



PROJECT MUSE®

A Lost Track: On the Unconscious in Folklore

Utz Jeggle, John Bendix

Journal of Folklore Research, Volume 40, Number 1, January-April 2003,
pp. 73-94 (Article)

Published by Indiana University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40749>

A Lost Track: On the Unconscious in Folklore

Translated by John Bendix

NOTHING REALLY GETS lost, least of all in the unconscious. In fact, that is precisely what is distinctive about the unconscious, that it retains apparently lost items in an unresolved state and determines when these objects will be found or revealed again. All of us know these situations of loss that collapse in on themselves when they have served their purpose. A key, rediscovered once all the locks, at considerable expense, have been changed. A colleague, saying “Freudian criminal” (*Verbrecher*) when he meant to say “Freudian slip of the tongue” (*Ver-sprecher*), in his disagreeable misspeaking revealing his attitude toward psychoanalysis. The unconscious frequently also breaks through in jokes; you surely know the statement of the energetic wife of a dean who said to her husband “If one of the two of us dies, then I will move to Nürtingen.” A barely concealed widow’s wish.

In any case, there is no coincidence in the unconscious realm. You don’t simply misplace a book; rather you have good, or often also bad, reasons for doing so. When the regional radio station is looking for someone to interview who knows something about Martinmas geese, you give a colleague’s name with concealed malice (“he knows everything”). Or you jealously lose a book edited by an old enemy and you desperately needed an essay from it that was written by one of your long-standing competitors. Even if they appear harmless, such misfortunes are often laden with embarrassment. At the same time they also indicate an effort to allow envy to emerge in small parcels, preventing much more serious manifestations and wish-fulfillment (such as slan-

der, bodily injury, or even murder). Humankind would be long extinct if *homo sapiens* followed every desire to murder.

The basis of our cultures lies in the transformation of our raw drives, as through sublimation. Another “attempt to civilize” our drives is repression, the relegating of unpleasant impulses into the unconscious. Insistent progeny of the unconscious live on in a weakened state, but emerge in compromising odd quirks, drolleries, and symptoms.

The point of departure is a (theoretically assumed) sense of being hurt conjectured to arise from an assumption that people are not masters of their own souls. Psychoanalysis begins with the assertion that there is a dynamic and driven unconscious whose relationship to consciousness is to be investigated. In the words of Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, psychoanalysis has forced into the light the unpleasant and disturbing realization “that we are creatures who continually bring forth unconscious meanings in the form of wishes, fantasies, and dreams, and whether we want to or not, they influence our thoughts and actions in uncontrollable and unprogrammable though highly effective ways” (1999:5). No wonder then that the psychoanalytic option holds an odd position, in a scientific sense, precisely vis-à-vis those colleagues who deny or even combat such an offending realization.

Empirical Cultural Research should also accept this: there are subliminal energies that are not recognized and that exist unconsciously. “Drives are our mythology, so to speak. Drives are mythic beings, magnificent in their vagueness” (Freud 1972e:101). In what follows, this mythology is also the basis for our reflections. We do not fear working with mythical beings, as the myth means “a recognition of natural conflicts, human desires, inhuman forces, suppressing the hostile, or denying antagonistic wishes or negative impulses their fulfillment. Myths speak of birth, suffering, and being conquered by death, and thus speak of the common fate of humankind” (Langer 1979:177). Myths have many interpretations, and analyzing them is not like solving an equation with a single unknown term. Susanne Langer speaks, in this context, of a “*presentative* symbolism,” in contrast to a *representative* symbolism, by which she means the difference between pictorial mythological symbolism and verbal representation—visual versus abstract representation.

Freud knew the popular imagination that presumed there were as many drives “as one needed just then: a drive for admiration, imita-

tion, play, sociability, and many others. One adopts them equally, lets each do its particular work, and then lets them go again.” But psychoanalysis is different: “. . . we have always had the notion that something large and serious lies hidden behind these many adopted drives . . . hunger and sexuality” (1972e:102).

The ideal path to the unconscious and into the life of drives is dream interpretation. Dreams, lying between the remains of the day and the condensation or displacement of manifest and latent dream-thoughts, are affected and structured by a quite different sense of time. Leaps in time become coterminous, and the contradictory and torn is made whole. These mechanisms are generally true for those matters that are inadequately nourished unconsciously. Their everyday nature is of interest to us here, as seen in dreams, in the small madness we call superstitions or folk belief, and in the slips we make when we lose and find things again.

Right at the edge between stubbornness of mind and *idée fixe* lie forms of superstition, expressed through magical rituals that can develop into obsessions. Acknowledging the agony of eccentricity this entails is part of the responsibility of Empirical Cultural Research; it thereby keeps the respective party from being institutionalized, although such mental representations also belong to the area of study of our field. Eccentricity, to follow Ludwig Binswanger’s reading (1956), lies just this side of the border between normality and illness. Schizophrenia clearly lies on the other side.

But it is also true that the “folkloric ways of life” provide large containers in which to rid oneself of a variety of droll and crazy impulses, and at the same time to salvage them. The [Berlin] Love Parade and carnival-like events (*Fasnacht*) generally serve this purpose, but spray cans and brightly tinted hair also provide such opportunities and are catch basins for what is borderline. The spontaneous, unplanned, naughty, not pretty, unsophisticated, unconscious is rapidly expanding, so much so that the deployment area for maintaining order keeps constricting, making new boundary lines necessary to distinguish between order and chaos, proper and improper, and between the “indulgent-me” (Lust-Ich) and the “real-me.”

The unconscious is so “un-” that it cannot even be classified as base. Folk psychology nevertheless gladly speaks of the subconscious when it wants to classify or find a place for particular, irrational-seeming symptoms. Freud only rarely used the term subconscious, and when

he used it, in his essay “The Question of Lay Analysis,” he was dismissive: “When someone speaks of the subconscious, I do not know if he means something in the soul lying underneath consciousness, or if he means it in a qualitative sense, as in a different consciousness, like something subterranean. Probably he has no clear idea of it at all” (1972d:225). Given such a chiding, it is probably necessary to abstain from using this popular term.

In what follows, I would like to develop some thoughts about the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, as well as how this border is patrolled folklorically. Folklore has said little about this in theoretical terms. The field is like a typical customs official, more concerned with discovering smuggled goods than with enforcing the laws of mercantilism. As a field that studies the normal, everyday, and self-evident, it has rarely ventured into the material lying on the other shore. The great exception is the sexological collection of Friedrich Salomon Krauss, a work promptly placed at the border between ethnography and pornography, then disciplined and punished, even raped, by head customs officials like Johannes Bolte.

These are important orientations that project into the history of our field only to be lost again—though with the previous caveat that nothing is lost in the unconscious. Empirical Cultural Research must ask itself about the reasons for this loss and seek to research those situations in which the suppressed vanished and then re-emerged. The thought here is not to engage in communal psychiatric intervention or social pedagogy. Rather, I think in terms of a history and ethnography of how the difficult, the odd, and the crazy have been dealt with, as well as how one could rewrite this task in a manner appropriate to folklore study. This has no healing effect, but Empirical Cultural Research could engage in preliminary work to address the irrational within the normal, since normal and irrational are related, even congruent.

Yet the solution here is not simply to seek the crazy-making aspects of society. Rather, it is much more important to understand what unconscious drives underlie everyday phenomena, phenomena that are bound up with difference and ambivalence and yet still leave us with an entire palette of interpretive readings. As a result, I do not want to attempt to provide a general answer but instead want to indicate a line or argument to show how the unconscious works to summon futures, to produce double meanings unnoticeably, to destroy culture but to create it as well. This driving force is at the same time

also the basis for human creativity. I wish to illustrate this dual function by means of a few examples, and though they belong to quite differing material worlds, they all lie at the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious.

Dreams

Every night, we descend into the arms of Morpheus, who holds us whether we remember it or not. The movement the verb “descend” expresses, as Hanna Rheinze put it when she wrote of the “*via demonica* into the underworld,” is downward, to what is underneath (1999:20). Folklore is the study of the everyday, and only on the margins does it address the night. But it is odd that a third of human life is inaccessible to scholarship and as a result remains largely unresearched. Psychoanalysis provides the exception, since it continues to assert that dream interpretation is the ideal pathway for understanding the unconscious. And it is not by chance that Freud is honored with a memorial tablet (at the Himmelstrasse, in Vienna’s 19th district) that reads, “The secret of dreams was revealed here to Dr. Sigmund Freud on 24 July 1895.”

Today’s sciences of man, that regard themselves so highly, denounce the interpretation of the content of dreams as meaningless, and in fact generally deny the unconscious. Psychoanalysis is called a “discontinued model” by many, characterized in altercations by a high level of aggression: Freud-bashing is an intellectual sport in the United States. Empirical Cultural Research is certainly too weak to be even an influential junior participant in the coalition of fields interested in such psychological matters, quite apart from the lack of willingness to do so. But just how effective a single scholar can be in incorporating the world of dreams and the unconscious is illustrated by the work of Peter Gay, who has made clear how fruitful such *liaisons dangereuses* with analytic psychology can be.

So of what do we dream? According to a German Press Agency report of July 8, 2000, on “The Dreams of Germans” reported in the southwestern German press and based on a survey conducted among 2,113 German citizens by the Allensbach Institute, 80 percent said they dreamed regularly. Of these, 34 percent dreamt of work, 27 percent of travel, 22 percent of physical immobility, and the same percentage dreamt of people who had died. Still, 19 percent dreamt of

money, 15 percent of crashing or falling, 10 percent of being able to fly, and 9 percent each dreamt of attacks, death, and being pursued. The difference between West and East Germans was insignificant; 33 percent of West and 36 percent of East Germans dreamt of work, while only 3 percent less of those in the West dreamt of travel than those in the new German states in the East. On the other hand, death dreams were 3 percent higher in the West, at 10 percent. Overall, only 2 percent dreamt of war, though among those over 60, it was twice as high at 4.5 percent. To the Allensbach survey researchers, dreams are primarily an extension of the problems and wishes in everyday life. On the other hand, the zone of death appears to weigh heavily: if one adds together all categories containing threats—death, an inability to move, danger, and pursuit—one arrives at a total of more than 70 percent of the dreams.

This is quite revealing, and a modest self-experiment underscores it. In the night of May 9, 2000, while in Paris, I dreamt that a Tübingen colleague had lost a leg. It is a picture of envy: one (I) would like to magic away one of his legs, and which “leg” is meant I will leave to your imagination. The day before I had addressed Oedipus’s riddle, also known as the riddle of the Sphinx, and the solution to his riddle (for in Arabic the sphinx is male) also deals with legs. Leftovers from that day, a thickening of a compact stem—with enough fantasy, one can set up a row of associated meanings whose radical nature can only be illuminated in a dialogue with one’s own unconscious.

Yet despite all the malice of my dream, a one-legged apparition seems fairly harmless. Modern psychoanalysis, of the sort Hermann Beland embodies, on the other hand, is far harsher:

The core of the latent dream-thought is never harmless. Most dreams (that is, all dreams not dealing with fear) try to render this core harmless by wrapping a hard shell of incomprehensibility and harmlessness around it . . . a greedy desire for primitive bodily gratifications, the cruel conquest of a rival, ruthless arrogance, the elimination of a brother or sister out of envy about a minor matter or simply because they exist, parricide as mean or inflated revenge for insults to one’s megalomania . . . ” (1999:54).

This “list of brutalities and destructive wishes could be extended at will,” (54) and in Hermann Beland’s case, it is.

Dreams are thus dangerous crossing-points, and dealing with them allows us to be crazy and nevertheless remain normal. To concern

oneself with dream work both distorts and makes dreams harmless; dreams are put out of one's head, or they are muzzled and they thereby become attractive to popular literature. In "Sisyphus's Night Shift," Hans-Georg Behr cites a publisher who stated that "books with the word 'dream' in their titles sell nearly a third more copies." Yet coupled with this bookseller's high regard also comes intellectual contempt: "By breakfast-time I couldn't care less about what I dream" (Behr 1999:5). Whether this synchronicity of negligent arrogance and popular thirst for knowledge drives people from the topic, and whether it is for that reason that there are so few examples in Germany of something like ethnographic attempts to address dreams, remains an open question.

On the other hand, in France there is an extensive ethnography of dreaming. In the library of the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale in Paris one can find over 550 titles listed under the subject "Rêve."¹ For the most part, these are ethnographies and interpretations of distant cultures, such as Australian aborigines, but there are also investigations like those of Jean Duvignaud and others. Their study's subtitle is "An Anthropological Essay about Contemporary Dreamers," and its contents have a certain harmless quality to them,² thus perpetuating the deep divide that exists between psychoanalytic dream interpretation and everyday observation. Germany at least can claim Charlotte Beradt, who collected and analyzed a notable collection of dreams under the shadow of the Nazi regime (1981).

Nazis did not just want to subjugate the external world; they also wanted control over the internal world. Dreams were certainly sharply (self-)censored or they were completely ignored. That would be a topic for a critical dream study: dreaming in the Third Reich! Among perpetrators, it was clear that souls were to be lashed down, and in Ulrich Herbert's comprehensive book on elite bureaucrats in the Nazi regime, dreams play no role (1996). The author himself would regard the question itself as completely irrelevant. The dream world of victims is barren for other reasons: they experienced worse things than one could ever dream of. No dream could have devised Auschwitz. Every dreamer would have awakened from such a nightmare. We do not know whether, in that realm of the dead that we call Auschwitz, there were nighttime dreams of survival. To put it differently, dreams were absorbed, vacuumed up into a horrible system that either drove you mad or killed you.

Madness

Dreams are an excursion into psychosis, while in madness one remains its prisoner even if one appears to escape it. In madness one suffers a waking dream that appears real, though it is usually an unending nightmare. Here, too, it is a matter of drawing and defining boundaries. Madness is often incomprehensible, and modern psychiatry has learned to be modest in its interpretation. Those psychically ill are strangers from another world. If one thinks of the Swabian teacher Wagner, it is difficult to interpret his deeds with sympathy. Owing to an insult—it was rumored that he engaged in sodomitic relations—he murdered his family as well as large numbers of his former neighbors. The Tübinger psychiatry professor, Gaupp, later involved in Nazi matters but full of scientific curiosity, conducted research by holding long conversations with the madman in a search for understanding. The scholars Neuzner and Brandstätter, who have recently investigated this case, see parallels to Hitler in the case of this teacher, but though Hitler was certainly mentally ill such an interpretation does not help much (1996).

On the other hand, this kind of comparison makes clear that there is rarely clarity in reality. More often there are differentiated positions that attempt to establish different forms with various degrees of assertion. The Freudian statement “patients love their madness” remains true whether it is prophets, politicians, or murderers who are being examined. If this tendency to be enamored of one’s illness can be overcome, the path lies open to recognize the reality that can put the “drives” in their place and transform the “indulgent-me” into the “real-me.” In the case of Wagner, Christel Köhle-Hezinger (1999) has had the courage to develop the context of a murderous life out of his social field of existence, and thereby show that an open folkloristic approach is certainly capable of bringing in aspects that are useful in understanding the environment of madness. Or to cite Freud, “We are faced with the challenge of investigating the relationship of the neurotic, and of humans generally, to reality and how it develops, and thereby to include the psychological significance of the real, external world into the structure of our teachings” (1969a:17). This does not mean explaining the world but rather working up those parts of the world that have something to tell us about a dead landscape of the soul.

The term “superstition” has fallen into disrepute in folklore, but in the theory of boundaries that I am proposing here the term takes on a surprising vividness. Superstition, seen in conjunction with compulsion, really gains the sheen of a religious substitute or becomes a private faith that stands in close relation to pseudo-religious rituals. Ludwig Binswanger relates the illustrative case of a patient, Lola Voß, who had constructed a superstitious world that was based on the omnipotence of the word and which linked madness and superstition. To Voß’s way of thinking, all words beginning with *Car* or containing *no*, whether in German or Spanish, were liberating and positive. Words with *chi* or *si*, the confirming Spanish “yes,” however, were dreadful and frightening. She could not even bring herself to say the word *si*, and the attempt to do so was a torment, compulsively inflicted. Her speechlessness and powerlessness in the face of reality were underscored when her father bought her a new umbrella (*Schirm*); those around her had to guess it was an umbrella as she could not express it herself. “Schirm” contains *chi*, and in addition, a hunchback was present when the umbrella was bought. She had been afraid of hunchbacks before, and now the bad luck she associated with that condition was transferred, “it was now inside the umbrella.” To make matters worse, her mother took hold of the umbrella soon afterwards, and as in a chain reaction, she too was contaminated; dealing with her now also became problematic.

The whole thing is certainly also a “fleeing into the illness.”³ The illness becomes a contagious fever that constricts her life more and more into an ordered world ruled by very particular rules and commands. But our interest in this kind of psychiatric material is not so much in this specific case of illness but rather in what it can say about everyday life. Clinically relevant madness is not our task; rather, the breaking through of irrational drives, the invasion into normalcy and the defense of the system against madness. The usual scenario is not of psychotic collapse, however, but rather the creating of compromises with that world—something that Lola Voß was more capable of than Wagner.

In the next section, this process of compromise will be described, as well as how people deal with their uncontrollable present and with their futures.

Superstition and the Future

Superstition is a way of managing irrationality in our world. Our feeling of powerlessness, whose result is fearfulness, is spellbound by the use of magical means, or is at least quieted by avoiding a potential danger or by removing it. Though today this strategy no longer plays an important role, it nevertheless lives on in conspicuous markers. The high-speed German ICE trains roll without a car 13, and in Allensbach surveys, respondents were asked about items that might have a *lucky* significance: 38 percent mentioned four-leafed clovers, and among Green Party supporters, it was even 41 percent. Our everyday world in the so-called risk society is marked by a contradiction, by a willful overlapping of careful, individualized planning and a collectively careless living-in-the-world. This is manifested in the gulf between the nitpicking exactitude demanded by the appointment book and the generous indifference toward ecological destruction and the short-sighted plundering of our planet.

Superstition is a child of the pre-scientific world. Though compulsive behavior seems closely related, superstitious behavior has more affinity to magical practices. Freud reminds us of the Roman who gave up the activity he had planned because he stumbled at the door-sill. He “knew his soul better than we can attempt to. For this stumbling proved that a doubt existed, that there was a counter-current inside of him” (Freud 1972a:288). In our rationally administered world there is little room for ambivalence. There is no place for the contradictory, for the tension between incalculable fear and calculable risk, between rationality and irrationality, between that which is unconsciously determined and coincidences that cannot be influenced, between knowledge and belief, or between religion and superstition. We commonly accept but also differentiate between chance and the unconscious in the world of the soul, but in the world of superstition, there are no broken legs without (later realized) premonitions, no calamities without their portents. It is irrelevant whether a premonition is unjustified, therefore entirely magical, or unconsciously justified: the rules of superstition dominate the unconscious by their omnipotence. Realistically speaking, they permit what is unforeseeable to appear to have been foreseen and predictable. The future plays a fateful role, appearing as though it can be controlled yet van-

ishing as an open possibility at the same instant. Better to accept the potential catastrophe, and magically bind it, than to leave open the possibility that no catastrophe occurs.

Following Freud, superstition emerges from suppressed antagonisms and cruel impulses: “Superstition to a large extent is an expectation of calamity, and those who often wish bad things to happen to others, but who owing to an education stressing doing good have repressed such desires unto the unconscious, will more likely experience the penalty for their unconscious bad impulses as an expectation of external calamity befalling themselves” (Freud 1972a:289). The interlacing of the inner with the outer is a key part of the superstitious worldview. The superstitious project their motivations to the outside, motivations psychoanalysis searches for within, and replace thinking about coincidence with thinking about an event that is determined by chance. “But the hidden existing in him (the superstitious) corresponds to the unconscious for me (Freud), and the compulsion to not permit the coincidental to be seen as coincidental but rather to find an interpretation for it we both share” (287). The mythological view of the world—and Freud counts superstition as part of this perception—is nothing other than “a psychology projected onto the outside world” (287).

The dark knowledge of psychic factors and the relations of the unconscious are mirrored, following Freud, in the construction of a transcendental reality. In part, psychoanalysis can transform that reality back into a psychology of the unconscious. The principle that magic reigns is the “omnipotence of thought” (Freud 1972c:106). A patient had coined this term to plumb the depths of all the odd and uncanny events that seemed to pursue him and others afflicted with such woes. If he thought of a person, that person already walked toward him, as though he had conjured him up. If he suddenly asked how a person he had long missed was doing, he had to learn that she had just died. All the compulsively ill are superstitious in this fashion, often against their better insight. To modify a line from Freud, one could say that the superstitious live in a particular world in which only “the superstitious coin is valid” (1972c:107). Thus, the omnipotence of thought finds no limit in the affective life of the superstitious, for relative to reality, mental processes are completely exaggerated. The superstitious use ceremonial patterns to master their own powerlessness (Freud

1972b:130). They take the form of small routines, or additions, or limitations, or directions, mechanically repetitious actions in daily life, or sometimes following strict rules that permit specific changes.

Unlike religious ceremony, which is determined according to symbolic meaning and significance, the actions of a compulsive person seem senseless, even ridiculous. Freud said compulsive neurotics provided a distorted picture of their private religion, one that was half-comic and half-tragic (1972b:132). A key term here is “ceremony,” not only because it describes the obligatory character and private orientation of the compulsive, but also because it can be used to describe how closely connected religion is to superstitious practices.

Here we want to examine the superstitious principles involved in the interchange between external, or so-called real, and internal psychic worlds with the help of examples from agrarian and lower middle class life. At one level, the future appears threatening, hence systems of superstitious rules developed to provide ritual answers to questions about fate. At another level, the threat posed by the external world put the internal world under such pressure that a different, magical psychology needed to develop to serve as a kind of transformer, changing the tasks of external and internal realities into a kind of transcendental comforter. An emergency called for fourteen (not thirteen) helpers for those in need; dangers while traveling brought forth belief in Saint Christopher. The category of saints, which I would label only marginally as *superstitious*, indicates the frequency with which aid is entreated, and diverse helpers stand ready to fulfill these pleas.

How did our ancestors deal with their fear and their hopes for the future? The agrarian world rests more on a known cyclical repetition than on striding into an unknown future, which such repetition also entails. The unknown and hence threatening future is therefore bound fast in superstition. This makes it possible for plans born of desires to be resolved within the limited possibilities at hand, in such a manner that the decision can be made between denying the satisfaction of desire or denying reality. That is, the conflict between the demands of drives and the objections of reality comes at the cost of “a fissure in the self” (Freud 1969a:391), which folk speech accurately calls a crack in the bowl (which in turn also plagues the superstitious). The problem of the superstitious person is also a “disintegra-

tion when faced with the outer world that derives from a tough and apparently impossible-to-bear wish-denial of reality" (335).

The manner in which superstitious thinking deals with reality is not static. The risk of a smaller likelihood is also met with a "crack," but reality is neglected in a different, albeit equally delusional, manner. The belief goes that that which is possible will also become possible, and thus a remaining risk does not exist. What occurs frequently, in the sense of a rule of potential events, is unimportant. Rather, anything that could occur might also affect me.

What people think today, however, is the exact opposite. One could call it the "Saint Florianization" of the world: anything could occur, but none of it will affect me: "Saint Florian, set fire to the others!" might be the rule. Statistics do not have the indicative aspects of signs. Instead, danger lurks behind the percentages and encourages other forms of suppression, as in the case of the unlikelihood rule, also expressed in seemingly objective numbers and formulae. The traditional world perceives the exact reverse. Everything in this world is a sign and humans are surrounded by signs, constantly reminded of life's dangers and finality, that we forget or, better, have suppressed. This magical-symbolic lesson in special signs is of central importance for understanding the relationship of present to future. Actual life is already anticipated in such sign-like expressions. The present is only the shadow of a plan that lies above and in me, and which is revealed to me through particular encounters with other life forms. The future is set, and the signs only make it decipherable, not changeable.

Whom will I marry? A first prerequisite is a certain level of wealth and possessions, and it is not impossible that love will develop once one sees the red cheeks of the partner. We read too many novels and as a result believe in the authenticity of love. But as Niklas Luhmann has convincingly shown, intimacy itself must be learned, and the so natural-seeming world of the emotions in fact is culturally patterned (1982). This reality provides the background for love prophecies that offer an illusion of many alternative partners even though, as young women know well, the number of willing and available marriage candidates is very limited spatially and particularly socially. A great deal of limitation and ineluctability exists in love, but in some circumstances also great good fortune. Sexuality is the one great pleasure in the agrarian world, and as a result love prophecies and love magic play a large role.

The conventional path is the oracles that divine the future. All manner of techniques exist to discern the future intended, with local and regional variants, and in their conscientious acrobatics they remind one of the compulsive rules and prohibitions of Binswanger's patient. Girls get into bed backwards or with the left foot first, jump around on the bed, kick the bedstead or shake it or the bedcover—as though one could shake the future into the present. The fence, particularly the garden fence, is also fateful (the first who goes by is the intended), or it might be a substitute for the fence (a barking dog indicates the direction from which the longed-for will come), or the clothes-drying pole, or a tree (Bächtold-Stäubli [1927–42] 1987, I:511). An apple might be peeled, while making sure “the peel does not break and this is then thrown backwards over the shoulder. From the figure the peel makes on the ground, one can read the first letter of the intended's name” (513).

The repository of sticks or poles, peels and skins, fence posts or barking dogs, indicates to what extent sexual signs are encoded in the foreground of folklore. It is perhaps more interesting that ingenious techniques are maintained and must be followed in order to grab—by a corner—the future. Desire, like ecstasy, knows no time or at best an “alternate” time, and pulls the future into the present. And perhaps that is the corner by which we take hold of wishes for love: even today longing constitutes a psychic connection between experience and anticipation. Past, present, and future premonitions remain; the beautiful, aura-like moment may come and may stay, and the future reveal itself to be a transfigured past. Since one cannot anticipate the future, it is desired all the more, and this desire is emphasized with particular practices. Magic serves to make the future one's own, and though it does not change the anticipated course of life, its magic practices confirm it, as in the small cannibalistic acts with which one secures a bit of the body, especially hair, and thereby symbolically unites what is meant to be together, executing what we maintain as a phrase—“You are good enough to eat” (*Ich hab' Dich ja zum Fressen gern*).

Death, as the last and weightiest step in human life, is particularly freighted with signs due to the inability to know what lies ahead. Precisely because it is a definitive endpoint, there are particularly many and varied ways it is prophesied. If the pear bread turns black while baking, then a death will soon occur. The same is to be feared if bis-

cuits and pastries have cracks. These fragments derive from morphological logic made concrete and are based on a particular condition or color. The same is true if a clock drags, or if in the coffin-maker's workshop the saw rattles. Death announces itself and gives a sign. It is not possible to bargain with it, but there is the belief that one can prepare oneself for it with magic. The signs provide a clear framework of a lifelong preparation for an unavoidable death. The outer world alarms the inner world, and the unconscious opens itself and perceives in the signs as much as Woody Allen perceives in Manhattan. That is the triumph of superstition over psychoanalysis.

Losing and Finding

Forgetting, misplacing, losing: these are the little calamities of everyday life that we have all experienced. Who has not misplaced their appointment book? Forgotten the name of an esteemed colleague? Lost the wallet along with the library card in the university library? One then speaks of *Pech* (bad luck; also pitch, a tar), or of something raven-black, and while superstitious contemporaries see it as a blow of fate, enlightened university library users call it a time-consuming annoyance. The "why?" question is excluded. Chance reigns in this realm and if something is "behind" it, then it is magical notions of predestination and fate that reign; only rarely is one's own, interior part of the matter questioned. Yet the problem of losing things is one path into the labyrinth between coincidence and determinacy, a means to place the logic of the external world in relation to the regularities of the internal world—that is, without having to wonder, when one occasionally is made a fool of, whether what is coincidental is incorrectly being interpreted as having been necessary.

The forgotten umbrella, the gloves put aside where one can't find them again: their fate is Janus-faced. Without a doubt they belong to external reality and their loss is a sign of external conditions. But objects often also have a particular history: the handbag was a present; the scarf that came from the mother-in-law always itched. Bringing such episodic scenes to mind gives the objects individuality and an emotional track is created in their owner that leads to the interior reality. It is for this reason that the anthropological background for this essay is to be sought in the examination of how external and internal realities

work together. That the lost umbrella, sharing its fate with many others in the lost-and-found office, could have its own history that led it to end here—not entirely without reason—does not exclude the fact that for lost umbrellas external reality (namely the rain or more properly that the rain stopped) played a decisive role.

Without a doubt, and without my doing, weather exists, and objects are lost in accordance with it: umbrellas, sunglasses, and gloves hold the record among lost objects. It is thus risky to ask if, aside from changes in the weather, another language is also encoded in such losses. The deciphering of the question is perhaps possible for the analytically trained psychologist, but for the historian searching for external rules and regularities such an attempt would remain fairly alien.

Our disciplines have always investigated forms of appropriation of (and far more rarely forms of aversion to) goods and objects. Those who study rural history focus on inheritance and how field and meadow are consolidated by careful marriage policies; cultural anthropologists have of late investigated shopping; military historians have examined war booty—I am thinking here of San Marco as well as of the honored Louvre and its spoils—and booty and appropriation are topics that remain current and newsworthy. I am thinking also of the art stolen by the Red Army, so rigorously mirroring the habits of the German *Wehrmacht*.

The best work on such forms of appropriation is still Marcel Mauss's 1925 essay "The Gift." In it, he makes clear that the gift is a *fait social total* (a complete social fact), one that is connected to many other facts and actions and with many other social references, and a pattern that is not only individual but that also defines cultures. Though it enriches a culture, it can also destroy it, as Mauss illustrates with the potlatch customs of the Kwakiutl. The gift exchange involves moveable goods that legally change ownership through contract-like agreements. In losing and finding, though the goods do not, admittedly, willingly change owners, it is also a matter of goods that through their unintentional loss appear to be ownerless the moment they are discovered.

A variety of themes are thus raised: the role of chance or accident in history, or rather in the histories that offer a bridge between external and internal worlds, the forms of aversion that arise in losing

objects, the forms of appropriation in finding them, and particularly the expression of highly contradictory but underlying emotional qualities in the relations between objects. Loss is revealed in the process of losing, one might say, and this is not a tautology, for it is only in the crisis of loss that the otherwise self-evident utility of the object is noted.

There are also losses that have only a weak meaning—the pencil I negligently left behind—and those with a strong meaning—the lost wedding band that, aside from the material value it represents, also immediately evokes a fear that faith and love also have gone astray.

From the lost object's point of view—and it is in this direction I will now try to move—one was actually pursued by a tragic fate. To begin with, one conscientiously performed one's duty, warmed hands, looked sharp, provided writing services. But then one was forgotten or lost, giving a more or less clear sign of an unconscious aversion or at least indifference on the part of the owner. Then one was left, uncollected, in the recesses of a lost-and-found office and later added to an auction of found items, at the lowest possible price, to be bid on by a small-minded public eager to snap up bargains. A lack of respect was preprogrammed, and the prices realized at auction signal all too clearly that those wishing to acquire are not bidding with an appropriate passion for the individual objects but rather out of a good mood, less for the items themselves than as part of the communicative experience and the thrill of the bidding.

The lost and unclaimed umbrella demonstrates a misalliance between the disrespect of the loser and the respect of the finder who makes an effort to return it—for naught—as is evident from the full shelves of the central lost-and-found office of the German Federal Railroads in Wuppertal. What is most surprising is the quantity of deposited but unclaimed modern electronic and communication devices. CD players, cassette recorders, and any number of cellular phones can be found there by the boxful, silently attesting to the end of always being reachable. When I visited the central lost-and-found office in Paris (Rue des Mourillons), one of the phones was even ringing, looking for a connection. The officials there made no move to answer.

That such devices are often lost is one thing; that they are not reclaimed is another. It illustrates that the loss is not valued all that highly or that the loss can readily be made good again. Georg Simmel,

in his *Soziologie*, wrote that the “process of objectifying cultural substance, supported by increasing specialization of cultural subject matter, brings about an ever-growing alienation of subjects from their creations, and reaches even into the intimacies of daily life” (1968:572). So in Wuppertal one can also find an entire cupboard full of valuable keys that, though they once should have guaranteed isolation, have now betrayed that claim by their unconscious flight from responsibility (573). When keys, signs of power and a rapidly increasing need for safeguarding, are lost, it arouses one’s suspicion that there might be a lack of security in the consciousness of their owners, or at least in their owner’s pockets. The object’s point of view that I am employing here with some care is dangerous if one forgets that it is only a projection. Yet to wonder how a glove or an umbrella feels reaches far back into the memory and history of childhood.

Loss may evoke memories of childhood, which find expression in the close connection to objects like dolls, blankets, and certain toys, the so-called transitional objects. If the transition from the person to the object and back to the person is unsuccessful, then such objects may turn into fetishes in adulthood. The idolized fetish often has enormous significance and is thought of with passionate attachment. Faust expresses this forcefulness of relation when he says, “Obtain for me a scarf from her breast, a garter of my pleasures of love!” (Goethe 1997:80).

The bourgeois world, which invents, owns, and manages more objects, also loses them more pitilessly. At the same time, and unlike in a village, it creates instruments to make this loss public. In the village, the finder, in anticipation of and obedience to social controls, gives what has been found back to the owner (or hides it without joy and with a bad conscience). By contrast, if a bourgeois finder responds according to mores and morals, then he acts in the manner he himself would wish to experience were he in the same situation; the honest finder is lauded.

While people may not have become more scattered, neither is their attention span divisible at will. In a sense, there is only a limited capacity for attention, and as a result, the least important things are most ignored. The umbrella, as noted above, is unnecessary once the rain has stopped, the gloves unneeded when it stops freezing. Ambivalent items, such as articles of clothing one long wanted to be rid

of, or cellular phones that build a golden cage around their owners by their mad insistence on making one constantly available, may also be shed. The same is true of the burdensome and sorrowful: it is readily understandable that people lose death crowns, as was advertised in Paris, since one does not want to accept the fact that the person has died.

The lost-and-found office is a place where objects are collected, but so are coincidences, though without knowledge about their possible, or even likely, determination by the environment. What remain are certain regularities, as we have learned from chaos theory. In the discrepancy between what is turned in and what is reclaimed, one can see an increasing de-emotionalization of the relationship to objects. One can also see a barrier in transferring the nature of relationships between humans over to relationships with or to objects. The objects mean more to the office than to the loser, for a lost-and-found office is not merely a place that stores lost objects, but is also a moral institution that teaches respect for objects and guards property rights.

Prospective

The line of argument began with a short description of the inwardly directed dream world, traversed madness and superstition, and ended with the losing and finding of objects. This “thickening” of the material also led from the mental processing of conflicts or situations of helplessness to concrete manifestations of approbation and rejection.

This circular movement around the multiple interpretations of presentative symbolism is what holds my reflections together. What I sought to explore is the proximity to a boundary—the boundary between dream and wakefulness, madness and normalcy, superstition and compulsion—and between the daily dealing with things and the psychopathology of everyday life. This boundary runs between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the demands desires make and the objections reality raises, as Freud put it. Drives are the mythological journeymen who work in the world of desires and wishes. What we like to call the “coincidental” needs to be located: the social reality submits to it, while the interior psychic life is far more regulated than we often assume. The relation of external to internal has a far more

branching boundary than we can discern here. The body, the senses, everything is directed outwardly but everything also has a side turned within.

We can cast a glance back once more. We began with dreams, and there is no need to modernize Freud's views. Rather, we have revisited Freud's discovery of the wish-fulfillment function of dreams. Freud once summed it up in a single sentence: the goose dreams of corn. That, he said, was all there was to his dream interpretation. Seen this way, dreams and their world of desires are comparable to the world of the mad—attempts to resolve conflicts between the ego and the external world.

The "brain-cracked" escape the limitations of time and reality. In the worst case, they live in a system of mad compulsions, but in better cases in a system of superstitious compulsions. Religion uses the forms of compulsion and tries through ceremony to establish religious attachment. Superstition is a kind of private religion that tries to keep fear of the future at bay by using rituals that translate psychic insight into real views of the world. Superstition in that fashion tries to address the split between internal and external worlds. And then there is the pathology of losing and finding, a harmless and perhaps even fruitful modality. Losing would be the psychically hidden *Ver-Lust* ("Verlust" literally means "loss," but here it is divided to emphasize *Lust*, desire, in this case the desire to lose). Finding is by contrast a stroke of luck: things are serendipitously found. Coincidence is thus a creative element, less torment than surprise, less rubbish than a transformation of garbage into a basis for the future. Fanatics, like Bolte against Krauss, would have us fight a determined struggle for the right cause. Tübingen *Volkskunde* seeks integration in the shape of Empirical Cultural Research and seeks not to make what has been put asunder the object of research. Rather it aims to discover the in-between as a boundary area between unconscious and conscious, between the clutching of drives and the need to tame them culturally, between law and creativity, between the visible and the invisible, or between the one and the other, for without both the in-between cannot be understood.

*Eberhard-Karls-Universität
Tübingen, Germany*

Notes

1. Thanks go to Madame Abélès, the head librarian of the Laboratoire, who provided me with the references.
2. Under the heading “sexuality” we read here for example from the dream of a twenty-five-year-old: “She is my pal, I see her under the trees and she talks to me, and we tell each other everything we cannot tell to anyone else. We are very happy and we hold each other by the hand” (Duvignaud, Duvignaud, and Corbeau 1979:188).
3. Freud mentions “Fleeing into illness” for the first time in print in “*Allgemeines über den hysterischen Anfall*,” here cited from Freud 1969b:201.

References Cited

- Bächtold-Stäubli, Hanns, ed.
[1927–42] 1987 *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*. Vol. 1. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Behr, Hans-Georg
1999 “Sisypho’ Nachtschicht.” *Kursbuch* 138 (December): 4–15.
- Beland, Hermann
1999 “In Acheron baden? 100 Jahre Psychoanalyse des Traums.” *Kursbuch* 138 (December): 49–71.
- Beradt, Charlotte
1981 *Das Dritte Reich des Traums*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Binswanger, Ludwig
1956 *Drei Formen missglückten Daseins: Verstiegtheit, Verschrobenheit, Manieriertheit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Duvignaud, Jean, Françoise Duvignaud, and Jean Pierre Corbeau
1979 *La banque des Rêves*. Paris: Payot.
- Freud, Sigmund
1969a *Studienausgabe*. Vol. 3. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1969b *Studienausgabe*. Vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1972a *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*. 4th ed. Vol. 4 of *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1972b *Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen*. Vol. 7 of *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1972c *Totem und Taboo*. Vol. 9 of *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1972d *Die Fragen der Layenanalyse*. Vol. 14 of *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
1972e *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. Vol. 15 of *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Verlag.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von
1997 *Faust*. Teil I. dtv-Gesamtausgabe, vol. 9. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Grubrich-Simitis, Ilse
1999 “Sprache. Königsweg zum Unterbewussten.” *Psyche* 53:1–8.

Herbert, Ulrich

- 1996 *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903–1989*. Bonn: Dietz.

Köhle-Hezinger, Christel

- 1999 "Herkunft Heimat. Dörfler, Schulmeister, Grenzgänger." In *Wahn und Massenmord. Perspektiven und Dokumente zum Fall Wagner*, ed. Klaus Foerster, Martin Leonhardt and Gerhard Birchkremer, 39–47. Nürtingen: Sindlinger-Burchartz.

Langer, Susanne

- 1979 *Philosophie auf neuem Wege. Das Symbol im Ritus, im Denken und in der Kunst*. Mittenwald: Mäander Verlag.

Luhman, Niklas

- 1982 *Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Mauss, Marcel

- 2000 *The Gift*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Neuzner, Bernd, and Horst Brandstätter

- 1996 *Wagner: Lehrer, Dichter, Massenmörder*. Frankfurt: Eichborn Verlag.

Rheinz, Hanna

- 1999 "Dunkle Wasser, lästige Chimären." *Kursbuch* 138 (December):19–28.

Simmel, Georg

- 1968 *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Vol. 2 in *Gesammelte Werke*. Berlin: Duncker and Humbolt.