

FREUD'S ROME – PHOBIA AND PHANTASY

Conference in Rome, 23-24 June 2010, organized by Andreas Mayer in cooperation with the American Academy in Rome

In a famous passage in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud invokes the history of Rome to construct a „phantasy“ about the preservation of the past within a psychical entity. All monuments and buildings from different historical periods would then coexist in the same place, nothing would have perished. Freud declares this phantasy to be no more than an „idle game“ which would only serve to demonstrate „how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms“. The way this epistemological lesson is articulated seems to be paradoxical: while the phantasy is spun out at some length by conjuring an excess of visual stimuli before the readers' mental eye, its only function seems to be to make the sheer impossibility of visualization apparent. If the Rome phantasy is so firmly relegated to the status of a mere game, why is the fascination with a synoptic view of the multiple layers of the past given such free rein?

The sources of Freud's lifelong fascination with the city of Rome and its multi-layered history date back to a strange phobia which haunted him during the formative period of psychoanalysis. When stuck during the writing of his book on dreams, Freud turned repeatedly to the study of the topography of Rome. Despite this strong desire to travel to Rome, he did not manage to reach the eternal city during his first Italian journeys. Freud interpreted his Roman dreams in the light of a „deeply neurotic“ wish dating back to his highschool days and his identification with Hannibal, the Semitic general whose troops destroyed most of the Roman army in a series of tactical battles in the Second Punic War without ever marching into the city. Freud's own political interpretation of the „Rome neurosis“ has been put aside by a psychoanalytic literature which reinterpreted it in terms of „ambivalence“ or even of Oedipal conflict.

Whereas the biographical and sociological dimensions of Freud's Roman phobia have been extensively studied and commented upon by historians and psychoanalysts, the epistemological aspects of his engagement with art, literature and architecture on Roman soil have received less attention.). Instead of further

dramatizing Freud's own encounter with Rome, this will entail studying more closely the extent to which his repeated inspection of the city's architecture and some of its monuments found its way into the psychoanalytic practice. In this context, one has to follow the textual and material traces of the Italian journeys within the intricate arrangement of Freud's peculiar private museum which served as his consulting room. The Rome phantasy in which the observer's eye is free to move and superimpose many historical layers from the city's past, then, may be read not only as a response to the successful resolution of Freud's Roman phobia, but also against the perspective of the patient lying on a couch surrounded by a multiplicity of antiquities and images whose concrete functions are far from understood.

Instead of adopting the common format of a scientific conference, this event is structured, not unlike the *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as a walk where talks and discussions will take place in the sites and in front of those monuments which incited the phobias, dreams and phantasies Freud dealt with in various texts. The walk will lead from the hills of the Janiculum and the Aurelian walls, to the bas-relief of the walking woman in the Chiaramonti collection in the Vatican Museum known as „Gradiva“, to Michelangelo's Moses at S. Pietro in Vincoli and finally, to the Forum Romanum.

Participants:

Gerd Blum (Münster)

John Forrester (Cambridge, UK)

Elizabeth Lunbeck (Nashville)

Andreas Mayer (Berlin)

Francesco Orlando (Pisa)

Nathalie Richard (Paris)