

Screen Memories as a Formation of the Unconscious

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Introduction

During arguably the most productive period of his life spanning ten years from 1895 – 1905 Freud developed his thesis of the psyche and its unconscious mechanisms, the psychosexual development of the individual, underwent his own self analysis and outlined the formations of the unconscious. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) were all written within this period. The dream, the joke, the symptom and parapraxes were all recognised as having meaning and understood to be subject to unconscious motivations and mechanisms. These formations of the unconscious were central to Freud's theory of the unconscious highlighting for him that "*the most complicated achievements of thought are possible without the assistance of consciousness*" (1900 p. 593). These formations of the unconscious are still today key to an understanding of the unconscious internal struggle of patients and are the very material which analysts use to further the patients analysis. Among the many areas of inquiry relating to the psychical life of the individual which Freud delved into at this time was one of particular interest for this thesis, that of screen memories.

When Freud first discussed screen memories in the paper carrying the name in 1899, he was astonished by the fact that the earliest childhood recollections were concerned with everyday and indifferent events described in great detail, while known significant events laden with affect remained forgotten. He concluded that these indifferent memories were the result of two opposing forces, the force to remember and a resistance to prevent the

painful remembering of psychically significant events. Just as he would later apply the same ideas to the motivations behind forgetting of names, slips of the tongue and other such parapraxes he firstly applied them to these childhood memories. Although this phenomenon is further discussed in 1901 under the category of parapraxes I shall be arguing in this paper that the importance of screen memories has to some degree been overlooked and through a review of Freud's own writings I shall posit that a screen memory should be considered a formation of the unconscious along with those mentioned above.

By re-examining Freud's texts I hope to show that a screen memory is subject to the same mechanisms as dream's, jokes, symptoms and parapraxes and can justifiably considered a formation of the unconscious. In order to make this argument I shall firstly explicate and outline the fundamental mechanisms and characteristics central to the makeup of a formation of the unconscious. I shall do this by outlining two of Freud's most famous and oft quoted investigations of the mechanisms of the unconscious at work in the dream of the 'Botanical Monograph' (1900) and his forgetting of the name Signorelli (1901). These two examples I feel will provide an adequate outline of the unconscious mechanisms at work in all formations of the unconscious. Secondly an outline of Freud's writings on screen memories shall follow, enabling a comparison be made between these memories, their construction, purpose and that of those already defined as formations of the unconscious. Papers which deal directly with screen memories and are therefore of central importance to this section are Screen Memories (1899), Childhood and Screen Memories (in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), A Childhood Recollection from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1917), Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of

His Childhood (1910). Thirdly, to provide further weight to our current thesis the focus of attention shall shift to how Freud worked with and used his patients screen memories to further the treatment by examining arguably his two most important case histories; A Case of Hysteria (Dora) (1905), An Infantile Neurosis (The Wolf man) (1918) both of which provide important examples of screen memories. Although Freud makes reference to screen memories in his other case histories time constraints mean that we don't have the luxury of investigating them. However the examples from the case histories chosen shall I hope prove adequate in outlining Freud's clinical attitude towards screen memories. Investigating the writings outlined above should provide us with a clearer understanding of the importance Freud himself placed on screen memories thereby enabling us ascertain if their significance has been underestimated by the psychoanalytic community including universities, academic journals, publications etc. Only a handful of analysts have it seems tackled the subject or made mention of screen memories in their writings Fenichel, Abraham, Greenacre, Glover, Lacan being some of the main contributors. The reason for this omission of interest I cannot explain, however it is regrettable when we consider that what is being dealt with in analysis are ones recollections.

Formations of the Unconscious

"I have often found that people who dispute the unconscious as being something absurd and impossible have not formed their impressions from the sources from which I at least was brought to the necessity of recognizing it..... They had never realized the idea that

the unconscious is something which we really do not know, but which we are obliged by compelling inferences to supply; they had understood it as being something capable of becoming conscious but which was not being thought of at the moment, which did not occupy 'the focal point of attention'. Nor had they ever tried to convince themselves of the existence in their own minds of unconscious thoughts like these by analysing one of their own dreams; and when I attempted to do so with them they could only greet their own associations with surprise and confusion. I have also formed an impression that fundamental emotional resistances stand in the way of accepting the 'unconscious', and that these are based on the fact that no one wants to get to know his unconscious and that the most convenient plan is to deny its possibility altogether" (1905 SE VIII p.162).

In order to outline the characteristics and enable an understanding of the qualities and mechanisms at work in formations of the unconscious it is necessary to briefly outline what Freud had discovered about the unconscious and how it presented itself. What Freud had discovered along with the help of Joseph Breuer was that symptoms in hysterical and obsessional neurosis etc. could be cured when the patient was able to recollect or trace back the origin of the idea or memory and speak about it. However during the practical development of the 'talking cure' or 'cathartic method' in the following years Freud discovered a mechanism which prevented these memories, wishes or ideas from reaching the patients consciousness thus halting progress. This mechanism he called the 'censor' or 'critical faculty' (1900 p 101). This critical faculty represses and prohibits the bringing to consciousness of undesired ideas or memories that may be

stored in ones unconscious (1900 p. 547). However these unconscious ideas are not without 'affect' and do not just lie dormant (1900 pp. 604 – 606). They seek expression but must pass from the unconscious or primary process, through the secondary process of which censorship plays a major role (1900 p. 144). When conditions are favourable these repressed ideas make themselves known through formations of the unconscious such as slips of the tongue, bungled actions, symptoms, dreams and jokes (see Psychopathology of Everyday life).

Freud's principal thesis in Psychopathology of Everyday Life posits that certain inadequacies in our mental performances can be shown by means of psychoanalysis to have been determined by motives of which we were at the time unaware. Disagreeing with the notion that parapraxes are the result of inattentiveness or solely due to acoustic similarities or traces, tiredness etc. he quite convincingly posits the cause as being due to the disturbance by a repressed thought. He applied the same method of interpretation to dreams, parapraxes etc. as he had to hysterical or obsessional symptoms thus enabling him to posit the same mechanisms at work in all, namely condensation and displacement (1900 p 101). The work of these mechanisms meant that when a repressed idea, wish or memory was allowed to surface it did so only after undergoing distortion and so appeared in a disguised fashion i.e. a dream, slip of the tongue, bungled action, symptom. When applied to dreams what appears as the dream is known as the 'manifest dream content' (1900 p. 465). Behind this manifest dream content there lies an infantile wish that acts as its motivating force. The immediate instigators of a dream however are in general harmless enough. Every dream, Freud maintained, exhibits "a point of contact with the events of the previous days", known as the "day residues" (1900 p.170). When the

the censor has completed its work the disguised idea or wish is only recognisable to the individual after an interpretation ('latent dream content') (see SE IV 1900 chapter IV).

Equating parapraxes with symptoms Freud noted:

“the phenomena can be traced back to incompletely suppressed psychological material, which, although pushed away by consciousness, has nevertheless not been robbed of all capacity for expressing itself”(1901 p.279).

This 'incompletely suppressed psychological material' seizes the opportunity of making itself known or makes its return in a disguised form in parapraxes, dreams and other formations of the unconscious (ibid). The motivation for the production of formations of the unconscious being outlined in the following passage:

“In healthy people, egoistic, jealous and hostile feelings and impulses, on which the pressure of moral education weighs heavily, make frequent use of the pathway provided by parapraxes in order to find some expression for their strength, which undeniably exists but is not recognized by higher mental agencies” (1901 p. 276).

Freud points out that we are much more inclined to forget troubling or unpleasant events over pleasant ones. Therefore Parapraxes, dreams, symptoms can be understood as compromise formations resulting from a conflict between the subject's conscious intentions and what has been repressed (Laplanche 2006 p. 301). Freud regards repression as a defence-mechanism, the function of which is to guard the mind from

painful experiences. The fact that we dismiss parapraxes as insignificant is for Freud another example of repression at play. In the case of 'forgetting' he holds that there is in the mind of everyone a tendency to forget the things that the person does not like to be reminded of, in other words painful or disagreeable memories. This opinion being exemplified in a quote by Nietzsche "*I did this says my memory. I cannot have done this says my pride and remains inexorable. In the end – Memory yields*" quoted in the case of The Ratman (Freud 1909 p. 184). Forgetting, an act which itself is very often attributed to biological factors or simply brushed off as an annoyance, can be assumed according to psychoanalytic discoveries to provide the convenient function of protecting the ego from an unpleasant experience or thought. The reason that tendentious jokes have a deeper impact on the individual can according to Freud be "*traced back to the overcoming of internal inhibitions and repression*" and in fact they liberate pleasure by removing ones inhibitions (1905 SE VIII p. 134).

Condensation and displacement are the principle mechanisms present in all formations of the unconscious and prevent deeper undesirable motives from becoming conscious. The process of condensation affects the repressed idea or dream (symptom) by combining elements which may not be unrelated into a single unity from which multiple meanings can be drawn (Freud, 1900 p. 179). Freud likens aspects of this process to the family portraits of Francis Galton's which made use of multiple exposures onto one negative of several family members emphasising facial features common to all (1900 p.293). The brevity of jokes is a common feature along with the multiple meanings condensed into a jokes wording and is exemplified in the frequent use of neologisms in the production of jokes. Displacement affects an idea by removing from it, its original emphasis or power

and transfers it onto another idea which was originally of little interest but is linked to the original idea (1900 p. 177). The diversion of one's train of thought by the material of a joke culminating in a punch line, based on a different idea than the opening section of the joke, makes clever use of displacement. The clever and ingenious way the censor makes use of condensation and displacement is evident in psychoneurosis, dreams and all formations of the unconscious (1900 p. 593). Freud likens the activities of distortion and censorship to that of the poet or the political writer, the latter having to present his political views in a disguised form in order to be published and avoid persecution (1900 p. 143). The stricter the censorship the more creative the writer must be (1900 p. 143). The processes of distortion which the idea or wish undergo can be seen to form a compromise between the will for its release, the compromise taking its form in the manifestation of the symptom (1900 p. 144).

I

Freud's example of the forgetting of the name *Signorelli* during a conversation on a train, a name of which he was extremely familiar is an excellent example of conflictual processes at work in the psyche and the creative nature the unconscious employs. The names that sprang to mind in place of *Signorelli* were *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio*. These names can be understood as forming a compromise, a compromise between the repressed idea associated with the actual forgotten name *Signorelli* and the wish for the repressed idea to reach consciousness. These substitute names form part of the symptom and are not without meaning or relevance. They make reference to the repressed idea through the method of condensation. As Freud put it; "*they remind me of both what I wanted to forget and what I wanted to remember, showing that my intentional forgetfulness was*

neither wholly successful nor entirely unsuccessful" (1901 p. 8). What Freud wanted to forget was actually the recent suicide of one of his patients, an event that would have had a devastating impact on him. A wish to keep this memory repressed inadvertently caused him to forget the name *Signorelli* which in the context of his conversation with a stranger became linked by association to this painful event. This forgetting can be seen as a protection against the remembering of this painful memory associated with the name and its substitutes as the return of the repressed in a disguised form.

What had come up in conversation on Freud's journey was the high esteem the Turks who live in *Bosnia* and *Herzegovina* placed on a doctor, who on disclosing the terminal nature of a patient's case would reply: "*Herr (sir), what can I say? I know that if he could have lived, then you would have saved him!*" (1901 p. 6). Prior to his forgetting the name *Signorelli*, there occurred to him a train of thought relating to these Turks attitude to *death and sexuality*. Freud did not share this thought as he deemed it inappropriate for conversation with a stranger (1901 p. 7). However this thought was more than inappropriate for Freud's patient had committed suicide due to sexual difficulties. The repressed memory of this suicide was linked by association to many aspects of the conversation culminating in his forgetting the name *Signorelli*. The painful memory was not wholly repressed however as it appeared partly in the substitute names *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio*. Therefore emphasising that a substitution is never wholly complete, the repressed being still present in the substituted. This is exemplified when Freud divides the substituted names *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio* into formal segments and follows the associated links to the repressed idea. The *elli* part remaining unchanged from the forgotten *Signor/elli*. The *Signor* (Italian for sir through the process of displacement

appears in *Herr* (German for sir) of *Herr/zigovina* and ‘Herr, what can I say? Referring to sexuality and death. The *Bo* of *Bosnia* through condensation also appears in the substitutes *Bo/tticelli* and *Bo/ltraffio*. Lastly the *traffio* part of *Boltraffio* is linked to *Trafoi*, the town from which Freud heard the painful news of his patient’s suicide. We therefore see the repressed returning in the material in a disguised form just as in dreams and symptoms.

II

A famous example cited in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of one of Freud’s own dreams given the name ‘The Botanical Monograph’ highlights yet again the mechanisms of the unconscious at work in the psyche.

“I had written a monograph on a certain plant. The book lay before me and I was at the moment turning over a folded coloured plate. Bound up in each copy there was a dried specimen of the plant, as though it had been taken from a herbarium” (1900 p.169).

In his associations towards the dream he remembers having seen a new book *The Genus Cyclamen* in a bookshop window that morning. He recalls that cyclamens are his wife’s favourite flowers, that in turn leads to a self-reproach because of his infrequency in buying them for his wife. He then in turn remembers a poignant anecdote in which a husband forgets to bring his wife flowers on her birthday and the perceived hidden meaning the wife takes this forgetfulness to signify, thereby reiterating his theory of parapraxes and in particular forgetting due to unconscious motivations and meanings. Also his associations lead him to talk about his own botanical monograph written on the

coca-plant and the anaesthetic properties of its by-product cocaine which had been further developed by and officially credited to Dr Karl Koller instead of Freud himself. This leads to the remembering of a daydream in which Freud himself imagines being operated on for glaucoma in a Berlin clinic where the doctor mentions the ease with which the procedure can now be undertaken since the anaesthetic benefits of cocaine had been discovered. Freud imagines that he “should not give the slightest hint that I had a share in the discovery” (1900 p.170). He then reflects on the awkwardness involved in receiving medical treatment from colleagues, particularly he seems to be inferring the awkwardness surrounding payment. He then remembers an actual event in which his father was operated on for glaucoma by Dr Konigstein while Dr Koller who had previously appeared in his thoughts is surprisingly linked again to this association by the fact that he actually administered the cocaine during the operation on his father. Freud then remarked that “this case had brought together all of the three men who had had a share in the introduction of cocaine” (1900 p.171). Following his train of thought which was beginning to centre on cocaine he traced back the last time he was reminded of the substance. He had read a few days earlier in a copy of Festschrift a tribute to the work of Dr Koller in his realisation of the therapeutic use of cocaine. At this time he had an “excited conversation with Dr Konigstein” and had met Professor Gartner (Gardener) and had congratulated him and his wife on their ‘blooming’ looks (ibid). There then follows a chain of associations from the failure of a botany exam in secondary school to a seemingly insignificant memory (which he recognised as a screen memory) from his childhood involving himself and his sister tearing out the pages of a book “leaf by leaf like an artichoke” he found himself saying (1900 p.172).

The whole dream centres around the two words 'monograph' and 'botanical' and the chain of associations Freud applies to these words reveals an unconscious meaning in the dream. If we take the word monograph we can follow several chain of association locating numerous points of contact with the word that lead to further associations and eventually to meaning. For instance monograph is linked to cyclamen – flowers – wife – headmaster – failure in school – memory of pulling apart monograph as child – sister – father – cocaine – Dr Koller – failure to be acknowledged – glaucoma – operation – conscientious relating to payment etc. This overdetermined nature of the dream material only being recognised after interpretation and the practice of free association. The theme of flowers and books is a recurring one in the dream, as are the issues of love and ambition. As Freud continues to associate to flowers he remembers another couple of incidents from his childhood. These seem to be more psychically important in that they centre around two incidents of urinating. The first of an occasion of bed wetting at the age of two in which he consoled his father with the grandiose statement that he would buy him a new bed. The second a seemingly more traumatic incident at the age of seven occurs when upon urinating into a chamber pot in his parents room his father in obvious frustration states that "the boy will come to nothing" (1900 p.216). This "frightful blow to my ambition" Freud states is a recurring theme in his dreams while the occurrence of his achievements and successes in this and other dreams latent thoughts can be understood as a reaction to this, as if to say "you see I have come to something" (ibid). This dream therefore, provides evidence of the fulfilment of an infantile wish, which provides the impetus and motivation for the dream, in this case to prove his worth to his father, while also exemplifying the use of the day's residues in providing the seemingly insignificant material of the dream (the manifest content). Similar motives of

conscienciousness and competitiveness and a need to prove ones self can be found in another of Freud's famous dreams, Irma's Injection.

We see again here a return of the repressed in the seemingly 'unimportant' acting as a compromise formation between the wish for expression and the need for repression. The over-determined nature of the dream-work due in no small part to the mechanisms of condensation and displacement also being highlighted here. The same mechanisms of repression and its return in a disguised form (due to condensation and displacement) can be seen in dreams, parapraxes, jokes, symptoms etc. Formations of the unconscious can be understood then as psychical phenomena in which the unconscious intervenes in a veiled form. Dreams or slips of the tongue if taken at face value are meaningless. However if put to careful analysis, using the technique of free association around each detail can reveal a whole network of associated links.

Screen Memories An Overview of Freud's writings

When Freud first discussed screen memories in the paper carrying the name in 1899, he was struck by the fact that the earliest childhood recollections were concerned with everyday and indifferent events described in great detail, while other important events laden with affect remained forgotten. Acknowledging the fact that the memories retained from childhood frequently show evidence of a difference between what attracts the interest of a child and that of an adult Freud believed this did not account for the

occurrence of these indifferent memories as very often their subject matter was not of psychological importance even to children. Freud also dismissed the argument that infantile amnesia is merely the product of a faulty memory by acknowledging that children are capable of highly complicated thought processes and are capable of a high degree of mental functioning. For Freud these indifferent memories were the result of two opposing forces, the force to remember and a resistance to prevent the painful remembering of psychologically significant events. He explains these forces as such:

“One of these forces takes the importance of the experience as a motive for seeking to remember it, while the other—a resistance—tries to prevent any such preference from being shown. These two opposing forces do not cancel each other out, nor does one of them (whether with or without loss to itself) overpower the other. Instead, a compromise is brought about, somewhat on the analogy of the resultant in a parallelogram of forces. And the compromise is this. What is recorded as a mnemonic image is not the relevant experience itself—in this respect the resistance gets its way; what is recorded is another psychological element closely associated with the objectionable one—and in this respect the first principle shows its strength, the principle which endeavours to fix important impressions by establishing reproducible mnemonic images (1899 p.307).

Therefore for Freud a screen memory is substituted for a significant impression and owes its preservation to an associative relationship with the repressed memory. Much in the same way as the Signorelli example examined in the last chapter where what was substituted for the forgotten name were the names Botticelli and Boltraffio which as we had seen were linked by a chain of association. In relation to screen memories the

elements that one finds objectionable are also eliminated, therefore the memory, which is presented, is often trivial in nature. The memory retained in the form of a screen will Freud states, *“seem incomprehensible to us because we are inclined to look for the reason for its retention in its own content, whereas in fact that retention is due to the relation holding between its own content and a different one which has been suppressed”* (1899 p.307). Much in the same way as the manifest content of a dream seems incomprehensible before interpretation. Where psychically important memories have on further investigation been ‘falsified’ in the sense that they have been misremembered Freud notes that the motivations are tendentious *“that is, that they serve the purposes of the repression and replacement of objectionable or disagreeable impressions”* (1899 p.322). The mechanism of displacement which makes use of contiguity is recognised to be at work here or, to take the process overall Freud notes that we see *“a case of repression accompanied by the substitution of something in the neighbourhood (whether in space or time)”* (1899 pp. 307 - 308). The similarity between dreams and screen memories is remarkable both forming a compromise between a wish to repress and a wish to remember. Of particular importance to our current thesis that, a screen memory should be regarded as a formation of the unconscious, Freud goes on to explicitly state in the following lines concerning screen memories that:

“The process which we here see at work—conflict, repression, substitution involving a compromise—returns in all psychoneurotic symptoms and gives us the key to understanding their formation” (1899 p. 308).

We can take it that when he says ‘all psychoneurotic symptoms’ he is including dreams, parapraxes etc. What is clearly being stated here is that a screen memory is subject to the same mechanisms and processes as other formations of the unconscious. However if there is any doubt as to an equation of screen memories and formations of the unconscious it is expelled in 1914 in the paper ‘Remembering, repeating and working through’ where speaking about screen memories he writes:

“Not only some but all of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to extract it out of them by analysis. They represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest content of a dream represents the dream-thoughts” (1914 p. 148).

The importance that Freud lays on screen memories is remarkable in that for him they provide a key to important memories from ones childhood. The fact that he equates their importance to the manifest content of dreams in revealing repressed childhood material is also worth noting. Dreams and their interpretation being of central importance and were considered by Freud *“the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind”* (1900 p.608). The similarity between screen memories and dreams is also highlighted in Freud’s analysis of his disguised autobiographical screen memory in his paper from 1899 described as the dandelion memory. However before we engage in a synopsis of this now famous screen memory it is necessary to briefly outline the varying types of screen memories categorised by Freud.

Screen memories have distinctive features according to Freud. They are frequently remembered in great detail. Their content is usually indifferent. They are predominantly visual in nature and are remembered in an observing, detached way as if watching oneself perform. The last characteristic providing evidence for Freud that the material has been worked over: *“Whenever in a memory the subject himself appears in this way as an object among other objects this contrast between the acting and the recollecting ego may be taken as evidence that the original impression has been worked over”* (1899 p.321). Freud distinguishes between two different types of screen memories in 1899. The first type occurs where a later memory is used to screen an early experience or phantasy; in the second, an early experience is used to screen a much later event this being known as ‘retrogressive’ or being ‘pushed forward’ (1899 p.320). The difference between these two types of screen memory being due to the chronological relationship between the screen and the repressed thought. Of the first type Freud states that a screen of a later event is used due to the nature of its *connection with experiences in early youth which have remained suppressed*” (1899 p. 320). He later mentions in 1901 that the first type is by far the most common type of screen memory (1901 p.43). The second type (retrogressive) occurs where a recent unacceptable thought or fantasy becomes displaced onto a memory from ones childhood which is in some way related to this recent material, the memory provoked being reworked to provide a disguised representation of the recent unconscious thought or fantasy (1901 p.44). Therefore an early experience is used to screen a much later conflict of interests. The choice of this early memory Freud posits is due to the innocent nature of the childhood memory. Freud gave as an example of a retrogressive screen memory his now famously disguised autobiographical “dandelion” memory written in the third person as patient:

“I see a rectangular, rather steeply sloping piece of meadow-land, green and thickly grown; in the green there are a great number of yellow flowers—evidently common dandelions. At the top end of the meadow there is a cottage and in front of the cottage door two women are standing chatting busily, a peasant-woman with a handkerchief on her head and a children's nurse. Three children are playing in the grass. One of them is myself (between the age of two and three); the two others are my boy cousin, who is a year older than me, and his sister, who is almost exactly the same age as I am. We are picking the yellow flowers and each of us is holding a bunch of flowers we have already picked. The little girl has the best bunch; and, as though by mutual agreement, we—the two boys—fall on her and snatch away her flowers. She runs up the meadow in tears and as a consolation the peasant-woman gives her a big piece of black bread. Hardly have we seen this than we throw the flowers away, hurry to the cottage and ask to be given some bread too. And we are in fact given some; the peasant-woman cuts the loaf with a long knife. In my memory the bread tastes quite delicious—and at that point the scene breaks off” (1899 p. 311).

His screen memory, Freud stated, was formed when he was sixteen and had fallen in love with a fifteen-year-old girl of a family whom he was periodically staying with. At this time he suddenly remembered an innocent childhood scene in which he snatched some dandelions from his young female cousin at the age of three. The children in the screen memory were later revealed to be Freud's nephew John and his niece Pauline (1899 p.302). This screen memory, he explained, covered his unacceptable unconscious wish to deflower his present 'calf-love' providing “*a fulfillment of the two suppressed wishes—*

for deflowering a girl and for material comfort” (1899 p.318). In this way the scene of defloration takes on a metaphorical significance which allows the repressed thought of “*gross sexual aggression*” be presented in a disguised seemingly innocent form thereby overcoming ones ‘critical faculty’ (1899 p.317). Much in the way ‘monograph’ through the process of condensation led to multiple lines of association in the Botanical Monograph dream discussed in the last chapter. The screen memory therefore acts as a compromise formation much in the way a dream or parapraxe does. In fact he treats the screen memory in this case as he would a dream by applying the method of free association to it therefore extracting it’s latent thought associations. Freud then goes on to point out that the ‘complicated processes’ involved in the creation of screen memories, are “*analogous to the formation of hysterical symptoms—are involved in the building up of our store of memories* (1899 pp.320-321). This equation of the processes involved in the creation of screen memories and symptoms is further evidence that these memories should be considered formations of the unconscious.

As to the validity or factual accuracy of childhood memories used as a screen or whether they are created like works of fiction at a later date by the projection of a later disguised fantasy into ones past Freud remains uncertain. On this subject Freud notes, “*there is in general no guarantee of the data produced by our memory*”(1899 p.315). The phantasy from a later date may “*not coincide completely with the childhood scene*” but rather shares some similarities along associated lines of which it makes use to disguise the later unacceptable phantasy (1899 p.318). In fact Freud states that “*every suppressed phantasy of this kind tends to slip away into a childhood scene*”.... but that “*this cannot occur unless there is a memory-trace the content of which offers the phantasy a point of*

contact—comes, as it were, halfway to meet it” (1899 p.318). In the example of dandelion screen memory a number of key motifs stand out, the color of the ‘yellow flowers’, the scene of defloration, the taste of the ‘lack bread’ providing a figurative representation of Freud’s unconscious phantasy and are such examples of a ‘point of contact’. The similarities of these points of contact or nodal points can also be observed in dreams. In the example of the Botanical Monograph “*folded coloured plate*” and, “*monograph*” etc. also provide occasions of points of contact leading to multiple associations proving that dream material is over-determined (1900 p.169).

Freud goes on to question whether we can justifiably state that we retain any memories from our childhood stating, “*memories relating to our childhood may be all that we possess*” (1899 p.322). This raises important questions as to the nature of our memory, how it works and whether in fact we only retain screen memories in place of factual memories. These childhood memories represent our early years not as they were but as they appear to us at a later stage when the ‘memory’ was recalled according to Freud. It would be incorrect to say that these memories emerge Freud states, but rather it would be correct to say they are formed at this later stage. Freud concludes “*a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves*” (1899 p.322). These motives being similar in all formations of the unconscious that is the conflictual relationship between repressed impulses and their wish for expression. The mechanisms of condensation, displacement being present in screen memories as in other formations of the unconscious. The unconscious motivations, thoughts or phantasies appear in a veiled form make use of points of contact that meet them halfway and to an unquantifiable degree create

memories which appear instead of the undesirable repressed material of which they are associated.

In 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life' during the chapter entitled, "Childhood Memories and Screen Memories" (1901), Freud compared screen memories to forgetting. Freud stressed a third type of screen memory, which is formed at the moment the initial conflict is aroused. The significant affect or impulse is immediately repressed, and a substitute memory is achieved through displacement along superficial associations (1901 p.43). Freud also adds another personal recollection the "cupboard screen memory" (1901 p. 50). He only superficially analyzed it at the time, and it was not until a later revision that he analyzed his memory in much greater depth. In a small footnote in the 1924 edition he alluded to the significant fact that this "cupboard screen memory" covered over his incestuous impulses toward his mother as well as his aggressive impulses toward his father (1901 p. 51). Again in this paper Freud reiterates what he said in 1899 concerning screen memories and acknowledges his limitations in quantifying the degree to which our store of memories are made up of screen memories. An investigation of Freud's later references to screen memories also shows that he was never able to completely resolve the question of whether they stem from fact or from phantasy.

When Freud turned his attention to write a psychoanalytic biography of his much admired Leonardo Da Vinci he proposed to investigate the psychological makeup of this great man and his work. Noting the scarcity of material available on the childhood of

Leonardo Freud based the focus of his paper on a seemingly innocuous entry in one of Leonardo's scientific notebooks:

"It seems that I was always destined to be so deeply concerned with vultures; for I recall as one of my very earliest memories that while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips" (1910 p.82)

Perplexed as to the significance of this entry that seemed out of place among the compilation of scientific experiments, weapon designs and fortifications etc. Freud proposed that this recollection or phantasy held a hidden significant meaning; *"a phantasy of this kind must have some meaning, in the same way as any other psychical creation: a dream, a vision or a delirium"* (1910 p.86). Seeking to fill 'the gap in Leonardo's life story' by the analysis of this screen memory Freud attempted to find answers to the peculiarities of Leonardo's personality i.e. the painfully slow pace he worked at, his inability to finish projects completely, his sexuality etc. The emphasis on the ability of screen memories to retain *"all of what is essential from childhood"* yet again being exemplified in the importance he placed on such a seemingly insignificant memory (1914 SE XII p. 148). Also worth noting for the benefit of our thesis is his equation of such a 'phantasy' with other formations of the unconscious yet again implying the same mechanisms to be at work in all.

What Freud actually proposed Leonardo's screen memory symbolically represented was an act of fellatio, the tail of the vulture substituted for the phallus. This phantasy taking

its roots from an even earlier experience of sucking at the mother's breast: "*The organic impression of this experience – the first source of pleasure in our life – doubtless remains indelibly printed on us*" (1910 p.87). This unconscious oral phantasy implied for Freud a passive homosexual phantasy connected with the idea that his mother was the possessor of both penis and vagina. This was verified for Freud by the fact Leonardo had been disowned by his father and was brought up in the sole care of his mother for the first few years. He had been "*a vulture child – he had had a mother, but no father*" the vulture according to Egyptian myth being impregnated by the air and deemed bisexual (1910 p.90). Regardless of the fact that unknown to Freud, the vulture in Leonardo's fantasy was mistranslated and should have appeared as Kite this paper exemplifies the importance and readiness on Freud's part to work with, interpret and indeed use as a focal point to write up one of his longest psychoanalytic biographies. Yet again we see the use of condensation and displacement in the substitution of the vulture's / kites tail for the phallus. The tail of the vulture sharing a metaphorical connection with the phallus, much in the way Signorelli held a metaphorical link with death and sexuality for Freud in the last chapter. Gaining confidence from his psychoanalytic investigation of one 'great man' Freud now turned his attention to yet "*another man of genius*", Goethe (1910 n. p.84).

Having already made reference in a footnote in his Leonardo paper to a screen memory of Goethe's, Freud went on in his 1917 paper 'A Childhood Recollection from Dichtung Und Wahrheit' to yet again confirm the importance of these phenomena in representing unconscious material. Freud notes that when writing an account of his life at the age of sixty Goethe makes reference to only two episodes from his childhood. One being the

difficulty and near fatality of his delivery into the world recounted to him by others, the second a curious episode of his own recollection occurring before the age of four in which he “*threw a plate into the street*” much to the delight of himself and some neighbours who encouraged him to continue the act until he had “*hurled every piece of crockery (he) could get hold of to the same destruction*”(1917 SE XVII pp.147-148). Yet again Freud notes that an innocuous memory of this sort can act as a veil, screening a more psychically relevant event of which it is symbolically associated, its hidden meaning being revealed only after an interpretation. Using his clinical experience to investigate Goethe’s screen memory Freud recounts a similar episode divulged to him by a patient whom became jealous of and subsequently attacked his younger sibling. This patient’s jealous episode Freud connects with an event similar to Goethe’s whereby this patient also threw crockery from his house to its destruction on the street. The question Freud then poses is whether Goethe’s actions were derived from similar motivations.

Freud discounted Goethe’s explanation that it was the encouragement from neighbours that provided a motivation for his actions by recognising that they merely provided an impetus to continue what he had initially instigated of his own accord. In his investigation of Goethe’s childhood he noted the birth of a brother when he was aged three and a quarter years that would have coincided with the incident of the recollection in question. The birth of this brother would have provoked a sense of animosity in the young writer according to Freud. This idea finding support in two accounts related by Freud: one being a recollection from Goethe’s mother Bettina Brentano concerning his childhood whereby he failed to show any signs of grief upon the death of his younger brother but rather felt “*annoyance at the grief of his parents and sisters*” (1917 SE XVII

pp.151-152). The second factor noted by Freud being the ‘surprise’ omission of any recollection concerning this brother from Goethe’s autobiography.

The act of throwing ‘out’ of the window is understood by Freud as a symbolic representation of the removal of a sibling from where it came. This Freud explains by associating the movement through the window with the childhood explanation of birth propagated by parents whereby a stork would bring the new arrival, perhaps through a window. There then follows further examples of patients whom feeling a sense of grievance towards their parents and jealousy towards their siblings who shared similar experiences of throwing various objects reiterating for Freud a symbolic connection.

What is interesting is the value Freud placed on this screen memory of Goethe’s and the fact that the case material is used merely as a secondary source to further and support his thesis.

Screen Memories in Freud’s Case Histories

In order to ascertain the level of importance that Freud applied to screen memories in a clinical setting, an investigation of two of arguably his most important case histories shall be undertaken. It is in the analytic setting that psychoanalytic theory is put to the test and obtains the true measure of its worth. The first case history known as Dora, is Freud’s longest in volume but shortest in length of treatment and is regarded as arguably his most controversial written in 1901 under the title of ‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of

Hysteria'. The second case history under discussion is 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' or more popularly known as The Wolf Man written in 1914. This is an account of the longest psychoanalytic treatment by Freud spanning some four and a half years. Although there are several screen memories accounted for in this case, due to time constraints I shall only focus on one. This was also a deciding factor in our limitation to just two case histories. However I hope that the two case histories chosen shall offer a fair reflection of Freud's clinical attitude and application of his theories concerning screen memories.

I

It was at the request of Dora's father that her treatment with Freud commenced when she was aged eighteen. Dora suffered from a variety of hysterical symptoms since the age of eight including breathing difficulties, nervous cough, loss of voice, migraine, hysterical unsociability, suicidal ideas. This was a case of petite hysteria as noted by Freud and was chosen for publication to show the role which dreams play in the analysis of hysteria. However it is more famous for its exemplification of the transference and counter transference encountered in the analytic setting. The unfortunate Dora found herself caught up in a love triangle involving her father and a friend of the family (Frau K) whom was married to Herr K. In turn Herr K's affections were turned towards Dora who felt herself an object of barter, used in a payoff by her father for the continuation of his affair with Herr K's wife. It was in this context that Dora produced a suicide note, which in turn became the precursor to her somewhat forced entrance into analysis with Freud.

It was during an investigation of Dora's identifications and her subsequent symptoms that we find an example of a screen memory outlined by Freud. Freud noted that with hysteria there is always a sexual element linked to the aetiology of the symptom positing that the "*psychoneurosis are, so to speak, the negative of the perversions*" (1905 p.50). In interpreting Dora's nervous cough Freud deduced that its cause lay in an unconscious phantasy of oral sexual gratification between her father and Frau K. in the only means available to them due to her father's impotence (1905 p.48). After accepting this explanation Dora's cough disappeared, however Freud noted that he did "*not wish to lay too much stress upon this development, since her cough had so often before disappeared spontaneously*" (1905 p.48). What Freud did use however to further this hypothesis that Dora's cough was determined by this unconscious phantasy was a screen memory. He noted that Dora had remembered that as a child she was a thumb-sucker. Dora recounted to Freud "*a clear picture of a scene from her early childhood in which she was sitting on the floor in a corner sucking her left thumb and at the same time tugging with her right hand at the lobe of her brother's ear as he sat quietly beside her*" (1905 p.51). Although not elaborated on by Freud the fact that this screen memory was used to support his thesis is evidence of the value he placed on these phenomena. The screen memory can be interpreted as a retrogressive screen memory in which the seemingly innocent scene involving Dora's brother provides a disguised expression of the unconscious phantasy of oral pleasure associated with the innocuous scene. This interpretation was emphasised and further elaborated on by Jacques Lacan in his 'Intervention on Transference' (1985 pp. 67-68). The Dora case does not share the same degree of elaboration of Freud's use of screen memories as the following case history,

that of the Wolf Man which to a greater degree exemplifies his readiness to make use of screen memories within a clinical setting.

II

Sergueï Constantinovitch a twenty three year old wealthy Russian who later became known as the Wolf Man came to Freud for help as somewhat of a last resort having spent some time in a German sanatoria suffering with ‘manic depressive insanity’ (1918 p.8). Instead of dealing with the psychotic problems presented by the Wolf Man, Freud decided to concentrate his narrative mainly on the patient’s infantile neurosis. Central to the case is a recurring dream experienced from the age of four involving wolves, which evoked a phobic anxiety in the patient. Freud interpreted this dream as relating to a primal scene – a tergo coitus between the parents, witnessed by the child at the age of eighteen months. This primal scene was for Freud the starting point of the disorders that later determined the Wolf Man’s neurosis in adulthood. Freud posited that a neurosis in an adult was understandable only in the light of an investigation of infantile material and the conflicts which arose at that time:

“I am ready to assert that every neurosis in an adult is built upon a neurosis which has occurred in his childhood but has not invariably been severe enough to strike the eye and

be recognized as such. This objection only serves to emphasize the theoretical importance of the part which infantile neuroses must play in our view of those later disorders which we treat as neuroses and endeavour to attribute entirely to the effects of adult life” (1918 p.99).

In the chapter entitled ‘Fresh Material from the Primal Period – Solution’ Freud noted that very often when an analysis is reaching its termination “*new recollections emerge*” which “*make the physician prick his ears*” leading to the recognition that seemingly insignificant fragments of memories act “*as the key to the weightiest secrets that the patient's neurosis has veiled*” (1918 p.89). It was one such memory fragment the importance of which was recognized by Freud as a screen memory that acted as a key to unlock a hidden memory of huge psychological importance. A curious recollection occurring after the age of four was recounted in several sessions in which upon chasing a swallow-tail butterfly (big wings with yellow stripes) and watching it land upon a flower, the patient was “*seized with a dreadful fear of the creature, and ran away screaming*” (1918 p.89). Freud recognized that this memory was acting as a screen for some more psychologically important event of which it was connected, however an explanation of its content was not initially forthcoming. During a later session the patient had revealed to Freud that in his native language of Russian a butterfly was called ‘babushka’, ‘granny’. There then followed a chain of associations in which the patient connected butterflies with females. With this information Freud then drew the conclusion that the patient's anxiety aroused by this scene was therefore due to a connection with some female. Reaffirming this connection in another session many months later, the patient revealed to Freud that the opening and shutting of the butterfly's wings upon the flower provoked in

him an uncanny feeling (1918 p.90). According to the patient the butterfly looked like a woman opening her legs the Roman numeral V being the shape these legs made. Freud then notes that V was also the hour at which the patient was prone to “*fall into a depressed state of mind*” (1918 p.90).

Writing of the usefulness and importance of this screen memory in leading to these associations Freud states:

“This was an association which I could never have arrived at myself, and which gained importance from a consideration of the thoroughly infantile nature of the train of association which it revealed” (1918 p.90).

Following this screen memory there then followed a recollection from a ‘very early age’ involving the patient’s nursery maid who ‘had become fused with his mother’ (1918 p.90). Interestingly her name was brought to recollection through a memory of a store room from his first estate in which a ‘big’ pear with ‘*yellow stripes*’ was kept, the word for a pear in Russian being shared with this nursery maids name, Grusha. Freud realized that “*behind the screen memory of the hunted butterfly the memory of the nursery-maid lay concealed*” (1918 p.90). This was the break Freud had been waiting for. There then followed a recollection of a scene involving the nursemaid in which she was kneeling on the floor, “*beside her a pail and a short broom made of a bundle of twigs; he was also there, and she was teasing him or scolding him*” (1918 p.90). Freud associated this scene with another scene recounted to him by the patient involving his falling compulsively in love with a peasant girl at age eighteen after seeing her on her knees scrubbing the floor.

It is also worth noting that relations with this girl led to a gonorrhoeal infection which was the precipitating cause of a later outbreak of his illness. The name of this girl Matrona having "*a motherly ring about it*" for Freud, once again connecting the patients object choice with his mother and the shame associated with the act and the patient's mother (1918 p.91). If Freud could connect this episode with the Grusha scene then he felt the displaced shame associated with Matrona could also be transferred back to the earlier scene with the nursery maid (1918 p.91). Through an association with fire and its opposite, water the material produced in the analysis "*fitted together spontaneously and served to fill in the gaps in the patient's memory of the scene with Grusha*" (1918 p.92). The missing elements of the memory were now put in place. The scene consisted of Grusha on her knees scrubbing the floor, the then patient proceeding to urinate on the floor and this is met with a light-hearted threat of castration by the nursery maid. This scene provided a link according to Freud between the primal scene and his later compulsive love in the follow way:

"When he saw the girl on the floor engaged in scrubbing it, and kneeling down, with her buttocks projecting and her back horizontal, he was faced once again with the posture which his mother had assumed in the copulation scene. She became his mother to him; he was seized with sexual excitement owing to the activation of this picture; and, like his father (whose action he can only have regarded at the time as micturition), he behaved in a masculine way towards her. His micturition on the floor was in reality an attempt at a seduction, and the girl replied to it with a threat of castration, just as though she had understood what he meant" (1918 pp.92-93).

The patient according to Freud was showing a compulsive love towards women assuming such a posture and this “*had dominated his love-choice*” due to its relation with the position assumed by his mother during the primal scene (1918 p.92). This was also linked with the patients urge to “*debase his love object*” (1918 p.92) a recurring characteristic throughout his sexual life. The importance of this scene with Grusha represents for Freud the earliest effect of the primal scene in which the boy attempts to copy his father thus assuming a masculine position (1918 p.94). Freud again reiterates the importance of the scene with Grusha and central part played by the screen memory which carried it’s displaced affect. This displaced affect on such a seemingly innocent memory proving for Freud the significance of the hidden event behind the screen memory. He writes that:

“By means of the accompanying associations and the inferences that followed from them, it was possible with certainty to supply this significant element which was lacking in the patient's memory. It then appeared that his fear of the butterfly was in every respect analogous to his fear of the wolf; in both cases it was a fear of castration, which was, to begin with, referred to the person who had first uttered the threat of castration, but was then transposed on to another person to whom it was bound to become attached in accordance with phylogenetic precedent” (1918 pp.95-96).

This new information brought about by the associations to the butterfly screen memory highlights the practical use of working with these memories in analysis the benefits of which can be seen in the furthering of the patients analysis. Their interpretation leading to the recollection of repressed material, which in turn can provide a useful avenue of

further investigation. Just as “*dreaming is another kind of remembering*”, screen memories too provide a disguised type of remembering (1918 p.51). In the way that Freud dealt with this screen memory a number of factors stand out; firstly his ability to recognize the butterfly memory as a screen memory due in part to the uncanny feeling it provoked in the patient, secondly, once recognizing it as holding a disguised significance the patience he showed in awaiting associations is noteworthy, thirdly his ability in allowing the patient free associate and thus forming connections between disparate sources much in the way Freud associated to the dream of the Botanical Monograph discussed in the previous chapter. Freud had noted, “*In order to show that a childhood memory is to be regarded as a screen memory, it would often be necessary to present the complete life history of the person in question*” (1901 SE VI p.48). The ability to recognise screen memories within the case of the Wolf Man could arguably be accounted for due to the length of the analysis. This may favour an attitude of indifference towards screen memories positing the impracticality of interpreting them early on in an analysis. However as we have seen in the Dora case history the length of time spent in analysis does not inhibit Freud from recognising and working with a screen memory early in an analysis.

Conclusion

In this thesis we have attempted to outline the key mechanisms determining the categorisation of formations of the unconscious. Condensation and displacement are understood to be present in all formations of the unconscious an outline of which appears in two of Freud's own examples discussed in chapter one. The dream of 'The Botanical Monograph' and the act of forgetting with the formation of a substitute in the Signorelli example provide a clear picture of conflict, repression, substitution and how repressed material returns in a disguised form creating a compromise. The fact that phenomena

such as dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes etc. are often brushed off as insignificant can be considered a reason for their suitability for it is their seemingly innocuous characteristics that make them a perfect vessel to carry more psychically charged material past ones censor.

The question of whether screen memories share the same characteristics and qualities as other formations of the unconscious was tackled in chapter two. It became evident that condensation and displacement are common features of screen memories and that after interpretation a chain of association can be found from the manifest material of the memory to the latent thoughts revealing previously unconscious repressed material. The screen memory therefore can be interpreted much like a dream revealing points of contact with repressed material from ones unconscious. The innocuous nature of screen memories can also be understood to create a compromise between the wish to repress certain material and the wish for its remembrance sharing this similarity with other formations of the unconscious. I think it is plain to see that Freud regarded screen memories as formations of the unconscious and treated them accordingly. This attitude being exemplified by the fact that two of his psychoanalytic biographies were based fundamentally on episodes of their occurrence. Even more importantly screen memories are not merely resigned to theory by Freud but are put into practice within the clinical setting as outlined in the examples from his case histories with screen memories being made use of alongside dreams, symptoms etc to uncover the unconscious of his patients thus furthering the treatment.

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