



## Letters From Santiago Re-membling the Displaced Body Through Dreams

*Cartas desde Santiago  
Volviendo a componer el cuerpo desplazado a través de sueños*

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### **Abstract**

Moving from storytelling exercises with the author's exiled father to analysis of literary dream-narratives, this contribution is an epistolary correspondence with the past and archival inquiry into a future which asks how we might be able to escape the reproduction of self-silencing and trauma by applying pop culture with dream theory and memory studies in an endeavor to sidestep the reductive and circular silence-testimony binary. In re-contextualizing Euro-American psychoanalytical frameworks with models grounded in performance and embodied experiences, this work provides an intimate analysis of the agency of memory in the face of cultural erasure.

### **Resumen**

*A partir de ejercicios de oralidad con el padre exiliado del autor, y en dirección hacia el análisis de narrativas oníricas y literarias, este trabajo es un epistolario compuesto por correspondencias y la indagación de archivo hacia el futuro; en donde se pregunta cómo podríamos escapar de la reproducción del silencio individual y del trauma, aplicando a la cultura pop la interpretación de los sueños y los estudios sobre la memoria, con el propósito de superar el binomio circular y reductivo silencio-testimonio. Desde la re-contextualización Euro-Americana de los marcos de trabajo psicoanalíticos, mediante modelos basados en la performance y en las experiencias corpoeizadas, este ensayo proporciona un análisis íntimo del papel que desempeña la memoria frente al borrado cultural.*

**Keywords**

exile, migration, memory, dreams, psychoanalysis, Cuba

**Palabras clave**

exilio, migración, recuerdo, sueños, psicoanálisis, Cuba

**Summary**

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**Sumario**

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**My father says he no longer dreams** of Cuba; that he hasn't dreamed of Cuba in several years. "When was the last time?" I ask him and he shakes his head, remains silent. But a day after asking him, he dreams of Cuba again. He returns to Santiago de Cuba, the city of his birth.<sup>1</sup>

"When was the last time you were there?" I ask him. "When I was fourteen," he says. "You know that."

But I am referring to his dreams. I want him to remember so he can take me there too. And in a way, I've already taken him with me. In a way, the son has become a medium for the father to return to childhood.

## A

**I am** organizing my father's dreams and arranging them in a list. Dreams are often erratic, arcane, unremembered.<sup>2</sup> Lists help to cohere things that would otherwise remain incongruent, unrelated, or digressive. The illusion of *order* in a series of items, expounded for our consideration and inclusion, to foster an inclusiveness that would otherwise be absent. Or (archaic): an inclination and a craving.

Every time I'm with you I have the urge to use two fingers, a movement or gesture like a pinch. To let me know I'm still here.

Any act of dream interpretation is an act of translation, a rendering of images from the unconscious imagination, the emotive and internal turned visual and external. The inside becomes the outside so it can be assimilated again, taken in and turned into something else, to hang on a wall or in the drop-capped first line of a story. Atget's photographs of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century ushered in a new need for text to accompany images. Captions replaced imagination the same way that images replace our memory of where we've gone and what we've encountered, in our daily lives and while we sleep. A rendering means to melt down or convert, but also to transmit to another, to

**1** Juan José Campanioni fled Cuba in 1959 to arrive in Miami, Florida, eventually shuttling between Miami and Jamaica, Queens as he waited to become naturalized, sixteen years later. These series of interviews and storytelling exercises were conducted between April 17 and May 20, 2017, in a place he now calls home.

**2** There is a reason Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to tell him what his dream means, and also: to tell him exactly what it was he dreamed.

give up, to yield. My father dreams in Spanish. I am writing this down in English.

Where are the gaps and slips, I wonder, as I hold the tape recorder with my left hand, and with my right, scrawl the notes that will eventually re-constitute this story.

Where are the gaps and how can I make them wider, instead of trying to fill them; how can I make them wider so I can breathe within them, in and out, out and in, and make song from all those unknowable breaths?

My father looks down, or to the side, or he faces my mother, who often walks into the room—usually the kitchen—to stand beside us, as we talk, or as he talks to me and I listen. But right now he is looking straight ahead; we are facing each other and he is looking right at me, and I am recording everything.

“My grandmother lived in Holguín, and every afternoon we would go out on our bicycles. We would stop for guarapo or a batido during the day, and then we’d keep riding,” my father explains, when I ask him about the context of last night’s dream, a scenario that involved a secret lake, a naked swim, a childhood friend who delivers milk, a boy who acted as a guide.

On a road, like a highway for what seems like miles, we reach a dirt path that leads to a lake, with an island at its center. We strip down and go swimming. There are five or six of us and it is forbidden. I know I’m not supposed to be here and I know I’m not supposed to be with my friend, the one who delivers milk to us. There is no one else around when we return to the dirt, waiting for the sun to dry our backs.

When I play the tape back I can hear my father’s voice come in through the sound of silverware and plates shaking, and the growl of a lawn mower, and the chimes that herald a visitor, outside, at the foot of a front door. I am thinking about all the breaths we don’t see.

## B

**My father’s dreams** give me agency as a writer to write the piece I couldn’t write for six years. In those six years, I’ve published three novels, a

collection of poetry, a chapbook, and a book of hybrid nonfiction. I've written another poetry collection and a collection of irregular accountings from my notebooks. I don't cite this as an uninviting custom of credentials; I only mention the fact to illustrate how often I write; how unceasingly I work with words.

Like my father, who had avoided talking about Cuba since he left his home country, I had avoided writing about the island I could only imagine. I felt that it was too close to me, too close and at the same time, too far away, a liminal space that I could easily locate on the map but could never conceptualize in my mind for more than a moment, before the moment passed too. Halfway between two worlds, or two words: *sea* and *no*. As the common saying goes, *neither here nor there*. I was isolated and also attached, but to something I couldn't name or identify; something I didn't know how to begin; where to start and how.

In actuality, I *only* had a beginning. Half a page. Two paragraphs describing an early childhood memory of my Aunt Nena's, a habitual experience Ana shared with her older brother, my father, on the rooftop of their home in Santiago. It began like this:

But we never cut the other kites. We only raced. And from where I would stand, I could see the whole of Santiago. I used to imagine that Santiago was the whole world and so I could see all of it if I spun around and rotated like a dancer. And sometimes it was the whole world. The kites flying in between the other buildings and above my head, and around, and around ...

But we never cut the other kites, we only raced.

Surprisingly, or maybe with no surprise at all, the first dream my father relates to me is a dream about the kites, a scenario in which he and Ana are vying to be crowned champion in the tall, old building where they live, weaving their kites in between and around other kites, as girls and boys on various verandahs of the apartment complex do the same thing, choreographing a colorful dance in the middle of the afternoon, in an Oriente that is still resting in the shade of childhood. In the dream, he cuts them, using a small pocket-sized razor, before mistakenly cutting his own hand. He wakes when he realizes that he can no longer fly the kite, when he can only follow its path by looking up into

the sky where each kite drifts and falters, and eventually falls. But it doesn't fall, it just hangs there, suspended. Halfway between cloud and ground.

The dream is an excuse to remember that he can't move, I think, as he stops talking, and we sit in the silence before words. Any dream is an excuse to remember something in waking life, and thereby re-materialize it. My father can't move, or can't move back; he can't return, or he is unwilling to. But he can return in dreams, and I can return in his recollection of them.

In Greek, the word for *witness* is *martyrs*—a noun, meaning martyr, derived from a verb: *to remember*. When we bear witness to something, we bear witness to it in our body *and* our mind. But even not remembering is a choice, and as Giorgio Agamben tells us in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, “The survivor's vocation is to remember; he cannot *not* remember” (1999, p. 26).

My father, I think, has only decided to transfer memory to imagination, everyday consciousness to the unconscious dream world. My father has only decided, I think, to privilege the flight of fancy over the literal flight, the parting which continues to uproot him today.

## C

**First-generation citizens** can only imagine a place of origin we've never been to. And so I am used to imagining; I've been practicing my whole life. My own dreams as a displaced child of two immigrants from different countries involve no kites but a feeling of urgency and desperation and unyielding curiosity that has followed me everywhere I've been to, everywhere I move and the places I've called home.

If motion is nothing but displacement, dreams are nothing if not dislocated, temporally and geographically. Time expands like an accordion, or it condenses. My father is only ever a child in his dreams,<sup>3</sup> whenever he is dreaming

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**3** A necessary regression Jung (1974) attaches special significance to: “This dream forces the dreamer to admit that even a highly differentiated consciousness has not by any means finished with childish things,” he writes in *Dreams*, “and that a return to the world of childhood is necessary” (p. 134). Childhood is a liminal space where experience becomes a mass of materials that cling to us, overwhelm us, and bring us to a place beyond the intellect, a place where remembering as an adult becomes also a re-experiencing: a re-encounter with ourselves.

of Cuba, of the past that depends on repetition and renewal, the increased playback of memory that Allan J. Hobson attributes, in *Dreams Drugstore*, to the diminished capacity to record (2001, p. 109). Everything in this motion picture depends on playing back the scene or site of original trauma.

And yet, as Glissant relates in his poetics, “while one can communicate through errantry’s imaginary vision, the experiences of exiles are incommunicable” (1990/1997, p. 20). And yet, as Glissant relates, “the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened [...] an outcast in the place he has newly set an anchor [...] forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging” (1990/1997, p. 143). Why is it that I feel it more, having not actually felt it in the flesh? Why is it that I feel as if I must communicate these aspects of exile, whatever it is that I’ve inherited from my parents if not their biological distribution, their own migratory passages, the effects of refuge and fugitiveness, the traces, the remnants—which are always fragments of the whole but which are *always fragments*.

And how can I interrogate these necessary fractures? How can I track the flow of its movement, which is also its repetition, even and especially through dreams?. What the dream declares for the future of the dreamer derives only from what is disclosed of the involvements and ties of his freedom,” Foucault (1954/1986) writes in *“Dream, Imagination, and Existence”*:

“Linking the past to the present in the rehearsing of remorse, and knitting it into the unity of a destiny [...] brings to light the freedom of man in its most original form. And when, in ceaseless repetition, it declares some destiny, it is bewailing a freedom which has lost itself, an ineradicable past, and an existence fallen of its own motion into a definite determination (1954/1986, pp. 52-53).

If every dream, as Foucault says, is a dream of death, the reconciliation of an existence fulfilled, the exiled may only achieve a temporary jump-cut to a birthplace that melts away on the horizon upon waking. Death and waking serve the same purpose: exodus from a reality in which one has been captivated; literally held captive.

The dispossessed home exists beyond itself, like a flickering image in a continuously refreshed vanishing point, a gift or GIF beyond birth or death—merely a bow-tied ribbon, encasing air. “The mesh of exile,” Foucault writes, “the stubborn return, the bitterness of coming back to things unchanged and aged” (Foucault, 1954/1986, p. 63).

My father pledged that he would never return to Cuba. “Never in my wildest dreams,” he’d often say, whenever I’d ask. And yet, here we are.

Has my father been afraid that too much had changed—or that *nothing* has?

“All dreams,” Steven Kruger writes in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, “are caught between the embodied and the bodiless” (1992, p. 41), and yet the proliferation of bodies, or their semblances, always threaten to dislocate the dream reader, and our attempt to locate ourselves in the body of the narrative or the body of the dreamer, the one who is asleep in bed and skiing, or swimming, or flying a kite, the “Two Body Problem” (States, 1993, p. 14) ascribed by the German phenomenologist Medard Boss as a failure to reconcile the recumbent body with the active one.

What if both bodies are the “real” one? What if waking life and the unconscious underpinnings of our dream worlds are two streams of the same reality?

Glissant links the experience of exile to an awareness that is contrapuntal, “an awareness of simultaneous dimensions” (1990/1997, p. 148); I’d like to think of this essay not so much as a piece of music but as a film, and the jump-cut is the changeover from one culture to another, one setting to another, one home for something that will never be home and yet must be ... this displacement is in fact a plurality, this fracture is in fact a force of beauty and power, a perception of simultaneity; of inhabiting both the new and the old, the actual and the imagined, the real and the dream; to straddle or hover; to know both contradictions as one knows one’s contradictory self. Is the experience of the exile not the experience of being human?

## D

**As I listen**, I also read. Books on dreams. Books in dreams. *Le Roman de la Rose*. *Tundale’s Vision*. *The Dream of Scipio*. *Il Corbaccio*. *The Book of the*

*Duchess. The Lathe of Heaven. The House of Fame. Piers Plowman.* Some of them put me to sleep; all of them are useful. After all, I am looking to trace the similarities; looking to enter the aperture of a dream's afterlife.

The difference between coincidence and prophecy is a matter of perspective and causality, in a dream, outside of a dream. "It is quite conceivable," Aristotle (350 BCE) writes in *On Prophesying by Dreams*, "that some dreams may be tokens and causes of future events." But beginnings are small, and it's improbable, Aristotle advises, that "that which was about to happen is not in every case what now is happening, nor is that which shall hereafter be identical with that which is now going to be" (350 BCE).

Another way of thinking about coincidence and prophecy is to consider Derrida's concept of spectral messianicity, a singular experience of a promise, or what he calls a covenant, which forms and formulates our thinking of the future, but also the historical materialism of a past that is not static; a past, instead, that is always threatened by the street insurgence of the present.

In the past, my favorite song was "Dreaming of You" by Depeche Mode.

The name of the horse who is the odds-on favorite to win the Preakness Stakes today, as I begin to organize this narrative, is named Always Dreaming.

In the future, I mean hours after writing the sentence before this one, Cloud Computing will win or has already won the 142<sup>nd</sup> Preakness Stakes.

Dreams give power to those without autonomy or authority. If they're lucky. If they're not, they get executed as heretics.

The difference between execution and exultation is coincidence. Or dreams.

I haven't decided which.

It is not coincidental that my father begins to dream about Cuba when I ask him to relate his dreams about Cuba. Research shows that experiments meant to influence dreams using manipulations such as film and images fail to predict the effects of waking experiences on dream content, but, on the contrary, novel learning experiences, like interviewing, have been found to have a particularly pronounced impact on dream experience. "Engaging learning experiences," Erin J. Wamsley writes in "Dreaming and Offline Memory Consolidation," "may have a particularly robust influence on dream content. [...] In fact, evidence dating back to the 1970s suggests that dreaming of a learning experience is associated with enhanced memory for that information" (2014, p. 3). My request for dream recall

has produced my father's dreams of Cuba, which, integrated in interview form, has produced more lived memories<sup>4</sup> of Cuba, or at least his ability to disclose them. My memory of our conversations has produced this text, or versions of it. We are both learning, about each other, and ourselves.

## E

**“The poet and the dreamer are distinct,”** Keats writes in “Canto One” of *The Fall of Hyperion* —a fragmented dream vision composed during the summer of 1819.

“Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes./The one pours out a balm upon the world,/The other vexes” (Keats, 1935, p. 387).

What is the difference between the writer and the dreamer? Or should the dreamer become the writer for the fact of their dreaming, and write their dreams as a way of transforming their reality?

There are two types of writers, I think, and even as I think this I know there are many more than two. One who records reality and one whose task it is to re-construct it.

The dream, too, is tasked with the aim of anticipating a revision to the role or script we've been acquainted with since birth, and much earlier, before we were born. “It is a prefiguring of history,” Foucault writes, “even more than an obligatory repetition of the traumatic past” (1954/1986, p. 58).

Jung also believed that through our unconscious, we could immerse ourselves in historical associations: “curious excursions,” he writes, “into the history of the human mind. [...] Hence one could say [...] that history could be constructed just as easily from one's own unconscious as from the actual texts” (1974, p. 160).

In his insistence to return to the childhood of consciousness, Jung was an innovator. But, Fanon thought, he made a remarkable mistake. He went back only to the childhood of Europe.

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4 Memory is easily distorted or even fabricated in response to social demands. Or could it be that every experience, thought, and feeling is recorded in our mind, like a hard drive, and capable of being retrieved with the right pass code? All writers collect the new and the old, and learn with time to control the habit of bringing it forth.

As Chaucer adapted Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's (1230-1275) *Le Roman de la Rose* into Middle English<sup>5</sup> and Gavin Douglas (1513) translated Virgil's *Aeneid* into Middle Scots, adding a thirteenth book, each exploiting the dream frame to situate themselves in a canon of literature as a project of national identity, we might explode our current moment by writing our marginalized communities into the historical lens of a past that has abandoned us. We do this by seeking alternate sources of evidence and focusing on undermining the monochromatic, heteronormative cultural and state processes that have only produced exclusion, under the auspices of forming a "national identity." We do this through collective refusal and collaborative self-expression, the sharing of personal narratives, the co-creation of testimony: the dreamer, and the one who is still dreaming.

Instances of embodied re-membering (Barad, 2018) work to counteract colonialist practices of violence and erasure, a task that also reorients the void, not as the nothing-that-is but the everything-that-might-be. In reconfiguring conceptions and experiences of time and space, Karen Barad's framework also raises questions about history, memory, and politics. It is not just that the personal is political but that the individual becomes dynamically linked to the other, a politics of self that is inextricable from a communal framework; a belonging predicated on what seemingly can't be shared, unless one were to trouble the narrative frame, the point of origin, the site of rupture. It requires, above all, the risk of response, the response-ability of attention, exposure, surrender, the certain uncertainty of *opening up*. If it's true that nothingness is an infinite and "iterative re-opening" (Barad, 2018, p. 80), then my father's ability or desire to forget is also a kind of memory, a re-verse or reversal, in which we both face each other; in which we both face the incomprehensible.

Marianne Hirsch's (2008) "postmemory generation" framework traces affective and aesthetic dimensions of trauma that is collective, passed down, and inherited, a fractured recall that is suffused in "imaginative investment, projection, and creation [...] dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 107) and yet, which also remain culpable to further reconstruction. This is because such generational trauma

5 Chaucer's choice to write his major works in Middle English, which was not the vernacular of the court until the middle of the fifteenth century, several years after he died, is a choice made with a view to the future.

elides placement, finality, the pause that constitutes a period. *The end*. What does survival mean except that it is never solitary; the process of passing is only superseded by the process of *passing on*, a transfer of the past that strives to imagine new futures. In this and all scenarios, it is important not to grasp everything; not all at once, not all at all.

## F

**The book** that I'd been trying to write for six years is called *Letters From Santiago*. It was meant to be an epistolary historical novel, told in the polyphonic voices of my family, at least the people who arrived safely in the United States and began their lives here, and who eventually became a part of my life. We became a part of each other's story, and I wanted to make them a part of the next one I was planning to write, a project that would begin in the years prior to the revolution, and follow the lives of my loved ones in the various parts of Cuba they called home. Holguín and Havana and Matanzas and Camagüey and Santiago. I began my research by interviewing Ana, whom we affectionately call Nena, and her husband, David.

All the recordings were lost when I upgraded my cell phone. My Uncle David died unexpectedly. I had worried about how it would feel to hear his recorded voice cutting across time and space, life and death, until I couldn't hear his voice anymore, any longer.

On mobile phones, when no one's on *the other end*, you don't even get dial tone anymore. Just imperceptible silence.

I stopped asking questions about Cuba, and for a while, I stopped imagining the coastal city where my father and my aunt grew up, and Matanzas, in the middle of the island, a bay and three rivers which held the experiences of my uncle—who had stayed—and the horrors he endured until his escape.

What are the ways in which trauma, too, is passed down, inherited like cultural customs and genetic code? What are the ways in which trauma presents itself as an infinitely un-locatable future? The trauma which can't yet be set, placed, laid to rest because of its effects, its residue and remainder—the trauma which “defies and demands our witness” (Caruth, 1996, p. 5). Cathy Caruth, in “The Wound and the Voice,” privileges a Euro-American, psychoanalytical model

for dealing with trauma, thinking about “the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (1996, p. 8).

But what good are words to communicate the violence that is unsayable? Agamben reminds us that every testimony contains at its core “an essential lacuna” (1999, p. 13). Often, there are realities that can only be shown.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s (2013) work on trauma theory is rooted in re-locating its discursive structure towards non-narrative, lyrical, often fragmentary meditations and works that are at times pedagogic and performative, emulative and immersive—each of them capable of responding to trauma and identity in ways that conventional narrative cannot.

I want to do both, I thought to myself, when I began exploring the ways to respond to the self-silencing so common to the immigrant experience, its traumatic aftermath. I want to do both, I always think. I want to be both. Storyteller and stagehand; lyrical and expository, theoretical and autobiographical. *I want to always be both.*

## G

**My favorite** writer, or the writer who taught me how to write, the writer who allowed me to see what was possible through writing, is William S. Burroughs. I like a lot of what he wrote, but one of my favorite lines is something I think about often, whether I’m thinking about dreams or only trying to re-construct everyday life in our image-rich culture, a mush-fake generation of substitutes and stand-ins.

“If I had a talking picture of you, would I need you?” (Burroughs, 1967, p. 145)

## H

**Dreaming interjects** a desire that makes any act of dream interpretation simultaneously invasive and intimate. Plato (381 BCE) likens the unconscious mind to “our bestial nature. [...] As you know,” he writes in the *Republic*, “there’s nothing too bad for it and it’s completely lost to all sense and shame” (381

BCE). And yet shame, in so many texts, in so many instances in life, resides in the recognition or observation of others. When what is internal seeps into or slips out into the material world, or the public gaze.

“It seems to me quite certain,” the psychopomp of Boccaccio’s *Il Corbaccio* (1355) declares, “that if any of them ever comes to hear the truth of their malice and defects which I have shown, they will be in no hurry to recognize themselves at once, or to feel ashamed at being recognized by others [...]” (1975, p. 34).

Earlier, Boccaccio’s psychopomp cautions the dreaming narrator of the “greater disgrace”: “countless numbers who dare to take their pleasure even though their husbands are looking” (1975, p. 28).

Is the shame in doing in public what should be done in private, without recognition of the other? Is shame in the looking, or in being looked at?

“Nakedness reveals itself,” John Berger (1972) writes in *Ways of Seeing*. “Nudity is placed on display. To be naked is to be without disguise. [...] Nudity is a form of dress” (1972, p. 54).

Consider the difference of recognition as a difference between appearance and awareness, or self-actualization. To be nude is to be an object for *others*; to be naked is to be recognized for one’s self. It’s no wonder, then, that the mirror is credited with the potential to prevent shame and persist passion and pleasure between the adulterous Venus and Mars in the latter-half of *Le Roman de la Rose* (De Lorris and De Meun, 1995, p. 301)

But even mirrors return only resemblances, an image meant to mimic the flesh and blood before it. And perhaps shame has less to do with the discovery of others than it has to do with our own self-discovery—“[w]hat is shameful is our intimacy [...]” Lévinas writes, “our presence to ourselves” (Lévinas, 1935/2003, p. 64). But why, I always think—I am thinking now—is that so troubling? To be present with myself, to see myself in the act of seeing—or being seen—what a vision it would be, what a dream to document my own presence for later, and to look at it now.

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“In the absence of an actual body,” Kruger writes, “its image can be recalled from memory, and such remembered images can be combined to create

composite pictures—conjectural likenesses of bodies that exist but that have never been seen, or even likenesses of non-existent bodies” (1992, p. 37).

“My grandfather’s appearance,” Cicero writes in “The Dream of Scipio” (*Somnium Scipionis*, the sixth book of *De re publica*), “was better known to me from his portrait-mask than from my memories of him” (Macrobius, 1990, p. 70).

The question is not how a physical object can replace an internal feeling. The question is why.

We are human, after all, and can so easily be made to submit to emotions conveyed in images and imaginings, the traces of things that never existed to begin with; and in doing so, we multiply our passion for them from afar, the distance of time and space, of a hypothetical what-if suspended in the future imperfect.

### I.I. (Eyes, plural—as if looking at the other)

When a thought materializes into a vision, we sometimes call it art.

I watch *Twin Peaks*, a television show that originally aired when I was four years old. In the show, as in real life, actions precede identity.

“When did you start smoking?” James asks Donna, one episode after the first season’s finale.

They’re talking in a jail; James is in a cell.

“I smoke every once in a while,” Donna says, smoke slipping through the bars, dangling her cigarette as if it were a set of keys. “Helps relieve tension.”

“When did you get so tense?”

“When I started smoking.”

You do things; you become the things you do, the way we might dream of an occasion which has been paved from the encounters “set up” during the daytime. Likewise, Aristotle explains, “it must happen that the movements set up first in sleep should also prove to be starting points of actions to be performed in the daytime.” Freud (1913), too, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, writes of the effect of the waiting room, patients who begin dreaming of the trauma talked about with others or overheard earlier in the day, everyone passing the time—and passing on dreams—prior to their appointments. “You know that the stimulus for a dream,” Freud writes, “always lies among the experiences of the preceding day” (1913, p. 124). The stimulus for living, too, can be gleaned from the fragments of the unconscious actions committed in one’s sleep.

## J

**Dreams** do not deal with the details of the actual event experienced, Ernest Hartmann (1998) argues in *Dreams and Nightmares*, but with the emotion. Dreaming, he asserts, is a form of therapy, a process of inoculation that also occurs in the act of artistic production, whenever one decides to write their life into art. Hartmann calls this type of dream therapy a process of “contextualizing emotion”—finding a picture (the dream), or a picture metaphor that provides a context for the feeling. Most critically, however, is the appropriation of these connections in our waking life, in which the new material is “woven in, and is less dangerous” (1998, p. 14). Trauma is adapted into pre-verbal storytelling; new connections mean seeing things in a new way.

Later in the next episode, Bobby’s father sits across from him at the diner, forking at his peach pie while Bobby scowls.

“Bobby, may I share something with you?”

“Okay?” Bobby responds, uncertain whether to wait or leave, stay sitting or stand up.

“A vision I had, in my sleep last night,” Major Briggs says, “as distinguished from a dream, which is a mere cataloging of the day’s events by the subconscious. This was a vision, as clear as a mountain stream. The mind revealing itself to itself.”

(The camera cuts to Bobby’s incredulous face, his shit-eating grin.)

“In my vision,” Major Briggs returns, “I was on the verandah of a vast estate, a palazzo of some fantastic proportion. I seemed to emanate from a light, from within this gleaming, radiant marble. I’d known this place. I in fact had been born and raised there. This was my first return. A reunion with the ... deepest wellsprings of my being.”

(The camera cuts to Bobby, his head down, looking languid at the booth.)

“Wandering about I noticed happily that the house had been immaculately maintained,” Major Briggs continues, “there’d been added a number of additional rooms, but in a way that had blended so seamlessly with the original construction, one would never detect any difference.”

(Here the camera cuts to Bobby, running his hand through his wavy, tousled brown hair to stay on the ruddy face, the wide blue eyes that look without

emotion at his father, or the man who is playing his father, Major Briggs, dressed in his officer's suit, with a badge that says his name. Bobby, still wearing the same outfit he's been wearing the whole first season, an olive T-shirt over a white long-sleeved thermal. Bobby playing the only way he knows how to play Bobby: silent, wide-eyed, expressionless, on the verge of cracking up. Bobby on the verge of becoming someone else.)

"Returning to the house's grand foyer," Major Briggs resumes, "there came a knock at the door. My son was standing there. He was happy and carefree. And clearly living a life of deep harmony and joy. We embraced. A warm, loving embrace. Nothing withheld. We were, in this moment, one."

(Bobby looks up, breaks character. Disgusted, appalled, maybe just confused. His eyebrows furrow together, become one eyebrow. The two of them melting into one.)

"My vision ended. I awoke with a tremendous feeling of optimism and confidence in you and your future. That was my vision of *you*."

(Bobby makes a noise like a car screeching or sneakers on pavement. Tears well in his eyes. Major shakes hands with his son and then salutes the waiter behind the bar. It takes a while for the scene to fade out. Out of error or for effect. Sometimes you can't tell the difference, or there is none.<sup>6</sup>)

## K

**If nothing** is unspeakable in a dream, certainly there are things omitted in our re-telling of them. What is the difference between suppression and silencing, and how does each, in its own way, relate to a trajectory of trauma?

Throughout *The Book of the Duchess* (1368), Chaucer insists on veracity: the words "true," "truly," "in truth," "truth to tell," and "truthfully" occur

<sup>6</sup> When Chaucer's narrator mentions Scipio's dream in *The Book of the Duchess*, he incorrectly cites its author as Macrobius. Elsewhere, Chaucer takes up Dante, Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, and Homer; he is writing in Middle English what was originally in Latin and Greek, but he goes off someone else's adaptation. What happens when you proceed from a glitchy representation? The re-imagining of dreams via white European males in the visual arts in most Medieval and Early Modern woodcuts, drawings, and paintings manipulates the dream vision which we see, and further manipulate in our conscious or unconscious imaginations. I am interested in the glitch that becomes the standard model.

thirty-three times (Chaucer, 1996, pp. 126-213). This repetition to *tell the truth* is a tactic to avoid repression, the trauma of death on the micro (Blanche of Lancaster) and macro (the Black Plague) levels. Chaucer, in each of his dream narratives, prefaces plot by saying that the dream is so wonderful that it *can't* be interpreted, which is another way of saying that what we are about to read is unreadable.

Freud, similarly, begs pardon when discussing his examinations of children—"I have, frankly, no inclination to follow the matter further" yet still, he decides to elaborate upon an anecdote of a prominent clinician who always examines his patients only through their clothes. "I could still spend much time upon it; I could draw further explanations from it, and bring up new problems which it bids us consider. I even know the points," Freud draws out, "from which further thought associations might be traced [...]" (1913, p. 102).

The opposite of silencing is verbosity. But even verbosity can be a veil for acute repression: truth hidden among a sea of words.

## L

**Part of narrating** the dream experience is in *not* disclosing all the details, whether out of insecurity or an inability to retrieve them.

The narrative half-finished, in *The House of Fame* as in *Le Roman de la Rose*, begs intervention, in turn, by the reader, or the one who listens.

My father says his dreams are like the previews. By the time the feature film begins to play, he's already forgotten all of them. The previews, I think, promise something: a view of the future—if one intends to watch the film in its entirety when it arrives. The dreams do the same: a view of the future—but one that is necessarily disjointed.

What is the ideal point of view in which to narrate a dream experience? Third-person adds certitude to dream vision by cutting off intimate reflection. Or is it more effective to be inside the dreamer's head?

Absent a visual, how do we *imagine* sequences of dreams in literary texts and how is our general perplexity while dreaming re-created in the dream frame we encounter?

Chaucer's insistence on evoking so many dream theories—he spends

the first sixty-five lines accounting for possible explanations, and another forty-five lines with an invocation—before he tells us *his* dream in *The House of Fame* (1379-1380) forces readers to re-frame our reading of his work, and yet because there are so many options available to us, we are also immersed in the hazy feeling of disorientation; the feeling of being, also, in a dream.

“In the dream,” Foucault writes, “everything says, ‘I,’ even the things and the animals, even the empty space, even objects distant and strange which populate the phantasmagoria” (1954/1986, p. 59).

In my own writing, I have a tendency to get so self-referential. Everything becomes a one-to-one correspondence. *Letters From Santiago*, through Juan José Campanioni. But whose letters?

I repeat, this is a letter to myself.

## M

**Near-death visions**, or “infernial literature”—like *Tundale’s Vision*, translated from the original Latin forty-three times into fifteen languages by the fifteenth century—was a popular genre in medieval times.

At Medieval Times, I had a near-life experience. But I fell asleep after the first joust, as a roast chicken slowly made its way through my digestive tract, a situation that doesn’t bode well, according to Foucault,<sup>7</sup> for prophetic dreaming.

## N

**The last photo**, or the most recent photo in my Photo Stream, is a screenshot message I keep near me as I write, as a prompt or as a memo, a photograph to replace a kind of memory.

*We can’t and won’t help readers to “locate” us. Distance, homelessness, anonymity, and insignificance are all part of the Internet literary voice, and we welcome them.*

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to morning dreams, valued for their “poverty,” tracing a Greco-Roman tradition that discredits any dream that occurs “among digestive vapors” (Foucault, 1954/1986, p. 44).

## O

**Where will** I go from here? How will I get there? I often think, usually when I walk out the door and decide what line to catch; what line to catch and what lines to catch or take hold of while I'm riding.

The future is up in the air, as evidenced by the common representation of the dream landscape in paintings and drawings, bubbles of text encapsulated over a subject's head, signifying a move toward the outside of the frame of reality or waking life. Instructions from afar.

In a cabin in the woods, away from Twin Peaks and its residents, a conversation takes place between a demon and a mute. The demon is smoking a pipe; the mute is serving as his houseboy, a servant wearing a shock collar, a pawn in the demon's elaborate chess match with real-life consequences. Both of them happen to be possessed, what some people think of as being under the command of someone, or something outside their body or deep within it, so far it would otherwise be inaccessible.

"Even if you've been to the country before," the demon says, taking a long drawn drag from his pipe as his houseboy looks on, silent and staring, "when you try to imagine what it would be like to go back, the image is imperfect, the mental image is always imperfect. Am I right?"

## P

**Several texts** involving dream representation are motivated by their evangelizing discourse. Dreams are didactic, serving as cautionary tales or a code of ethics on how to live; no matter through what form or language they are mediated, the dream frame is an instance of conversion.

Is it true or isn't it that all this time, you've put yourself in my mind and body?

## Q

**For the last** three days, my father has had the same dream. He's in Holguín, with all his cousins, and he's not yet a teenager. The scenario involves

a pick-up game in a neighborhood baseball field that ends by being chased off by a pack of wolves, or dogs, the attempt to hide one's self behind a telephone pole, the substitution of my father for his rotund cousin, René Ramon, a fact that becomes revelatory when his belly sags out from the pole he's hiding behind. When he sucks in his stomach, or tries to, he's on a camping trip, hiking through La Gran Piedra, back in Santiago, past the woods and into the mountains, a big patch of dirt road that circles around and around, the cold silent night air, and gunshots when it becomes too dark to see, which is when he wakes.

"Re-membering is a bodily activity of re-turning," Barad writes. "She must place her body on this wounded ground to hear its murmuring silences and muted cries [...]" (2018, p. 84).

Dream landscape vs. real landscape. The space one is living in vs. the space one remembers.

Recording can be a form of memory. To remember in Spanish is *recordar*.

I have listened to these tapes each night. I listen to them until my father's voice is embedded in my mind, until my father's voice becomes mine. And then we sleep.

In early cinema, the effect of "double exposure" was used to frame the sleeping body and waking body, to contain both or conflate them, to commingle, to contradict or coincide.

The doubling of dreams, at least in the Bible, means the outcome is fixed. Re-occurrence is a token of certitude.

## R

*Fixed could* also mean cheated, phony, simulated.

What if reality moves to match the interpretation, instead of the other way around? Freud writes of patients that are compelled to create an unfulfilled wish in life, an instance where the wish fulfilled in the dream may often lead to creating real absences: a dream that replaces reality.

"The dream substitutes for action," he writes, describing a dream of drinking to assuage a bodily thirst, "as elsewhere in life" (1913, p. 104).

## S

**A dream of worms**, everywhere and always. A bowl of worms, a glass of worms, a toilet and a sink full of worms. A face full of worms or a face formed from worms when one thinks to look in the mirror.

## T

**In the Book of Genesis**, the text seems to say that the dream outcome depends on *not* acting on the dream, or its interpretation. Joseph's dream of his future glory leads his jealous brothers to fake his death, selling him off to the Madianites, who in turn sell him off to an officer of Pharaoh, in Egypt. He gets wrongfully accused of lechery, jailed, and eventually becomes a dream interpreter, saving Egypt from seven years of famine to become the king of the nation, and the savior of the world. The human action that insists on not following the logic of the dream inevitably (re)produces the dream, in waking life. Some things are inevitable. Some things don't depend on fortitude, or a lack thereof, but are determined by fate.

At least in stories.

Did you know the word for *traitor* in Castro's Cuba, for those who were abandoned or who were abandoning the revolution, is called gusano? In English, it means *worm*.

## U

**I don't know** what it feels like to leave the place I was born, to be forced to flee, to escape to a place where I know no one, and know no words in the language which I would be required to speak. To get by, to get in or over.

All my father and his sister had with them was a suitcase and five US dollars when they walked into the sun and onto the tarmac and boarded a small turbo-prop plane. To hover between cloud and ground. Nothing more was permitted.

## V

“It didn’t seem like anything to us, because we were young, and I really didn’t grasp the reality of it until we were already up in the air, and I realized that all my other possessions were no longer with me. I don’t seem to recall packing myself, so I suppose my mom decided what we would take and not take, what we could carry and what we would leave behind. For them, it was probably more of a shock; everything they lived for and everything they had lived with ... everything they had achieved or acquired was gone, to go to a new country and a new culture and a new language. We flew Cubana de Aviación, a small plane with a propeller to keep us floating above the sea.”

“Do you remember how many people were on the plane?”

“It was a full flight, because everyone was trying to get out. We flew from Havana, which was the only place we *could* fly out from, and it took longer to board, or to say good-bye, than it did to fly to Miami. It was such a short flight, too short, I remember, and I remember it was sometime in the morning because I remember walking to the tarmac and having to wait for my dad, who was finishing his last sip of cafecito. And I remember walking to the plane and looking for our seats, hoping I could find a seat by the window, so I could look back.”

“Do you remember looking back?”

“I remember looking. I remember trying to look.”

“Were you nervous?”

“We were excited because, you know, when you are young, it seems like an adventure. I had always listened to American

music and rock and roll and I thought it was cool, or that it would be cool once we got there. It was my first time on any plane, my first time flying. I couldn't stop looking at the propellers, and I remember wondering what would happen if they stopped working, or how they could keep us up there, so high."

"Did you consider, when you were out on the tarmac, that you would never return?"

"No. It did not occur to me. And all the adults, too, everyone thought it would be a short-term move. No one thought Castro would last. I did not say *good-bye*, I told my friends and cousins see *you*. Everybody had the idea we would see each other soon. Everybody had the impression that we were going to be back in six months, and that it would be in time for Día de los Reyes."

## W

**In most visual** representations of the biblical Magi, the critical element of their "common dream" is represented by the Three Wise Men sharing the same bed. Proximity breeds an intimacy that can't be communicated consciously.

Does sex presume the sharing of secrets of the mind?

If I slept with you, would we share the same dream?

## X

**At the beach** I like to close my eyes and feel the sun on my face and the breeze all over my body, under my back and between my legs and above my hips and all the parts of me I can't see. And it's this feeling, or it's this feeling of not being able to feel anymore, any longer, that scares me the most and most of all to not be able to feel so much and all the time or ever again and what could feel worse than that and what would and what will?

I am reminded by Foucault's thoughts on death and dreams, and the privileging of the dream of death, for its ability to show a "fullness in a world about to close in" (Foucault, 1954/1986, p. 55).

Everything else is received second-hand, re-presentations and retrospective renderings, and most of all, interpretations, all of them subject to the versions and perversions of reproduction. Everything else, we receive in accumulations, variations of feeling and skin and sensation. A piecemeal production of Life, or something similar. The difference is a difference between a point and the whole. The *all* that is unflinchingly out of our reach in each of our waking moments.

Death is the only totality we have to live for. And if we don't imagine our own death, we aren't truly alive.

When I just began to be with another and when I was still learning how to do it and how often and when, I could never last very long because I was so excited to be inside that person, to be with that person, to be that person for a little while which increasingly or gradually or at some point became a little longer, and lingered even when I wasn't or when we weren't together. I was so excited to feel another person and to hold these feelings within me and I did and I do and I still am.

## Y

"... **Escape into** one's counterpart, with all the immense promises of poetry, will perhaps one day be possible." — René Char, "Partage Formel"<sup>8</sup>

## Z

**While I decide** what to do with my father's present dreams, with our conversations of the past, I find a notebook entry with the date missing, something I'd forgotten about or discarded. Something I'd abandoned.

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**8** From the original French: "L'évasion dans son semblable, avec d'immenses perspectives de poésie, sera peut-être un jour possible."

On a recent trip to Miami, my father is reunited with his uncle Verona, his cousin Claudio, other people he had not seen in almost fifty years. I, of course, am meeting them for the first time. All of a sudden, the reticence ceases. All of a sudden, we are back in another place. We are back in a pre-Castro oasis, we are back in the casinos and nightclubs of Havana, medianoches and salsa and the mob money laundering in, and the mountainous eastern village of my father's childhood—Santiago de Cuba, the main site of the revolution that would soon follow, where much of the guerrilla fighting took place—and I am there for the trip. And it occurs to me, if the people over here and the people over there cannot talk, and if the generations of Cubans in America themselves do not talk, when all the old men and all the old women die, the story ends.

I want to write the story. I begin by piecing together how my parents met. And then maybe I'll go further backward.

I look forward to what dreams may come.

## A (again)

**Pretend you are** the one dreaming and also that you are the one recording the dream.

I would caution against hesitation or distraction or self-reflection, or updating your personal device. I would urge you only to *play this back*.

The second time is always different, because something inside me has changed, which is you.

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