

A REVOLUTION IN CONSCIOUSNESS

DOLFI TROST'S *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE*

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Dolfi Trost (1916–66) was a member of a Romanian surrealist cell group founded in 1940 as the German occupation of France began, and disbanded with the communist takeover of Romania in 1947. Although this group was not able to publish its work, hold exhibitions, or even meet in public until 1945, a great deal of its most intense activity took place in wartime Bucharest, in secret and behind drawn blinds. Like the *Main à Plume* group in Paris, the Romanian surrealist group of the forties was a wartime surrealism—isolated, passionate, and under siege. The group's core was composed of Trost, Gellu Naum, Virgil Teodorescu, Gherasim Luca, and Paul Păun, but its members frequently worked with fellow travelers, including the artist Jules Perahim and the artist and resident *femme fatale* Nadine Krainik, who acted as a liaison between the Bucharest and Paris surrealist groups and continued to be involved in surrealist doings until well into the sixties. Naum and Luca in particular were close to the artists Victor Brauner and Jacques Hérold, both involved with the Parisian surrealists from the early thirties. They were all part of what could be called a Romanian archipelago within the surrealist movement led by André Breton.

Of the group's core members, three were Jewish: Trost, Păun, and Luca. All three managed, in the fifties (Trost and Luca) or sixties (Păun), to escape communist Romania to Israel. In Tel Aviv, Trost and Luca continued with their surrealist experiments, texts, and tracts, but the two

began to disagree more and more in their views, and when they finally came—literally—to blows, their friendship never recovered. At some point after this falling out, Trost wrote a seventy-page handwritten letter to Breton, titled “L’âge de la rêverie.” This letter, slightly revised, later formed one part of Trost’s 1953 book *Visible and Invisible*, published with Eric Losfeld’s Éditions Arcanes.

This book, along with two other of Trost’s books, is cited in “Balance-Sheet Program for Desiring Machines,” an appendix to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. “One already finds,” they write, “in Gherasim Luca and Trost, authors whose work goes strangely unrecognized, an anti-oedipal conception of dreams which strikes us as being very fine.”¹ In pointing out that the “manifest” content of dreams is far more important than their “latent” content, Trost

reproaches Freud . . . with having failed to recognize the dream as a machine for communication with the outside world, with having fused dreams to memories rather than to deliriums, with having constructed a theory of the compromise that robs dreams as well as symptoms of their inherent revolutionary significance.²

Trost operates a reversal in which what the dream must neutralize—by treating it symbolically—is not a troubling or taboo content arising from the unconscious, but rather regressive and repressive elements issuing from our memories of the waking world. Trost’s and Luca’s anti-oedipal texts

[bring] out an unconscious alive with revolution, straining toward a being, a non-oedipal man and woman, the “freely mechanical being,” “the projection of a human group still to be discovered,” whose mystery resides in its function and not in its interpretation.³

The second part of *Visible and Invisible*, in fact, begins with a dream of a special kind. Trost’s account of this dream alternates with theses on the nature, functioning, and significance of dreaming, but it quickly becomes apparent that dreaming itself is not the point. The dream he relates is

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “Balance-Sheet Program for Desiring Machines,” trans. Robert Hurley, in Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1995), 132.
2 Ibid., 132.
3 Ibid., 133.

important because of what it reveals and what it makes possible: an experience of oneself against the backdrop of the universe—the universe of galaxies and gas clouds, of black holes and of distant stars hundreds of times bigger than the sun. It puts the human being and the universe, in a sense, face-to-face. For Trost, there are two ways of being in the world, the historical and the cosmological. The function of history, as a web of human events and relations, is to draw a comforting veil over the night sky and make us forget where—and what—we really are. The dream, at least in its “cosmic” mode, reminds us.

Trost also has much to say about what Deleuze and Guattari call “deliriums,” and particularly about schizophrenia, which is not to be understood in its psychiatric sense. Both dreams and madness, he writes, have the capacity to place us immediately before the “world of stars and planets.” For Trost, the dreamer and the schizophrenic are caught up in a dialectical process in which they turn back toward and work directly upon and within the world of daylight and reality that they had hitherto abandoned. In this way they arrive at something entirely new: a luminous and revolutionary way of living, what Trost calls life-within-life. Trost’s understanding of schizophrenia is in many ways similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*: “Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive or reproductive desiring machines.”⁴ For the anti-oedipal schizophrenic, there is no self and nonself, no inside and outside. He is connected to everything, and everything can be “take[n] into himself, as in a dream.”⁵

This schizophrenic, multiply-connected, and nondualistic way of being is, for Trost, allied with a certain mode of thought: a thought that “turns upon itself,” taking itself for its own object. It is consciousness that is constantly aware of itself as consciousness. This self-regarding consciousness is in turn distinct from, but linked to, the “cosmic” consciousness made possible by the dream. Trost feels, as well, that those who have attained this form of consciousness are fundamentally, “ontologically” different from those who have not. This is the context in which his readers should understand his ideas about a new “race” of human beings: anyone might discover in himself or herself the capacity to become this

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 5.

5 Here they quote Georg Büchner’s short story “Lenz.” *Ibid.*, 2.

new kind of being; and indeed, Trost writes, the role of any revolutionary collective should be to hasten and disseminate the necessary moment of awakening. The revolution—by which he means, simultaneously, the surrealist revolution, the liberation of the proletariat, and the freeing of human expression in all its forms from oppression of all kinds—must incorporate self-regarding consciousness and “cosmic” consciousness within its unfolding, instead of setting them aside as a kind of mystical idealism.

I have chosen to translate the title of the first section of *Visible and Invisible*, “La méthode des ombres,” as “Shadow Tactics” mainly because Trost here incorporates dream, madness, and poetry (this last understood in the surrealist sense as a way of being, thinking, and creating rather than as the simple creation of poems) into a discussion of revolutionary strategy and collectivity. However, given his fascination with both astronomy and astrology, Trost might easily have been thinking of the “shadow method” that Galileo used to determine the height of lunar mountains: knowing the length of a cast shadow and the angle of the sun, the height of anything can be calculated, even on the moon. This, as Trost might have thought, is a way of using the intangible (sunlight, shadow) to measure and understand the tangible. What he calls the “invisible,” then, should not be pursued for its own sake, as in occult and spiritualist traditions, but should instead act as a kind of fulcrum for thought. The “invisible” is not a world of spirits and occult forces, but instead that which permits the discovery of a perceptible but as yet inaccessible “concrete unknown”—like the lunar mountains that Galileo could not travel to touch.

Visible and Invisible is often difficult for a contemporary reader to approach. This is partly because its audience, whether Trost liked it or not, was a group of readers to whom a promiscuous mix of Freud, Marx, alchemy, and specifically surrealist concepts (including automatic writing and objective chance) would not be unfamiliar. It is also because Trost took a passionate amateur’s approach to the theories, philosophies, and sciences that he addressed and conjoined, which often makes his essays read like works of conceptual art. A reference to René Guénon might be followed by a paragraph on nonfigurative art and then by a poetic reimagining of the Hebrew alphabet.⁶ Since the book cannot appear here in its

6 “*Mem*, the unconscious that chooses a conscious to its taste . . . *samech*, the serpent of sleep surrendering to fate . . . *tsadé*, disillusionment vanquished by the knife of poetry . . . *tau*, the power to destroy the nightmare.” Dolfi Trost, *Visible et invisible* (Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1953), 85.

entirety, I instead attempt to follow one particular thread of argument across two of its “chapters.” Within what has been translated, I have had to omit some passages whose meaning relies on concepts explained in detail in other parts of the book. I have also omitted one footnote that is part of a series of footnotes that bear no strict connection to the main text and tell a separate story: that of a woman named X, a kind of natural medium and delirious freethinker who speaks in riddles and aphorisms. Since the other footnotes in this series do not appear in the translated section, I did not want to preserve this one out of its context. Finally, since the chapters in a sense stand alone, working out similar ideas in parallel and in widely varying modes, I felt that to switch the order of the book’s first and second chapters would aid the comprehension of the whole.