

The Cognitive And Dynamic Unconscious:

A Critical and Historical Perspective

EVER SINCE FREUD'S EPOCH making discoveries in the treatment of mental illness, which included the method of "free association", and an understanding of the Oedipus Complex, considerable attention has been paid to unconscious processes by psychologists. The interest which Freud sparked, however, has given rise to some widely shared misconceptions. Contrary to popular mythology, Freud did not discover the unconscious. Indeed, before the unconscious became a respectable topic for clinical investigation, it had been a matter for some considerable speculation by Leibniz and Kant, who approached it as a branch of epistemology, or what came to be known as *Erkenntnistheorie*.

Fortunately, the last few decades have witnessed the growth of a new literature intended to rectify this popular misconception. L. L. Whyte's *The Unconscious Before Freud* and Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* are merely two of the better known installments available to the general public. This being so, any attempt to canvass some of the same ground once more must furnish some plausible *raison d'être*, or at least some basis in contemporary debate as its point of departure. Unfortunately, contemporary approaches to the relationship between the dynamic and cognitive unconscious are often oblivious to the historical background, notwithstanding the last few decades having witnessed a growing collaboration between cognitive theory and psychoanalysis, illustrated, for example, by the work of Rapaport, Peterfreund, Pribram and Gill, etc. (Pribram & Gill, 1976). As another example, we may cite Piaget, who alludes to the complementary ontogenetic sequences embodied in the development of the affective and cog-

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nitive unconscious; terms which, incidentally, originate with him (Piaget, 1973). Prompted by Rapaport's wish to make psychoanalysis a truly general psychology, by Jung's word association experiments, and by research into the Rorschach, writers like Schachtel and G. Klein have demonstrated the ineluctable interaction between cognitive and conative processes in the unconscious (Schachtel, 1959). Finally, historian Raymond Fancher has explicated the link between Freud's neurological thought and his cognitive theory, thereby elucidating the relationship between cognitive and ~~conative~~^{affective} processes in Freud's initial metapsychological efforts (Fancher, 1971, 1973, 1977).

However, one of the startling things about this new wave of collaboration between cognitive and clinical researchers is the way it is generally taken for granted. One may acknowledge, for example, that for several decades cognitive and clinical researchers have begun to collaborate more closely, and that cybernetics and "systems theory", together with the publication of Freud's correspondence with Fliess, have helped pave the way for this historic rapprochement. Beyond that point, few would venture an opinion, which is merely symptomatic of the generally unreflective and un-historical character of "normal science". A critical and historical approach to this subject would begin by explaining the institutionalized indifference between cognitive and clinical theorists that prevailed until recently, and illumine some conceptual problems that characterize the field at the moment.

The claim I advance here is twofold, being both substantive and historical in character. On the historical plane, I would suggest that, as mentioned previously, collaboration between cognitive and analytic theorists is indeed a recent phenomenon. The tendency to study the interaction of cognitive and dynamic processes in the unconscious was preceded by the development of two discrete research traditions in the German and English speaking worlds in the late 19th and early 20th century. One tradition, associated with Helmholtz, Wundt et. al., was experimentally oriented, and regarded the unconscious as an essentially rational phenomenon implicated in audio-visual perception. The other tradition, associated with Freud, Prince, Janet, etc., was clinical in outlook, and viewed the unconscious as the repository of irrational, instinctual impulses that are ego-alien, or split off from the rest of the conscious per-

sonality. Small wonder, then, that neither camp could glimpse its reflection in the materials, methods or results of the other. It should be emphasized that these remarks apply chiefly to the English and German contexts. In France, by contrast, clinicians interested in the unconscious (e.g., Binet and Janet) conducted experiments with hysteria and parapsychological phenomena (For a scholarly treatment of this point, see McGuire, 1984).

Still, despite its roots in clinical practice, the Freudian paradigm drew considerable inspiration from Schopenhauer (1970) whose reflections on instinct, sexuality and "the unconscious will in nature" represent a variety of a psychology of the unconscious that developed both prior to and concurrently with the experimental tradition. One of the salient characteristics of this older psychology of the unconscious, which included Leibniz, Herbart, Carus, Fechner, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, was that it regarded cognitive and conative trends, insofar as it distinguished between them, as aspects of the same substrate of mental activity existing below the threshold of consciousness.

I believe that the older psychology of the unconscious, though crude and speculative by modern standards, reflects many recently re-discovered truths. Thus while the cognitive and dynamic unconscious represent discrete modalities of functioning in theoretical terms, in reality, they function in unison: a fact reflected in Freud's own writings. Indeed, one might even argue that Freud's "dynamic" unconscious presupposes a cognitive unconscious, both logically and historically. Thus far, however, historical and theoretical research has focused on the cognitive and neurological premises of the metapsychology, the character or impairment of cognitive processes involved in reaction times, Rorschach responses, etc. While valuable, this research does nothing to elucidate another kind of cognitive unconscious presupposed in the clinical theory, involving unconscious inferences one makes concerning one's own or another person's intrapsychic activity. Unconscious inferences of this nature are clearly presupposed in Freud's theory of the "dream work" or secondary revision, and in his brief discussion of unconscious communication and transgenerational identification. Their existence may be attributed to an unconscious reflexivity which parallels the working of reflective self-consciousness.



The Dynamic & Cognitive Unconscious: Contrast & Continuity

Generally speaking, psychoanalysis explicates psychological disturbances by means of dynamic/genetic hypotheses relating current difficulties to antecedent conditions and causes, i.e. to disturbances in psychosexual development, which give rise to the intrapsychic processes that cause (and express) anomalies in the individual's experience of himself and others in the world. Inasmuch as no psyche is entirely unique, and to account for the empirical uniformities that crop up repeatedly in treatment, however, psychoanalysis was obliged to posit some model of human nature, or of mental and developmental processes that are natural, normal and universal. Still, though leaning, by extension, on normal psychology, psychoanalysis arose as a variety of abnormal psychology, and it is within this framework that the dynamic unconscious first captured public attention.

The cognitive unconscious, by contrast, is an idea native to normal psychology and 19th century experimental psychology. It is designed to explain how cognitive and sensory inputs are processed so as to render a more or less accurate picture of external reality, or one that works for human purposes. Thus, while Freud was impressed with the irrationality of the unconscious, his older counterparts in experimental psychophysics were interested exclusively in its silent, inarticulate reasonings. Thus, addressing the notion of "unconscious inference", while still persuaded of the reality of the unconscious, Wundt wrote that:

The suggestion of the *logical* character of the processes of perception is an hypothesis of no lower order than any other assumption we make with reference to the ground of natural phenomena . . . If the first act of apprehension, which yet belongs to the sphere of unconscious life, is already a process of inference, the law of logical development is thereby shown to hold even for unconscious life; it is proved that there is not merely a conscious, but an unconscious thinking. We believe that we have thereby completely proved that the assumption of unconscious logical processes is not merely competent to *explain* the results of the processes of perception, but that it in fact correctly declares the real nature of these processes, although the processes themselves are not accessible to immediate observation (Wundt, 1862, p. 438; cited in von Hartmann, 1931, p. 39).

In a detailed account of Wundt's theory of unconscious inference, R. J. Richards observes that:

Wundt advanced a variety of reasons for . . . unconscious inference. Its principle justification . . . derived from an analysis of the logical preconditions of judgement: returning along the Kantian path, Wundt attempted to show that even elemental perception presupposed prior synthesizing inferences, of which we have no introspective awareness. But there are other reasons . . . (According to Wundt) conscious attention can be directed only to one thing at a time . . . , but ordinarily the several sense organs and their nervous connections react simultaneously to ambient stimuli. Hence, most sensory effects must go unnoticed—that is, they must occur simultaneously. Now it might be objected, Wundt noted, that such nervous processes are not really sensations. If, however, sensations break into consciousness from a continued increase in stimulation, then one may reasonably conclude that the same sensory activities have been growing in intensity till they pass the limen of consciousness . . . Moreover, if the boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness constantly shifts, as indicated by Fechner's experiments on sensory discrimination, then a continuity of transition is conceivable only if both processes are essentially similar, if consciousness is only the further development of one and the same fundamental process originating in the unconscious (Richards, 1980, p. 50).

Thus far, we've traced the cognitive unconscious to Wundt, Fechner and Kant. For most practical intents and purposes, however, it is usually traced back to Leibniz, who, together with Herbart, subsequently, originated the principle of psychic continuity that Fechner and Wundt relied on. Like Wundt, albeit much earlier, Leibniz maintained that the mind plays an active role in organizing perception; a fact he explained by the faculty of *apperception*. Naturally, Leibniz's emphasis on the activity of perception brought him into conflict with Lockean empiricism. Thus, in *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz complained that Locke

claims that there is nothing *potential*, nor even anything which we do not always actually apperceive; but he cannot take this quite strictly, otherwise his opinion would be too paradoxical, since acquired habits . . . and the contents of our memory are not always apperceived . . .

Besides, there are a thousand signs which make us think that there are at all times an infinite number of perceptions in us, though without apperception and reflexion; that is to say changes . . . which . . . are either too small, too numerous or too unified, so that they have nothing distinctive in themselves . . . It is thus that habituation causes us not to notice the motion of a mill or waterfall, after we have lived near them for some time. It is that these impressions, when they are devoid of novelty, are not strong enough to attract our attention and memory when these are attached to more absorbing objects (Leibniz, 1973, p. 152–160).



In the *Prolegomenon to Any Future Metaphysics and Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant took up the Leibnizian critique of Lockean empiricism, developing it in new and remarkable ways. As was customary for idealist philosophers, Kant proposed a two-tiered universe, comprised, in his case, of 1) the realm of phenomenal appearances (which behave in a lawful, orderly fashion, and are subject to scientific scrutiny); and 2) the "noumenal" world of real objects or entities, whose structure, apart from the operation of our minds, is unknowable. While current opinion frequently repudiates the unknowability of the Kantian "ding an sich", Kant's critical philosophy was a pioneering attempt to elucidate the way in which sense data are experienced and interpreted. Thus, for example, if causality as such cannot be proven to exist—Hume's argument—then at least it can be grounded as an innate idea that patterns our perception of events in the world; as a constitutive part of our mental apparatus, and not a mere product of habit and conditioning (Leary, 1982).

At any rate, the active element in perception, and the doctrine of apperception, were developed in novel and interesting ways by Herbart, Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt who was the first to put this hitherto philosophic faculty to the test experimentally (Danziger, 1980). More to the point, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Leibniz's monadological musings on "appetition" and "representations" (Vorstellungen)—*viz.* the notion that drives and their objects are also symbolically apperceived—evidently influenced Herbart, who inspired Lindner's *Manual of Empirical Psychology*, which Freud read as a gymnasium student (Anderson, 1962). If we can trust Ricoeur's recent scholarship, then Freud's notion of the way drives and their psychic representations struggle to gain access to consciousness owes much to the oblique and unacknowledged influence of Herbart, whom Freudians frequently derogate as a sterile academician (Ricoeur, 1970).

In any case, with few exceptions, Kant and his followers were concerned chiefly with processes of judgement, perception and logical inference which are unconscious, but reconstructable after the fact, by a series of inferences from the available data. A seldom noted fact—noteworthy for its oddity, as much as anything—is that in a metapsychological paper entitled "The Unconscious", Freud exclaimed that psychoanalysis represents an

extension of the corrections begun by Kant in regard to our views on external perception. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perception is subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with the phenomena perceived but never discerned, so psychoanalysis bids us not to set conscious perception in the place of the unconscious process which is its object (Freud, 1915, p. 104).

With all due respect to Freud, however, Kant's "unconscious", if we may call it that, really belongs to what Piaget termed the "cognitive unconscious". In contrast to Kant, Freud was concerned chiefly with what is deliberately thrust out of awareness, but strives through dreams, papapraxes and symptom formation to gain access to consciousness once again. The exception here is what Freud termed "primal repression", in which experiences prior to the acquisition to language, though unconscious, are *expelled*, since they were never adequately conceptualized or represented to consciousness in the first place (cf. Freud's papers "Repression" [and] "The Unconscious" [1915]).

At any rate, the whole point of this distinction is that while the Freudian unconscious encounters active resistance and repression, there are no special forces driving the contents of the "cognitive unconscious" toward or away from the threshold of consciousness. On the contrary, to be conscious of the various schemes and operations employed in processing the diverse cognitive/sensory inputs that impinge on the mind would overburden self-consciousness, rendering us incapable of even the most simple and mundane tasks. Consequently, the exigencies of survival insure that most of what is mental remains unconscious; that not the process, but merely the products of our thought are normally available to conscious introspection (Bateson, 1972, 1980).

To sum up, then, the concept of the unconscious bequeathed by idealist philosophy and psychophysics suggests that our conscious cogitation represents the end product of processes of sensation, perception and inference that occur below the threshold of consciousness, whose existence if inferred on the basis of logical and inductive considerations, which include experimental procedures to test the validity of this surmise. Beyond these well established facts, we have hazarded some elementary comparisons between the dynamic and cognitive unconscious, and reproached Freud for being cavalier in his choice of ancestors. However, if we search far



enough back in the development of Freud's thought, we do indeed discover that the reference to Kant contains an inadvertent historical truth. Indeed, it bolsters the contention that the dynamic and cognitive unconscious share a common ancestry.

In the "Project For A Scientific Psychology", contained in his correspondance with Wilhelm Fliess, Freud (1895) laid particular emphasis on the idea that the ego cannot sustain its critical/monitoring function *vis à vis* external reality without a record of previous experience or memory to draw on—Herbart's apperceptive mass (Wolman, 1968). Consequently, he devoted several pages to cognitive processes, paying attention to the interplay between memory, attention and judgement. While it is unnecessary to recount Freud's reasoning in detail, we can say that in Freud's view, much of judging, remembering or, in a word, information processing, is actually unconscious, regardless of the data impinging immediately on the perceptual-consciousness system. (Some will note that this notion anticipates Freud's later formulation that the ego is mostly unconscious, despite its link to the perceptual-consciousness system [Freud, 1923]). Under the heading of "Normal Psychological Processes", Freud observed that:

Along side of cognitive and practical thought, we must distinguish *reproductive or recollecting thought*, which is partly included in practical thought but does not cover it completely. This recollecting is a precondition of any testing carried out by critical thought. It follows a given thought process in a reverse direction, as far back, it may be, as perception . . . In pursuing this backward course, this process meets with intermediate links which have hitherto been unconscious . . .

In any case, the reproducibility of thought processes extends far beyond their immediate indications of quality: they can be made conscious subsequently, though perhaps the outcome of a train of thought leaves traces behind it more often than its intermediate stages (Freud, 1895, p. 437).

Understandably, the publication of Freud's "Project" in 1950 led to increasing recognition of the cognitive component in Freud's metapsychology. Among the first to draw attention to it were Rapaport and G. Klein et. al. In various books and articles, Raymond Fancher has offered us a lucid historical reconstruction and translation of Freud's neuropsychological assumptions into contemporary language (Fancher, 1971, 1973). Others, like Peterfreund, Pribram and Gill, etc., have tried to salvage the cognitive core of Freud's metapsychology, and to correct it in accordance with new

findings in cognitive and neuro-science. Pribram and Gill (1976) have very aptly pointed to the historic filiation between cybernetics and neurology fostered by Norbert Weiner's apprenticeship to Walter Cannon, and bravely attempt to revive Freud's notion of "psychic energy", so roundly discredited by Lashley and otherwise sympathetic critics like John Bowlby and Robert Holt (Pribram & Gill, 1976). But while these observations may interest psychoanalytic historians, the real relevance of "Project" to our inquiry is as follows.

First, if Rapaport et. al. can be trusted, then the whole thrust of the metapsychology militates against the artificial compartmentalization of affect and cognition; a division of labor which psychologists found congenial for many decades. If psychoanalysis has anything to teach us, it is that affect, perception and cognition all work hand in hand, as Kant himself discovered long ago (Leary, 1982).

More importantly, perhaps, Freud's later forays into the cognitive unconscious, which we'll come to presently, force us to make a number of analytic distinctions. On the one hand, as we saw in connection with German idealism and psychophysics, the cognitive unconscious refers to unconscious processes, whose products are accessible to reflection, but which are not in themselves apperceived by the cogitating subject. On the other hand, the cognitive unconscious also refers to processes where both the process and the product are unconscious, albeit without necessarily being repressed. Here the individual knows something, but without knowing that he knows it (e.g. Polanyi's 'tacit knowledge'). Finally, in a third modality resembling the second, both process and product are unconscious, the difference being that: what is cognized here are not perceptual data or logical transformations, but data about one's own or another's intrapsychic processes. But we are anticipating. Before dealing with these topics, let's rejoin the historical narrative once more.

Form, Content and Process: Models of the Mind From Plato to Freud

While we can easily trace the cognitive unconscious to Leibniz, strictly speaking, the concept precedes him. To the best of our knowledge, it originates in Plato's doctrine of anamnesis or recollection, which is developed in the dialogues "Phaedo" and "Meno".



Leaving the metaphysical ramifications of this idea aside, the Meno is of interest in that it describes a conversation between Socrates and a slave boy, in which the latter discovers that he knows mathematical formulas of which he was previously unaware (Plato, *Meno*, 82–86). This ambiguous state, of knowing something without knowing that one knows it embodies this sense of the cognitive unconscious as well as any formula can.

In any case, Plato's doctrine of anamnesis represents the first clear statement of the "nativist" position, in which ideas of justice, harmony, mathematical truths and recollections of past lives are thought to reside in the psyche in a state of forgetfulness. Like Plato, and contra Locke, Leibniz argued that the *forms* of knowledge are innate—e.g. notions of space, time, etc.—although the specific *contents* of the mind are derived from experience. As Leary, among others, observes, this critical distinction between the form and content of knowledge was a vital tenet to Kant's psychological endeavors (Leary, 1982). It remained to an English Kantian, William Whewell, to fuse the German distinction between form and content with a corresponding appreciation of *process* as an unconscious variable; an achievement reflected in the notion of the "unconscious syllogism" (Whewell, 1847). Citing a certain Bishop Whately, Whewell suggested that every act of visual perception is informed by a "major premise" concerning external reality which is not a product of previous experience. Such premises include the categories of space, time, causality, i.e. Leibniz's 'forms' of knowledge, which Whewell, as a good Kantian, took to be innate. On the other hand, said Whewell, every perception involves a "minor premise" supplied by the influx of sensory data, *contents*, at least in terms of our present comparison. Finally, there is the conclusion, or the result of the synthesis of the major and minor "premises", which give rise to the consciously apprehended percept, a process Helmholtz described as follows:

idea (Vorstellung)	major premise
sensauon (Empfindung)	minor premise
percept (Anschauung)	conclusion

And like Helmholtz subsequently, Whewell emphasized that a given percept could be the end product of a multiple series of

inferences or "colligations" (Graumann & Somer, 1983; Turner, 1982).

But there was a world of difference between Helmholtz and Whewell as well. For while Helmholtz's references to Kant were always reverential, he purported to regard the "major premises" of perception as almost invariably the products of previous experience, albeit not necessarily in ontogenetic development, since he allowed for, indeed required, a Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics to account for the development of spatial perception. This reliance on phylogeny, together with a clear concession to Kant on the origins of the concept of causality, indicate that Helmholtz met nativism half-way, despite his programmatic intention of developing a purely empirical science of perception (Turner, 1982). Nonetheless, his attempt to translate insights of philosophy into scientific idiom altered the terms of the discourse, obscuring the debt of experimental science to Leibniz, Kant and their followers. For after him, ideas and sensations alike were often treated indifferently as "contents", although ideas derived from prior experience were still granted priority in the syllogism of sense-perception. As a result, it remained for Piaget and his followers to emphasize the role which the forms of knowledge (e.g., schemes) play in the organization of unconscious thought (Piaget, 1969).

In any event, to read Helmholtz's *The Facts of Perception*, one might almost get the impression that he arrived at his theories by putting Kant to the empirical test. While this is true, it is also insufficient. Thanks to the efforts of Wundt, Zollner, Classen and the various priority disputes that followed in their wake, Helmholtz and his fractious colleagues were obliged to acknowledge the priority of Schopenhauer, who invoked unconscious inference—albeit not by that name—to explain the instantaneous reversal of the inverted retinal image that issues in normal vision (Graumann & Somner, 1983). As Crombie points out, the solution to the problem of the inverted retinal image eluded the best scientific minds from Alhazen to Kepler and Descartes, making Schopenhauer's contribution a major scientific accomplishment (Crombie, 1964). However, while important to the history of natural science, vision was of decidedly peripheral interest to the philosopher himself, who staked his reputation on what he termed "the unconscious

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will in nature"; what we would later term "instinct". And whereas processes of perception are localizable within the individual (even at the unconscious level), the "unconscious will in nature", like Freud's "id", was a more impersonal force, which binds the individual to what Schopenhauer termed "the life of the species", or the relentless struggle for survival and reproduction. In characterizing "the life of the species", Schopenhauer accorded to sexual passion what some would regard as an extravagant role, but one that was consonant with Freud's thinking. In one of his lighter, more accessible passages, Schopenhauer wrote of

important role the relation of the sexes plays in the world of men, where it is really the invisible central point of all action and conduct, and peeps out everywhere in spite of the veils thrown over it. It is the cause of war and the aim of peace, the basis of what is serious, and the aim of jest, the inexhaustible source of wit, the key to all allusions . . . all unspoken offers and stolen glances . . . But all of this agrees with the fact that the sexual passion is the kernel of the will to live, . . . therefore . . . I have called the genital organs the focus of the will. Indeed, one may say that man is an act of copulation, and this tendency alone perpetuates his whole phenomenal existence (Schopenhauer, 1970, p. 106–107).

Now, whatever one's assessment of Schopenhauer—there is no doubt that he had an appreciable impact on Freud. In the concluding passages of a paper entitled "One of the Difficulties of Psychoanalysis", Freud declared that analytic theory provides scientific corroboration of Schopenhauer's view; that before psychoanalysis, it was Schopenhauer "who in words of unforgettable impressiveness admonished mankind of the importance of their sexual craving, still so depreciated" (Freud, 1914). However, despite a vague reference in the same article to "renowned names among the philosophers" who preceded Freud in the discovery of the unconscious, there is nothing in the Freudian corpus that explicitly links Freud and Schopenhauer to the latter's precursors and contemporaries, e.g., Kant, Schelling, Oken, Carus, Fechner, and von Hartmann. For this reason, Freud's indebtedness to the "older" psychology of the unconscious, *viz.* the same tradition that inspired Helmholtz et. al., albeit in a different direction, goes largely unacknowledged. This is particularly true of the idea, tendered in Leibniz's *Monadology*, and again in Herbartian psychology, that drives or wishes, like external stimuli, can be symbolically apperceived (Ricoeur, 1970). This critical insight was seized upon by

von Schubert and Scherner, pupils of Carus and Schopenhauer, who first applied it to the psychology of dreaming, and are duly footnoted in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900). Our inattention to these facts is abetted, indirectly, by J. F. Herbart, who, unlike the Romantics, stressed the primacy of ideas over affect, arguing that affect is little more than confused ideational representations. This intellectualistic bias, inherited from Leibniz and Wolff, may be one reason Freudians tend to dissociate their discipline from their historic antecedents. Wundt, who respected Herbart, nevertheless spoke for his generation when he stressed the primacy of affect over ideas, although he repudiated the idea of the unconscious at about the same time (Danziger, 1980). Ironically, had he retained the Herbartian repression of ideas—modified, to be sure, by the primacy of affect, a central tenet of Romantic psychology—Wundt's psychology would have been scarcely distinguishable from Freud's. Had this transpired, clinicians would be obliged to adopt a more balanced view of the idea of the unconscious and its thought provoking history.

Needless to say, all efforts at historical reconstruction may degenerate into occasions of idle speculation. We all know, for example, that Freud, and not Wundt, introduced the unconscious to the popular imagination. Still, the exercise does serve to emphasize the enormous fund of theorizing about the unconscious Freud had at his disposal, and the suggestion that Freud's originality, or the magnitude of his achievement, is somehow diminished by a knowledge of its concrete historicity expresses a naive or idolatrous posture that we simple cannot sanction.

Now, however, I'd like to abandon the historical thread momentarily, and turn to the substantive side of my claim, concerning the reciprocal interaction of cognitive and dynamic processes in the unconscious, and the latently *social* character of processes which are generally deemed "intrapsychic". The best way to give these claims a solid footing is to demonstrate that psychoanalysis presupposes the existence of a cognitive unconscious, although what is "cognized" in this instance are one's own and other's mental states, and not percepts emanating from non-human sources.

Dreaming, Reflexivity and the Unconscious

Next to his discussion of parapraxes and symptom formation, it is Freud's dream theory which was most often cited as evidence



for the existence of the “Ucs. repressed”. Still, and quite apart from its intended application, Freud’s dream theory unwittingly discloses the existence of unconscious processes of a cognitive character which collaborate in the production of the manifest (or remembered) dream. Freud supposed that before undergoing secondary revision, repressed impulses are brought up for inspection by the dream-censor, i.e., the ego-ideal or super-ego. In his celebrated paper “On Narcissism”, Freud speculated that this “censor” is an intrapsychic monitor that carries on after waking introspection and reflection have subsided (Freud, 1915). Now such states and/or statements as “I think . . .”, “I wish . . .”, or “I feel . . .” x, y, or z take the form of concrete symbols. An outstanding example is Silberer’s “threshold symbolism” or “functional phenomena”, which Freud applauded as the only original contribution to dream theory within the analytic circle, despite its obvious affinity with the efforts of von Schubert and Scherner. Silberer, wrote Freud,

has shown that in the states between waking and sleeping we can directly observe the translation of thoughts into visual images, but that in these circumstances we frequently have a presentation, not of a content, but of the actual state of mind (readiness, fatigue, etc.) of the person who is struggling with sleep. Similarly, Silberer has shown that often the end of a dream signifies merely the dreamer’s own perception of his sleeping and waking. He has thus demonstrated that self-observation . . . plays a role in dream formation (Freud, 1914, p. 54).

Moreover, Freud continued,

We may recall our discovery that dream formation takes place under the sway of censorship which compels distortion of the dream thoughts. We did not picture this censorship as a special force, an entity, but we chose the term to designate a particular aspect of the repressing tendencies which control the ego . . . If this censor is to some extent on the alert even during sleep, we can understand that the necessary condition of this activity—self-observation and self-criticism—should contribute some such thoughts as these: “Now he is too sleepy to think . . . now he is waking up” (Freud, 1914, p. 55).

Apart from the observation that self-observation, an activity normally associated with consciousness, is a pre-requisite to the dream-work, what is particularly arresting here is Freud’s use of the third person to represent the cognitions of the “censor” concerning the

sleeping subject. (“Now *he* is sleepy . . . how *he* is waking up.”) At the same time, however, Freud insists that: “We do not picture this censorship as . . . an entity, but (as) a particular aspect of the repressive forces controlling the ego.” This suggests that in monitoring its own functioning, the ego (or self) adopts the attitude of G. H. Mead’s (1934) “generalized other”, making its own impulses subject to reflection prior to their deflection from motor pathways into the audio-visual imagery that supposedly safeguards sleep. This, in turn, presupposes an already *socialized* self, and an unconscious reflexivity paralleling reflective self-consciousness. From this we may infer that 1) socialization is a necessary precondition to repression (which is nothing new) and, more importantly, that 2) the “Ucs. repressed”, much like its cognitive counterpart, involves an ambiguous state of “knowing”, where one knows something (e.g., that I want but repress the desire for ‘x’), but *without knowing that one knows it*.

As we gather from various sections of Freud’s paper, Freud accounted for the role of social values in psychic functioning, and for abnormal processes (e.g., delusions of observation, persecution), etc., in terms of narcissistic and homosexual libido which, depending on their degree of sublimation, either promote or intrude upon normal mental functioning. Though replete with suggestive insights and imagery, this view has the unfortunate effect of robbing the ego-ideal and unconscious reflexivity of their specifically *social* and *interpersonal* properties, by treating them as elements of a purely intrapsychic process. While narcissistic and homosexual energies may indeed be invested in the development of sociability, they are probably secondary to the inborn capacity to adopt the stance of the “generalized other” that emerges as a by-product of identification with a loved one, where one begins to appraise oneself (consciously and unconsciously) through the other’s eyes. This process, which commences in relation to the mother or mothering one, and which carries no seal or guarantee of veridical judgement, is only perpetuated as a purely intrapsychic process through introjection, or the internalization of object-relations with significant others. Phenomenologically, we are discussing a latently social dimension to intrapsychic functioning, which Freud later termed the “super-ego”. Unfortunately, many psychologists reify Freud’s ideas, treating the “super-ego” as an entity *sui generis*. For a clearer acknowledgement of the social character of uncon-

scious processes, let us turn to Freud's discussion of the cultural super-ego in *Totem and Taboo*.

Tradition, Communication and The Unconscious

Anyone accustomed to watching people communicate over an extended period of time soon realizes that much of what passes between them is unconscious to both—or all—parties. Without going into these processes in any detail, we might compare them to the use of a code or symbolic device, where the code itself, and the messages transmitted, etc., are unconscious, and sometimes (though not always) inadvertent (Danziger, 1976). Freud spoke of this mode of communication in connection with the parricidal guilt he felt to be immanent to the development of religion from the dawn of totemism to the rise of Christianity. Freud speculated that we all inherit a repressed nucleus of pathogenic conflict that pre-dates totemistic social organization, and that in two directions. One (which is interesting, but doesn't concern us here), is the Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics, which most biologists nowadays regard as untenable (Gould, 1977). The other mechanism for the transmission of the unquenchable hatred toward the father, (coupled, to be sure, with a concomitant yearning for forgiveness and self-punishment), is via unconscious communication, facilitated by identification and introjection. As Freud himself declared, however, the processes of transgenerational identification he examined, logically presupposed a kind of supra-individual mind, since

Without the assumption of a collective mind, which makes it possible to neglect the interruptions of mental acts caused by the extinction of the individual, social psychology in general cannot exist . . . if each generation were obliged to acquire its attitude to life anew, there would be no progress and next to no development in this field (Freud, 1913, p. 158).

Freud went on to observe that:

The problem would seem even more difficult if we had to admit that mental impulses could be so completely suppressed as to leave no trace behind them. But this is not the case. Even the most ruthless suppression must leave room for distorted surrogate impulses and for reactions resulting from them. If so, however, we may safely assume that no generation is able to conceal its more important mental processes from its successor. For psychoanalysis has shown us that everyone possesses in his

unconscious activity an apparatus which enables him to undo the distortions which other people have placed on the expression of their feelings. An unconscious understanding such as this of all the customs, ceremonies and dogmas left behind . . . have made it possible for later generations to take over their heritage of emotion (Freud, 1913, p. 158–159).

Let us analyze Freud's assertions. Freud evidently believed that we possess an unconscious "apparatus" for decoding the garbled, ambiguous messages from parents, educators and priests about God ("the gods"), our remote ancestors, and so on. However, this apparatus is part of our "unconscious activity", so that we "understand" our elders, but without having done so consciously. Small wonder! No sane person would shoulder the parricidal guilt and anguish of another, especially if it is prompted by a mere fantasy, and not an actual deed. An "understanding" in this rationalistic sense would erode the bond between successive generations. Perhaps this is why the myth of Christ was invented; to stimulate remorse and the hope of redemption through identification with one who does shoulder another's guilt, presumably out of love. But even if we refrain from embellishing on Freud's conjectures, it is clear that internalization of tradition, itself an irrational (or non-rational) process, presupposes a kind of cognitive unconscious, or a tacit understanding of the meaning of the irrational, which is intelligible to the unconscious in terms of its own inner "logic". However, this tacit understanding is subject to the injunction to remain unconscious, lest the individual emancipate himself from the charmed circle of collective belief and superstition; or perhaps, it may be, of collective wisdom. And that, on one level, is what repression is all about.

Now, *Totem and Taboo* was written with the express intention of demonstrating that the Oedipus complex is ubiquitous, if not culture constitutive; a claim which most anthropologists—and not a few analysts—deem untenable. Still, and irrespective of any empirical warrant it may possess, what interests us here is that Freud's "archaic inheritance" presupposes unconscious communication and some impressive cognitive achievements and inferences, although what is inferred in this instance are other people's states of mind, and not visual percepts, mathematical abstractions, or one's own intrapsychic processes. Unlike the cognitive unconscious, the "archaic inheritance" is actively repressed. But like it, it 1) involves the paradoxical condition of knowing something, without knowing that one knows it (as does dream censorship); and more



importantly, 2) serves to pattern our whole way of orienting ourselves to the world from a locus of mental activity far below the threshold of consciousness. Much as Freud was mistaken ontologizing the Oedipal drama, he was obviously attuned to social and cognitive ramifications of unconscious functioning which still await more concrete elucidation.

Finally, it must be emphasized that neither the social and cognitive components of dream censorship and cultural transmission discussed in the preceding two sections implicate the kind of neurophysiological modelling of cognitive processes treated in the "Project". Gone is all talk of primary and secondary processes, of quantities of neural excitation, etc. Instead, Freud merely suggests (albeit implicitly), that we are dealing with a modality of cognitive functioning where both process and outcome are unconscious, and what is cognized are one's own and others unconscious mental processes.

Using the terminology currently in vogue we would say that the processes in question are treated from a "clinical" or psychological standpoint, rather than from a "metapsychological" point of view (Gill and Holzman, 1976). They represent what R. D. Laing termed "operations of experience", i.e., something people actively do (albeit unconsciously) to distort, suppress or disown a portion of their own intrapsychic experience (Laing, 1969). At the same time, these "operations" presuppose an unconscious sociability, or an ability to adopt the standpoint of the other (i.e., reflexivity, unconscious identification, etc.), which suggests that they are too complex and too dependent on environmental conditions to be reduced to the level of a purely "intrapsychic process", regardless of whether the latter is conceived in psychological or neuropsychological terms. Even dream censorship, which involves endopsychic perception (or self-monitoring activity) implicates the outside world as a determinant, since what is repressed is so treated in accordance with norms, values and corresponding fears and anxieties that imply prior socialization. Characteristically, however, in classical psychoanalysis, the role of socialization in intrapsychic processes is not sufficiently elucidated.

Childhood Amnesia and Social Factors in Cognition

Psychoanalysis is a dynamic/genetic psychology, and on Freud's reckoning, most of our childhood is inaccessible to conscious recall

because of the repression of the birth trauma, castration anxiety, the primal scene and so on, traces of which are obliterated in the "latency period", if not before. Freud termed this phenomenon "infantile amnesia". In a paper entitled 'On Memory and Childhood Amnesia', Schactel countered with the observation that:

The term and concept of repression suggest that material which be recalled is excluded from recall because of its traumatic nature. If the traumatic factor can be clarified and resolved, the material is again accessible to recall. But even the most profound and prolonged analysis does not lead to the recovery of childhood memory; at best it unearths some incidents and feelings that had been forgotten. Childhood amnesia, then, may be due to a formation of memory functions which makes them unsuitable to accommodate childhood experience, rather than exclusively to a censor repressing objectionable material which without such repression would be remembered (Schactel, 1959, p. 285).

The reason for this, Schactel suggests, is that:

The categories (or schemata) of adult memory are not suitable for early childhood experiences and therefore not fit to preserve those experiences and enable their recall. The functional capacity of the conscious, adult memory is usually limited to those types of experiences which the adult is consciously aware of and is capable of having (Schactel, 1959, p. 284).

Schactel then argued that, as in Hesiod, Forgetting (Lethe) issues from Strife (Eris), but that the conflict in question is less a product of instinctual vicissitudes than of normal socialization—"normal amnesia", as Schactel termed it. Early childhood experience, claimed Schactel, is not yet calibrated to the dictates of a specific culture, so that as it becomes integrated into the adult milieu, the child's experience is liable to become stereotypical and banal. But having cited Piaget's notion of an ontogenetic sequence in the development of intelligence, and having posited an ideal shift from an "autocentric" to an "allocentric" mode of perception, Schactel was remiss in failing to specify which adult schemata issue from optimum development and which from faulty or excessive socialization. While this isn't the time and place for a methodical inquiry into these issues, there are indications that these issues, which Schactel failed to tackle, are important from theoretical and clinical standpoints.

Of immediate therapeutic interest is the phenomenon of "resistance". While in the course of therapy, many of the patient's communications concern repressed and unconscious material, the an-



analyst differs from the patient, presumably, in “hearing” these messages, and in finding a suitable mode—and a suitable moment—for reflecting them back in a way so that the patient can understand and utilize the countercommunication. However, this process is frequently impeded by what is known as resistance on the patient’s part. So far, classical analytic theory has dealt with resistance as a purely individual, intrapsychic issue. However, on closer inspection what is termed resistance emanates from both individual and social causes. Thus a woman who consciously loves her mother and hates her philandering father gradually discovers that she also covets her father and hates her mother, on whom she is dependent psychologically. Similarly, a man bristling with indignation about ‘imperialism’ or ‘the homosexual menace’ may discover that he really hates himself (for whatever reason), but needs a locus of external threat or persecution to continue evading his own inner misery. In bringing these matters to consciousness, people experience resistance issuing from inner motives, no doubt, but bolstered considerably by what passes for common sense in their enveloping social milieu. Thus, in handling resistance, the analyst often contends with the parochial perspectives and language habits of the group (or groups) in which the patient is enmeshed.

To interpersonal psychoanalysts, however, it seems probable that in everyday life the social construction of reality exercises a comparable constraint on what we can and cannot experience, even where painful issues of self-disclosure are not immediately involved. Normal communication in any culture presupposes that individuals collaborate in maintaining certain conventions of speech, logical syntax and the expression of affect; patterns which shape the character of a culture, and impart a distinctive way of ‘being-in-the-world’ to its participants. Indeed, if the research of Whorf and Sapir is reliable, then culture modulates not only social conventions and interpersonal interactions, but the way space, time and causality are apprehended through language (Steiner, 1976). Sullivan, who was a friend and associate of Sapir’s, took pains to situate his theory of “security operations” and “selective inattention”, as it bears on clinical psychopathology, within a broader theory of culture and the role of language in modulating consciousness (Sullivan, 1953). Similarly, in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, Fromm took up the Whorfian hypothesis, attempting to demonstrate the existence of “social filters” that pre-determine the

forms of experience along socially patterned co-ordinates, often to the detriment of those limited to a single *Sprachspiele* (Fromm, 1960). If one were to summarize the thrust of what these analysts are saying, one might suggest that culture imparts the “major premises” or ground rules of communication, and hence, by extension, the criteria of consensual validation that determine whether a given perception or idea is deemed valid, e.g., whether so and so is really a witch, Christian, communist or schizophrenic; an approach which has notable points of resemblance with major trends in the sociology of knowledge. In this way, the enveloping social matrix evidently plays a pre-eminent role in determining what thoughts, feelings and experiences are subject to social stigma or intrapsychic repression, and presumably the way in which these particular contents are withheld from consciousness.

Building on the insights of Sullivan, Thompson, Fromm and Schactel, and to a somewhat lesser extent, R. D. Laing, interpersonal psychoanalysts in the past few decades have illuminated some of the many roles and levels of the cognitive unconscious in the clinical situation and society at large (Crowley, 1952; Tauber, 1954; Levenson, 1972, 1983). In the process they have brought a heretofore implicit dimension of analytic theory out into the open.

Although I’ve tried to unearth some of the antecedents to contemporary theory in the Romantic and psychophysical psychologies of the late 18th and 19th centuries, and to show their relationship to unspoken assumptions informing Freud’s dream-theory and social-psychology, I’m continually impressed by the universal phenomenon of people reading others’ states of mind, but without doing so consciously. In everyday life, we often see people acting on their unconscious surmises, and behaving as if they were consciously informed, although they would strenuously deny it. Assuming they’re sincere, we’re obliged to infer that the ego-alien character of their own mental activities is a result of dissociative processes of an intrapsychic character, and/or social and interpersonal rules governing what they may know about what they know; rules that obtain for their particular ethnic, religious, political, occupational and familial enclaves.

Of course psychoanalysts themselves comprise such a community, and possess no magical immunity from “false-consciousness” or the myriad temptations to ignore unconscious channels of com-



munication, modes of reason and so on. Nevertheless, they are mandated, in their clinical work, to challenge the conventions and 'common sense' which the patient favors in the interests of engaging him or her in a more frank, dispassionate, but also more charitable and realistic assessment of their own intrapsychic processes. Much as we may quarrel about the nature, limitations and means to achieving "truth", it still seems abundantly clear that a more wholesome, integrated mode of functioning, (and therefore by implication, alleviation of symptoms) is predicated, as a rule, on a more truth-loving disposition, a tolerance of ambiguity and paradox, and a willingness to see reality as it is, free of the distortion enshrined in conventional pieties (see Fromm, 1960).

However, psychoanalysis is unique in obliging the therapist to engage the patient in a healing dialogue through careful scrutiny of the way the analytic situation and its manifold determinants are represented also in the analyst's unconscious. However, like Crowley (1952) and others (see Epstein and Feiner, 1979) did long ago, I'd question the wisdom of subsuming all such phenomena under the heading of "countertransference" in the traditional classical sense. While this undoubtedly happens, and requires analysis, as often as not spontaneous and unconscious responses to patients furnish information that is not merely veridical, but often critical to a good therapeutic outcome. Indeed, unless this rational (but unconscious) insight is accessed and acted upon, so that it modulates and minimizes irrational countertransference components, the authenticity of the whole analytic enterprise is in jeopardy, and liable to degenerate into a sterile intellectual exercise (Tauber and Green, 1959).

Concluding Remarks

If this paper is to be more than an inventory or enumeration of perspectives on cognitive and social factors in unconscious functioning, we must break off discussion here and return to our original ground. I began this essay by pointing to the existence of two traditions in psychology which claim the unconscious as their own; one cognitive and experimental in orientation, the other clinical/affective. Recent years have witnessed an attempt to close the gap between the cognitive and dynamic unconscious, occasioned by 1) Piagetian inquiry into ontogenetic development; 2) the attempts of

Rapaport et. al. to recast psychoanalysis as a truly general psychology; and 3) the revolution in cybernetics and systems theory, which took information processing out of the 19th century, psychophysical/experimental matrix and applied it to intelligence and communication generally.

However, prior to the aforementioned traditions, there existed an older psychology of the unconscious; a psychology that was neither experimental nor clinical in orientation, in which the rational and irrational processes seized on by the different traditions were lumped together in the same theoretical matrix. If my attempts at historical reconstruction are valid, then current developments represent a partial return to the original state of affairs, albeit under the aegis of systems theory and information processing.

Needless to say, however, the division of labor between the cognitive and clinical approaches to the unconscious was a necessary prelude to current thinking. Research proceeded, for the most part, as if cognitive and affective or clinically related phenomena were essentially unrelated, and this led to many worthwhile discoveries. Still, in clinical practice, we characterize those who split thought from affect as schizoid.

We know that many cognitive performances are augmented or obstructed by dynamic processes in the unconscious affecting recall, judgement, attention, visual acuity, etc., as Rorschach researchers have long been aware. And even if neuro-science should situate cognitive and affective processes in different parts of the brain, it remains true that in terms of overall adaptive functioning, i.e., to the extent that affect and cognition are related to the world, they invariably function in unison.

One great advantage that accrued from the division of labor prevalent till now is that many cognitive researchers have come to realize that cognitive templates are intimately interwoven with the cultural fabric.

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