

Definitions of Dreams and Dreaming: A Surrealistic Freud and the Freudian Dali

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ABSTRACT

The inescapable impression of lay readers regarding the source of pervasive nature of dreams often lies with the idea of it as a portent, but the history of structural analysis of course lies with Freudian study of Interpretation of Dreams. Dreams as wish fulfillments also are considered to be potent corollaries to the process of creation and no aesthetic movement of the modern times would be as integrally connected to the land of dreams as Surrealism.

For the Surrealists the idea and meaning of art was to evoke some illuminating signs which would in a formal manner define the process of thinking, at the nearest with the conscious process and at the remotest with the glimpses of the twilight zone, the unconscious. The integrating relationship between art and dreams are never straightforward but has to contain always the conflicting, prohibitive and the most metaphorical. What is so restrictive and prohibitive has been proven to be just the opposite by the validity of the latent which relegates to the rear or suppressed. Hence the artistic expression was never on a straight line, not even the naturalistic portraits. When Freud himself interprets the lot of Oedipus and also Hamlet by bringing in the analogues of Oedipus Complex, he as a pioneer psychoanalyst also differentiates between the manifest in Oedipus and the latent in Hamlet in his artistic analysis. The dynamic theory of dream formation as indicated by Freud in his Second Introductory Lecture of Psychoanalysis would simultaneously accommodate wish fulfillment and dream censorship.

For the surrealists like Duchamp, Max Ernst, Francis Picabia, Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali perhaps art is the forms of trepidation, fluctuating moments working in stasis, romantic and lyrical as dream images, creation of incoherence and terror with the language of unconscious. Taking Dali's representative work as the bridge between land of the dream and the real, fascinating reading of the metaphorical and the literal, and manifest and the latent would be possible and perhaps we could have glimpses on the hermeneutics of aesthetics and life with the tangents of dream work. This line of assumptions would also hold that the visual enactment of Freudian dream work in Dali's art would be a fascinating reading, but at the same time a reciprocatory perspective needs to be focused on the aesthetic and moralistic limits of psychoanalytic interpretation.

Key words- Psychoanalysis, Dream images, Manifest and latent, Oedipus, Surrealism, Modernism, Illuminating signs, Real, Metaphorical and illusive, Art and aesthetics.

The interpretation of dreams is an ancient practice all world over. According to various cultural norms dreams signify portents both good and evil. Man with imaginative exuberance and creative urges forms definitions of dreams and the dream processes. Dreams also signify the specific states of mind and psychology. But of course, courtesy Freudian analysis, people are indeed curiously inclined towards this fascinating spectrum of colourful podium of thought and fantasy.

The integral connection between dream thought and literary fantasy or process makes one marvel at the intricacy of the process of dreaming. Besides the fact that dreams do interlocate and interpret We can and do surmise about the whole periphery of thought in the mind. Freud in his second introductory lectures of Psychoanalysis stresses the variety and purposeful impressions of dreams on human life and relationship and

behavior. The fact that dreams are but wish fulfillment has prompted so many of inferences that it is simply wondrous. Along with an elaborate assessment of dreams and its overwhelming impact, Freud also has brought to the fore the distinct trajectories of emotional and instinctual vicissitudes that could affect man and his ambience.

Freud and his theory of Dreams

In his mammoth document on dreams and dreaming *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud goes to the intricacies, subtleties and innuendoes of the whole process of dreaming which in simpler terms, he terms as wish fulfillments. One general misconception that is associated with wish fulfillments is that all dreams have got some erotic content to fall back upon! To this Freud has clarified in explicit terms in reference to Otto Rank's explanation that "Only a few pages back I mentioned the manifold wish fulfillment of children's dreams (to make an excursion on land or water, to make up for an omitted meal etc.) Elsewhere I have mentioned dreams excited by thirst and the desire to evacuate, and mere comfort – or convenience- dreams." In the same context he has tried to clarify the most notable charge that he is almost always put to, that he considers all dreams have sexual bases. He categorically rules out that confirmation and rather offers a broader connotation to "Eros" or libido. Freud says "The matter has, however, a different aspect if we employ the word 'sexual' in the sense of 'Eros', as the word is understood by psychoanalysts. But the interesting problem of whether all dreams are not produced by 'libidinal' motives (in opposition to 'destructive' ones) has hardly been considered by our opponents. (Freud 1997 : 68)

Simple definitions and sexual connotations apart, dreams are identifiers of personality, prompters of action and associations of life- principles. Accordingly any discourse on dreams and its impact on persons at moments need to be a complex exhibit. As such the manifest content of a dream generally professes an indifferent character. But as Freud says immediately after that, this indifference and non specificity becomes absolutely personal, when the dream is interpreted and analysed. In the chapter 'The Material and Sources of dreams', the master analyst examines queries and questions regarding the essential and non essential parts of human dreams. He very succinctly comments, "I see that the puzzling theory that the dream deals only with the worthless odds and ends of the day's experiences has no justification; I am also compelled to contradict the assertion that the psychic life of the waking state is not continued in the dream and that hence, the dream wastes our psychic energy on trivial material." He further says that, that is not true as "the very opposite is true; what has claimed our attention during the day dominates our dream thoughts also..." (p 78 TIOD)

Dichotomy between Manifest and Latent

The fact that for Freud dreams are but wish fulfillments created various reservations in the mind of the earlier readers, individuals and critics as not many of them were ready to concede to that theory. Because on the surface dreams not at all corresponded to the conscious intentions or knowledge of individuals. Curiously the interpretations of Freud made things clear that the dreams like literary pieces have dual level of operations. The conscious or the real is not ready to accept the implausibility of the logic that speaks just the contrary what the mind believes to be true. The manifest dream refers categorically to that part of the process which the conscious would like to believe as it is on the appearance. But at moments it becomes very difficult to imagine what appears to be on the surface. As an illustration, the sequence of the dream of a woman who sees her fifteen year old daughter lying dead in a box maybe cited. She was not at all prepared to readily accept Freudian theory of wish fulfillments since it was not as it were that she even in her imagination could think of her beloved daughter's death! As Freud cites this in the chapter "Distortion in Dreams", after giving thought to various possible strands of perception, she admitted that the reference to the box would bring in diverse suggestions like, a simple literal box, or the box at the theatre, or the chest, or box in the ear etc! Even that box could suggest the womb or uterus. In the interpretation of the dream it emerged that "treating her knowledge of topographical anatomy with a certain indulgence, to assume that the child in the box signified a child in the mother's womb. At this stage of the explanation she no longer denied that the picture in the dream actually corresponded with a wish of hers. Like so many other young women, she was by no means happy on finding that she was pregnant, and she had confessed to me more than once the wish that her child might die before its birth; in a fit of anger, following a violent scene with her husband, she had even struck her

abdomen with her fists , in order to injure the child within. “ (Freud 1997: 63) So Freud surmises at the end of the explication of the dream that “ the dead child was therefore , really the fulfillment of the wish , but a wish which had been put aside for fifteen years ,”. (Ibid)

In a very momentous essay ,” ‘Psychoanalysis’ and ‘ libido Theory’ (Second Introductory Lecture)” Freud in a most pertinent manner introduces the lay reader to a number of key concepts and areas that work as necessary imperatives. He refers to the most engaging tool of free association and the functions of dreams as working towards meaning of states and relationships among others. In this connection Freud also curiously brings in the topic of dream censorship and discusses how in the manifest dream content distortion is brought about in order to justify the latent. The logical question as why distortion does take place thereby making it , undecipherable , strange or absurd is explicated quite intelligibly by the great master. “ The indecipherability , the strangeness, the absurdity of the manifest dream on the one hand follows on from the transfer transposition of the dream thoughts into another mode of expression that might be described as archaic ,while on the other hand it is the affect of a restrictive , critically refusing agency that is not entirely abolished even during sleep.”(P 113)

Here in this connection , let me bring into discussion a very curious observation made by Freud in his pioneering essay “ An Outline of Psychoanalysis” about the nature of dreams and the process of dreaming. He refers to this peculiar experience as “ Dreams , then are a psychosis ,with all the inconsistencies, delusions , and tricks of the senses that the psychoses demonstrate” . But he also concedes the fact that this is a very short lived psychosis ; a harmless one and after that phase normal activities could be presumed. It is marvelous to gauge the propensity and scope of Freud’s thought and also to understand the poetic inferences of the associative principles of the human mind. The graphic nature of his narration makes the plane of the mind rather visual , almost akin to the dream itself , very conspicuous, visible and suggestive. As an omniscient narrator he sees it all, as a forgiving observer and scrutinizer he makes for allowances because he knows it all, and sadly he observes the paucity of remedy.

In the all pervading discourse of Freud’s dream theory, a few strains of thought however occurs to the keen observer and that points to the question whether in all possible cases of dream interpretation Freudian theory offers satisfactory conclusion . Of course that’s a far cry when we tend to understand the details of the conscious and the unconscious in the total dream process. Freud’s friend C G Jung who later fell apart from him had also a robust theory of dreams and dreaming. While he acknowledges the masterful contribution of Freud in this regard, he differs from the concept of dreams being only wish fulfilment. He confers more complicity on the process of dreaming, which he deliberates in his Book Dreams (trans. R F C Hull). After “a methodical questioning of the dreamer’s own associations “ which Freud also subscribes , Jung brings in place of content, as he says “ taking up the context”.(p 73, “ On the Nature of Dreams”)

Surrealism and the component of Dreaming

Surrealism , to bring into discussion the closely related artistic representation to the dream process , was an aesthetic movement characterized by the illusive, incoherent and illogical, also remotely romantic but blatant , allegorical and suggestive , meaningful yet meaningless. When at the beginning of the 20th century there was a suggestion in the preceding artistic scene that a momentous age of change was on the horizon and virtually the very modes of artistic representations were going for a radical transition! In 1919, in Paris , three young poets Andre Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault brought together by their earnest devotion to Apollinaire dedicated their art to ‘the new spirit’ and ‘illuminated signs’ . The pioneer Dadaist Tristan Tzara already had defied all plastic art and his 1918 manifesto caught the attention of Andre Breton. Duchamp, and Picabia brought thoughtfulness to art and Max Ernst started his geometric experimentation with form. After Dada movement died which also had worked as fuel to surrealism, Breton brought the formal manifesto of Surrealism in 1924, and the prime motto was thought to be “ a kind of psychic automatism which corresponds very closely to a dream state , which today is very difficult to delimit.” (2007, Alexandrian : 47) The expressed aim of surrealism was not to replace reality with something fantastic or illogical but to create “ a superior reality , in which all the contradictions which afflict humanity are resolved as in a dream.” (ibid : 49) . So “ an interior model” he was in search of, that would inform a completely transformed reality, a complete

metaphoric and linguistic representation in pictures. He was completely convinced at this stage that the painting had to include “ the field of mental adventure” if surrealistic paintings had to survive . This was to stifle the debate and skepticism that sporadically arose in the art world regarding Surrealism as an aesthetic movement. He profoundly deliberated in this manner “ I find it impossible to think of a picture save as a window , and my first concern about a window is to find out *what it looks out on* ...and there is nothing I love so much as something which stretches away from me *out of sight* “ (p.60 SA)

With the emergence of Salvador Dali as a staunch Surrealist , the movement regained an unprecedented momentum, a new vigour and a new earnestness. All that exuberance evinces in his works of that period during the second decade of the twentieth century. He was not firmly committed towards surrealism till 1929, as he was restlessly trying to find an apt and genuinely potent style or way of expression fit for the free fiery spirit of his. The sense of liberation he was looking for in his art , was being explored through various ways, from diverse perspectives. Within the period from 1927 to 1929 , Dali worked with film director Bunuel for a most extraordinary cinematic project *Un Cien Andalou* , the most innovative experimental surrealistic reflection in cinema. The violence of emotion was as it were appropriately reflected in the bizarre dynamic images in the film.

Sigmund Freud and Salvador Dali

The relationship between Freud and Dali was never ordinary as it would never be in case of such giants who were masters in their own fields ! They respected each other’s erudite exploration in the realm of art, aesthetics and life. As revealed by Dawn Ades in *Dali* , these two masters met in London, in 1938. To Stefan Zweig , Freud seemed to have written, “ I really owe you thanks for bringing yesterday’s visitor. For until now , I have been inclined to regard the Surrealists ,who have apparently adopted me as their patron saint, as complete fools...That young Spaniard ,with his candid, fanatical eyes and his undeniable technical mastery has changed my estimate...” (Ades , 2004: 82) . It remains an undeniable conjecture that Dali was to the core a Freudian, a practitioner of the theory in art and aesthetics. His obsessive fascination with Freudian psychoanalysis or for that matter the interpretation of dreams unraveled a vast sky to Salvador Dali to explore and probe about himself and the world. Maybe it is also a fact that Freudian theories of the conscious and the unconscious enabled the artist in him to innovate and experiment to the fullest extent. Freud’s concept of fetishism and the excessive projection of the libidinal object could be illustratively read in Dali’s installation art “ *Lobster Telephone* “(1936) and other art works like “ *The face of Mae West*” especially, “ *Mae West’s Lips Sofa*” (1036-7) .

“ *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonitions of Civil War* “ by Salvador Dali is a complex manifestation of the interior and the exterior , the individual psyche and the collective unconscious and of course Dali’s exploration of an appropriate aesthetic for the tumult of his heart. The fact that he was apathetic to an overt political stance and wanted to remain mostly noncommittal ,made him a victim of critical slur among his contemporaries. Dali’s comment on this famous painting is almost impressionistic” I showed a vast human body breaking out into monstrous excrescences of arms and legs tearing at one another in a delirium of auto strangulation. As a background to this architecture of frenzied flesh I painted a geological landscape, that has been uselessly revolutionized for thousands of years congealed in its” normal course”.(pp.111-112, *Dali*)

Is surrealism an artistic manifestation of the mind? The answer to that question of course wouldn’t be simple at all, as perception of art objects needs to be seen alongside the sense of the aesthetics ,the formation of the creative urge and the promptings and the seminal drive that actually forms the essence. Dali was the most representative surrealist, not only in ideological gusto but also in the wide propagation and practice of that ideation. But another fabulous and flamboyant artist in the same field was Magritte. His concise and condensed metaphorical display of the unconscious is as striking as it is thought provoking. One of the main concerns of his art was objectification of thought. This is reflected in most of his paintings and installations. Sarane Alexandrian in the preface to the book *Surrealist Art* refers to Magritte’s remark about his art in a letter written to the author “ I conceive of the art of painting as the science of juxtaposing colours in such a way that their actual appearance disappears and lets a poetic image emerge ... There are no “ subjects” no “ themes” in my painting . It is a matter of imagining images whose poetry restores to what is known that which is absolutely

unknown and unknowable”.(P.7 SA). What this phenomenal artist does is creation of “the most astounding visual dialectic of our time “ as said by Alexandrian . (pp 119-120, SA) His surrealism was actually a phenomenological approach manifest towards art and aesthetics. His is seeing as it were a thought ! The same idea very aptly applies to Dali also. The only difference is that while Magritte’s images seem to be tranquil , Dali’s are volatile and dissipated just as they are in the unconscious.

The experimentation with automatic writing as initiated by Andre Breton in his Paris studio in 1922, also was an attempt to shift the stream of thought , without reason or control or everything that passes, to writing in rapid successive way to formulate what it becomes ! A year before Breton had met Sigmund Freud , whom he admired to the exception of other Frenchmen and very excitedly thought of applying the techniques of automatic writing to painting. (see p.47, SA)

Reading Surrealistic art as a Display of Dreams

The psychosis and neuroses of the patients, the dreams and manifestations of surrealistic representations, all coalesce in “Dreams in art”. How do we read a work of art as a dream ? Perhaps it won’t be futile to read Salvador Dali’s art works as virtual interpretations of dreams , because as we tend to equate the incoherent dream images on the plane of rationalistic analysis, Freudian theory induces the two parallel planes of interpretation, namely manifest and latent or to say it more simply as illusive/fantastic and real. Now to posit the surrealist art pattern on this mode of interpretation, the signifier manifest images such as Dali’s “ The Persistence of memory” (1931) or Duchamp’s “ Nude Descending a Staircase” (1912) , or for that matter Giorgio De Chirico ‘s “ Melancholy” (1912) , all points to semantic assessments of various kinds. If Dali’s images are at moments completely independent of their connotations and do stand for the dreams themselves , Duchamp and others like Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy ‘s , tend to lead us from half sleep through trance to hallucinations , fantastic and marvelous. The shrouded mystery of Ernst’s “ Men Shall Know Nothing of It” (1923) p 68 has nothing to do with the near scientific projection of his another painting, “ Natural History” (1923) ,which slowly shifts from micro cellular organisms to the gigantic animals of Dinosaur family. Analysing Tanguy’s “The Rapidity of Sleep” (1945) and “ Infinite Divisibility” (1942) , together with the same lenses , a definite pattern of natural change emerges.

The individual sonority of mechanical metaphysics of the earlier work gathers into a societal and collective affirmation or acceptance in the later painting of 1945. Looking into these diversities , the unifying tone with the surrealists definitely would be the “ Journey into the marvelous”. That seems to be an apt phrasal description of the modus operandi of these artists. Here the whole process of creative work and the thought content blended meaningfully in order to help picking up the tangible oysters of dreams unto the vast ocean of the Unconscious and that becomes the focused imperative of the dreamer , the artist. Freud was such a poet who intended to remain behind the façade of rationalism targeting his mission Impossible to the goal of therapeutic cure for the sick and Dali was the artist most daringly diving and venturing into the sea in a mission to make the language of the dreams a valid mode of articulation for man.

But whatever is the nature of relationship that we are trying to figure out between Freud and Dali in tangible matrices , the blurred and twilight areas of the Unconscious form the source or promptings. One thing perhaps needs to be cleared here, that the dream formation or the fuzzy logic connected with the dream images is actually a loaded metaphoric identity, striking and blatantly bare and nude. How does various processes of condensation, displacement substitution etc do add to the process of transformation of the real into something different and separate? In this connection , Dali is said to have been obsessively concerned about the symbolic representations of dream contents and he included in the frontispiece to the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* “ both the processes of dream – displacement and dream condensation and a more direct representation of the latent content of the dream : sexual wishes and anxieties...” (p85 *Dali*)

The theory of perception or for that matter reader’s response theory by Peirce also holds good for reading of dreams. Even Derrida in “ Freud and the Scene of Writing “ explores between Freud’s concept of the unconscious and of memory , and the metaphor of writing. A shift from the content of Freudian psychoanalysis theory to its representative formal aesthetic also needs to be taken into account. How theories

relate to the objects of research? is an important follow up of Freudian psychoanalysis. In this connection , however , a wide generalization on the interrelation between Dali or other surrealists and psychoanalysis would constrict the main thesis that psychoanalysis is about dream and in the strictest connotation Surrealists also delved in the fuzzy area of dreams alone.

Relevant here would be the reference that Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “What I dislike about [the book] is the style . I was quite unable to express myself with noble simplicity, but lapsed into a facetious , circumlocutory straining after the picturesque’ which ensues from the dream itself. (P209 Freud and Psychoanalysis by Celine Suprenant in *Literary Theory and Criticism* , Patricia Waugh , Oxford University Press New Delhi 2006)

The fact that Freud is immersed in the study and practice of the source of Surrealism , (and that’s unconscious) his coordination with the most notable of surrealists needs to be brought to the fore. Dali was an absolute eccentric and mode or philosophy of his was random, spontaneous, fiery and impetuous! But Sigmund Freud was a rationalist, bent on analysis and explication and moderate in his life and beliefs. These two completely diverse personalities met to curious results. What was taken to be the base of the analysis (the dreams and the dreaming processes) was curiously able to produce magnificent specimens of thought , reflection and aesthetics. But concessions must be made in regards to the limitations , aesthetic and ethical , which tend to permeate the wide areas of interpretation and appreciation of art . And to arrive at some point of conclusion, one must go over the wider parameters of post Freudian analysis of dreams , the ambivalent yet the striking notions of gender and femininity and also political interference of pure and popular art aesthetics.

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