

dream machine: cathexis, sequencing, exaptation, divination, epiphany



In his remarkable book, *Iconostasis*, the Russian mystic-scholar Pavel Florensky analyzed the curious logic of dreams *initiated* by an external event which was reproduced, inside the dream, as the *terminal* event. How it was possible for elaborate narratives to unfold in the “non-time” of the single event that served both as first and last has but one possible answer: that the dream existed *before* the event, and that the event triggered the sequential narrative, which was *imagined* in reverse. This visual-mechanical model raises the question of how the prior dream structure was constructed, how the external event is able to trigger a “final moment” in the dream story, and how the reading of the dream is opposite.

In his equally remarkable book, *Finnegans Wake*, the Irish author James Joyce presented a graphically succinct model for his story of twins, rivals for the love of their sister, Issy: a vesica pisces — equal circles that intersect so that the perimeter of each passes through the center of the other. An equally succinct but more provocative condensation is provided by the Greek letter, phi, ϕ , modeling the idea of a city with a river running through it, a continuing motif throughout the novel. This letter also describes the system by which cities were founded by twins, one of whom was killed or already dead. The pair were held apart by a diametrical line, and allowed to meet only in exceptional circumstances.

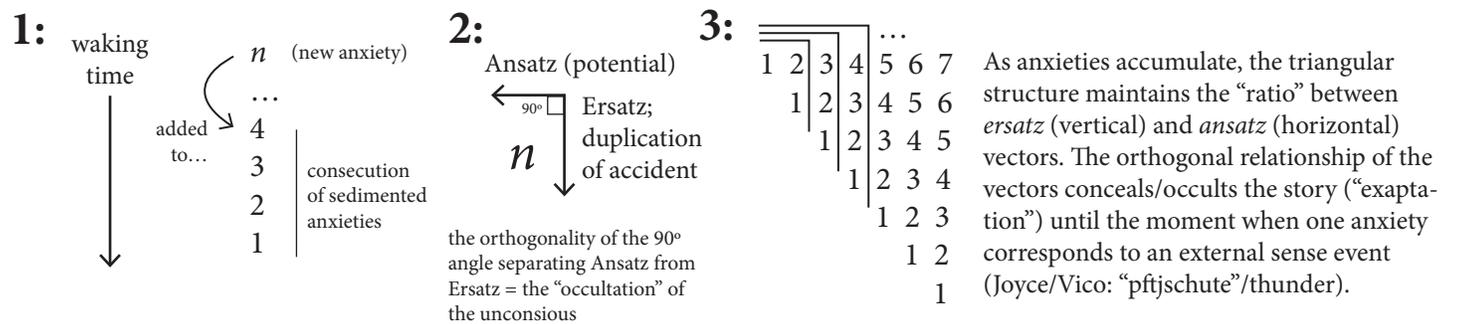


THE AIM: to geometricize the “event-dream” to show how the initial stimulus is remembered as the concluding action. The model will suggest relations between dream construction and recollection that will extend, more generally, to the techniques of observation and writing in Joyce’s Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, where sedimentation of detail, both in the writing process and the narrative flow, intensify in sudden moments of epiphany. Joyce himself formalized the relation of narrative “palintropos” (opposites that temporally alternate) to the super-symmetry of “palintonos” (held in constant tension) in the diagram presented in Finnegans Wake: a vesica pisces formalizing the theme, repeated throughout the novel, of a city with a river running through it. The coincidental logic of foundation rituals reported by anthropologists and preserved in myth confirms a similar relation of palintropos and palintonos, making the Wake’s theme of twins competing for the love of Issy, associated with the flow of water, both a key to primordial structures of history as well as a principle of artistic constructions that exploit those structures or theories, such as Vico’s, that explain them.

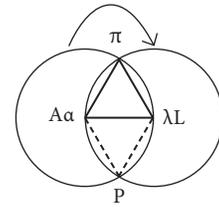
The event as a fall (Joyce: “pftjschute”; Vico/Joyce: thunder)

In the classic example of the event-dream, a nobleman anxious about his safety in the months following the Revolution recounts a dream initiated by the fall of a framed painting hanging above his bed. The dream, though it contained numerous detailed scenes of suspicion, flight, capture, imprisonment, negotiation, and finally execution, concluded with the moment when the guillotine blade fell on the dreamer’s neck — corresponding precisely with the accidental fall of the painting onto the dreamer’s neck. The dreamer remembered the dream in correct narrative order, say 1 to 7, but the event components must have been generated in reverse, 7 to 1. Consecutive order was maintained, but the ‘1’ was both an initial (generative) event and a final narrative event (*anagnorisis*).

Thesis: (1) The dream narrative was “already formed” in the dreamer’s unconscious, the result of a “sedimentation” of anxieties encountered sequentially in everyday experience. (2) Each anxiety had two components, or “vectors,” one that converted it to a fantasy substitution, an “Ersatz,” while the other vector constructed the complementary form, “Ansatz,” a “lucky guess” able to relate within a longer synthetic string of events. (3) The potential conversion of ersatz anxieties to ansatz stories exists at all scales, but as anxieties accumulate, a triangular structure — exaptation, or potentiality — evolves to shape the collection into a synthetic story with beginning, middle, and end.



Joyce took copious notes, scribbled on the pages of small notebooks he carried with him at all times. His method of collecting the “surplus refuse” of daily exchanges corresponded to the dreamer’s waking collection of anxieties; the notebook provided the basis for *exaptation* (future re-purposing) of these details within a narrative order, duplicating experience’s actual creation of “epiphanies” *standing both inside and outside* the flow of events.



the ersatz/ansatz anxiety/event-structure can be “extimated” (pulled into waking experience entirely) in a process that continually “dreams itself” (as in the experience of lucid dreaming) by using the sedimentation of experiential events in a mirror-sequence creating a “palintonic” tension between actuality and memory. Memory takes place as events take place; the events are *memory* used as imagination. This is a *déjà-vu* like experience that allows the past to overtake the future” (Bergson).

Joyce modeled this extimation process as a *vesica piscis*, intersecting (super-)circles allowing twinned opposites the “exception” of meeting along the line defined by Aa/λL, the “river” of Anna Livia Plurabelle (Liffy in the case of Dublin).