

INTRODUCTION: Signposts

Looking for something else, I came across an anecdote in Theodor Reik's *The Search Within*. One evening, in the Kaertnerstrasse in Vienna, Reik met his master, Sigmund Freud, and accompanied him home:

We talked mostly about analytic cases during the walk. When we crossed a street that had heavy traffic, Freud hesitated as if he did not want to cross. I attributed the hesitancy to the caution of the old man, but to my astonishment he took my arm and said, 'You see, there is a survival of my old agoraphobia, which troubled me much in younger years'.¹

I didn't recall Freud attributing a significant role to agoraphobia in his intellectual biography. And a quick scan through some of the many biographies and memoirs of the great man reinforced this impression: if mentioned at all, Freud's 'slight phobia' was dismissed as of little importance. Reik, by contrast, took an entirely different view. Far from passing over Freud's fear of open spaces as a personal quirk without further significance, he attributed to it a central role in the history of psychoanalytic theory.

According to Reik, in Freud's 'confession of a lingering fear of crossing open places' can be found 'the hidden missing link between his primarily psychological interests and his later occupation with the neuroses'.² Freud recognized that, 'in addition to the wish to help

nervous patients, there was the demand: Physician, heal yourself'. To heal himself, he had to 'move beyond psychology's distinction between the mind of the sick patient and the mind of the normal person'. This was the appeal of the dream – as 'an abnormal mental product created by normal people', it supplied 'the common ground of normal and abnormal mental activities'. Dreams 'secured the bridge from one shore to the other, from the limited island of his own neurosis to the larger continent of general pathology and psychology'.³ However, the personal *motivation* of Freud's ingenious bridge-building was, if Reik is to be believed, his own agoraphobia, or fear of crossing open places.

Was it possible, I wondered, that, at the origin of psychoanalysis an *environmental neurosis* had been repressed? Interpreting his agoraphobia as a neurotic symptom concealing something else, Freud turned away from the possibility that his hesitation at the roadside was an entirely *reasonable* response to the sickness of the urban scene. The 'heavy traffic' of which he was afraid was not, in the first instance, his own unruly instinctual drives. It was due to a more mundane and measurable form of driving: the immensely increased volume and accelerated pace of traffic in Vienna's newly enlarged roads and squares. This speculation suggested two further questions: Why did Freud repress the unconscious drives shaping his environment? And what would be the consequence of attending to these and therapeutically *unrepressing* them?

Repressed Spaces is the meditation produced by these questions. The book's four parts can be thought of as successive moments in a journey towards the centre of a city. 'Turning Out' is a short modern history of the term *agoraphobia*. The clinical literature on agoraphobia is immense, highly repetitive and inconclusive. The non-clinical literature is the opposite: sparse, ambiguous and highly creative. The efforts of scholars such as Esther da Costa Meyer and Anthony Vidler mean that the cultural history of agoraphobia is relatively well-trodden ground. Since its first clinical description in the late 1860s, cultural critics and clinical psychologists have disputed its nature. For critics of modernity, it is a symptom of urban estrangement. The soul doctors, on

the other hand, have treated it as a symptom of psychic displacement. Neither orthodoxy, it seems to me, grasps the point that, whatever else it may be, agoraphobia is a *movement inhibition*. Teasing out the implications of this, the condition can be relocated within a neglected history of urban mobility and its discontents. When this is done, the immobile elements of the urban scene are also freed up, and a different relation between the pedestrian and the city square comes into focus.

The next part of the book, 'Driving', takes up the first questions I posed after reading Reik's anecdote about Freud. Psychoanalysis, of course, wanted to locate the drives, or instincts, in a realm of the psyche known as the unconscious. But a traffic that was more easily accessible, and whose chaotic violence matched anything the Oedipus complex could conjure up, existed outside every late nineteenth-century Viennese doorway. Freud had compelling psychological and professional reasons for internalizing the anxieties he experienced every day in negotiating the wide-open places of Vienna. His space fear was, in fact, widely shared. What is interesting is that, although Freud repressed his own movement inhibition, the repressed returned. The dream territory he set out to map surprisingly resembled the *environmental* unconscious of the modern city.

When the term *agora* is regarded as a synonym for space, there is a temptation to treat agoraphobia pathologically. This changes, though, if it is recognized that it defines a particular kind of space, or place, with a distinctive physical form and political history. This also applies to the equivalent terms in German (*Platzangst*) and French (*crainte des places*). The third part of *Repressed Spaces*, 'Alighting', is a road-map to the history of a term which, in ancient Greece, meant not only the place of political assembly, but the assembly gathered there. Something else emerges from this day-tour into the remote past. The democratic space of the agora turns out to be twinned with the wilderness. The traffic between these opposite environments suggests why agoraphobes feel anxiously torn between exposure and suffocation, solitude and the crowd, and why, either way, they fear being hunted.

The section entitled 'Meeting' tries to make good the promise

of the subtitle. Many modern artists and writers have devoted their talents to exploring and depicting the modern faces of agoraphobia. One thinks of Munch, Beckett, Giacometti, Breton, Joe May, Rilke, Douanier Rousseau, di Chirico or Canetti. But an agoraphobic poetics is not a poetics of agoraphobia. It is one thing to characterize the smoothly imprisoning wastes of modern estrangement, quite another to track them. A different design on place-making is required to transform places of gathering into meeting places. Such a design can, perhaps, only emerge when the repressed spaces (of which agoraphobia is the symptom) are recognized as relations, as movement-multiples, as cloud-like formations and deformations of groupings, and their well-being as dependent on arrangements made uniquely for this occasion.

Agoraphobia can be temporal as well as spatial. Perhaps under the influence of another kind of marketplace-induced anxiety, most writers blithely pretend to address the living (the reader). But most writing is addressed to the dead. It is from the dead that the ideas come, and the echoes of their thoughts, from which a book like *Repressed Spaces* is composed, return to them. It is this other conversation that gives books their liveliness. How horrible it is when a writer perpetuates the fiction that all arose Minerva-like from the brow of genius. A double debt of gratitude is owed to those who have passed away and who, besides their own writings, gathered together the writings of others and bequeathed them to posterity. *Repressed Spaces* would not have been written but for a serendipitous coincidence: the Australian Centre's acquisition of the Alan Davies library. Davies, for many years Professor of Political Science at the University of Melbourne, died in 1986. His forethought in securing the rich and curious history of his reading for posterity created a meeting place where, otherwise, there must have been a void.

It seems strange to exculpate a shade, but I hasten to say what will be obvious to all who, unlike me, had the privilege of knowing Davies: the labyrinth I have found in his library is entirely my own. I am indebted in this regard to the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne and to the Australian Research Council, whose joint and

generous support gave me the means to spin my thread, and let it out. Sign-pointers along the way included Gregory Burgess, Horst Trossbach, Donald Bates and Peter Davidson. My thanks to them all.

Lastly, the signs in the labyrinth deserve a word. As *Repressed Spaces* is loosely conceived as a drive from the periphery of a city towards its centre, the use of road signs as section breaks is logical enough. Collecting them for this purpose, though, I couldn't help but begin to read them differently. Their verbal formulae, previously so familiar that their meaning was absorbed unconsciously, now came into focus – and grew correspondingly strange. Having compared the instinctual traffic of Freud's unconscious to the 'moving chaos' of the modern city's wheeled and pedestrian traffic, I found the comparison working in the opposite direction. Instead of regulating my movement through physical streets and squares, the signs pointed in the direction of another city, one archaeologically buried beneath the present structure.

This other city is the one travellers make for. Signs are interpreters. The divinity of interpretation is Hermes, who is also the patron saint of travellers. Residents don't need signs, only foreigners do. Only the homeless have to have home pointed out to them. In this sense, all signs are signs of not belonging, of coming from somewhere else. Then, logically, a city in whose streets signs cluster like bees is designed for strangers. It is constitutionally home for the other. Seeing signs in this way I became, again, a foreigner. I might have been entering Vienna, not Melbourne. Travelling again, I could inhabit Kierkegaard's dictum, 'Becoming is a movement *from* some place, but becoming oneself is a movement *at* that place.'⁴

