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L'art démaquillé

The Case of Richard Freeman

Born in Renfrew Ontario in 1935, Richard Freeman was raised to be a psychic medium by his mother who was a card reader in the circus. At a young age he was encouraged to develop so-called "trance" abilities, abilities which helped him escape from his fatherless childhood and lack of social adjustment. His mother held "seances" every Sunday to supplement her welfare income. In 1953, Freeman participated in his first seance as a medium and achieved his first contact with Culture X.

At the 1954 death of his mother, Freeman continued the Sunday meetings on his own. His "spirit guide"¹ was a woman from Culture X, a culture so-named because Freeman never managed to locate the civilization in time or place. During his trance sessions Freeman had the literal sense of entering, into another world, a fully developed culture with a history and mythology of its own. The members of the seance meetings posed questions to the woman from Culture X and proposed theories about X's whereabouts. Freeman, however, became slowly possessed by this new world.

Over the ten year period in which Freeman elaborated on Culture X, he pieced together the history of that culture. The people of X, like those from many early societies, sprang from chthonic goddess worship. Men and women originally lived in harmony, but as the culture evolved² the female and male members of the society divided and the women began sleeping in different parts of the house, developing their own foods, myths, and arts. This division became increasingly frictional until the males were ousted from the city by the more aggressive females and were obliged to set up a new city one kilometer down river. The male culture seems to have subsequently degenerated, adopting a number of decadent practices. The females, unwilling to witness the extinction of their society, were forced to embrace the practice of impregnating themselves by the weakest males available to them — their own sons. After impregnating his mother the adolescent boy was expelled from the woman's city and condemned to certain death in the inferno of the men's world.

In the ten years over which Freeman concocted this remarkable fantasy he became more and more obsessed with Culture X. He began speaking and writing in the X language and cooking their foods in his kitchen. He did many drawings of their costumes, instruments, and buildings, eventually resorting to three dimensional models in order to explore the buildings in more detail. By 1963 his house was completely filled with evidence of his fantasy. The situation reached a crisis when his spirit guide, the woman from Culture X, came to him in a trance state and announced to him that he himself was from Culture X, and that the only reason he had access to the culture was because the spirit guide was his mother! She claimed that he had been killed in the terrible genocide of the entire male population — the cataclysmic event which ended the history of Culture X — before his mother had had the opportunity to sleep with him.

This event marked the complete breakdown in Freeman's psychology. Terrified, he burned down his house and all the artifacts in it. He was admitted to the Montreal Institute of Behavioural Psychology in 1964, under the care of Dr. Ruth Evelyn. Dr. Evelyn immediately recognized Freeman as a victim of an extraordinarily developed Oedipus complex. Freeman could not talk about his childhood, however, because he was completely swallowed up by his schizophrenic fantasy. Dr. Evelyn decided upon the radical treatment of entering Freeman's fantasy and exposing its unreality from the inside. Unfortunately, during her two years of analysis, she was unable to find any faults in Freeman's seamless construction — it was logical and complete to a degree never before seen in psychiatric study.

With an eye to publication, Dr. Evelyn embarked upon a dangerous



Richard Freeman, *Sketch. City of Women*, 1960.
 Gouache on paper; 65 x 42 cm. Richard Purdy, 1987
 Richard Freeman in trance, 1987. Photo : Daniel Dion

treatment. While Freeman was in a “trance” state she sedated him, lowering his resistance and thereby permitting the woman from Culture X have her way with him. In the following weeks Freeman was indeed cured — he could no longer enter Culture X or call up the woman. In Dr. Evelyn’s mind this represented the unification of his divided psyche and a return to reality. Freeman, however, was demoralized and suicidal. Nine weeks after this final treatment Freeman began to show the signs of phantom pregnancy — distended abdomen, sore legs and vomiting. This condition of pseudocyesis (phantom pregnancy) persisted for six months as his psychological condition deteriorated dramatically.

On March 29, 1968, Dr. Evelyn was called to Freeman’s room. He claimed to have aborted. Returning to his room with a sedative, Dr. Evelyn found Freeman’s bed in flames. He could not be found inside or outside of the room. Only the charred remnants of his slippers remained on the floor. Dr. Evelyn’s final report offered no logical explanation, but cited “spontaneous combustion”, a phenomenon well known within occult circles. The following year, Dr. Evelyn retired from psychiatric practice with the mystery of Freeman’s disappearance left unresolved.

Richard Purdy
 Artist

NOTES

1. In parapsychological circles the “spirit guide” is the disembodied voice which feeds information to the trance medium while in a trance state. See Jane Roberts, *Seth*; or the work of Edgar Cayce.
2. We recognize this phenomenon as the “moving away from unconsciousness” best represented by the Greek writer Echylus and dear to Jungian interpretation.