

## Two stains on the ghost

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*The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the application of extensionism to the professional field of verbal therapy. Extensionism is the passing through the borders of close reductionism, in order to explore and occupy the pertinent adjacent worlds. The material is a conversation about a dream in which the patient, Milly, sees her mother, who has been dead for more than ten years, with two stains, on her belly and on her breast, that will certainly lead to her death. From the standpoint of extensionism, Milly is confronted with the possibility of her mother in the dream being not so much a naturalistic mental projection, as a real ghost existing independently in the spiritual world of dead souls. The result of extensionistic procedures is the priority given to the fatal stain on her mother's body over her own sense of anger against her mother, also fully expressed in a manuscript of hers about to be published. A practical consequence is that the manuscript is dedicated to her mother, "To my mother", in a dramatic shift of a narrative line, which transforms a prosecution closing speech into a funeral ceremony, a gift, a prayer, all ritual activities suited to reconciling dead ancestors with descendants who are still living.*

**1. Where do dreams come from?** Scholars of dreams, both past and present, have given at least three answers to the question about their origin: where do dreams come from?

**1.1. Dreams are sent by the gods, or the souls of the dead**, says Homer, who describes five or six examples in the Iliad and the Odyssey. In the Iliad, Zeus sends the Deceitful Dream to Agamemnon, which remains suspended over the king's head, while he is sleeping, and orders him to prepare his army to attack the walls of Troy. In the Odyssey, the goddess Athena appears in a dream to Nausicaa and remains poised above her head, convincing the girl with gentle words to make her way to the river to wash superb clothes, tunics and cloaks.

Again in the Iliad, the ghost of Patroclus, killed in battle by Hector, enters the dream of his friend Achilles, lamenting his lack of burial and funeral ceremony.

**1.2. Dreams come from the irrational soul**, says Plato on the other hand, taking the opposite view to Homer. In the *Republic*, we read that the irrational, irascible and concupiscent soul feeds the most despicable and chaotic passions, the most arrogant desires, going as far as eating and drinking to excess every kind of food and wine, or joining one's own body with that of one's mother or father or any other man or woman, and slaughtering someone, and not stopping at anything however crazy and indecent. 2,500 years later, Freud would have said, similarly, that dreams come from the unconscious.

**1.3. There are dreams that come from inside and dreams that come from outside** the person who dreams, says the Dominican Jacopo Passavanti, agreeing with and juxtaposing the points of view of both Homer and Plato, in one of his sermons for Lent in 1354. Among the dreams that come from outside, some can come

from God, others from the devil. Among the dreams that come from within the person, on the one hand there are the animal, or natural causes, which are the desires and passions of the irrational soul, according to Plato's thinking. On the other hand there are physical causes, related to the movement of the humors, (according to the theory of Hippocrates,) and to each of these belongs a specific category of dreams. Dreams then arise from the way the dreamer is lying, either on his back or his tummy, or on one of the two sides, the right side on the liver, or the left side on the heart.

**2. Consequences.** Reasonably, there will be different consequences depending on which of the three ways the dreams are dealt with. Let's see them and imagine them on one of Milly's dreams, which we have called *the dream of the two stains on the ghost*. Milly is a writer, who has been under analysis for some years, for a form of depression.

**3. The story of Milly's dream.** Milly says she has once more dreamed about her mother, who has been dead for about ten years. Together with her mother, Milly finds herself inside the passenger cabin of a digger or a refuse lorry or a coach. She feels as though she is falling, like being thrown out. At some point she is told that her mother has been found to have two dark stains, one on the belly and one on the breast, which will lead to her death. Then Milly realises that she is to go to sleep in the baggage compartment in the bus.

**4. If dreams come from within the person, from the irrational soul, from the unconscious.** If the therapist were to follow the idea that Milly's dream is an expression of her irrational soul, he or she would be inclined to take the view that it is Milly, as the dreamer, who wants her mother to die now, or who wanted her mother to die in the past. Therefore, the therapist may take the view that Milly herself feels guilty because she shuts herself up in the cargo hold of the bus, hidden down below, as though in hell.

**5. If dreams come from outside the person, sent by the gods or the spirits of the dead.** With Milly, the therapist follows the idea that the mother who appears in her dream comes from outside, not from Milly's unconscious or irrational soul, but from the world of the dead. Therefore, the therapist helps to build a conversation that is congruent with this point of view. For example, he or she begins to tell Milly: "Your mother is back, in a matter of weeks she has returned twice to visit her daughter." When Milly wonders what her mother might want, the therapist responds without hesitation: "She wants a funeral and remembrance." The therapist, in so doing, takes literally, absolutely literally, the story of Milly's dream. If, in the story of her dream, Milly says that her mother is together with her in a passenger cabin of a digger, then, the mother is sharing the cabin of the digger with her daughter. If, in the story of the dream, she says that her mother has two fatal stains on her body, then, her mother has two fatal stains. If the story of the dream says that her mother is likely to be thrown into the rubbish, then, her mother runs that risk. With this procedure, the therapist disengages from Plato and Freud, first of all by making the mother the subject of the sentences: it is the mother who returns, it is the mother who wants the funeral. In addition, as the second movement, in order to be able to concentrate the story of the dream not so much on Milly but on the main character of the story of the dream, that is Milly's mother who returns from the dead, it is necessary for the therapist to operate two extensionism procedures: spatial and spiritual (see Addenda).

**6. Spatial extensionism.** If we interpret the term extensionism as meaning the breaching of the limits of narrow reductionism in order to explore the adjacent worlds relevant to the world of origin, then, by spatial extensionism we mean the operation that the therapist carries out by removing the specter of the mother from the internal space of the unconscious to allow her that space which she actually already occupies in the space outside the soul of the person narrating the dream, in the space of the story of the dream where the bus, the digger, etc. are.

**7. Spiritual extensionism.** The other extensionism procedure is correctly indicated by the term spiritual extensionism. The therapist suggests, alludes, gives cues to convince Milly that her mother is neither the corpse thrown into a common grave, nor the product of a fantasy of her own irrational soul, but an entity with an independent existence in another world, the spiritual world, no less real than the existing entities in the material world, a ghost which can come back from the spiritual, supernatural world to the natural world.

**8. Consequences.** The consequences of the extensionist procedures of the therapist are dramatic. A first consequence is that Milly agrees to talk with the spirit of her mother to the point of confessing to the therapist her hope that her mother will be able to hear her: "I hope my mother hears me". And the trader dealer answers with a definite encouragement to conversation: "She is sure to hear you". The second consequence is what Milly calls "the change in the story line". This is as follows. Milly has completed a manuscript that is ready to be published, in which pride of place is given to all her disappointments and anger towards her mother, in a kind of indictment. During the conversation, the dramatic change of perspective occurs, culminating in Milly's decision to dedicate the book to her mother. "To my mother." The indictment becomes a proof of love, a funeral ceremony, a prayer, a gift of charity. All of which converge towards the reconciliation of dead ancestors with their living descendants. In this act, the results of spatial extensionism (my mother is not growing inside me as a product of my irrational soul but lives in her own independent space outside) and of spiritual extensionism (the place where my mother lives and moves independently is the supernatural world of the spiritual entities who are allowed to pass from the immaterial to the material world). These two results establish the leap from the introspective psychological perspective, where it could be a matter of identifying Milly's feelings of guilt towards her mother and the possible measures to be taken now to come to terms with these past emotions, to the current empirical relational perspective where it is a question of what suitable action can be taken by two individuals who meet, here Milly and her mother, when the ghosts of dead ancestors return for reconciliation with living descendants.

**9. Extensionism and story-telling.** In story-telling, the two suggested consequences attempt to re-establish the multiplicity of the possible points of view of the narrator, taking it away from the reductionism contained in the slogan 'lupus in fabula', de te fabula narratur ', 'lector in fabula ', according to which every tale is the story of the narrator who, unconsciously, is the main character or the hero.

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## **Appendix**

### **Addenda A. Milly's dream recorded and transcribed.**

Milly: I had another dream about her. But what's the point of all these dreams about my mother? It was a dream very like that of Persephone, as if there were the same connections with the pallets of the meeting. Only that this one was much more disgusting, even sadder, no way out. The dream begins like this. I'm with someone who could be my mother or my husband, only one of them or both, all wrapped up in blankets, clothes, all together, all sweaty, I didn't know if I should take them off, those rags, off me at least. And the thing about the dream was that it was about rolling away. Because it was as if we were in those cabins of big diggers, diggers or refuse lorries, when things are thrown where they have to go. There was this feeling of falling, of being thrown out, although, because of the rags and blankets we were wrapped in, we wouldn't have got hurt. But this digger or garbage truck was part of something, like a caravan, as you see in some American films, and it was all very threatening. We're in there, as if I'm talking to someone who's telling me something. But I'm being told something that's got nothing to do with the situation, that my mother and Antonio are eating off tiny stools, like in a tent. And I'm wondering how two plates can fit onto a stool like that. The fact is that I'm also told that my mother's been found with a dark stain on her belly and on her breast. I'm also told that she's going to die. I'm there and there's this person I'm talking to who's informed me, who's told me they're sending letters to ask for funding. Straightaway I think these letters are not right, and I write one, like a draft, asking for the funding of fireproof tents. And I think about clothes that catch fire, about women who set fire to other women's clothes. Then I'm going to

go to bed. The fact is that this space clearly turns out to be a coach, and I'm going to go to sleep in the place where they put the bags down below, where there are these two side tailgates. This dream was disgusting and painful, and I also thought, "I don't want to waste any more time with her."

### **Addenda B. Definitions of reductionism and extensionism.**

Reductionism and extensionism are two movements of to and fro, in and out, within the boundaries of a given domain of entities, as objects or the characteristics of the objects could be, facts but also theories. The boundaries are used to define, to contain, to include the objects. But objects contained in the domain that expand to absorb other objects of adjacent domains can also cross through these boundaries. One of the best known and most frequently studied ways of reductionism is the idea according to which the objects of a special domain, for example, the mental domain, are traceable to the biological or neurophysiological domain. Another form of reductionism is the idea according to which the individual subjects of special domains such as chemistry, biology, psychology, may be absorbed and explained by the domain of physics. For objects that are reduced to a basic domain, we say: "they are nothing more than" 'a thought or an emotion, they are merely modifications of this or that part of the brain.' In the sense in which we now speak of reductionism, even psychoanalysis is a form of reductionism, when it brings all the phenomena of psychological suffering of a person back to the conflicts stored in the unconscious mind stemming from the desire to kill one of the two parents and to merge with the other. Both Freud's theory of dreams and Plato's theory of dreams are reductionist because they maintain that all dreams can be traced back to the same source, from inside the person, whether it be from the irrational soul or the unconscious. But Homer's theory is also reductionist when he traces the source of all dreams back to the gods and the souls of the dead.

On the contrary, Passavanti's theory of dreams suggesting different origins for the phenomena of different dreams that, empirically, seem to come from outside rather than from within the person, we call extensionist. These phenomena could be humours circulating in the body, the eating of food and drinking of wine, the position of the stars, the events of the day before the dream, the way of lying on one's left side, or right side, or back, not forgetting the dreams expressed by the passions of the soul, or sent by the gods and by devils and ghosts. We can give a definition of extensionism, contrasting it with the definition of reductionism already provided. Extensionism is the theory that tends to include, to incorporate, in the field of study it starts from, every adjoining phenomenon that somehow appears connected with the characteristics that define the original field. For example, in biology we have a recent case of extensionism in the addition of two letters to the previous DNA nucleus. Other examples of extensionism in psychoanalysis can be considered in the extension of psychoanalytic therapy to psychosis. As well as this, there is the transition from the psychoanalysis of Freud to Lacan's psychoanalysis or to Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis, or to systemic family therapy, or even, as far as the writer himself is concerned, to conversationalism. Along the same lines, another recent example of extensionism is the approach of verbal conversationalism to *bilateral verbal trade*. Another example of extensionism can be found in the exoskeletons that enable an extension of the human body through robotic devices capable of transmitting signals from the brain to the limbs and bypassing any paralyzed marrow.

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