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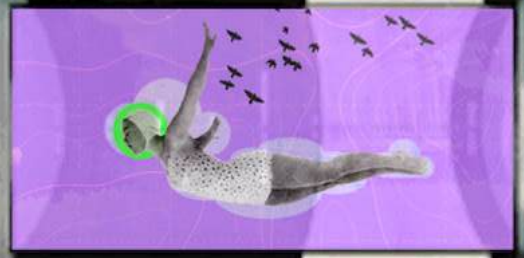

"Without music,
life would be a mistake."

—Nietzsche

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DIVING INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS: Beyond the Archeological Analogy

BY RASMUS GRØNFELDT WINTHER

Photographs by Alexander Turoff

IN LITERATURE we speak of metaphor: "Juliet is the sun," says Shakespeare. Each of us can learn, engage in critical thinking, and generate new knowledge or information by comparing cases, objects, systems, and domains that resemble—in some relevant respects—*other,* rather different, cases, objects, systems, and domains. In therapy, we can reflect on what a dream, in part or as a whole, might represent in waking life. Analogies are everywhere in science: Geologist Alfred Wegener, father of continental drift theory, said that "great ocean floors and the continental blocks … behave like open water and large ice floes." Both metaphor and analogy (not to speak of simile or fable) are ultimately about learning new things about something unfamiliar—often with hidden and inchoate features—by reference to something else much more familiar, explicit, and, perhaps, simpler.

Freud understood the power of analogy. He compared psychoanalytic work, new and unfamiliar at the time, to the well-known idea of archaeological work (see **The Archaeological Analogy in Psychoanalysis and Philosophy of Science** sidebar below). But what if we dove, rather than dug, into the mind?

As I have argued elsewhere, the oceans are, and have been, "a cradle or spring for analyses of the human condition in all its complexity—emotions, freedom, sexuality, imagination, memory, political structures, and cultural conditioning." My suggestion here of a *diving analogy* is inspired, first and foremost, by my personal experience with diving. Diving in the corals off the coast of Venezuela in childhood and among the rich sea life in the Kattegat in Denmark, now tragically long gone, and later in Raja Ampat in Indonesia, Mexico and Marie-Galante in the Caribbean, and throughout the Mediterranean, has opened new vistas for me. I cannot let go of all the awe and splendor that oceanic immersion experiences have gifted to me. Indeed, when you are diving, the alien familiarity of the sea—the "honey, I'm home!"—becomes clear and present. Bodies connect with the wetness, the levity, the embryonic home from which we were torn, and maybe even with a distant memory of the evolutionary past. It is this primeval familiarity with the salty depths that I count on as the source of the analogy of plumbing the personal unconscious as a kind of diving.

JUMP WITH ME into the Mediterranean Sea, the crib of many ancient cultures, including the Phoenicians, and Ancient Greeks and Romans. Our rented boat, *Gaia 10/14*, moves across Sardinia's Orosei Gulf. You have brought some of your favorite people along. We drop anchor in the azure sea perhaps 50 meters from the white sands of a beach: Cala Goloritze. The boat rocks. You steady yourself on the railing. The anchor almost runs out of its 25-meter line. Our vessel is now secured.

We drop into the water—splash! Everyone wears a mask and snorkel. You float. After a few minutes enjoying freedom from gravity, you look around, just under the surface. Fish surround you. You realize that your body is wrapped within a school of elegant damselfish, *Chromis chromis*. Extend your arms and they close up their bodies escaping downwards and away from you. Retract your arms, and the damselfish open up and swim up to you again. Perhaps they are neurally wired to escape shadows or big moving objects or … ? Stop. Breathe. No need to work it out. Let us revel in suspended animation with the damselfish for a too-brief moment.

The Mediterranean carries us towards its cliffs. As you look right, a towering brown wall thunders down into the white quartz sand deep below. The contrast is striking. Approaching this wall triggers a feeling of relief. You are no longer hovering over sand far below. Safe again. You look closer at the wall. The common and beautiful ornate wrasses (*Thalassoma pavo*) snake their way across the rocks covered with marine life. Most of these fish are females, swimming in groups of three or four. You occasionally spot a male. As it happens, each individual of this species is born a male and later turns into a female. These fish are what scientists call *sequential hermaphrodites*. Sex may be an important biological category crucial to evolution, but it is not necessarily a stable category—even within one organism. Sometimes, especially near deep crevices in the wall, you see large groups of eight or ten.

As you inspect the cliff walls more closely, you notice miniature gardens and forests. The rocks are replete with gorgeous green and brown algae; sea firs such as the cnidarian, *Eudendrium rameum;* red and black sponges; a few bivalves; and even some discreet yet elegant *Hexaplex trunculus* snails, a source of indigo dye for the ancient Phoenicians. Never mind all the life too small for you to see! A submarine universe throbs on these cliffs, just under the sea's surface. Beauty in the raw. Nature inspires us in its color, magnitude, and resilience.

What if we thought of therapy as this kind of experience: one of floating, exploring, descending, and ascending in a fluid medium? What if the psychic "traces" described by Freud were *underwater* rather than *underground?* What if the unconscious were more like a coral reef or kelp forest or open water depth zones? Which reimaginations of psychoanalytic content and method would be invited by deploying the oceanic imagination—that is, psychoanalysis as embodied, wild diving rather than painstaking, arm's-length digging?

IN *CIVILIZATION and Its Discontents*, Freud was critical of French writer Romain Rolland's characterization of religious feeling as a "sensation of the 'eternal' (which may very well not be eternal, but simply without perceptible limits, and in that way oceanic)." Freud could not recognize or discover this "oceanic feeling" in himself, and found it challenging "to deal scientifically with

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feelings." Unlike Freud, I embrace such an "oceanic feeling" of the potentially limitless. I also believe it worthwhile to bring something of the oceanic into the therapeutic encounter.

Freud's analogy of therapy as a kind of excavation of the patient's unconscious—ideally resulting in a "construction" integrating interpretations of the patient's dreams, their slips of the tongue, their associations, and so forth—is strong. But I am suggesting a different, perhaps complementary, analogy for making explicit the deep, the fundamental, the early, the unfamiliar, or the hidden, this time premised on *diving*—rather than digging—into the depths.

To frame therapy as digging or diving makes a difference. If we consider therapy to be akin to noticing a school of damselfish or tiny underwater cliff wall garden, rather than meticulously dusting off an ancient Roman coin at our archaeological site, then a much more dynamic and processual picture of depth work takes hold. This in a few ways.

First, the analyst-diver can move spontaneously and unhindered within the depth layers of the patient's unconscious. An archaeologist scrupulously and carefully digs downwards, from the surface, destroying what surrounds an object in order to unearth it. A snorkeler or scuba diver can move, freely, in three dimensions (although a diver must carefully equalize the pressure in going down). With diving, we portray, as it were, much freer epistemic access to the topography and inhabitants of the unconscious. Gravity, layers, and top-bottom directionality no longer constrain our efforts at discovery and (re)construction. A diving therapist is not bound to slow and painstaking archaeological excavation, but to surprising and quick associations, as she can quickly move around in the waterscape of the patient's unconscious, frequently and rapidly *changing positions*.

Second, diving is a better analogy for psychological depth work because analysts jump into the very universe which contains their objects of study—that is, because transference and countertransference shape the clinical encounter. The therapist is not only looking for insight into the patient but participating in a drama shaped by the patient's (and to a lesser extent her own) unconscious feelings. The analyst is thus submerged in the medium into which she is making an inquiry. The *embodied immersion* in that drama is necessary to obtain insight.

Third, as any diver knows, scales can change suddenly while diving. What is near or far away can suddenly become relevant and draw attention. This may happen intentionally ("wait, is that an invasive blue crab, *Callinectes sapidus,* scurrying there along the cliff walls?"), but sometimes, embarrassingly, by accident ("gosh, that strong current pulled me away, and the cliffs now seem like a background of rolling hills"). Marine life and topography, whether along a peaceful Mediterranean coast or along a healthy tropical reef, exist at many fractal scales, from microscopic phytoplankton, to barely visible nudibranchs or pygmy seahorses, to large coral groupers and bumphead parrotfish, or mantas and even whales. Ecological and evolutionary theories address the complexities of the web of life, and of the tree of life, *both of which exist at many scales or levels*. Analogously, in therapeutic work as in diving, we pay attention to small, almost insignificant slips of the tongue, as well as to broad motifs in a patient's utterances and behavior. In contrast, it is more difficult to change focus and scale at an archaeological dig when you are surrounded on so many sides by opaque, solid rocks and earth.

Diving provides new metaphors and analogies for how we can learn and understand more about the hidden and secret. Quick and multidimensional epistemic access; embodiment in the secret universe itself; and the scalar structure of what we wish to learn about are features of diving—rather than of archaeology—that help us illuminate and reimagine therapeutic work.

To what extent does this notion of diving capture what psychoanalytic therapists already do? Would psychoanalytic practice *change* if more analysts self-consciously viewed themselves as diving rather than digging? I am not a clinician, so I leave these questions to the reader. Here I have only provided a glimpse of how a return to a primordial watery experience provides a more dynamic and fluid picture of the process of diving into the depths of the unconscious. The oceans have yet much to teach us. ■

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The Archaeological Analogy in Psychoanalysis and Philosophy of Science

FREUD WAS FASCINATED by the history, mythology, and archaeology of ancient civilizations, especially the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. In his 1937 essay "Konstruktionen in der Analyse" ("Constructions in Analysis"), he brings this interest into his theorization, developing an *archaeological analogy:* "[the analyst's] task is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct* it," a task which he says, "resembles to a great extent an archaeologist's excavation." Both the analyst and archaeologist form constructions from what remains based on limited information, both have to face various kinds of difficulties and errors, and both are concerned with the "relative age" of the various traces.

The personal unconscious is layered, the repressed is buried, dreams are messages from the deep—this is the language of archaeology. To me, as a philosopher of science, this comparison between archaeology and psychoanalytic work is exceedingly strong and generative. In a book on maps, cartography, GIS, analogy, philosophy, and science, *When Maps Become the World,* I generated the tool of *assumption archaeology* for diagnosing and unraveling systems of assumptions (and biases) in everyday life and in science, which expresses what I call a "theoretical unconscious." A property of collectives as well as of individuals, the theoretical unconscious is something like the hidden part of a scientific paradigm or theoretical perspective. Assumption archaeology helps block or undo the inappropriate conflation and confusion of model with world, a set of fallacies I baptized *pernicious reification*.

In developing assumption archaeology as a method, I was inspired by an eloquent book, *Archaeology and Modernity*, which argued that "[Archaeology] evokes notions of the repressed, the lost and the forgotten, and of the drama of discovery, which are often spatialised in terms of the relationship between depth and surface." Undoubtedly, archaeology is a brilliant analogy for depth work, whether into our minds and souls, or into the hidden and deep recesses and crevices of scientific theory.

An example I used to introduce assumption archaeology in *When Maps Become the World* is the Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium, a standard idealized model in the theory of population genetics, a field about which I also wrote a book: *Our Genes: A Philosophical Perspective on Human Evolutionary Genomics*. As is familiar to mathematical geneticists, this equilibrium model shows that gene frequencies will stay the same over generations as long as there are no evolutionary forces acting such as mutation, migration, and, most famously, natural selection. Now, we can use assumption archaeology to uncover multiple assumptions, not always so clearly stated, that must be satisfied for the Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium model to hold—for instance, that population sizes are infinite, mating is random, and no individuals migrate across populations. But problems ensue when the theoretical researcher or experimental designer is not explicit about the nature and the exact assumptions being deployed in particular cases. For example, we might apply the idealized and abstracted Hardy–Weinberg model indiscriminately to myriad populations of species with, say, highly limited population sizes or assortative mating. For such populations, Hardy–Weinberg assumptions simply do not hold. Such an idealized model would then overexplain, and would be universalized, narrowed, and ontologized—conflated with the world—in inappropriate ways. This is what I mean by pernicious reification.

Psychoanalysts, despite their commitment to examining the unconscious, are not immune to pernicious reification, especially if they fail to question their theoretical assumptions or believe these assumptions capture too much—perhaps even everything—about a patient. Patients, too, might be said to suffer from a sort of pernicious reification if they hold a too-rigid self-image or are trapped by unexamined psychic forces. Just as a clinician needs to be aware of theoretical assumptions in order to best interpret patient patterns or symptoms, so a patient needs to become aware of unconscious assumptions to best gain personal insight, heal, and grow.

One way of avoiding pernicious reification is to examine the metaphors and analogies that guide our thinking—while understanding that, precisely as metaphors and analogies, they have limits. Returning to Freud, even by his own admission, there are important differences—disanalogies—between psychoanalytical and archaeological work. For instance, archaeological sites almost always involve extreme amounts of destruction, whereas therapy can dredge up from the depths of the psyche discoveries akin to Pompeii or Tutankhamen's tomb, seemingly without such tremendous damage. I still believe that there is something to all this digging imagery, but my point here is that the *diving analogy* for therapy works swimmingly, illuminating psychoanalytic practice in new ways. (Back in my home pond of philosophy of science, I leave a theorization of *assumption diving* into the theoretical unconscious of science as an exercise for a later day.)—*RGW* ■

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