

THE COHERENCE OF THE DREAM-WORK

Psychoanalytic theorizing begins with the fact that conscious thought is coherent or, at least, ordinarily capable of coherence, whereas the manifest content of dreams is often partly or wholly incoherent. Sigmund Freud's (1900) *Interpretation of Dreams* makes the methodological claim that incoherent images and ideas can be rendered coherent through their interpretation as symbols whose meanings are unconscious. As Fliess (1973) remarked, "If a sequence of thought contains gaps that can be closed only by reading certain elements in it symbolically, then they are symbols" (p. 17). To explain why the psychoanalytic method of dream interpretation appears to work, Freud hypothesized that the unconscious mind produces dreams by translating the contents of conscious and rational ("secondary process") ideas into images, of which some are manifestly incoherent or irrational ("primary process").

In 1900, when Freud presented what came to be called the "topographic hypothesis" of the psyche, he allocated all rational thought to the system *Perception-Consciousness* (*Pcpt.-Cs.*) and only irrational symbol-formation to the system *Unconscious* (*Ucs.*). Carl G. Jung's position was closely derivative. Although Jung (1938, p. 45) recognized that "the unconscious mind is capable at times of assuming an intelligence and purposiveness which are superior to

actual conscious insight,” the observation, which was presumably clinical, was never formally expressed in theory. In Jung’s theory system, archetypes are unconscious instinctual forms that manifest conscious images whenever there is a quantitative imbalance in the distribution of psychic energy between consciousness and the unconscious. The intelligence and compensatory function of archetypal manifestations is an automatic consequence of the design of the objective psyche. It is analogous to a thermostat turning an air conditioner on and off. The unconscious does not reason. It remains limited to irrational symbol formation.

The exclusive irrationality of unconscious thinking, which both Freudians and Jungians have since taken for granted, may be contrasted, for example, with the views of William James (1902) and Evelyn Underhill (1910). In their classic contributions to the psychology of religion, James and Underhill argued that the emotional crises that surround conversion and the *via mystica*, respectively, are products of conscious resistance to unconscious religious materials. James and Underhill postulated a highly intelligent, rational unconsciousness (*inter alia*, as the recipient of divine grace).

Freud implied the validity of postulating unconscious rationality when he expanded his model of the psyche in 1923. In what came to be termed the “structural hypothesis,” Freud introduced the terms “id” to describe the primary, irrational process of the unconscious and “ego” for the secondary, rational process of consciousness. He also subdivided secondary process thought into the systems ego and superego, and he recognized that the superego has an unconscious extension.

Freud nowhere explicitly acknowledged that the superego’s unconscious performance of secondary process thought constitutes an unconscious, rational intelligence. However, Paul Schilder and Otto Kauders (1926) drew psychoanalytic attention to “sleep vigils” that remain awake when the rest of the mind sleeps. They cited “the mother who can be aroused only by the crying of her own child; the miller who awakens when his mill stops” (p. 67). These vigils are instances of intelligent unconscious responses to sense perceptions. Other feats of the sleep vigil are still more instructive. Many people can awaken from sleep at a designated time (p. 68)—for example, a minute before an alarm clock. To explain the extraordinary achievements of the sleep vigil, Schilder and Kauders suggested that “it must attend to minor tasks only which it then

carried out with greater precision" (p. 68) than the waking ego. They attributed the sleep vigil to the ego ideal (p. 76), which they considered "an integral part of the superego" (p. 75, n. 1), and they extrapolated from the sleep vigil to the hypnotic state.

Parsimony, rather than logical necessity, was responsible for the assignment to the superego of the unconscious intelligence that manifests in both the sleep vigil and hypnosis. It may not be assigned to the ego because the ego is unconscious of it; and it may not be assigned to the id because the primary process is irrational. If a fourth psychic agency is not to be postulated, the unconscious intelligence must be assigned to the superego.

In this connection, I would emphasize Freud's (1923a) observation that the superego is better informed than the ego because it has access, as the ego does not, to the contents of the repressed. Schilder and Kauders suggested that because the superego can devote more time to single problems than the ego can afford to do, it can arrive at more intelligent solutions. The combination of more extensive self-knowledge and greater concentrated intelligence in the handling of limited topics constitutes what I shall call unconscious wisdom.

Freud never integrated his theory of the superego with his work on dreams. Reissues of *The Interpretation of Dreams* included a footnote that identified the dream censorship as the superego; and Freud suggested that some dreams, which he called "dreams from above," manifested superego materials. Otherwise, he basically let his original formulations stand. The oversight has yet to be corrected.

Anna Freud remarked that for many decades she and many other psychoanalysts used both the topographic and the structural models of the mind in alternation, depending on whether, for example, they were momentarily concerned with dreams or defense mechanisms. "I definitely belong to the people who feel free to fall back on the topographical aspects whenever convenient, and to leave them aside and to speak purely structurally when that is convenient" (Sandler with Freud, 1985, p. 31). In similar fashions, Lewin (1952), Arlow and Brenner (1964), and Kohut (1984) stated that most of their contemporaries reverted to the topographic hypothesis whenever they conceptualized dreams. Under the circumstances, the superego's unconscious contributions to dreams went unexplored.

As a person who habitually relies on the unconscious incubation of ideas—both everyday problems that I “sleep on” overnight, and major efforts of creativity—I do not doubt the occurrence in dreams of unconscious wisdom. I know from frequent experience that my unconscious is both smarter and wiser than my waking consciousness, but always in addressing specific limited topics. Because most psychoanalysts do not recognize the rationality of the unconscious, I presume that they interpret dreams differently than I do.

It happens that Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) was the first work by Freud that I read, and I have applied its model to dreams ever since. Dream interpretation as Freud originally outlined it differed from the procedure that he discussed in his later publications. *The Interpretation of Dreams* does not integrate the sexual theories that Freud first published in 1905. We know from Freud’s letters to Wilhelm Fliess that he had already developed the sexual theories in 1899. As a consequence, even as the epoch-making dream book went to press, its author was abandoning the clinical technique that he recommended in it.

The innovation in technique that is reflected in Freud’s later writings on dreams did not arise from a change in dream theory. The innovation was designed to save time in therapy. Once Freud arrived at his sexual theories, he developed an abbreviated method of dream interpretation that focused on unconscious infantile sexuality, and he habitually neglected many other aspects of dreams that he had discussed in detail in 1900. He never renounced his initial findings—he simply did not work with them clinically. Neither have psychoanalysts since.

A notable exception to this generalization is Robert J. Langs (1988; 1992; 1994b; 1999), who has discussed “unconscious wisdom processing” in several recent works. Langs is a highly original and controversial theorist who has invented his own model of the psyche (1986; 1987a; 1987b) as well as a clinical technique that he terms “communicative psychoanalysis.” Lang’s first book on dream interpretation (1988) is less idiosyncratic than his later presentations and has much to recommend it.

Unlike Langs, I see neither need nor advantage to depart from the tripartite model of the mind. The experiential reality of the unconscious wisdom of dreams can be formulated through superego

theory in a fashion consistent with Schilder and Kauders's notion of the sleep vigil. Let us review dream theory in its light.

Wish-Fulfillment Theory

The experience of interpreting hundreds of dreams led Freud (1900) to his general thesis that "the meaning of *every* dream is the fulfilment of a wish" (p. 134). Freud's formulation combined two claims.

1. Dreams are meaningful, motivated, and purposeful; they are not random, meaningless, and incoherent gibberish.
2. Unlike motivations, intentions, and desires, dreams involve more than wishing; they portray the fulfilling of wishes.

The fundamental premise of Freud's theory, that dreams are purposive, is not altered by changing fashions that refer to wishes by such terms as instincts, drives, desires, motives, and interests. The alternative to wish-fulfillment theory is not its qualification through a minor nuance, but the categorical claim that dreams are random, unmotivated, and nonpurposive gibberish. Because Freud's theory was based on the evidence not of dreams but of their interpretations during conscious states, his case was inconclusive. On Freud's showing, it was conceivable that the motivation disclosed through dream interpretation was read into dreams by their interpreters. The logical force of my argument differs. I am arguing that dream interpretations often exhibit wisdom greater than the conscious abilities of their interpreters. The interpretations have the power to surprise both dreamers and interpreters with their wisdom. Since the wisdom cannot reasonably be treated as an invention of consciousness subsequent to the dreams, neither can the wishes to which the wisdom responds.

As to the second part of his thesis, Freud (1940) eventually moderated it by stating that "a dream is invariably an *attempt*" to fulfill a wish. "The attempt may succeed more or less completely; it may also fail" (p. 171). A dream may portray an unsuccessful attempt to fulfill the wish; it never fails to portray an attempt. On the other hand, Freud's thesis that dreams are constructed in the

form of wish-fulfillments does not imply that fulfilling wishes is the *raison d'être* of dreams (Dement, 1964, p. 151).

Freud (1908a) presented the basic ideas of wish-fulfillment theory most succinctly in the course of a discussion of daydreaming.

Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory (p. 148).

A wish that is not presently being satisfied is associated with the memory of a wish that was satisfied. When the two wishes are unconsciously equated, the satisfaction of the past wish becomes the fantasied satisfaction of the present wish.

A wish-fulfillment always compounds two separate wishes. It is the past wish whose habitual use may cause it to function, in Jean Piaget's terminology, as a cognitive "schema." Unfortunately, Freud often lapsed rhetorically into the singular, for example, in his statement that the unsatisfying present wish "harks back to a memory . . . in which this wish was fulfilled" (Freud, 1908a, p. 148). In another phrasing, Freud (1900) clearly distinguished the past and present wishes, respectively, as the "wish" and the "source" of the dream. "The source of a dream," he wrote, is always "one or more recent and significant experiences" (p. 180). In the passage adduced above, Freud referred discretely to the present wish as the "motive force" of the daydream.

Freud (1900) regarded symbol-formation as the whole of the unconscious process of dreaming. "Dreams are nothing other than a particular *form* of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the *dream-work* which creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming" (pp. 506–7 n. 2). Freud imagined that the condensation of the present and unsatisfied wish with the memory of a wish that was satisfied in the past, automatically and mechanically portrays the present wish as fulfilled.

The coherent meaning that a dream's psychoanalytic interpretation purportedly reconstructs is termed the "dream-thought" or "latent content" of the dream. Freud assumed, again *ex hypothesi*, that the process of dreaming makes use of latent dream-thoughts that have already been formed preconsciously during wakefulness. Dreaming is limited to their secondary conversion into symbolic forms. Freud (1900) treated the dream-thoughts and their symbolization (the "dream-work") as mutually exclusive processes. "Everything that appears in dreams as the ostensible activity of the function of judgement is to be regarded not as an intellectual achievement of the dream-work but as belonging to the material of the dream-thoughts and as having been lifted from them into the manifest content of the dream as a ready-made structure" (p. 445).

Freud similarly attributed the occasional intelligence of the dream to preconscious thought. He claimed that the ideas are developed during wakefulness when preconscious secondary process thought elaborates the unsatisfied wishes of the day. "The fact that dreams concern themselves with attempts at solving the problems by which our mental life is faced is no more strange than that our conscious waking life should do so; beyond this it merely tells us that that activity can also be carried on in the preconscious—and this we already know" (pp. 506–7 n. 2).

Symbolization

Under the term "dream-work" Freud (1900) initially discussed four phenomena by which latent dream-thoughts are converted into the manifest dream-contents: condensation, displacement, considerations of representability, and secondary revision. Two later formulations restricted the dream-work to the first three phenomena (Freud, 1913; 1923d). With secondary revision excluded from discussion, dream-work became synonymous with "symbolization": the conversion of the latent dream thoughts into manifest dream imagery.

Considerations of Representability

Freud (1900) regarded the manifest dream-content as a "transcript . . . as it were in a pictographic script" (p. 277). Considerations of representability refer to the limited ability of the

“pictographic script” of perceptual fantasies to express abstract ideas. The considerations are imposed during “the transformation of the dream-thoughts into the dream-contents” (pp. 343–44). Considerations of representability may be counted as the first aspect of symbolization. Both adults and children report some dreams that involve no further types of symbolization. “These well-organized dreams may portray ‘cure,’ or perhaps sudden good fortune, like winning a lottery, or sexual success . . . these dreams make sense and tell coherent stories; at times it is difficult to be sure whether we are listening to an account of a dream or to that of an actual event” (Stein, 1989, p. 68).

Laboratory dream research has augmented but has not significantly altered these aspects of the clinical picture. Although coherent dreams are rarely reported clinically, they appear experimentally to form a majority of dream experience.

About 90 percent of REM dreams are judged to be about as credible as descriptions of waking reality, equally undramatic and lacking in bizarreness. . . . REM dream reports are generally clear, coherent, believable accounts of realistic situations in which the dreamer and other persons are involved in quite mundane activities and preoccupations. . . . Reports were considered almost entirely representational and realistic in visual form, generally involving a familiar or commonplace setting, almost always including the self, usually in interaction with other persons. The most typical interaction described is verbal in nature . . . REM dreams seem to be almost as much auditory as visual experiences (Snyder, 1967, in Trosman, 1969, pp. 58–59).

Coherent dreams have also been reported following arousal from NREM sleep (Whitman, Kramer, Ornstein, & Baldrige, 1967, p. 293; Cartwright, 1969, pp. 362–63). “The mental activity from nonREM awakenings is thoughtlike and can be distinguished from the perceptual, storylike, and sometimes bizarre content that occurs during REM sleep” (Greenberg, Katz, Schwartz, & Pearlman, 1992).

The conversion of latent fantasy ideation into concrete perceptual imagery may similarly be the total extent of symbol-formation

both in daydreams and hypnagogic states. The “transcription of thoughts into pictures in the hypnagogic state occurs in relative isolation from other dream-forming factors” (Silberer, 1909, p. 197).

To account for the unconscious translation of verbally expressed thoughts into perceptual forms, Freud suggested that dreams accommodate an inherent limitation of the *Ucs.* *Ex hypothesi* unconscious thought differs from conscious thought not only in its access to consciousness, but also in its mental elements. The dream-work’s reduction of verbal ideas to sense images, emotions, and motor ideas is comprehensible if the *Ucs.* cannot understand higher order ideation.

Freud (1900) assumed that all dream-thoughts commence in the form of abstract (verbally expressed) ideas and subsequently undergo reversion to the concrete (perceptual) images from which they were abstracted (pp. 118, 277). Kohut and other analysts have recognized, however, that the generalization admits exceptions (Edelheit, 1968). No differently than conscious thinking, dreaming may utilize what psychoanalysts call “concrete ideas”: “mental images”; spatial, musical, and other sensory ideas; pattern perceptions; and so forth. In such cases, the secondary process ideas are already in perceptual forms, and a further transcription is unnecessary.

Condensation

Freud found marked discrepancies in the extent and expressiveness of dreams and their interpretations. “Dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts” (Freud, 1900, p. 279). He postulated that a single symbol may express a plurality of latent ideas as a consequence of an unconscious process that he termed condensation. The motifs are then said to be overdetermined. Condensation is not a response to censorship (Freud, 1916–17). Like considerations of representability, condensation is an accommodation of the primary process. Because the primary process works with only a small range of emotions, sensations, and motor ideas, secondary process ideas must be rendered concrete and reduced to the limited vocabulary of instinctual desire before an unsatisfied wish can gain unconscious associations and be fantasied as fulfilled. Condensation accomplishes the reduction.

Emotion plays a distinctive role in condensation. Freud (1900) noted that “in dreams the ideational content is not accompanied by the affective consequences that we should regard as inevitable in waking thought” (p. 461). He suggested “that the affect felt in the dream belongs to its latent and not to its manifest content, and that the dream’s *affective* content has remained untouched by the distortion which has overtaken its *ideational* content” (pp. 248–49). He also suggested that the dream-work’s preservation of affect functioned as a criterion or organizing principle for the association of dream materials. “During the dream-work, sources of affect which are capable of producing the same affect come together in generating it” (p. 480).

Displacement

Again on the basis of his practice of dream interpretation, Freud (1900) hypothesized that “the elements which stand out as the principal components of the manifest content of the dream are far from playing the same part in the dream-thoughts . . . what is clearly the essence of the dream-thoughts need not be represented in the dream at all” (p. 305). To account for these discrepancies, Freud postulated the activity of an unconscious process that he termed “displacement” (p. 306).

It thus seems plausible to suppose that in the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, *a transference and displacement of psychical intensities* occurs in the process of dream-formation, and it is as a result of these that the difference between the text of the dream-content and that of the dream-thoughts comes about (pp. 307–8; Freud’s italics).

Because displacement distorts the manifest content of a dream, Freud speculated that displacement is a response to a process of censorship that prevents the latent content from manifesting consciously in undisguised form (p. 308). “The censorship exercises its

office and brings about the distortion of dreams . . . in order to prevent the generation of anxiety or other forms of distressing affect" (p. 267).

The Metaphor of Regression

Freud was never able to locate the process of symbolization within his heuristic model of the mind as a "psychic apparatus." Freud's writings (1901a, p. 676; 1910a, p. 36; 1915b, pp. 153–54; 1915c, p. 190; 1916–17, p. 212) are decisive in their arrival at a quandary. Freud maintained that ideas are unconsciously transformed into symbols in order to evade a censorship that prevents their conscious manifestation. Because he consistently credited the censorship to the secondary process, the evasion of censorship by recourse to symbolization could not logically be assigned to the same secondary process. However, Freud could not logically ascribe the translation of verbal ideas into perceptual form to the primary process either. The primary process does not perform verbal ideation. Neither has it a capacity to understand verbal ideation. What it cannot understand, it cannot translate into its own considerably limited, concrete mental elements. Because fantasy is a compromise formation that reduces secondary process ideas to the forms of primary process materials, Freud (1910a, p. 36) inferred that fantasy is produced "in the unconscious, or rather, to put it more accurately, between two separate psychical systems like the conscious and unconscious."

Freud arrived at his concept of symbolization as a compromise formation through a process of elimination. Symbolization could not be a secondary process because it is censored by the secondary process; yet symbolization could not be a primary process because symbolization makes ideational uses of perceptual imagery in treating them as symbols. For the same reasons, symbolization cannot be a collaboration of the primary and secondary processes. It is an exception to both, occurring in neither, but somehow located in the interstices between the two.

Freud (1900) provided a detailed model of the conversion of latent ideas into concrete perceptual images. "We call it 'regression' when in a dream an idea is turned back into the sensory image from which it was originally derived. . . . *In regression the fabric of*

the dream-thoughts is resolved into its raw material" (p. 543). Because Freud (1900, p. 548; 1916–17, pp. 342–43; 1917a, pp. 227–28) later distinguished varieties of regression, the resolution of verbal ideation into perceptual images came technically to be termed *topographic regression*. Topographic regression reverses the preconscious process of verbal recognition. It is a fitting of perceptual images to verbal ideas, rather than vice versa. In the topographic hypothesis, Freud (1900) considered topographic regression responsible also for *temporal regression*, which is a return to mentation consistent with an earlier developmental stage. Every wish-fulfillment was therefore necessarily infantile. Freud's (1923a) structural model of the mind instead recognized that the two types of regression are independent variables. Either may occur in the absence of the other.

Freud's account of symbolization through topographic regression is not a coherent theory, but only a metaphor that covers a gap in close theoretic reasoning. The metaphor extends Freud's analogy of the psychical apparatus to a reflex arc. In a mechanical reflex arc, such as a toy that is powered by tightening a spring that drives the toy as it unwinds, every increase in energy potential is a progression toward its tightened position, and every decrease a regression. Although the metaphor of a reflex arc served Freud well as long as he used it in a loose, heuristic manner that made it equivalent to what we today term "biofeedback," pressing the metaphor unduly led Freud into fallacy. The model of a reflex arc is at best a metaphor for psychological purposes. It does not accurately reflect the real circumstance of the psyche, among other reasons, because neurons only fire in one direction. It is not possible that a reversion from the secondary to the primary process can be accomplished by the same neurons that construct secondary process ideas on the basis of primary process sensations. At minimum, a physiological model of the mind would require the postulation of a parallel set of neurons that point in the opposing direction.

Although many scientific discoveries are initially apprehended in the form of metaphors, the replacement of metaphor with closely reasoned theory is a condition of subsequent scientific progress (Langer, 1957, pp. 102, 201–2; Grossman, 1992, p. 55). Uncritical perpetuation of the metaphor of topographic regression is an impediment to psychoanalytic theory. Freud's notion (1910a, p. 36) that fantasy is produced, as it were, in the interstices "between two

separate psychological systems like the conscious and unconscious” extended the metaphor of topographic regression to the point of absurdity.

On one early occasion Freud (1901b, p. 147) speculated that symbolization might be the product of a “lower psychological agency,” and the suggestion remains a viable theoretical option. A retroversion from secondary to primary process thought cannot be accomplished as a regression. There can be no simple mechanical retroversion. Any such concept is mere metaphor. What occurs is a complex and intelligent process of *translation* that reduces secondary process ideas to forms that are capable of communicating with the primary process (Brenner, 1973, p. 172). If the work of translation is to succeed—that is, if a present frustration is to be associated with an unconscious instinctual desire, so that a wish-fulfillment may be elaborated—the presently unsatisfied wish must be translated into a form that is consistent with the primary process. It is untenable that the work of translation is accomplished by the same psychological agency whose limitations necessitate its performance. The translating process is bilingual; the primary process is not. If the primary process were bilingual, a translation process would not be necessary. The semantic or lexical limitations of the primary process both necessitate the process of translation and impose constraints on it.

Consider, for example, the analogy of a computer program that is upgraded at a later time. The upgrade can process any ideas that the original program can produce, but there is much that the upgrade can produce that the original program cannot compute. A translation program that converts upgrade formats into the original format is necessary before the “primary process” can work with “secondary process” ideas. The translation is limited by considerations of primary process representability, but the translation program constitutes a third piece of software in its own right.

Secondary Revision

Freud attributed the partial coherence of manifest dreams to a process that he termed “secondary revision” and explained in different ways over the years (Breznitz, 1971; Stein, 1989). He always held to his initial description of the manifest phenomenon: “Those

parts of a dream on which the secondary revision has been able to produce some effect are clear, while those parts on which its efforts have failed are confused" (Freud, 1900, p. 500). Freud maintained that secondary revision differs in its purpose from symbolization. "This function . . . fills up the gaps in the dream-structure with shreds and patches" (p. 490).

Freud initially attributed secondary revision to the dream-censorship. "There can be no doubt that the censoring agency, whose influence we have so far only recognized in limitations and omissions in the dream-content, is also responsible for interpolations and additions in it" (p. 489). "The secondary (and often ill-conceived) revision of the dream by the agency which carries out normal thinking . . . is itself no more than a part of the revision to which the dream-thoughts are regularly subjected as a result of the dream-censorship" (p. 514). The censorship "has the power to create new contributions to dreams," "exerts its influence principally by its preferences and selections from psychic material in the dream-thoughts that has already been formed" and "seeks to mould the material offered to it into something like a day-dream" (pp. 491–92).

Only a few pages after Freud attributed secondary revision to the censorship, he radically qualified these formulations and transformed the term "secondary revision" into a misnomer. On the strength of a persuasive demonstration that secondary revision may save labor by utilizing preexisting daydreams that happen to be available in memory, Freud denied that revisions of *unconscious* dream symbolism ever occur (pp. 495–98). Revisions occur, but Freud maintained that they are invariably *preconscious*.

Freud's lifelong habit of publishing the unrevised first drafts of his ideas was presumably responsible for allowing this self-contradiction to see print. In Freud's second formulation, secondary revision occurs before symbolization, and not vice versa. The revision is not a process of rationalization that links incoherent dream-symbols in a specious manner (cf. Nunberg, [1932] 1955, p. 151). The preconscious thinking contributes to the coherence of the manifest dream only indirectly. It contributes directly to the coherence of the latent dream-thoughts. Astoundingly, this formulation rendered Freud's initial theory meaningless! Only a secondary revision that is truly secondary, because it occurs *after* symbol-formation, could be said to rationalize the manifest dream without

participating in its latent content. Secondary revision, as Freud had defined it only a few pages earlier, did not exist.

In the middle years of his psychoanalytic career, Freud entirely abandoned the idea of secondary revision. In his first account of dream-work, Freud (1900) had defined fantasy as co-extensive with secondary revision and daydreams. When several years later he considered daydreams closely, Freud (1908a) expanded his definition of fantasy to include latent dream-thoughts as a whole.

Our dreams at night are nothing else than phantasies. . . . If the meaning of our dreams usually remains obscure to us in spite of this pointer, it is because of the circumstance that at night there also arise in us wishes of which we are ashamed; these we must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious. Repressed wishes of this sort and their derivatives are only allowed to come to expression in a very distorted form (pp. 148–49).

Here Freud recognized fantasy as a genus of which daydreams, latent dream-thoughts, and hysterical dream-states (Freud, 1908b) are species. Daydreams may depend less on symbolization and more on rational thinking than dreams do, but the process of fantasizing is the same in both cases. The variable factor is the extent to which waking and sleeping fantasies make use of displacements.

Freud's new definition of fantasy corrected the misnomer "secondary revision" by rendering the very concept superfluous. If dreams are fantasies, and secondary revisions are fantasy's contributions to the dream-work, secondary revisions are synonymous with dreams themselves. Two later publications were consistent with this new definition. Freud (1913; 1923d) twice dispensed with secondary revision and restricted the dream-work to condensation, displacement, and considerations of representability.

However, in his final formulations of dream theory, Freud (1933) amended his position in yet another regard. He reintroduced the concept of secondary revision, but he now claimed that it is introduced within a dream only "after the dream has been presented before consciousness as an object of perception" (p. 21). With this argument, Freud was at last able to sustain his view of

secondary revision as a superficial rationalization of the manifest dream-content.

The outcome of the dream-work is a compromise. The ego-organization is not yet paralyzed, and its influence is to be seen in the distortion imposed on the unconscious material and in what are often very ineffective attempts at giving the total result a form not too unacceptable to the ego (*secondary revision*) (Freud, 1940, p. 167).

Freud's three accounts of the manifest coherence of dreams had in common a categorical denial that rational thought contributes to the unconscious dream-work. Either secondary revision is a misnomer for preconscious elaborations of unsatisfied wishes prior to sleep; or secondary revision does not occur at all; or secondary revision takes place in consciousness in response to the manifestation of dreams. In all cases, there is no such thing as unconscious wisdom.

Freud's Argument from Theory

Freud (1900) always categorically denied that the unconscious processes of the dream-work can give origin to coherent thought. However, he offered no evidence in support of his assertion. His argument on this point proceeded from theory, not from fact. In discussing the manifest coherence of some dreams, or parts of dreams, he reasoned:

Are we to suppose that what happens is that in the first instance the dream-constructing factors—the tendency towards condensation, the necessity for evading censorship, and considerations of representability by the psychical means open to dreams—put together a provisional dream-content out of the material provided, and that this content is subsequently recast so as to conform so far as possible to the demands of a second [and rational] agency? This is scarcely probable. We must assume rather that from the very first the demands of this second factor constitute one of the conditions which the dream must satisfy (p. 499).

The cogency of Freud's argument depended on his assumption that the psychic apparatus is limited to two psychic agencies. Only *Pcpt.-Cs.* was rational. It alone could be responsible for the coherence in dreams. However, because *Pcpt.-Cs.* (a) is so relaxed that dreams have the hallucinatory quality of seeming real and (b) imposes the repression that dream-thoughts evade through symbolization, *Pcpt.-Cs.* cannot reasonably be thought to recast provisional fantasy contents.

The structural hypothesis of the id, ego, and superego (Freud, 1923a) rendered these arguments unnecessary. Unlike the topographic model of *Pcpt.-Cs.* and *Ucs.* (Freud, 1900), the structural hypothesis did not limit coherent thought to consciousness. The recasting of provisional fantasy contents could still not be assigned to the repressing agency, which was now named the ego (Freud, 1923a; 1926). However, Freud acknowledged that much superego activity was unconscious, and its involvement in dream formation was a viable theoretic option.

By the superego, Freud (1923a, pp. 35–37) described a psychic agency that he had earlier termed “conscience” (1914, pp. 95–98) and the “ego ideal” (1921, p. 110). Under all its names, Freud (1933) ascribed three functions to the agency:

Conscience is one of its functions and . . . self-observation, which is an essential preliminary to the judging activity of conscience, is another of them. . . . It is also the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself, which it emulates, and whose demand for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfill (pp. 60, 65).

Freud had been aware of the influence of conscience on dreams from 1900 onward. Drawing on his experience with the psychotherapy of neurosis, Freud (1900) asserted that “whenever one psychological element [in the manifest dream] is linked with another by an objectionable or superficial association, there is also a legitimate and deeper link between them” (p. 530). Freud attributed the disappearance of the latent link to a process of censorship. He suggested that the censorship's purpose is to avoid distress, and that latent dream-thoughts undergo displacement in order to accommodate it. “The censorship exercises its office and brings about the distortion of dreams . . . in order to prevent the generation of

anxiety or other forms of distressing affect” (p. 267). Freud speculated that censorship is imposed by an agency that has the “privilege . . . of permitting thoughts to enter consciousness” (p. 144). On this theory, the extent to which a wish-fulfillment undergoes displacement varies in direct relation with the censorship that the symbols seek to evade. Dreams occur during sleep rather than wakefulness because “the state of sleep . . . reduces the power of the endopsychic censorship” (p. 526). During wakefulness, the censorship is more thorough. Not even highly distorted materials are allowed to manifest consciously.

Freud (1900, pp. 615, 617–18; 1915c, pp. 173, 191, 193–94) twice raised the possibility that dreams encounter two censorships: (1) repression between the unconscious repressed and preconscious thought, and (2) another stimulus barrier between preconscious and conscious thought. He never expressed the idea of two censorships in terms of psychical agencies. However, he seems to have entertained the concept while avoiding the phraseology. A censorship that responds to psychic paralysis and helplessness by instituting repression operates differently than a censorship that expresses approval and disapproval, but enforces nothing. The tripartite model of the mind firmly separated the two functions by attributing the task of repressing to the ego, but moral censure to the superego.

In keeping with the attribution of dream-censorship to repression in the topographic hypothesis, Freud’s (1923a) initial presentation of the structural hypothesis stated that the ego “exercises the censorship on dreams” (p. 17). The superego can motivate the ego’s work of repression (Freud, 1933, p. 98), but it cannot enforce it. However, later in the same year and for the rest of his life, Freud (1923b) reversed himself and attributed the censorship of dreams to the superego. “To the mental force in human beings which . . . distorts the dream’s primitive instinctual impulses in favour of conventional or of higher moral standards, I gave the name of ‘dream-censorship’” (p. 262; cf. 1914, p. 97; 1916–17, p. 429; 1933, pp. 27–28). With the notable exception of repression, almost everything that Freud had attributed to the dream-censorship since 1900 had pertained to what he was now calling the superego, rather than to the ego.

Freud (1900) had always recognized that the dream-censorship is able to contribute original materials to the manifest dream. “The

psychical agency which otherwise operates only as a censorship plays a *habitual* part in the construction of dreams. . . . There can be no doubt that the censoring agency, whose influence we have . . . recognized in limitations and omissions in the dream-content, is also responsible for interpolations and additions in it" (p. 489). In his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Freud (1916–17) emphasized that "the dream-censorship itself is the originator, or one of the originators, of the dream-distortion" (p. 140; cf. pp. 168, 233); and he expressly linked the motivation of the distortions to conscience (p. 429).

When Freud introduced the structural model of the mind and attributed these limited influences on dreams to the superego, he was presenting exceptions to his categorical rejection of the possibility that some latent dream-thoughts have unconscious origin. He was himself advancing a theory of unconscious wisdom. Unlike the ego, which is quiescent during sleep, conscience is active in dreams as the dream-censorship and contributes original symbols to the manifest dream-content. However, Freud never systematically phrased dream theory in structural terms, and so never developed the logical corollaries of his own arguments.

Had Freud ever done so, the superego's active involvement in the dream-work would have been a necessary postulate. When a person sleeps, the conscious functions of the psyche relax. Both less important and voluntarily inhibited psychic materials, neither of which are conscious during wakefulness, have the opportunity during sleep to attract such attention as remains active (cf. Freud, 1900, pp. 590–91; Meissner, 1968, pp. 75–77). According to the structural model of the psyche, the principal divisions of unconscious thought are: the instincts, the repressed, the repressing, and the unconscious reach of the superego. It is only to be expected, then, that the superego would be among the chief contributors to dreams.

Freud's failure to recognize the extent of the superego's contribution to the dream-work may be attributed to oversight. His oversight was both theoretic and clinical, and led him systematically to discount clinical evidence to the contrary. To account for superego contributions to dreams, Freud (1923c) postulated a separate type of dream that he called "dreams from above."

It is possible to distinguish between dreams *from above* and dreams *from below*, provided the distinction is not made too sharply. Dreams from below are those which are provoked by the strength of an unconscious (repressed) wish which has found a means of being represented in some of the day's residues. They may be regarded as inroads of the repressed into waking life. Dreams from above correspond to thoughts or intentions of the day before which have contrived during the night to obtain reinforcement from repressed material that is debarred from the ego. When this is so, analysis as a rule disregards this unconscious ally and succeeds in inserting the latent dream-thoughts into the texture of waking thought (p. 111).

Freud's concept of dreams "from above" reflected the necessity to account for dreams whose wisdom is so blatant that it cannot be denied. In such cases, Freud acknowledged the rationality but denied its unconscious origin by postulating its derivation "from above."

Freud's division of dreams into superego dreams "from above" and id dreams "from below" was clinically and theoretically incorrect. Every dream is both a dream from above and a dream from below (cf. Palombo, 1978). It is a condensation of a present wish with a past one. The latent dream-thoughts have preconscious origin in the day residue, while the choice of dream symbolism has unconscious origin and a second order of latent meaning. The relative importance or prominence of each wish contributes distinctive character, so that some dreams are mostly from above and others mostly from below; but all dreams invariably include both components.

What alone truly differs in dreams from above and below is the manner of the analyst's method of dream interpretation: from above, in terms of the unsatisfied wish that is contained in the day residue (see Langs, 1988; 1991; 1994b; 1999); or from below, in terms of the unconscious wish that shapes its symbolism. In my own view, the traditional psychoanalytic prioritizing of interpretations "from below" systematically neglects the unconscious wisdom of dreams. Psychoanalysts systematically skew dream interpretation through one-sided emphases of the psychosexual and psycho-aggressive elements in dreams, and through an equally categorical neglect of their rational features.