

On Kant's po(i)etic concept of dream

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I. The topic of dreams in the framework of the “new sciences of man”

Dream, so says the famous lexicographer Johann Christoph Adelung, is “the state of confused representations in sleep, an intermediate state between sleep and wakefulness. (...) *To happen as in a dream*, devoid of distinct consciousness, in the condition of confused representations.” (GKW 4: 1036)¹ Thus sounded, in unison, not just the informed opinion of all lexicographers in Kant's time², but also the (scarce and negative) opinion which Anthropology, Psychology, even Philosophy then had of dreams

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¹ J. C. ADELUNG, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart*. 5 Bde. Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf und Sohn, 1774–1786. All citations, not only Kant's, but also from other authors, will be presented in a traditional manner (Abbreviation of work, Volume of work, number of page(s)). The abbreviation of each work cited finds correspondence in the final bibliographical section. All citations have been translated from their original German language into English. The citations are of my own translation, and therefore my own responsibility.

² See with regard to the negative character of dreams – as well as the inferior powers of the spirit – K. STIELER, von, *Der Deutschen Sprache Stammbaum und Fortwachs, oder Teutscher Sprachschatz* (1691): “somnia, insomnium, phantasia, imaginatio, species, visio nocturna. (...) Trug, betrogen. Unruhige, böse Treume, tumultuosa somnia. Närrische Treume, somnia levia, minuta. (...) Erdichtete falshe Treume, somnia ficta, falsa. Tunkele Treume, visa obscura, turtuosa, incerta. (...) Ein schwacher Hirntraum, species animo substituta, inanis, vana figuratio, imaginatio, imago, cum quis aliquid sibi fingit & cogitatione depingit” (DSSF: 2301-2302), or C. E. STEINBACH, *Deutsches Wörter-Buch, vel Lexicon Germanico-Latinum*: “einen närrischen Traum haben, mirum & inscitum somniare somnium; ich halte es vor einen Traum, somnio similis res mihi videtur” (DWB 2: 845-846).

and their singular manifestations³: an opinion which greatly precedes the 18th century, but whose history would by then reach a decisive *turning point*: that of the discovery of new potentialities, new scopes, in short, a new status of dreams which would characterize the topic in the 19th and 20th centuries, and is more palpable than ever in our days.

Indeed, dream, the “intermediate state” (id.) between wakefulness and sleep, consciousness and unconsciousness, is experienced as “devoid of distinct consciousness” (ibid.) – and, so adds Adelung twice, occurs in a “condition of confused representations” (ibid.): a condition enshrouded in obscurity, doubt and confusion, in which one cannot enter before one abandons the state of wakefulness the state of wakefulness, and from whence one cannot leave until one returns to clarity, that is, to the truth inherent to wakefulness. Precisely this confused – and rather confusing – character of obscure representations is stated by Adelung through other examples in the same entry:

To help someone come out of a dream, more precisely, to wake up a dreamer; but even more frequently figuratively, to render distinct his in-

³ Let it be noted that in the 17th century and in the first half of the 18th century, properly topicalizing and positive references to the term “dream” come only from literature or poetry. Among the so-called new sciences of man, barely any references to the term are to be found, for amid these sciences – particularly anthropology – there reigned originally a procedure of a physical or physiological order, and hence scarce or no attention at all could be devoted to the non-physiological, possibly irrational and unconscious dimension of the human being. As an example, Magnus HUNDT’s *Anthropologium de Hominis Dignitate, Natura et proprietatibus, de elementis, partibus et membris humani corporis* (1501), only occasionally refers to the term of dreams; the same happens in Otto CASMANN’S *Psychologia anthropologica, sive animae humanae doctrina* (1594), Sigismundus EVENIUS’ *Disputationes Anthropologicae* (1613) or Albert KYPER’S *Anthropologia corporis humani contentorum, et animae naturam et virtutes secundum circularem sanguinis motum explicans* (1647); to the extent that in some of the latter there is not one reference to the term. In the transition to the 18th century, along with epistemological shifts in the concept of anthropology (indeed interrelated with akin shifts in psychology), dreams gradually begin to be referred to in such manuals; though not a very laudatory reference, the occurrences of the term “dream” falling among manifestations of fantasy, or the unruly imagination, from whence nothing real and productive can arise; such is the case with Edward REYNOLDS’ *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1647) or John MASON’S *A Treatise of Self-Knowledge* (1746). Finally, only with the advent of Aesthetics by the hand of Baumgarten, and its multifarious collocation of this question, would the topic of dreams come to achieve independence and a new status –something which, as we shall see, Kant would later decisively and definitively confirm.

distinct and confused concepts, to point him in the right direction, to suppress his doubts etc. As well as the confused representation itself. To be plagued with heavy dreams. To have anguishing dreams. To have a dream. The dream signifies nothing good. (ibid.)

Namely, the oneiric state is often a state of impotence of consciousness: one which "signifies nothing good" (ibid.), one which is moreover like a plague (*geplagt*), and from which one must wake to "render distinct (...) indistinct and confused concepts" (ibid.). In short, the concept of dream, inasmuch as it is outside of the field conscious phenomena, falls into the uncertain, the confused and the obscure; and thus is explained not only the general negative opinion of dreams around the onset of the 18th century, but also, for this precise reason, its century-old neglect and omission from learned works in general.

However, we believe that the reason for such an opinion, as well as for such neglect, is further explained by *another cause* – curiously enough, one which is mentioned in Adelung's own definition of dream. For, we reiterate, notwithstanding the intermediate position of dreams; notwithstanding its ominous aura; in short, notwithstanding the preeminently negative general character of dreams, the important factor in this question is the vehicle, the mobile of the procedure of dreams, which after all determines and encapsulates all that dreams are: namely, the fact that dreams *work* through "confused representations", between wakefulness and sleep. Now, *these "confused representations" are no other than the obscure or sensible representations of the human soul*: those which, until Baumgarten and Kant, are equally disregarded by the learned opinion⁴, held as the most

⁴ What was said in Annotation 3 on the topic of dreams, could well be repeated here, *ipsis verbis*, on that of obscure representations, not only with regard to its evident disregard by learned authors until the 18th century, but also with regard to the topic's revolution at the hands of Baumgarten and Kant; perhaps with the difference that among all those which would ascend to the condition of elements of the inferior power of cognition (dreams included), the topic of obscure representations is that which was the most neglected, and hence the latest to be acknowledged as such. The affinity between both questions, that of dreams and obscure representations, may help explain their long neglect by the scholars of the time. On such a disregard, it is so evident that no additional reading is required to prove it. On Baumgarten's and Kant's revolution of the topic, see H. ADLER, (1988), "Fundus animae – der Grund der Seele. Zur Gnoseologie des Dunklen in der Aufklärung", in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 62, S. 197-220; C. LA ROCCA, "Das Schöne und der Schatten. Dunkle

inferior stage of human knowledge, from whence emanates but obscurity and incompleteness, and which therefore are to be brought to light under the form of clear representations. These are, no doubt, the “confused representations” of which Adelung speaks: which means that, according to the lexicographer, as well as according to said fields of knowledge at the time, obscure representations existed in the wakeful state, which was in itself problematic⁵. But dreams, so seems to accentuate Adelung, succeed in further emulating this situation, thus extending the influence of obscure representations beyond wakeful consciousness, up to unconsciousness (where such representations can give their unruliness and obscurity free reign), in a word, thus giving voice, enlarging the field of action of obscure representations; a field of action which, according to many philosophers of the time, was indeed harmful, and apparently pointless, and hence bore nothing important or noteworthy for the theory of human consciousness. And from this notable association between obscure representations and dreams, which Adelung undoubtedly acknowledges, is born the general tendency of the analysis to the concept of dreams until the second half of the 18th century; in short, one of the last episodes in a long historical saga of disregard for the manifestations of human unconsciousness or irrationality.

One of the authors which changes this history and thus emerges from it for reasons precisely contrary to the ones stated above, is *Immanuel Kant*; he who, in line with Baumgarten⁶, discovers in the apparent confusion,

Vorstellungen und ästhetische Erfahrung zwischen Baumgarten und Kant”, in *Im Schatten des Schönen. Die Ästhetik des Häßlichen in historischen Ansätzen und aktuellen Debatten*, hrsg. von Heiner F. Klemme, Michael Pauen, Marie-Luise Raters, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2006; M. OBERHAUSEN, (2002), “*Dunkle Vorstellungen als Thema von Kants Anthropologie und A. G. Baumgartens Psychologie*”, in: *Aufklärung*, 14, S. 123-146.

⁵ A proof of this are the first approaches to the topic of obscure representations as a topic of undeniable reality, but *questionable utility*, which consider obscure representations not in their possible promotion, but in their certain hindrance of the human consciousness. In a more or less visible manner, this is what emerges from the nonetheless laudable efforts of J. LOCKE (1690) *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XXIX; G. W. LEIBNIZ (1704), *Neue Abhandlungen über den menschlichen Verstand*, Buch II, Kap. XXIX; C. WOLFF, (1738), *Psychologia Empirica*, Pars I, Sectio II, Caput I “De differentia perceptionum formali”; Andreas RÜDIGER (1727), “Meynung von den Wesen der Seele” or Martin KNUTZEN (1741, 1744), *Philosophische Abhandlung von der immateriellen Natur der Seele*.

⁶ As to *the topic of obscure representations*, Baumgarten presents it as a proof of the “Reality of the soul”, in his *Metaphysics* (1739); between the sections on “The aesthetic

unconsciousness and irrationality of obscure representations, and in addition in dreams, new and very important fields of analysis – *new horizons for human consciousness*; and this, not by rejecting the general opinion on the topic of his time, but, quite conversely, by accepting obscure representations – and human imagination in general – in both their wakeful and oneiric dimensions, as a factor of dialogue between consciousness and unconsciousness, thus bringing dreams, as well as other less considered topics of the theory of human representation, to a well-deserved prominent condition⁷.

To understand how Kant operates this is therefore the main objective of this essay⁸; an objective which we now subdivide into two others and present as follows:

1) First, to understand how Kant conceives dreams, and their inherent imaginativeness, as a factor of simultaneous union and disunion between consciousness and unconsciousness.

2) Finally, to see how, according to the philosopher, dreams are involuntary imagination (involuntary poetry), which is directly opposed to cons-

truth” and “The aesthetic falsehood” in his *Aesthetics* (1750-1758) and in direct relation with poetry, in his “Meditationes philosophicae de Nunullis ad poema pertinentibus” (1735). As to *the topic of dreams*, Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics* approaches it – not without relation and relevance for Kant’s theory of dreams – in a section entitled “Facultas fingendi”, namely, §§ 593-594. In the *Aesthetics*, dream is dealt with, not by chance, among the sections on aesthetic truth, falsehood and probability (§§ 423-504) and immediately after, in the sections devoted to “Fictiones” (§§ 505-510) and “Fictiones poéticas” (§§ 511-525).

⁷ Reference to the topics of memory, the faculty of imagination, wit or genius, as well as those of dreams or the obscure representations, of which Kant would reveal new views and statuses, thereby definitively inscribing the latter as constituting topics or capacities of the inferior power of cognition.

⁸ An objective which sees itself unheeded by other works on the same problem, inasmuch as the problem of Kant’s concept of dream is still very much unapproached (perhaps due to the negative influence of its previous history). Nonetheless, on this theme, see JAITNER, Arne, “Traum, Wahn und die Konstruktion des Selbst bei Immanuel Kant”, in *Zwischen Metaphysik und Empirie*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999, pp. 14-63; GANTET, Claire, “Bewusstsein, Einbildungskraft und persönliche Identität um 1750”, in *Der Traum in der neuen Frühzeit. Ansätze zu einer kulturellen Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Berlin/New York: DeGruyter, 2010, pp. 429-472; DAVID-MÉNARD, Monique, *La Folie dans la Raison Pure. Kant Lecteur de Swedenborg*, Paris: Vrin, 1990; the second part (Zweiter Teil) of BAEUMLER, Alfred, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilkraft*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975.

cious imagination; and to discern what role obscure representations may have in this division and/or union: as the glue which connects and disconnects consciousness and unconsciousness, as that which *brings to light, in darkness, that which wakefulness leaves unrevealed in daylight*.

II. Imagination: connection and scission between consciousness and unconsciousness

Kant's initial collocation of the problem of dreams, as is found in the *Lectures on Anthropology*, but also in the *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798)⁹, is very much archetypical, and obeys the natural, more common traits of the concept in general. Dream, Kant agrees, "borders with sleep and with wakefulness" (AA 25.1: 101). It is "an offspring of somnolence" (d.), for sleep is followed by wakefulness and wakefulness by sleep, dream thus being that which, in-between both, as if *circularly*, unites and puts into contact human *consciousness and unconsciousness*, the two fundamental states of human life. Dreams, Kant therefore states, are *the intimate, ever reiterated and yet new dialogue between exteriority and interiority, clarity and obscurity, world and soul*; and so very connected are wakefulness and sleep, that it would be indeed strange if between both there was nothing but a contingent connection.

The natural intimacy of sleep and wakefulness, Kant nonetheless seems to suggest, cannot be explained merely through the proximity – not even through the infallible circularity – between these two planes. For, let it be noted, circularity, proximity are not yet *identity*, and if they were, then dreams would be nothing more than a transition into wakefulness, or a transition into sleep, and nothing else. Identity, the proportion between simi-

⁹ In the *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), the topic is dealt with in § 37, among the po(i)etic faculties of the soul. In the *Lectures on Anthropology* (1772-1789), the topic of dreams arises in the following occasions: Anthropologie-Collins "Träumerey oder, der Zustand des unwillkührlichen Dichtens" (AA 25.1: 100-101); "Vom Träumen" (AA 25.1: 101-102); Anthropologie-Parow "Vom unwillkührlichen Dichten" (AA 25-1: 328-335); Anthropologie-Friedländer "Vom Zustand des Menschen im Schlaf oder im Traum" (AA 25.1: 528-531); Anthropologie-Menschenkunde "Von dem Traume" (AA 25.2: 995-997); Anthropologie-Mrongovius "Vom Träumen" (AA 25.2: 1283-1289). In all these occasions, as in the *Anthropology* (1798), the topic of dreams invariably appears side by side with that of the faculty of poetizing and the remaining faculties of human imagination.

les, quite on the contrary, requires a resistance between poles, and hence, if one thinks the dream connects wakefulness and sleep, one should also think that the dream is precisely *between* wakefulness and sleep: as a factor of disconnection and direct opposition between the two states. Namely, the identity and true connection between wakefulness and sleep is indeed in the dream, but not only in the connection, rather also in the scission which the dream instils between the two. For, according to Kant, despite the affinity, if there is something that both these states are is almost entirely *divergent* – to the extent that in the perception one has of them, in the general concept that is their own, Kant must see above all *difference*. The possible connection between wakefulness and sleep, and the respective guarantee of circularity between both, must then arise not from causal phenomena which, though seeming to consentaneously explain both planes, do not forge a *true link* – a *proportion, a theoretical and functional harmony* – *between wakefulness and sleep*¹⁰. Quite on the contrary, since between sleep and wakefulness there seems to be no natural causality, rather a *whole different nexus*, this connection must arise from *something else, which is neither in one nor in the other of*

¹⁰ Such a theoretical device – that of a *continuous progressive resistance of the multiple which ultimately achieves unity* – reappears very often in Kant's work, and is one of the philosopher's recurrent reflexive mechanisms. In "Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim" (1784), progress between men is thought of based on the individual's "unsociable sociability": for, so says Kant, "The means nature uses in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is their antagonism in society, inasmuch as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order" (AA 8: 20); in *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795), the constitution of the federation of peoples (*foedus amphycionum*) is achieved in light of the previous view of the individual, namely, inasmuch as, according to Kant, "As hard as it may sound, the problem of erecting a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (as long as they possess understanding). It may be stated as follows: 'In order to organize a group of rational beings who require universal laws for their survival, but of whom each separate individual is secretly inclined to exempt himself from them, the constitution must be designed so that, although the citizens are opposed to one another in their private attitudes, these opposing views may inhibit one another in such a way that the public conduct of the citizens will be the same as if they did not have such evil attitudes.'" (that is, peace between peoples created in the light of peace between individuals, through a resistant progression of the contrary forces of individuals and/or peoples); and much before these works, in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), Kant suggests that everything around us, from the greatest to the smallest, that is, from our planet, the Milky Way, all the galaxies, the universe, to man itself, to natural manifestations and elements, to embryos themselves, is constituted according to such a progressive resistance between contrary laws or phenomena: a progressive resistance from whence seems to derive discord, but which will ultimately produce concord, through the conjoint action of nature (*natura daedala rerum*) and its creator.

the two planes – which is neither in consciousness or in unconsciousness – rather is in both at the same time, and thus succeeds in bringing together and rendering proportional and identifiable such different planes of human existence.

Now, that bridge between consciousness and unconsciousness, the connecting factor between wakefulness and dream, which is also at the source of their disconnection and difference: that factor exists. It consists of the all too human propensity to *represent*; that is, the propensity to be “constantly occupied with creating new prospects of objects, and [to] form new images from the matter it has in store” (AA 25.1: 328; AA 2: 264); namely, *human imagination (Einbildung)*, which “occurs in wakefulness and in dream” (AA 25.1: 328), and is therefore *common to both consciousness and unconsciousness*.

The reason for this is simple. For, according to Kant’s *Lectures on Anthropology*, but even more clearly the text “Essay on the Maladies of the Head” (1764), it is most natural in human beings that their faculty of imagination *labors incessantly* in the formation of representations:

The soul of every human being is occupied, even in the healthiest state, in painting all sorts of images of things which are not present, or also in completing some imperfect resemblance in the representation of present things, through one or other chimerical trait which the creative capacity of poetizing brings to the sensation” (AA 2: 264).

This, Kant stresses, is *of the essence of human beings*; and because this inescapable occupation “occurs in wakefulness and in dream” (AA 25.1: 328), and because, according to Kant, “there is no cause to believe that in the state of wakefulness our spirit follows other laws than in sleep” (AA 2: 264), then this means that the human process of dreaming, as well as that of conscious imagination, are indeed connected, inasmuch as they have not a mechanical or systematic order, but an organic one, namely, *a fictional, or po(i)etical nature*: “The dream proceeds according to rules of the imagination, it is a chain of fictions, for one draws the other to itself, just as in dialogues in society” (AA 25.1: 101). This, this all too human representativeness, no doubt draws together wakefulness and sleep and it is this which best characterizes Kant’s concept of dream.

Yet, we reiterate, because nonetheless dream and wakefulness are and ultimately have to be different states of the human consciousness, because

everything about them seems to have to promote a different environment for this very imaginative process, then, if we wish to attain identity between the two, *dream and wakefulness must also be considered as being opposed. That is, they must surely be heterogeneously fictional*, as heterogeneous must also be the conscious and unconscious uses of one and the same faculty. Namely, on the one hand, wakefulness and dream must share a common use of human images and cognitions – for, after all, the faculty of human imagination resorts to one and the same treasure of human knowledge, be it in wakefulness or in dream –, but, notwithstanding this common source, *they will have to create and invent differently* inasmuch as human consciousness and unconsciousness are altogether different. On the other hand, one such common imaginative procedure surely intertwines and renders reciprocally necessary the irrational and rational, obscure and clear planes of the human being – but *it is precisely in the necessarily different use of one and the same representations that we shall see in which way one influences, molds, in a word, is identifiable with the other*, and not the other way around, where equality merely results in neutrality and indistinctiveness.

In a word, the *question* is such that dreams and wakefulness share their procedures – through images and in accordance with the human faculty of imagination; but the problem in this question is such that all the rest, all whereupon this faculty lies, whence it arises and what it ultimately produces, is, between unconsciousness and consciousness, *opposed. And hence, regardless of that similarity, another use of this faculty and its images, another sort of imagetic products must be created in dreams*. Until we approach it and compare it with that of wakefulness, no conclusions may be drawn regarding the dialogue between consciousness and unconsciousness in human representations, nor can we truly ascertain Kant's vision on this topic.

III. Conscious and unconscious poetry. The *apparent* externality of dreams and the unique force of oneiric representations

Kant addresses this topic in the *Lectures on Anthropology*. However, the most exact and important collocation of this problem is to be found in his "Reflections", in the section entitled: "Von den unwillkürlichen Dichtung im gesunden Zustande, d. i. vom Traume" (AA 15.2: 157-159), more precisely in "Reflection 393", wherein Kant compares and distinguishes *the imaginative process in wakefulness and in dreams*.

Kant's words, which will accompany us until the end of this article, are worth quoting in its full extent. They read as follows:

Now, we have external sensations through *radios divergentes ab obiecto* (otherwise they would signal no point) *in [ocul] organa incurrentes*; (...). Now, I affirm that in each fantasy the organ must be moved, but from within; hence, the *punctum imaginarium* is not outside the body, rather in it; in sleep, however, if the external sensation (of the body) is unknown to man, then this representation stands as [if it were] external. If the *punctum imaginarium* is directed outwards (as *hyperpresbyta*), then the man is insane (AA 15.2: 157).

Kant begins by addressing *conscious imagination*. According to his description, at the genesis of conscious imagination several "external impressions" come to us "through radios divergentes ab obiecto" (id.: 157), and are "in organa incurrentes" (ibid.): and despite the heterogeneity with which these representations thus permeate the human being, within the latter there is set into motion a natural process of distinction and association between images, which culminates in the fixation of the image in a point. Kant designates this fictional point as a "*punctum convergentiae*" (ibid.), or, in a word, an inner "*punctum imaginarium*" (ibid.): "in each fantasy the organ [must be] moved, but from within; hence, the punctum imaginarium is not outside the body, but in it" (ibid.).

Now, the reader of the *Lectures on Anthropology* and knower of Kant's study of the faculties of the spirit will surely recognize in this description what in other sections is more thoroughly described as *the natural process of human imagination (or formation of human representations), which, among other possible dispositions, Kant acknowledges as laying the ground for conscious poetry*. For, according to the process of the generation of ideas, from several fragments of past impressions and objects arise sensible representations, which, as such, are already poetic representations¹¹.

¹¹ A conviction which Kant draws from Baumgarten, who, among other considerations on the matter, would state in his "Meditationes philosophicae de Nunullis ad poema pertinentibus" (1735): "Sensible representations are constituents of a poem, and hence poetic. But because sensible representations may be obscure or clear, so are obscure and clear representations poetic". To which he adds: "Distinct representations, complete, adequate, throughout profound representations, are not sensible, and hence they are not poetic" (Med.: 15; § XIV).

Upon accessing the reproductive faculty of imagination (that is, through memory and fantasy), such sensible representations are rendered intellectual and establish a commerce between the object and the impression which always underlies it, and its future function as a clear representation. Different kinds of memory, however, mean different evolutions of the representation and different dispositions of the spirit; and among these, Kant underscores one as the commencement of *the faculty of productive imagination: ingenious memory (Ingeniöse Memoriren)*¹², which precisely rescues from oblivion representations which are not new, but which, through the singular action of wit and genius, and the subsequent connection of different and improbable parts in one whole (the aforementioned “point of convergence” or “imaginative point”), render such representations sensible and, so to say, *new as such*. That is, the sensible representation, by then rendered intellectual, is so to say re-rendered, as much as possible, sensible (new), and therefore poetic. And it is that very witty or poetic representation, imbued of all the force of the “punctum imaginarium”, which is ultimately presented as a new image to the understanding; the understanding which, given the irresistible sensibility of such a representation, its veiled coherence and connection to truth, must ultimately grant it access to the human soul. For this poetic representation is the result of a play, but precisely *a play under rules of the understanding* (AA 25.1: 162)¹³; and hence a play in which the representation does not arise from nothingness, nor does it tend towards nothingness, rather is endowed with a pertinence and a sense altogether different; and this, *this play of sensibility under the rules of the understanding, is precisely that of conscious poetry*.¹⁴

¹² On Kant's concept of “ingenious memory” see AA 25.1: 756; AA 25.2: 1463; AA 15.2: 148; AA 7: 182-184.

¹³ In *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), poetry is presented by Kant as “a game of sensibility ordered by the understanding” (AA 7: 246) which “produces from itself new figures (compositions of the sensible) in [the] faculty of imagination” (id.: 247).

¹⁴ Something which Kant would describe in the third Critique as the po(i)etic talent of the genius: namely, “the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others. The latter talent is really that which is called spirit: (...) to express what is unnameable in the mental state in the case of a certain representation and to make it universally communicable (...)” (AA 5: 317).

However, Kant does not end here his description of the field of human imagination; and anchoring himself in the conviction that wakefulness and dream share *a procedure, but an opposed imaginative procedure*, opens his conception of the human imaginative capacity to the *unconsciousness, and to dreams*. Here, let it be noted, the connection and scission between both planes must be evident; and since we have already acquiesced that between wakefulness and dream there is circularity and relation, but a diverging circularity and a directly opposed relation, and that if this is so, it is due to the necessarily different, even opposed use of imagination by wakefulness and dream: then it is not hard to presume that, according to Kant, dreams cannot be a mere extension of wakefulness, rather one should think that they are in such a way different that *the dream begins, if not as such, at least in its effect, precisely where the representativeness just described in the “punctum imaginarium” ends*. That is, the dream is born out of this very disposition, and it does resume, *but in its own manner and its own measure*, a process of human representation which is notably imaginative, and a human process of imagination which is notably poetic. Now, *this is precisely Kant’s opinion*. For, not by chance, several of Kant’s lectures on anthropology devoted to the topic evoke dreams as an unconscious, or “involuntary poetizing” (AA 25.1: 100)¹⁵. And hence, one should think that according to Kant, the dream departs from the “punctum imaginarium”, “from the inside” (AA 15.2: 157) – that is, from the imaginative-poetic effect with which conscious human imagination ceases – and tends *to the outside*, through an inverted distribution of the faculties of the spirit and a new sub-division of the “radios divergentes” (id.), this time, one could say, *ab subiecto*. In short, the dream describes a course in which the representation, once intellectual, is rendered once again unintellectual, and *returns to its original sensible state* – in the sensible impression, or the object – and thus completes, in a manner entirely contrary to that of conscious imagination, a full circle; a circle which, in its running circularity, and yet its antithetical reciprocity, is in a word the image of wakeful and oneiric imagination which Kant has been presenting to us.

Now, Kant himself states this in the *Lectures on Anthropology*: “The commencement of a dream always arises from any sensible sensation which

¹⁵ Namely, Anthropologie-Collins “Träumerey oder, der Zustand des unwillkührlichen Dichtens” (AA 25.1: 100-101), or Anthropologie-Parow “Vom unwillkührlichen Dichten” (AA 25-1: 328-335)

we felt in our sleep" (AA 25.1: 101) – namely, from an unconscious sensible representation similar to the one created by conscious poetry, but in a manner directly inverse from the one which takes place in consciousness, and hence imbued with a different causality. For here, quite conversely, several "radios divergentes" spread from the "punctum imaginarium" towards the original sensible representation, and from this "is then derived the prosecution of the faculty of imagination" (id.: 328), "the continuation of this sequence of images" (id.: 101) – proof of the dream's similarity, but also of the dream's difference, even opposition, regarding conscious imagination.

However, Kant adds, even though this outward movement, which is that of the dream, is indeed real, it bears a problematic nuance; a nuance which in our view is precisely *that which is unique and specific of the dream, and truly characterizes its difference and connection with wakefulness*. Namely, the problem is that, unlike the "punctum imaginarium", which is the beacon of human representativeness and poeticity, which is of *an inward nature*, and is felt *internally*, "in sleep, however, if the external sensation (of the body) is unknown to man, then this representation stands as [if it were] external" (AA 15.2: 157).

According to Kant, then, the dream is at its origin poetic; it is the ultimate and yet original point of the convergence of human imagination and from it must proceed, through imagination, the reconstruction or deconstruction of representations, until such representations, which arise from a sensibility borrowed from poetry and robbed by an unconscious use of such faculties, are rendered once again sensible. For in dreams, as in wakefulness, there takes place an unconscious use of the productive faculty of imagination, of ingenious memory, even of wit, according to which one resorts to past images to create new ones – if not entirely new, at least new as such ("self-created images" (AA 25.1: 528)). The question, however, is that upon freeing such sensible representations in the world of unconscious imagination, and upon attempting to re-elaborate, divide, unite them, in a word – render them new – *the dream is unable to find any sensible representation, any external impression, to which it may return the representation*. That is, conscious imagination, precisely because it is in consciousness, elects its point of efficacy – the imaginative point. But in dreams, because one is in total unconsciousness and cannot here cognize the external sensation, *there is no other point to which one can send the*

representation, and the representation, given its impossibility to sub-divide itself and to return to a real sensible representation – of moving outward – remains within and is felt only “as [if it were] external” (AA 15.2: 157) – all the more because if one could indeed return to the original condition of the sensible representation, and if in dreams one could have external impressions, this would mean that the object was indeed physically in the dream – and that, Kant says, could only mean some sort of dementia: “If the punctum imaginarium is directed outwards (as hyperpresbyta), then the man is insane” (id.).

Now, it is our opinion – and the kern of this article – that by referring that the representation of dreams is felt only “as [if it were] external”, whereas wakefulness seems to be complete and open, Kant does not consider this to be a limitation, not even a cause for the dream’s inferiority regarding wakefulness; much on the contrary, *this appearance of exteriority, and seeming insufficiency of the dream, should perhaps be seen exactly as the opposite and hence as a more fertile source of connection between human consciousness and unconsciousness*. According to Kant, then, conscious imagination or conscious poetizing occur solely in wakefulness, and hence they have their repercussion, through a common treasury of images, of shared impressions, of mutual laws of imagination, in their corresponding unconscious representations. But “involuntary poetizing”, Kant counters, “is an oneiric state that we have *both in wakefulness and in sleep*” (AA 25.1: 100, our ital.) – for it is consciousness which is within unconsciousness, it is conscious poetry which is within unconscious poetry, and not the other way around; and if there is a difference which distinguishes both, it is that in wakefulness “all impressions are felt equally, and therefore this state is often interrupted” (id.) – whereas in dreams, one supposes, *the contrary takes place*. In other words – Kant seems to say – there is in the state of wakefulness *a natural neutrality of representations*, due to the constant alterations in meaning, the constant interruptions in the evolution of representations, which render them indistinct and *insensible* (intellectual). The *conscious exception* to this is precisely *poetry*, which succeeds in once again rendering sensible such de-sensitized representations – which, according to Kant, *dresses things in new colors*¹⁶, *new meanings, which gives things, through a special use of the productive faculty of imagination, new force, new clarity and truth*. And the *unconscious exception* to this, as it

¹⁶ On this topic, see Kant’s “Entwurf zu einer Opponenten-Rede” (AA XV.2: 903-935).

seems, is the dream, which, through unique representations, is at the same time connected and disconnected from the "punctum imaginarium" of conscious poetry.

Now, as was seen, what the dream does is precisely to assume those very traits of conscious imagination, to resume that operation, that *poetical making* (*poiein*), as an unconsciousness which engulfs consciousness, as an involuntary poetizing which engulfs the voluntary one, and have them act upon consciousness. However, *the dream has for its procedure no arrival point, nor is there one for it*; that is, unlike consciousness, in dream there is no interruption, for in it there is no sensibility but its own, rather just a sensation which is felt "as [if it were] external"; and hence, the dream is also bereft of the neutrality of wakefulness, for *its sensation is as if external – that is, it is intimately and exclusively internal*. Yet, for Kant, *this is no insufficiency, rather a virtue of dreams*; because what this means is that, unlike wakefulness, and unlike conscious poetry, oneiric representations, upon finding no final point for their construction, upon being resent to exteriority (but only apparently, for they are their own exteriority) tend to revolve over themselves: they, so to say, return to themselves, which therefore only *makes them gain in force, and acquire even greater clarity, truth, in a word, poeticity*; for, so says Kant, in wakefulness "lived and obscure representations (...) obscure and render unrecognizable the most delicate images of chimeras, whereas in sleep these have all their force, where access to the soul is shut to all external impressions" (AA 2: 264). Hence, oneiric representations are, in short, "the most powerful representations of the soul" (id.): singular sensible cumulations of already sensible representations, indeed armed of the necessary intellectuality which makes them emerge, but disarmed of an intellectuality which connects them to the exterior but in appearance; and through this *supreme intensity and absence of neutrality, wherein the impression is taken as the representation*, they escape the tedious and hollow homogeneity and the recurring interruptions of wakeful representations: "Hence, fictions which during the day are almost imperceptible receive in sleep such a force, clarity and distinction that, except for the force of sensations, there is nothing left with which to distinguish them from really sensible representations" (AA 25.1: 100).

On the other hand, and precisely for this reason – and because conscious representations arise in unconsciousness with unsurpassable force –

then one may conclude that oneiric representations have a connection with wakeful ones inasmuch as they present them in a different attire, and thus (re-)create them and are poetic. But because the use of the productive faculty of imagination has here no other point of efficacy apart from the very “*punctum imaginarium*”; that is, because the sensible or poetic representation cannot here return to any object but *as if externally*, then two conclusions have to be drawn. First, that everything in dream is poetic production, and this in such a way that in dreams the effect of poetic enthusiasm, wit, genius, seems at last to be prolonged – which is impossible in a wakeful state. Secondly, that unconsciousness thus gives consciousness, through an imagetic vehicle, a kind of superior, more faithful and hence more truthful plane of reality – which, given its unique intensity, will surely have to act upon the state of wakefulness. Namely, a more prolonged, more intense plane of self-knowledge of the subject, and because this plane is eminently poetic, it is also a plane of continuous productivity, of constant innovation, of imaginative and cognizing progress, as well as of *a more intense and real connection between the I and truth*, which poetic representations always imply. So much so, that one may affirm that these oneiric representations are so powerful and true that they surpass in such attributes even the consciously poetic ones, so that they seem to be “in this state, precisely what sensations are in wakefulness” (AA 2: 264); something which Kant brings to word by saying: “Because these sensations are, one could say, very arid and obtuse, but fictions are all the more powerful, *then we mix both and take fictive images on the obtuse sensation, which is here the theme, for real impressions*” (AA 25.1: 101, our ital.).

In conclusion, when he states that oneiric representations are felt “as [if they were] external”, Kant does not refer to them as an *emulation* of wakeful representations, or even as a mere *intensification* of the degree of wakeful representations. No. Quite on the contrary, Kant refers to another, singularly fertile and yet less considered stage of human knowledge: one which, on the one hand, productively regenerates and reinvents clear representations, and on the other hand productively activates obscure representations experienced or merely sensed in the wakeful state; in other words, dear to Kant, the stage of an *unconscious human poetry*, which as it seems is in continuous activity, and which labors not only behind consciousness, by imagining our imagination in the wakeful state, but in unconsciousness itself, by influencing our dreams and bringing them to a possible reality. While in the first

case the dream brings clear representations, in such a way saturated from intellectuality that they have become neutral, to their sensible originality, and hence elevates them, along with the representations of consciousness, to a newer, more intense and productive condition in the human soul; in the second case, the dream only does the same, but through *a different path*: namely, the dream summons representations which in the wakeful state are sensible and unconscious, but eminently poetic – the obscure representations – and, by giving them a present, but also a future being of an unheard of intensity (for inventive and new), it brings them to an existence which wakefulness dares not. For poetry brings obscure representations to their destination; a destination in which, due to their intrinsic originality and inventiveness, obscure representations are the *embryo* of all human cognitions in wakefulness¹⁷, and are therefore meant to come to clarity¹⁸; and precisely because it is the destination of all obscure representations that “just as phosphorus” (AA 25.1: 100), they are “barely noticeable” (id.) during the day, and yet “they appear in great fashion in darkness” (ibid.), then this is the final proof that such a destination may only be duly achieved in dreams, which are also by nature poetic, and which thus acquire their own, praiseworthy position amid the imaginative faculties of the spirit.

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¹⁷ Kant states this very embryonic origin of all human knowledge in obscure representations by referring that “there are many representations of which we would never become conscious in our life, if there was not an occasion which reminded us of that which already was in us, in [the shape of an] embryo” (AA 25.2: 868). For, Kant adds, “Obscure representations contain the secret spring of that which takes place in clarity” (AA 25.1: 479).

¹⁸ “A great part of all philosophical thoughts is already prepared in darkness” (AA 25.1: 479); and hence, Kant states, “That which was developed until this day is barely anything compared with what could still be developed. Hence, all metaphysicians, moralists, must contribute towards the enlightenment of obscure representations in men, for [in obscure representations] the matter is that of the concept of men, which the latter bring in themselves” (AA 25.2: 871).

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