THEORY II: BEYOND WISH AND DEFENSE

CLASS 2

THE EXPERIENTIAL GROUNDS OF THE THEORY OF NARCISSISM: NARCISSISTIC THEMES IN FREUD'S SELF-ANALYSIS

Aim:

The purpose of this class is to introduce some material from Freud's self-analysis. We will look at the experiential background from which his interest in and theories about narcissism emerged. By the end of the class, we should be familiar with the major narcissistic themes explored in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the four-step process of finding an object "along the path of narcissism" and a beginning appreciation of the psychological functions of identification.

Reading:

1) This handout

2) The Interpretation of Dreams: Irma's Injection, The Botanical Monograph, "Non Vixit" and Self-Dissection

Optional Reading:

Grinstein A (1980): Sigmund Freud's Dreams: Irma's Injection. The Botanical Monograph, Self-Dissection, "Non Vixit" (Chaps. 1, 2, 17, 12)

Schur M (1966): Some additional "day residues" of the "specimen dream of psychoanalysis." In Psychoanalysis - A General Psychology. Essays in Honor of Heinz Hartmann, ed. R Loewenstein, et al. NY: IUP, pp. 45-85

This book is about Sigmund Freud, another Great Man who is dead and who is kept alive not only through his work but in his person, as part of the soul of many others trying to ward off orphanage, of generations of intellectuals, and especially of stu-dents of the mind. For psychoanalysts, he is "our" Freud, and this has led me to ask what one person, especially a great person, means to another. This seems a query that can be answered simply, but it leads to nothing less than the complexities of the development of the mind. The psychoanalyst usually responds to any question by beginning genetically, seeking for origins: connecting with the child's early universe, which starts in chaos and develops to some vaguely global awareness of merger with another, then to a sense of a grandiose self whose omnipotence is connected intimately with (and, contradictorily, dependent on) an idealized, all-powerful Other ... A primal parent is first separated out from the initial merged self/parent; usually this is the mother. The father becomes important later. The two at first retain their godlike powers, but these (along with the grandiosity of the self) shrink as time and maturation proceed. Much of the child's subsequent psychic development depends on identifications (Freud calls them secondary identifications) with others, starting with the parents (now perceived more realistically)--taking them in to become part of one's mind and self. In the small but expanding psychic universe of the nursery, siblings also take an inordinate, clamorous, and largely unwelcome part.

Our natures, our instinctual drives, make for conflicts that lead inevitably to dangers based on our initial helplessness and dependency. The conflicts arise from the intensity of our needs and the resultant rage at unavoidable frustrations. Because of this rage (which Freud feels is part of our instinctual heritage as well as the result of frustration), we seek to rid ourselves of the very Others we cannot do without. These others as part of the self are constantly transformed and modified as we mature, but even the earliest registrations are never lost and can reappear transiently and take over their former power… For the self to become strong and independent, the initial godlike Others must be assimilated within so that they can largely be replaced in contemporary life by others---real people, eventually people outside the primal family, who can also be meaningful and can give and receive love.

These substitute others are needed (with less urgency than their parental antecedents) and can and should become precious. Dependency continues, but optimally it recedes with the consolidation of an independent sense of identity. We are still constantly surrounded by the realistic prospect of losses and must regress not only in reaction to them but also in anxious anticipation of them, for our instinctual nature ties us to murder as well as to desire and fear. We make use of a series of others, beginning with our actual parents, as gods; or as doubles; then others as substitute parents; substitute siblings; as children and substitute children--all transient replacements for the original primal narcissistic Others toward whom we return in death. For the fulfillment of our needs and for the

> continuing nourishment of our souls, we also use Great Men and Great Women from the past and the present, even from fiction--as well as friends, lovers, acquaintances on whom we be-come dependent--taking them in as parts of our mind (and thus conferring on them, consciously or unconsciously, a transitory narcissistic kind of greatness). We make our own changeable psychic versions of them, to guard us against feeling like orphans in a hostile or indifferent universe of stone.
>
> -Leonard Shengold, "*The Boy Will Come to Nothing*." Preface

Time, habituation and piety have all combined to blunt our realization of just how peculiar a book *The Interpretation of Dreams* is. It is perhaps the least discreet book ever written. In it, Freud reveals his most private (and censurable) thoughts about his wife, his friends and his patients. Despite a century of homage to this feat of exposure by the world community of psychoanalysts, no one of them has felt the slightest inclination to emulate Freud in such massive self-disclosure, and so it remains unique in the psychoanalytic canon and, at this point, bids fair to remain so.

But it is precisely this act of stripping himself naked in public that is the foundation of Freud's moral authority. "Let he who would criticize me…" he says in one passage, "first make the experiment of being franker than I have been." To date, no one has dared to accept that challenge.

Freud is both the exhibitor and the exhibit. "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing", vowed W. B. Yeats. In his dreams of TBM and SD, Freud depicts himself as a desiccated, mummified and dissected scientific display of his own sexuality. He becomes a psychological counterpart of the famous life-sized wax models of dissected cadavers in the Museum of Medical History at the Vienna Medical School used to familiarize the medical students with the human internal organs.

To be reproached is to be labeled as being disgraced, dishonored, or discredited. It is to be accused of having acted beneath oneself in a way that forfeits the good opinion of others. A reproach that is accepted as valid generates shame and guilt. The response to reproach, therefore, takes us immediately into the heart of the problems of narcissism: self-love, self-idealization, and the moral grounds for narcissistic self-approval.

Much of Freud's self-analysis was based on the investigation of dreams instigated by a reproach. The record of that self-analysis, The Interpretation of Dreams, begins with a dream in response to a reproach, the dream of Irma's Injection. It ends with a second discussion of the dream of Non Vixit, also a response to a reproach, which is the last piece of self-analysis (except for a retrospective analysis of a childhood dream), in the book. In between lie the dreams of Close the Eyes, Running up Stairs Undressed, The Botanical Monograph, and Dissecting My Own Pelvis, all of which develop, in both their manifest and latent content, the themes of narcissism. These dreams and the associations to them provide a reference point from which to assess the theoretical developments to which Freud's concept of narcissism was later subjected. Grinstein's book provides

valuable historical, biographical, and literary background for the understanding of the references made in these dreams. Freud's letter to Fliess of November 2, 1896 provides the actual day residue of Close the Eyes. Schur's article on additional day residues reveals the fever of idealization and de-idealization that fuels Irma's Injection.

Freud had begun analyzing his dreams at some time prior to the first systematic analysis, which he carried out in the late spring of 1895. In similar fashion, he had probably made some attempts at self-analysis prior to his formal initiation of the project following the death of his father. His major concerns, just after his 39th birthday, were a) to counter his fears of dying young (his fears of "coming to nothing") by quickly publishing some major scientific discovery and b) to adapt to the altered marital/sexual situation in which he found himself after his wife had become dangerously ill while pregnant for the sixth time in nine years. Both of these "therapeutic goals" were difficult for the spoiled "golden" child of an adoring mother and a permissive father; both required a degree of self-discipline that he felt he lacked. In this state of mind, he was reproach-vulnerable, and the external situation of being reproached resonated with states of inner turmoil.

What were the reproaches to which Freud was subjected? The dream of Irma's Injection was set in motion when his friend and junior colleague Oskar Rie informed Freud, on summer vacation, that his patient, Anna Hammerschlag, with whom Rie had been staying, was "better but not quite well." Freud heard in these words a reproach for having promised the patient too much. He responded by spending the evening writing a report to Breuer, who was on intimate terms with the Hammerschlag family, justifying his handling of the case. On the evening before the dream of The Botanical Monograph his old friend, Dr. Leopold Königstein, the ophthalmic surgeon, had reproached him, during an evening walk, for being too absorbed in his hobbies. The dream of Non Vixit was set in motion by a friend who informed him that Fliess was gravely ill and then went on to warn him not to discuss this with anyone, as if his discretion was not to be trusted. This reproach was compounded by Freud's own thought that he would arrive at the sickbed too late, an event, he says, for which he might never cease to reproach himself. Finally, the dream of Self-Dissection was prompted by the reproaches of a woman visitor who, asking for something to read, spurned Freud's offer of a popular novel and then demanded to see the text of the dream-book itself for which, she implied, Freud had made exaggerated claims, and which, in any event, she regarded as overdue. As she spoke, says Freud, he became aware that someone else was reproaching him through her mouth.

Freud comments that the power of these charges to disturb him lay precisely in their closeness to the truth: "It is only reproaches which have something in them that stick; it is only they that upset us" (ID 481-482). They add up to a picture of him as indiscrete, untrustworthy, self-absorbed and making a failure of himself by procrastinating and "coming late." Talking about his indiscretion, he denies that the warnings regarding Fliess had any current merit, but instead attributes his emotion to reactions arising from "a much earlier period of my life" in which he had, indeed, caused bad blood between Breuer and Fliess by imprudently relaying the critical comments of one to the other. This denial that he was still indiscreet must be evaluated in the context of the circumstances in which his friendship with Fliess ended.

In 1903, a book was published in Vienna which put forward several of Fliess' most cherished (and as yet unpublished) ideas. Fliess wrote to Freud asserting that the author, Weininger, was an intimate of Swoboda, a pupil of Freud's, and that it was by this route that the “great secret” had "leaked." Freud replied that Swoboda was not a pupil but a patient, that he might have casually mentioned the ideas to him, and, "That's all I know about the matter." Freud was lying. Fliess answered that Freud had previously called Swoboda his pupil, and that he had heard that Weininger had actually given Freud his manuscript to read. Freud then admitted the truth of Fliess' accusations but now complained about being reproached over such a trivial matter. Fliess arranged for a friend of his to publish an account of the affair in a pamphlet, to which Freud in turn responded with an open letter saying, "The credibility of the wretched publication may be judged by the fact that I myself, a friend of Fliess for many years, am accused as being the one who gave the information to Weininger and Swoboda that served as a basis for their alleged illegality." In another letter, he referred to Fliess' pamphlet as "a disgusting scribble, which amongst other things casts absurd aspersions on me" (Jones, pp. 314-316).

This whole incident reveals a Freud about whom we know very little: undisciplined, unreliable, and impulsive. It is a tribute to the transformative efficacy of his self-analysis that, apart from this one episode, Freud, after 1900, had become someone who sounds credible when he rejects these reproaches as "absurd aspersions." But, at an earlier phase of his life, the reproach of indiscretion interdigitated with the other reproaches to which he was subjected to create an overall accusation of maturational failure. Freud is reproached for lacking self-discipline: he is a “gas-bag,” who promises more than he can deliver; he boasts in an unseemly manner about the value of his product; he fools around in an immature way instead of getting down to business; he puts his time and money into his hobbies rather than fulfilling his responsibilities; he procrastinates; he does not perform his duties and fails to produce his much vaunted product on time; he has no self-control, he cannot keep inside what he should but instead leaks it in inappropriate places. The excretory (both urinary and fecal) nature of these charges is unmistakable.

Freud was a former bed-wetter (cf. The Open-Air Closet for his "megalomanic" thoughts about his urination as an unmistakable sign of greatness). Freud always connected the sensory aspects of urination with his "burning ambition," what he called his "unslaked thirst for grandeur." He was desperately attached to the "evidence" that he was unique: he had been born with a caul, and a gypsy had once predicted that he would be a great man. As a child, he had already demonstrated the same character traits for which he was still being criticized as an adult: at the age of seven or eight, he had flouted all the restrictions of a Victorian childhood by appropriating his father's chamber pot and urinating in his father's bedroom in front of his parents rather than going to his own room. This had caused his father to comment sadly, "The boy will come to nothing" (ID p. 216).

In order to transform himself into someone who would not be vulnerable to these accusations, Freud needed to reorganize his personality in a way that would control this childish sense of entitlement. Massive personality reorganization of this sort is only accomplished by the discovery of a new object (Loewald, 1960). Freud's analysis of his

dreams in response to reproaches shows him in the act of finding a new object, one chosen "along the path of narcissism." It was the reorganization around his relations to this new object that produced many of the results of his self-analysis. This new object was Freud analyzing himself. The "dream book" is a depiction of both his self-directed activities and the discoveries that were the fruits of those activities. Through the publication of this material, Freud turned indiscretion into a scientific virtue. By analyzing and publishing his sexuality, he gained control over it. It is appropriate that he called the attitude necessary to make these revelations "discipline (N.B., the exercise upon himself of the traits of control, orderliness and efficiency)."

Though it was not until the Three Essays on Sexuality and the Leonardo study that Freud explicitly described narcissistic object choice, the mechanisms that he later postulated were already described in himself during his self-analysis. In the Leonardo paper, he described the choice of an object "along the path of narcissism" as being accomplished in four stages. First, there is a withdrawal of object cathexis from the old object. Second, this object relationship is replaced by an identification that transforms the identity of the subject. Third, the transformed subject now takes his own self as his object, creating an intermediate state of an internalized self-self relationship. Finally, a representative is sought for in the external world that can be loved and admired in the same way, and for the same reasons, that the self was originally loved. In Freud's associations to dreams instigated by a reproach, each one of these four stages is repetitively illustrated.

Step 1: The abandonment of the object

One of the major themes that Freud finds at work in the dream of Irma's Injection, is that of "take away these people and replace them with others of my choosing." He directs savage criticism at his wife, at Breuer and at his friend, Oskar Rie. He denigrates his wife as pale, puffy, and over-reserved; his mentor, Breuer, as crippled, foolish, and inexperienced; and his friend and colleague Oskar Rie as hasty and untrustworthy. This denigration prepares Freud to replace all these objects with others who will be more to his liking.

In the morning-after fantasy that followed the dream of The Botanical Monograph, Freud decided that if he ever had glaucoma, he would go to Berlin to be operated on by a surgeon recommended by Fliess. In this way, the unfortunate Königstein (an ophthalmic surgeon), who had criticized him the previous evening, is dismissed and replaced. In the dream of Self-Dissection, the carping woman of the previous day is nowhere to be found in the manifest content. Instead, there is the figure of Louise N. who dutifully acts as Freud's helper and assistant. Finally, there is the triumphant dream discovery in Non Vixit that all the figures around him are merely ghosts and will live or die as he chooses. As he continues to associate to this dream, he comes upon the thought "no one is indispensable."

Step 2: Identification

The dream of Irma's Injection achieves an identification with Fliess. At the time of the dream, Freud was still in the middle of his cardiac episode, which had begun in 1894. Fliess, taking the role of physician, at first diagnosed the illness as a case of nicotine poisoning, and commanded Freud to stop smoking. Freud did this (on several occasions) without any relief of symptoms. Fliess then diagnosed a nasal reflex induced cardiac irritability secondary to the drainage from Freud's infected sinuses. He recommended that Freud come to Berlin to have his sinuses operated on. Freud was debating whether or not to follow this advice when the Emma Eckstein episode occurred (cf. Schur's paper). Fliess had performed on Emma exactly the operation that he planned to perform on Freud: cutting into the turbinate bone and enlarging the antrum to the sinus. The evidence of Fliess' incompetence was, after some struggle, denied by Freud, and, in September of 1895 he went to Berlin and had the operation performed (Schur, 1966). Freud had the Irma dream while struggling to make this decision. Thus, when Freud looks into Irma's mouth and sees the turbinates, the reference is not only to Emma Eckstein, but also to himself and he has identified with Fliess examining him. Later in the dream when Leopold discovers an infiltrated area, Freud feels it in his own body. This is a reference to the rheumatic nodules that Freud felt in his own muscles, nodules that convinced him that his cardiac illness was rheumatic myocarditis, therefore organic, and therefore fatal. In the dream, Freud identifies with Fliess, ordering the patient, who is himself, to stop putting on airs and submit properly to the doctor's demands. Freud's sensitivity to charges of not being a conscientious physician depends in part on this identification with Fliess, who had neglectfully left iodoform packing in Emma Eckstein's operative wound. At the same time, this identification serves to rebut the reproach that instigated the dream. After he had resolved his own doubts, Freud was able to affirm Fliess' conscientiousness and describe him as the very model of what a physician should be. Therefore, identification with him makes an idealized figure out of himself.

As he continues to analyze the dream of Irma's injection, Freud comments on his own associations. He states that the way he was thinking reminded him of the old joke about the man who was reproached for returning a borrowed kettle in damaged condition. The accused defended himself by saying he had never borrowed the kettle, he had returned it in perfect condition, and it already had a hole in it when he borrowed it. It did not matter that the ideas contradicted each other, **they all agreed in justifying him**. The very pattern of thought which Freud sardonically notes in himself is actually a mimicry of Fliess': "In the first place your illness is due to nicotine poisoning and in the second place it is due to a nasal neurosis." The damaged kettle stands for Emma Eckstein, his wife who was damaged by her multiple pregnancies and, in his fears, Freud himself.

The identification with Fliess in the dream of The Botanical Monograph is quite overt. Fliess had written to Freud saying that he could see the completed manuscript before him and Freud had written back envying Fliess' visionary powers.

In the dreams of Non Vixit and Self-Dissection, the identification has shifted to one with Brücke, whom Freud called the greatest man he had ever known. In the former dream, Freud states that the look with which he glares at Paneth is the look which Brücke

directed at him for coming late to work. This identification with the guardian of promptness nullifies both the reproach that Freud might come late to visit Fliess and also the one about being indiscreet, for Brücke was a notoriously silent and close-mouthed man. Jones notes that when Brücke was conducting an oral examination, if he did not like the first answer he received, he would stand silent for the remainder of the examination period despite the pleas of the officials present.

In the dream of Self-Dissection, the identification takes the form of a family romance in which Brücke becomes Freud's spiritual father: the dissection is a task assigned to Freud by Brücke. Freud has become a vehicle through which the spirit of Brücke flows.

Step 3: The establishment of a self-self relationship

In every one of these dreams, Freud identified with Fliess or Brücke, as the case may be, stares at something that is, or stands for, Freud. Freud looking into Irma's mouth is Freud looking at himself. Freud looking at the Botanical Monograph is Freud looking at himself, as he makes clear by identifying the dried plant specimen that is bound in the book with his own desiccated sexuality. This is an entry into a hall of mirrors. The dream is one of Freud looking at himself. The analysis of the dream is Freud looking at Freud looking at himself, and by a final twist that closes the strange loop, all of this is inserted into the very book at which Freud is looking in the dream.

In the dream of Non Vixit Freud makes clear the various connections between himself and Paneth, so that when he glares at Paneth, it is himself that he is glaring at. The dream of Self-Dissection begins with Freud staring at his own pelvis.

Step 4: Finding a new object along the path of narcissism

The new object which emerges as Freud’s narcissistic surrogate is the "dream book" itself and the image of the new Freud which it contains. It announces the appearance of the man who has analyzed himself, solved the riddle of dreams, and invented psychoanalysis. Because of its extraordinarily revelatory character, this book can stand for its author in a way that is unique in the history of Western culture, allowing Freud to admire in his book the very qualities he wishes to admire in himself: unflagging discipline, unflinching honesty, probing intelligence, and revolutionary insight. The book as dream element first appears in the dream of Irma's Injection in the form of the word Trimethylamin, printed "as if in heavy type." At this point, the book is about sexual chemistry and is written in the spirit of Fliess. In the dream of the Botanical Monograph the book has become an amalgam of a scientific treatise and a tomb, containing within itself a dried specimen of its subject. Another part of the day residue of The Botanical Monograph is Freud's looking at a window display featuring a book in honor of Professor Gardner. Freud's book will celebrate Freud as the *festschrift* celebrates Gardner (and, in its turn, will become the subject of future festschriften).

In Self-Dissection, Freud identifies the dissection of his pelvis with his self-analysis. The

connection to the book (and to Brücke) is established by the piece of silver-paper which Freud extracts from the dissection and associates to a textbook on the nervous system of fishes (Brücke had assigned him to investigate the nervous system of a fish).

The public character of the book as something that everyone can look at is carried forward in a series of references to plaques. When, one month before the Irma dream, Fliess reveals his theory of contraception, Freud responds that if Fliess is right, all he has to do is choose the marble for his plaque. Identifying with this image of Fliess, he has the same thought about himself as an after-association to this dream, writing to Fliess (five years after the dream-night) about the plaque that will announce the site of the first dream-analysis.

Two examples of memorial plaques occur in the day residue of Non Vixit, one the memorial plaque to Fleischl von Marxow, which is unveiled at the university, the other the memorial inscription to the Emperor Franz Joseph, which becomes distorted into "Non Vixit".

The book is thus Freud transformed into a memorial public display and a scientific self-exhibition. These themes are condensed in the last image of Self-Dissection in which the bridge (Brücke) leads to a small house that Freud, in his associations, recognizes as an Etruscan tomb he had visited on a trip to Italy. Crossing over the bridge to that tomb, Freud becomes an archeological exhibition (like the skeletons he had seen in the tomb) and all the interests in archeological artifacts for which Königstein reproached him now attach to himself. It is Brücke who is the bridge to his new condition. The image in Non Vixit of Freud at work in the laboratory in the middle of the night has dedicated his dream research to Brücke, the director of that laboratory. Jones notes, that for the rest of his life, whenever Freud was tempted to any moral laxity, he was subject to a quasi-hallucination of two blue eyes (i.e., Brücke's eyes) staring at him, after which, he felt strengthened in his resolve to do the right thing.

It would be a serious mistake to think about these themes as if they operated in isolation. Freud's later comment that the dream of Irma's Injection was, at bottom, a dream of sexual megalomania points to a related but still quite different set of narcissistic issues. In addition, there is another dream instigated by a reproach, the dream of Running Up Stairs Undressed, instigated by the reproach of the elderly housekeeper after she caught Freud spitting on the staircase of his patient's house. At first this seems another reproach for incontinence, and Freud's comments to Marie Bonaparte that he spat because he felt demeaned by the poverty of his patient would seem to reinforce the narcissistic meanings. But in his analysis of this dream, he connects it to early experiences of sexual stimulation by his nursemaid (who also reproached him for being "unclean") and thereby indicates that the very situation of being reproached may have been libidinized and therefore intertwined in sexual conflict. This other facet of meaning also lies behind the dream of The Botanical Monograph, which draws on a childhood memory of Freud and his sister Anna pulling colored leaves out of a book. The image of pulling a page out connects to his statement, in the paper on Screen Memories that "pulling one off" is a reference to masturbation. The memory of pulling out the page is connected to Freud's image of the

permissiveness of his father, hence his unsuitability to be internalized as the core of a superego which would give Freud the self-control he needed to achieve self-discipline.

Thus, while it seems clear that Freud did indeed form and relate to a narcissistic image of himself as the man who wrote Interpretation of Dreams, this psychical action cannot be divorced from its role in expressing and defending against infantile sexual conflicts and their expression in Freud's situation as he wrote his book.

Summary

Among the purposes served by Freud's self-analysis were the aims of overcoming immaturity that accompanied his refusal to effect Oedipal closure by submitting to the authority of the figure of his father. His Oedipal openness left him vulnerable to reproaches of having failed to achieve congruence with ideals of control and discipline. Freud remedied these maturational lags by using his self-analysis, in part, to create a new relationship with a new (narcissistic) object: Freud analyzing himself and making that analysis public. In doing this he transformed himself into an object that he, to some degree, controlled. The major trains of thought that subserve this process are to be found in his associations to his own dreams that were instigated by a reproach. Collating these trains of thought reveals that the formula he later enunciated to describe the process of finding an object "along the path of narcissism" is actually a description of psychical processes that he was familiar with in himself: withdrawal from the object, identification with the idealized figure, taking the self as the new object and then finding a representative for the self in the external world.

References

FREUD, S. (1899). Screen memories. S.E. 3.

FREUD, S. (1900). The Interpretation of Dreams. S.E. IV - V.

GRINSTEIN, A. (1980). Sigmund Freud's Dreams. New York: Inter. Univ Press.

JONES, E. (1953). The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud. Vol. I. New York: Basic Books.

MASSON, J.M. (ED.) (1985). The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap.

SCHUR, M. (1966). Some additional "day residues" of the "specimen dream of psychoanalysis." In: Psychoanalysis - A General Psychology. Essays in Honor of Heinz Hartmann, ed. R. Loewenstein et al. New York: Int. Univ. Press, pp. 45- 85.

SCHUR, M. (1972). Freud: Living and Dying. New York: Inter. Univ. Press.