of agencies, psychical writing in general is not a displacement of meanings within the limpidity of an immobile, pre-given space and the blank neutrality of discourse. A discourse which might be coded without ceasing to be diaphanous. Here energy cannot be reduced; it does not limit meaning, but rather produces it. The distinction between force and meaning is derivative in relation to an archi-trace; it belongs 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 of verbal representation. The 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 originarily as its death. This power, that is, this lack of power, which opens and limits the labor 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. Despite 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 the 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 one effaces the intensity of the relation to death as well.

We ought thus to examine closely— which we cannot do here —all that Freud invites us to think concerning writing as “breaching” in the *psychical* repetition of this previously *neurological* notion: opening up of its own space, effraction, breaking of a path against resistances, rupture and irruption becoming a route (*rupta, via rupta*), violent inscription of a form, tracing of a difference in a nature or a matter which are conceivable as such only in their

opposition to writing. The route is opened in nature or matter, forest or wood (*hyle*), and in it acquires 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.^[16] 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," SE XIV, 188), and of the *itinerant* work of the trace, producing and following its route, the trace which traces, the trace which breaks open its own path. The metaphor of pathbreaking, so frequently used in Freud's descriptions, is always in communication with the theme of the *supplementary delay* and with the reconstitution of meaning through deferral, after a mole-like progression, after the subterranean toil of an impression. This impression has left behind a laborious trace which has never been *perceived*, whose meaning has never been lived in the present, i.e., has never been lived consciously. The postscript which constitutes the past present as such is not satisfied, as Plato, Hegel, and Proust perhaps thought, with reawakening or revealing the present past in its truth. It produces the present past. Is sexual deferral the best example or the essence of this movement? A false question, no doubt: the (presumably known) *subject* of the question —sexuality— is determined, limited, or unlimited only through inversion and through the answer itself. Freud's answer, in any event, is decisive. Take the Wolf-Man. It is by deferral that the perception of the primal scene—whether it be reality or fantasy hardly

matters —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 nachtraglich*). The reason for this state of things is the retardation (*Verspotung*) 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 Freud’s intuition and his concepts 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 doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time.^[17]

Dioptrics and Hieroglyphics

Let us not hasten to conclude that by invoking an energetics, as opposed to a topography, of translation Freud abandoned his efforts at localization. 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 figurative image (*anschauliche Vorstellung*: intuitive representation, metaphor) of the two systems. We can avoid any possible abuse of this method of representation (*mode de mise en scène; Darstellungsweise*) by recollecting that ideas (*Vorstellungen*: representations), thoughts and psychological 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 resistance and facilitations 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 psychological entities themselves* [my italics] and can never be accessible to our psychological perception) like the lenses of the telescope, which cast the image. And, if we

pursue this analogy, we 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” (V, 611).

This representation already cannot be understood in terms of the spatiality of a simple, homogenous structure. The change in medium and the movement of refraction indicate this sufficiently. Later, in a further reference to the same machine, Freud 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 [*Preparat*: 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 [V, 536].

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 in question. 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" (V, 537). Finally, these optical instruments *capture* light; in the example of photography they register it.^[18] Freud wants to account for the photographic negative or inscription of light, and this 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 relating 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 systems. 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 [V, 538].

Two systems will thus be necessary in a single machine. This double system, combining freshness of surface and depth of retention, could only distantly and "imperfectly" be represented by an optical machine. "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* (V, 608). Only a small step. The graphic representation of the (nonpsychical) system of the psychical is not yet ready at a time when such a representation of the psychical has already occupied, 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, on an original site, of meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could only tend to repress, and (to a certain extent) could only fail to repress. In particular in so-called phonetic writing. The latter’s complicity with logos (or the time of logic), which is dominated by the principle of noncontradiction, the cornerstone of all metaphysics or presence, is profound. Now in every 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.” The border between the non-phonetic space of writing (even “phonetic” writing) and the space of the stage (*scene*) of dreams is uncertain.

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 nonphenetic writing in general. Synopsis and not stasis: scene and not tableau. The laconic, lapidary quality of dreams is not the impassive presence of petrified signs.^[19]

Interpretation has spelled out the elements of dreams. 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 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 for “if,” “because,” “just as,” “although,” “either-or,” and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches? [V, 312].

This type of representation (*mise en scène*) may at first be compared to those forms of expression which are like the writing within 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 as well not use spoken language? "In dreams we see but we do not hear," 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.^[20] Far from disappearing, speech then changes purpose and status. It is situated, surrounded, invested (in all senses of the word),^[21] constituted. 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" (V, 312).

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," we are left in no doubt on this subject, although Freud still uses the concept of translation on which he will later cast suspicion. "The dream-thoughts and the dream-content (the latent and manifest) are presented to us like two versions (*mises en scène*) of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript (*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*), the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts" (IV, 277). *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 symbolic relation (*Zeichenbeziehung*), we should clearly be led into error. ...A dream is a picture puzzle (*Bilderrätzel*) of this sort and our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition" (IV, 277-78). The figurative content is then indeed a form of writing, a signifying chain in scenic form. In that sense, of course, it summarizes a discourse, it is the *economy of speech*. The entire chapter on "Representability" (*Aptitude a la mise en scène; Darstellbarkeit*) shows this quite well. But the reciprocal economic transformation, the total reassimilation into discourse, 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 sufficient to say that in dreams, words are condensed by "things"; and that inversely, nonverbal signifiers may be interpreted to a certain degree in terms of verbal representations. It must be seen that insofar as they are attracted, lured into the dream, toward the

fictive limit of the primary process, words tend to become things pure and simple. 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” (V, 603). The interval in “dreams” and the interval in “wakefulness” may not be distinguished *essentially* insofar as the nature of language is concerned. “Words are often treated as things in dreams and thus undergo the same operations as thing presentations.”^[22] In the *formal regression* of dreams, words are not *overtaken* by the spatialization of representation (*mise en scène*). Formal regression 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, vigilant speech, by consciousness, logic, the history of 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 it falls into a space “exterior” to it, includes within itself 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 upon 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 a 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 reproduction (*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 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 [IV, 314].

The model of hieroglyphic writing assembles more strikingly—though we find it in every form of writing—the diversity of the 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" (V, 341).

More than twenty years separate the first edition of the *Traumdeutung*

from the “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad.” If we continue to follow the two series of metaphors—those concerning the nonpsychical 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 ancient 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.^[23] The interest which psychoanalysis brings to linguistics presupposes an “overstepping of the habitual meaning of the word ‘speech.’ For in what follows ‘speech’ must be understood not merely to mean the expression of thought in words, but to include the speech of gesture and every other method, such, for instance, as writing, by which mental activity can be expressed” (XIII, 176). And having recalled the archaic character of expression in dreams, which accepts contradiction^[24] and valorizes visibility, Freud specifies:

It seems to us more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with language. In fact, the interpretation of a dream is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphics. In both cases there are certain elements which are not intended to be interpreted (or read, as the case may be) but are only designed to serve as “determinatives,” that is to establish the meaning of some other element. The ambiguity of various elements of dreams finds a parallel in these ancient systems of writing. . . . If this conception of the method of representation in dreams (*mise en scène*) has not yet been followed up, this, as will be readily understood,

must be ascribed to the fact that psycho-analysts are entirely ignorant of the attitude and knowledge with which a philologist would approach such a problem as that presented by dreams [XIII, 177].

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 mechanisms. The debate between the functional hypothesis and the topographical hypothesis concerns the locations of an *inscription* (*Niederschrift*): “When a psychical act (let us confine ourselves here to one which is in the nature of an idea [*Vorstellung*, lit. representation] is transposed from the systems Ucs. into the system Cs. (or Pcs.), are we to suppose that this transposition involves a fresh record—as it were, a second registration — of the idea in question which may thus be situated as well in a fresh psychical locality, and alongside of which the original unconscious registration continues to exist? Or are we rather to believe that the transposition consists in a change in the state of the idea, a change involving the same material and occurring in the same locality?” (XIV, 174). The discussion which follows does not directly concern us here. Let us simply recall that the economic hypothesis and the difficult concept of anticathexis (*Gegenbesetzung*: “the sole mechanism of primal repression,” XIV, 181) which Freud introduces after refusing to decide on the last question, do not eliminate the topographical difference of the two inscriptions.^[25] 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 graphism itself is reserved for the description of 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, for the main thread of the article on “The Unconscious,” its *example*, as we have emphasized, is the fate of a *representation* after it is first registered. When perception—the apparatus which originally en-registered and inscribes—is described, the “perceptual apparatus” can be nothing but a writing machine. The “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad,” twelve years later, will describe the perceptual apparatus and the origin of memory. Long disjointed and out of phase, the two series of metaphors will then be united.

Freud’s Piece 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 demonstrated in progressive steps. 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 which is not memory itself: *hypomnesis* rather

than *mneme*, said the *Phaedrus*.^[26] 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 part extracted from the apparatus and “materialized.” Such is the *first analogy*:

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 supplement and guarantee (*ergänzen und versichern*) its working by making a note in writing (*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 [XIX, 227].

Freud’s theme here is not the absence of memory or the primal and normal finitude of the powers of memory; even less is it the structure of the temporalization which grounds that finitude. or this structure’s essential relation 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 is it that which is called for, as concerns the nature of the psyche, in order for this supplementation to be possible. At first, it is simply a question of considering the conditions which customary writing surfaces impose on the operation of mnemonic supplementation. 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 erasing the imprints on it, does not conserve its traces. All the classical writing surfaces offer only one of the two advantages and always present the complementary difficulty. 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” (XIX, 227). 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, a space which writing has always claimed for itself.

Auxiliary apparatuses (*Hilfsapparate*), which, as Freud notes, are always constituted on the model of the organ to be supplemented (e.g., spectacles, camera, ear trumpet) thus seem particularly deficient when memory is in question. 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 could have said in 1895: “As long ago as in 1900 I gave expression in *The Interpretation of Dreams* 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 ‘mnemonic 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" (XIX, 228).^[27]

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 the "small contrivance" placed "some time ago upon the market under the name of the Mystic Writing-Pad," and which "promises to perform more than the sheet of paper or the 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" (ibid.). 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 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-gray 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.^[28] 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 [XIX, 228-29].

Let us note that the *depth* of the Mystic Pad is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, 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 any foundation.

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 the waxed paper from "injurious effects from without." "I may at this point recall that in *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle,^[29] 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 surface behind it which receives the stimuli, namely the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*" (XIX, 230).

But this still concerns only reception or perception, the most superficial surface's openness 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" (ibid.). 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" (ibid.). Writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself [is conscious of 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.^[30]

Whereas other writing surfaces, corresponding to the prototype 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.” (XIX, 230-31). The becoming-visible which alternates 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 certainly 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 this time of writing is nothing other than the very structure of that which 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*, can reduce its essence to the timeless simplicity of an intelligible object.^[31] 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, to 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 also will be writing as the interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels: the remarkably heterogeneous 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, and 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 [XIX, 231].

This 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 withdrawn in this way. Freud compares this movement to the feelers which the *unconscious* would stretch out toward the external world, and which it would withdraw when these feelers had sampled the excitations coming from the external world in order to warn the

unconscious of any threat. (Freud had no more reserved the image of the feeler for the unconscious—we find it in chapter 4 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*^[32] — than he had reserved the notion of cathectic periodicity, as we noted above.) The “origin of our concept of time” is attributed to this “periodic non-excitability” and to this “discontinuous method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs.” Time is the economy of a system of writing.

The machine does not run by itself. It is less a machine than a tool. And it is not held with only one hand. This is the mark of its temporality. Its *maintenance* is not simple. The ideal virginity of the present (*maintenant*) is constituted by the work of memory. At least two hands are needed to make the apparatus function, as well as a system of gestures, a coordination of independent initiatives, an organized multiplicity of origins. It is at this stage 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” (XIX, 232).

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 repetition and erasure, legibility and illegibility. A two-handed machine, a multiplicity of

agencies or origins —is this not the original relation to the other and the original temporality of writing, its “primary” complication: an originary spacing, deferring, and erasure of the simple origin, and polemics on the very threshold of what we persist in calling perception? The stage of dreams, “which follow old facilitations,” was a stage of writing. But this is because “perception,” the first relation of life to its other, the origin of life, had always already prepared representation. We must be several in order to write, and even to “perceive.” The *simple* structure of maintenance and manuscription, like every intuition of an origin, 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. The condition for writing 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 the deletions, blanks, and disguises of writing, even if, at the beginning of the *Traumdeutung*, Freud seems to make only a conventional, didactic reference to it. The apparent exteriority of political censorship refers to an essential censorship which binds the writer to his own writing.

If there were only perception, pure permeability to breaching, there would be no breaches. We would be written, but nothing would be recorded;

no writing would be produced, retained, repeated as legibility. But pure perception does not exist: we are written only as we write, by the agency within us which always already keeps watch over 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: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found. In order to describe the 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 the ruses perpetrated by the author who reads and by the first reader who dictates, for at stake here is the origin of the work itself. The *sociality* of writing as *drama* requires an entirely different discipline.

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 to 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 section of the "Note," his gesture at this point is extremely Platonic. Only the writing of the soul, said the *Phaedrus*, only the psychological trace is able to reproduce and to 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" (XIX, 230). 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 psychological memory. Freud, like Plato, thus continues to oppose hypomnemonic writing and writing *en tei psychei*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of a present truth outside of time. Henceforth, the Mystic Pad, separated from psychological responsibility, a representation abandoned to itself, still participates in Cartesian space and mechanics: *natural* wax, exteriority of the *memory aid*.

All that Freud had thought about the unity of life and death, however,

should have led him to ask other questions here. And to ask them explicitly. Freud does not explicitly examine the status of the “materialized” supplement which is necessary to the alleged spontaneity of memory, even if that spontaneity were differentiated in itself, thwarted by a censorship of 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. The machine —and, consequently, representation —is death and finitude *within* the psyche. Nor does Freud examine the possibility of this machine, which, in the world, has at least begun to *resemble* memory, and increasingly resembles it more closely. Its resemblance to memory is closer than that of 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. This resemblance —i.e., necessarily a certain Being-in-the-world of the psyche — did not happen to memory from without, any more than death surprises life. It founds memory. Metaphor—in this case the analogy between two apparatuses and the possibility of this 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 when he had brought this question to the threshold of being thematic and urgent. 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 its finitude. The very idea of finitude is derived from the movement of this supplementarity. The historico-technical production of this metaphor which survives individual (that is, generic) psychical organization, is of an entirely different order than 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 *technology* (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 nonpsychical, life and death. Writing, here, is *technē* as the 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 nonpsychical apparatus. In this sense writing is the stage of history and the play of the world. It cannot be exhausted by psychology alone. That which, in Freud’s discourse, opens itself to the theme of writing results in psychoanalysis being not simply psychology —nor simply psychoanalysis.

Thus are perhaps augured, in the Freudian breakthrough, a beyond and a beneath of the closure we might term “Platonic.” In that moment of world history “subsumed” by the name of Freud, by means of an unbelievable

mythology (be it neurological or metapsychological: for we never dreamed of taking it seriously, outside of the question which disorganizes and disturbs its literalness, the metapsychological fable, which marks perhaps only a minimal advance beyond the neurological tales of the *Project*), a relationship to itself of the historico-transcendental stage of writing was spoken without being said, thought without being thought: was written and simultaneously erased, metaphorized; designating itself while indicating intrawordly relations, it was *represented*.

This may perhaps be recognized (*as an example and let this be understood prudently*) insofar as Freud too, with admirable scope and continuity, *performed for us the scene of writing*. But we must think of this 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/stage of the world, as the history of that scene/stage. 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 Freud then whom we will allow to say what scene he has played for us. And from him that we shall borrow the hidden epigraph which has silently governed our reading.

In following the advance of the metaphors of path, trace, breach, of the

march treading down a track which was opened by effraction through neurone, light or wax, wood or resin, in order violently to inscribe itself in nature, matter, or matrix; and in following the untiring reference to a dry stilus and a writing without ink; and in following the inexhaustible inventiveness and dreamlike renewal of mechanical models—the metonymy perpetually at work on the same metaphor, obstinately substituting trace for trace and machine for machine—we have been wondering just what Freud was doing.

And we have been thinking of those texts where, better than anywhere else, he tells us *worin die Bahnung sonst besteht*. In what pathbreaking consists.

Of the *Traumdeutung*: “It is highly probable that all complicated machinery and apparatuses occurring in dreams stand for the genitals (and as a rule male ones), in describing which dream-symbolism is as indefatigable as the joke-work (*Witzarbeit*)” (V, 356).

Then, of *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*: “As soon as writing, which entails making a liquid flow out of a tube onto a piece of white paper, assumes the significance of copulation, or as soon as walking becomes a symbolic substitute for treading upon the body of mother earth, both writing and walking are stopped because they represent the performance of a forbidden

sexual act” (XX, 90).

The last part of the lecture concerned the archi-trace as erasure: erasure of the present and thus of the subject, of that which is proper to the subject and of his proper name. The concept of a (conscious or unconscious) subject necessarily refers to the concept of substance—and thus of presence — out of which it is born.

Thus, the Freudian concept of trace must be radicalized and extracted from the metaphysics of presence which still retains it (particularly in the concepts of consciousness, the unconscious, perception, memory, reality, and several others).

The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance. An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed, that is, a mortal germ.

This erasure is death itself, and it is within its horizon that we must conceive not only the “present,” but also what Freud doubtless believed to be the indelibility of certain traces in the unconscious, where “nothing ends, nothing happens, nothing is forgotten.” This erasure of the trace is not only an accident that can occur here or there, nor is it even the necessary structure of

a determined censorship threatening a given presence; it is the very structure which makes possible, as the movement of temporalization and pure *auto-affection*, something that can be called repression in general, the original synthesis of original repression and secondary repression, repression “itself.”

Such a radicalization of the *thought of the trace* (a *thought* because it escapes binarism and makes binarism possible on the basis of *nothing*), would be fruitful not only in the deconstruction of logocentrism, but in a kind of reflection exercised more positively in different fields, at different levels of writing in general, at the point of articulation of writing in the current sense and of the trace in general.

These fields, whose specificity thereby could be opened to a thought fecundated by psychoanalysis, would be numerous. The problem of their respective limits would be that much more formidable to the extent that this problem could not be subsumed by any authorized conceptual opposition.

In question, first, would be:

1. A *psychopathology of everyday life* in which the study of writing would not be limited to the interpretation of the *lapsus calami*, and, moreover, would be more attentive to this latter and to its originality than Freud himself ever was. “*Slips of the pen*, to which I now pass, are so closely akin to slips of the tongue that we have nothing new to expect from them” (XV, 69). This did prevent Freud from raising the fundamental juridical problem of responsibility, before the

tribunal of psychoanalysis, as concerns, for example, the murderous *lapsus calami* (ibid.).

2. *A history of writing*, an immense field in which only preparatory work has been done up to now; however admirable this work has been, it still gives way, beyond its empirical discoveries, to unbridled speculation.
3. *A becoming-literary of the literal*. Here, despite several attempts made by Freud and certain of his successors, a psychoanalysis of literature respectful of the *originality of the literary signifier* has not yet begun, and this is surely not an accident. Until now, only the analysis of literary *signifieds*, that is, *nonliterary* signified meanings, has been undertaken. But such questions refer to the entire history of literary forms themselves, and to the history of everything within them which was destined precisely to authorize this disdain of the signifier.
4. Finally, to continue designating these fields according to traditional and problematic boundaries, what might be called a new psychoanalytic *graphology*, which would take into account the contributions of the three kinds of research we have just outlined roughly. Here, Melanie Klein perhaps opens the way. As concerns the forms of signs, even within phonetic writing, the cathexes of gestures, and of movements, of letters, lines, points, the elements of the writing apparatus (instrument, surface, substance, etc.), a text like *The Role of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child* (1923) indicates the direction to be taken (cf. also, Strachey, *Some Unconscious Factors in Reading*).

Melanie Klein's entire thematic, her analysis of the constitution of good and bad objects, her genealogy of morals could doubtless begin to illuminate, if followed prudently, the entire problem of the archi-trace, not in its essence

(it does not have one), but in terms of valuation and devaluation. Writing as sweet nourishment or as excrement, the trace as seed or mortal germ, wealth or weapon, detritus and/or penis, etc.

How, for example, on the stage of history, can writing as excrement separated from the living flesh and the sacred body of the hieroglyph (Artaud), be put into communication with what is said in *Numbers* about the parched woman drinking the inky dust of the law; or what is said in *Ezekiel* about the son of man who fills his entrails with the scroll of the law which has become sweet as honey in his mouth?

Notes

[1] "Freud and the Scene of Writing," by Jacques Derrida. Reprinted from *Writing and Difference* by Jacques Derrida, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 198-231, by permission of the University of Chicago Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul. Copyright © 1978 by the University of Chicago Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd. *Writing and Difference* was first published in 1967 as *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil).

TN [Translator's Note]. Phonologism is Derrida's abbreviated fashion of describing one of the metaphysical gestures inherent in most linguistics: the privilege given to a model of language based on speech, because speech is the most *present* form of language, is presence in language. This is equivalent to the metaphysical repression of writing, i.e., of difference. Here, too, Derrida might be challenging Jacques Lacan, whose statement about the unconscious being structured like a language seems to depend upon many of the linguistic conceptions which Derrida considers to be uncritically metaphysical.

[2] TN. "Breaching" is the translation we have adopted for the German word *Bahnung*. *Bahnung* is derived from *Bahn*, road, and literally means pathbreaking. Derrida's translation of *Bahnung* is *frayage*, which has an idiomatic connection to pathbreaking in the expression, *se frayer un chemin*. "Breaching" is clumsy, but it is crucial to maintain the sense of the force that breaks open a pathway, and the space opened by this force; thus, "breaching" must be understood here as a shorthand for these meanings. In the Standard Edition *Bahnung* has been translated as "facilitation," and we have, of course, maintained

this in all citations from the Standard Edition. Citations from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London: Hogarth Press (abbreviated as SE), are by volume and page number.

- [3] TN. Cf. the end of Derrida's "Force and Signification" (*Writing and Difference*, chapter 1) for a discussion of differences of force in Nietzsche.
- [4] 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 Will to Power*: "Our 'knowing' limits itself to establishing quantities; but we cannot help feeling these differences in quantity as qualities. Quality is a perspective truth for us; not an 'in-itself.'... If we sharpened or blunted our senses tenfold, we should perish; i.e., with regard to making possible our existence we sense even relations between magnitudes as qualities" (Nietzsche: *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Random House, 1967], p. 304).
- [5] The concepts of originary *différance* and of 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. The word "delay" must be taken to mean something other than a relation between two "presents"; and 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 *différance* and originary "delay" were imposed upon us by a reading of Husserl!
- [6] T N. In "Cogito and the History of Madness" (*Writing and Difference*, chapter 2), Derrida begins to elaborate on the metaphysical nature of the concept of decision. Decision in Greek is *krinein*, whence comes our "critic." The critic always *decides* on a meaning, which can be conceived only in terms of presence. Since *différance* subverts meaning and presence, it does not *decide*.
- [7] TN. On the relation of force and place (site, *topos*), see "Force and Signification."
- [8] Letter 32 (10 Oct. 1895). The machine: "The three systems of neurones, the 'free' and 'bound' states of quantity, the primary and secondary processes, 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" (Freud: *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess. Drafts and Notes*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey [New York: Basic Books, 1954], p. 129).
- [9] Warburton, the author of *The Divine Legation of Moses*. The fourth part of his work was translated in 1744 under the title: *Essai sur tes hieroglyphes des Egvptiens, ou Ton voit t'origine et le progres du langage, Tantiquite des sciences en Egvpte, et T origine du culte des animaux*. This work, which we shall discuss elsewhere, had considerable influence. All of that era's

reflections on language and signs bore its mark. The editors of the *Encyclopedia*, Condillac, and, through him, Rousseau all drew specific inspiration from it, borrowing in particular the theme of the originally metaphorical nature of language.

[10] William Warburton: *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*, 10th ed. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1846), 2:220.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

[12] TN. Derrida discusses Artaud's strikingly similar formulations about speech as but one element of language and representation among others in "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" (*Writing and Difference*, chapter 8); cf. especially note 7.

[13] *The Ego and the Id* (SE XIX, chap. 2) also underscores the danger of a topographical representation of psychological facts.

[14] TN. Derrida's fullest discussion of supplementarity is in *De la grammatologie*.

[15] TN. Derrida fully develops the supplementary status of the footnote — *la greffe* — in *La double séance* in *La dissémination*.

[16] TN. On roads, writing, and incest see "De la grammatologie," *Critique* 223-24, pp. 149ff. An English translation by Gayatri C. Spivak, *On Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), appeared after I had finished the present translation. All references are to the original French version.

[17] TN. In *Being and Time*, and especially *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger "deconstructs" Kant's posited timelessness of the *cogito*, a position taken over from Descartes, in order to develop an "authentic" temporality

[18] The metaphor of a photographic negative occurs frequently. Cf. "The Dynamics of Transference" (SE XII). 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. In "Notes on the Concept of the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis," 1913 (SE XII, 264), 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 picture has to pass through the 'negative process,' and some of these negatives which have held good in examination are admitted to the 'positive process' ending in the picture." Hervey de Saint-Denis 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 on 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."

[19] "Dreams are parsimonious, indigent, laconic." Dreams are "stenographic" (cf. above).

[20] TN. Cf. note 12 above.

[21] TN. "Invested in all senses of the word" includes the specifically Freudian sense of *Besetzung* or libidinal investment, which has been translated into English as "cathexis." The French *investissement* is much closer to the original German.

[22] The "Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," 1916 (SE XIV7) devotes an important development to formal regression, which, according to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, entails the substitution of "primitive methods of expression and representation [which] takes the place of the usual ones" (V. 548). Freud insists above all on the role of verbal representations: "It is very noteworthy how little the dream-work keeps to the word-presentations; it is always ready to exchange one word for another till it finds the expression most handy for plastic representation" (XIV, 228). 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 the schizophrenic. It should be analysed 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*, chap. 2.

[23] "The Claim of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest" (SE XIII). The second part of this text, devoted to "non-psychological sciences," is concerned first of all with the science of language (p. 176)—before philosophy, biology, history, sociology, pedagogy.

[24] As is known, the note on "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words," 1910 (SE XI) 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, could receive its difference and its conditions of operation, only through gesture and writing. On this text and Abel's hypothesis, cf. Emile Benveniste, *Problemes de linguistique generale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), chap. 7.

[25] This is the passage we quoted earlier, and in which the memory-trace was distinguished from "memory."

[26] tn. For a complete discussion of *hypomnesis/mnesis* in Plato, cf. "La pharmacie de Platon," in *La dissemination*.

[27] Cf. chapter 4 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

[28] 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.

[29] This is still in chapter 4 of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

[30] TN. In *La voix et le phenomene (The Voice and the Phenomenon)*, trans. David Allison (Evanston:

Northwestern University Press, 1973), there is a full “deconstruction” of perception as a past that was never present.

[31] TN. “Now what is this wax...?” The reference is to the *Second Meditation*, and Derrida is playing upon the fact that Freud’s piece of wax, the mystic writing-pad, is irreducibly temporal and differentiated, while the timelessness of Descartes’s piece of wax is symptomatic of the metaphysical repression of writing and difference. Cf. note 17 above.

[32] We find it again, the same year, in the article on “Negation” (SE XIX). 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. 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 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The concept of the “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 thinking is no more than a circuitous path,” SE V, 602). Cf. also the “Umwege zum Tode” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. “Compromise,” in Freud’s sense, is always *différance*. But there is nothing before the compromise.

Chronology of Important Dates

- 1856 Freud born in Freiberg, Moravia (now Pribor, Czechoslovakia), on May 6.
- 1860 Freud family moves to Vienna.
- 1865 Enters Gymnasium.
- 1873 Enters University of Vienna as medical student.
- 1876-82 Works as assistant in Brucke's Institute of Physiology; meets Josef Breuer.
- 1877 First medical research articles published.
- 1880 Translates four essays by John Stuart Mill for a German edition of Mill's works.
- 1881 Takes medical degree.
- 1882 Engagement to Martha Bernays; begins work at Vienna General Hospital.
- 1885 Appointed *Privatdozent* (lecturer) in neuropathology at University of Vienna.
- 1885-86 Attends Charcot's lectures at the Salpetriere in Paris, October to February.

- 1886 Marries Martha Bernays; begins private medical practice as specialist in nervous diseases.
- 1887 Meets Berlin physician and medical theorist Wilhelm Fliess; begins use of hypnotism in private practice.
- 1889 Visits Bernheim in Nancy for further researches into hypnosis.
- 1893 "Preliminary Communication" (with Breuer).
- 1894 "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense."
- 1895 *Studies on Hysteria* (with Breuer, although cases and discussions written and signed separately); writes *Project for a Scientific Psychology* and mails it to Fliess (first published in 1950).
- 1896 Death of Freud's father, Jakob Freud; first use of term "psychoanalysis."
- 1897 Abandons seduction theory; begins self-analysis.
- 1899 "Screen Memories."
- 1900 *The Interpretation of Dreams* (published in December 1899, but postdated for the new century).
- 1901 *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

- 1902 Appointed Professor Extraordinarius (associate professor) at University of Vienna; Wednesday evening meetings begin at Freud's house of the group that will become the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society; end of friendship with Fliess.
- 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality; Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious; Case of Dora* ("Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Flysteria").
- 1906 Jung makes contact with Freud.
- 1907 *Jensen's 'Gradiva.'*
- 1908 First international meeting of psychoanalysts at Salzburg; "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"; "Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness."
- 1909 Visits America with Jung and Sandor Ferenczi; receives honorary degree from Clark University and delivers *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*; A. A. Brill's first English translations begin to appear; Case of Little Hans ("Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy"); Case of the Rat Man ("Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis").
- 1910 *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood; "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words.'*"
- 1911 The Case of Schreber ("Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia").
- 1911-15 Papers on psychoanalytic technique.
- 1913 *Totem and Taboo*; association with Jung terminated; Jung secedes from International

Psychoanalytic Association the following year.

- 1914 *The Moses of Michelangelo; On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement; "On Narcissism."*
- 1915 Writes twelve papers on metapsychology, of which only five survive ("Instincts and their Vicissitudes," "Repression," "The Unconscious," "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," "Mourning and Melancholia").
- 1915-17 Gives *Introductory Lectures* at University of Vienna.
- 1918 Case of the Wolf Man ("From the History of an Infantile Neurosis").
- 1919 "The 'Uncanny.'"
- 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*
- 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.*
- 1923 *The Ego and the Id*; first of thirty-three operations for cancer of the jaw and palate.
- 1925 "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'"; "Negation"; *An Autobiographical Study.*
- 1926 *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety; The Question of Lay Analysis.*
- 1927 *The Future of an Illusion.*

- 1928 "Dostoyevsky and Parricide."
- 1930 Goethe Prize; *Civilization and its Discontents*; death of Freud's mother.
- 1933 Hitler comes to power; burning of Freud's books in Berlin; *New Introductory Lectures*.
- 1936 Eightieth birthday; formal celebrations; elected Corresponding Member of the Royal Society.
- 1937 "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."
- 1938 Nazis enter Austria; Freud leaves for England; *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (published posthumously)
- 1939 *Moses and Monotheism*; dies on September 23 in Hampstead, London.

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