

## *Dreams and the Structural Theory*

LET US PAUSE a moment to review what we have done so far. After differentiating between the structural and the topographic theories of the mental apparatus, we have summarized the principal elements of each. We then compared and contrasted them, concluding that the two are distinctly different theories despite their many similarities. We pointed out, moreover, that the two theories are incompatible in the crucially important area of intrapsychic conflict, and that the superiorities of the structural theory over the topographic one require that the latter be discarded *as a theory* in favor of the former. We have gone on then to suggest refinements and redefinitions of certain concepts, still important in our theoretical framework, which were introduced by Freud long before he wrote *The Ego and the Id*. The concepts we discussed in this way are regression, the primary and secondary processes, and the concepts "unconscious" and "preconscious." In all of the foregoing discussion we have referred repeatedly to the practical, clinical importance of the theoretical issues involved. Nevertheless our principal focus has been on the understanding of theories and of theoretical concepts.

We wish now to apply our conclusions to two phenomena of great clinical importance, dreams and psychoses. We hope to show that it is not only useful, but indeed necessary to apply the explanatory concepts of the structural theory if one is to achieve a satisfactory understanding of either of these two important phenomena of mental life. In this chapter we shall attempt to demonstrate the correctness of this assertion with respect to the psychology of dreaming. In the next chapter we shall discuss the psychopathology of the psychoses.

It should be noted that this is not the prevalent opinion among analysts as far as dreams are concerned. Indeed a conviction to the contrary is rather the rule. It seems fair to say that most analysts would maintain (1) that the topographic theory is admirably adapted to an explanation of the psychology of dreaming; (2) that it is clearly superior to the structural theory in this area; and (3) that even if there were no other reason for retaining the topographic theory as a part of psychoanalytic theory, it would be necessary to retain it in order to explain the phenomena of dreams.

We shall divide the present chapter into three sections for the sake of convenience. The first section is devoted to a summary of the theory of dreaming according to the topographic theory. The second section contains a theory of dreaming within the framework of the structural theory. In the third section we shall attempt to demonstrate that the topographic theory is inadequate to explain the phenomena of dreaming and that it should be superseded for that purpose by the structural theory.

### TOPOGRAPHIC THEORY OF DREAMS

Freud's exposition of the explanation for the phenomena of dreaming offered by the topographic theory is to be found

principally in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in the chapters on dreams in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916-1917), and in "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams" (1917a). It may be summarized as follows.

Sleep is characterized by decathexis of the mental apparatus with consequent quiescence of its functions. This occurs in accordance with the wish to sleep of the systems Cs. and Pcs. However, since the part of the system Ucs. which we call the repressed is barred from access to the system Pcs., it is likewise independent of the influence of the system Pcs. The energies of the repressed therefore remain active even during sleep, and its contents retain their cathexes. Also, some energies and contents of the system Pcs. are not entirely quiescent during sleep at times (e.g., "cares of the day," abandoned or unfinished trains of thought). Since mental energies in general press for discharge, the repressed of the system Ucs. and the active day residues of the system Pcs. strive for discharge during sleep, threatening thereby to disturb or waken the sleeper. During sleep, though, the muscular apparatuses under the control of the system Cs. are decathected and hence quiescent, so that energies active during sleep cannot pursue a normal course of discharge via the system Pcs. to the system Cs., thereby achieving consciousness and motor expression or gratification or both. The active mental energies of the sleeper which correspond to the latent content of the dream about to be formed find the normal course of discharge closed to them and pursue instead a retrograde course. This course was normal in infancy, but is no longer so in waking life once the systems Pcs. and Cs. have developed and have assumed their rightful roles in the functioning of the mind. This retrograde course leads to the sensory end of the mental apparatus instead of to its

motor end. Thus during sleep the mental energies which have remained active pass in a reverse direction through the system Ucs., along associational pathways which lead from one to another memory trace. Their ready displacement in this fashion is characteristic of what happens to mental energies in the system Ucs. It will be recalled (see Chapter 2) that in that system the laws of the primary process hold sway: displacement and condensation. Thus the mental energies in question, which are about to give rise to a dream, move (are displaced) from one memory trace of the system Ucs. to another until all of the active energies have been concentrated on a few memory traces, usually visual ones. The resultant hypercathexis of these few traces causes them to become conscious as sensory images. It is these sensory images which constitute the manifest dream, which the dreamer takes to be real, since we are accustomed to believe in the reality of sensory impressions when they appear as such in consciousness.

We see, therefore, that the dream work is governed by the laws of the primary process, i.e., by displacement and condensation, as well as by a preference for visual memory traces, what Freud (1900) called the need to represent thoughts in visual (plastic) form. In addition, the dream work is influenced by two other agencies or tendencies of the mind. The first of these is the dream censor, which is the same as the intersystemic censor of waking life. This censor is still active during sleep, though its strength is diminished in sleep as compared with waking life. The second is the tendency to secondary revision, a term alternatively translated as secondary elaboration. Secondary revision designates the particular activity of the dreamer's mind which tends to organize the thoughts and images of the dream into a coherent and logical sequence. It should be noted, however, that the

sequences and other formal characteristics of the manifest dream do not always result from secondary revision. They may at times be determined primarily by the latent content of the dream. For example, a repetition of an image may signify emphasis, or the fact that a dream is in three parts may be due to the fact that the repressed wishes from which it stemmed were phallic ones.

The infantile nature of the dream work was clear to Freud from the start. This is apparent from the section on regression in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The essentials of this section have been summarized earlier in Chapter 6. What we wish to emphasize at this point will to some extent repeat what was said earlier in that chapter and in the chapter on the primary and secondary processes. It is that the topographic theory uses the concept of *systemic (topographic) regression* to account for the fact that the mental processes involved in the dream work are infantile as compared with the mental processes of normal, adult, waking life. This point is made particularly clearly in "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams." According to the topographic theory, the infantile mode of mental functioning, the so-called primary process (i.e., the process which first holds sway in the mind), is confined to and characteristic of the system *Ucs*. The more mature mode of mental functioning, the secondary process, which gradually develops only later in life and which is normally dominant during waking life in the adult, is equally characteristic of the system *Pcs*. Thus the infantile character of the mental processes of the dream work is readily accounted for by postulating that the dream work takes place in the system *Ucs*, i.e., in accordance with the infantile mode of mental functioning called the primary process. It is important for our later discussion to note that according to this explanation

the infantile nature of mental functioning during the dream work is the result of a uniform and complete regression from the system *Pcs*. (secondary process) to the system *Ucs*. (primary process). By "uniform" we mean to indicate that all the aspects of mental functioning which are regressively altered in this way are equally altered. By "complete" we mean that the shift from the secondary process to the primary process is a total one, since the two processes are conceived by the topographic theory to be qualitatively distinct, rather than the extremes of a continuous spectrum.

## STRUCTURAL THEORY OF DREAMS

Previous attempts to apply the structural theory to the phenomena of dreaming in a systematic way have been rare. The first such attempt seems to have been that of Brenner (1955a). The ideas contained in it will not be summarized here, since they will be incorporated in the discussion to follow. More recently Richardson and Moore (1963) have demonstrated the value of a systematic application of the structural theory to dream psychology in an interesting study of the dreams of psychotic patients.

We may begin our attempt to formulate a theory of dream psychology which is based on the concepts of the structural theory by recalling certain of the ways in which the structural theory differs from the topographic one in its concepts of mental functioning in general. We shall naturally be chiefly interested in those differences which will require some alteration in the theory of dream psychology which has just been outlined above on the basis of the topographic theory.

First, the principle of multiple functioning (Waelder, 1930) occupies an important place in the structural theory.

According to that principle, energies from the id, as they press for discharge, activate various ego and superego functions, functions which may erect counterathetic barriers to the discharge of the id energies in question, may expedite their discharge, or may direct or control them. The final result is thus multiply determined by id, ego, and superego tendencies, including among ego tendencies those functions which are concerned with the facts of external reality.

Second, it will be remembered that, unlike the topographic theory, the structural theory does not model the mental apparatus after a reflex arc. It does not postulate a normally progressive path of mental energies to follow which begins at the sensory end of the apparatus and terminates at its motor end. On the contrary, as just noted, psychic events in general are viewed as the result of a mutual interaction among forces or tendencies of the id, ego, and superego. The result of this interaction may be ideational, motor, or both; it may or may not reach consciousness, with or without an affective accompaniment. The point here at issue is that whatever the result, the path or direction of discharge is the same. It is not in one direction when a motor act results, and in the reverse direction when the result is a dream or waking hallucination.

Third, primitive or infantile modes of thinking and of mental functioning in general are not considered to be exclusively characteristic of one or another division of the mental apparatus. Infantile modes of thinking, often referred to as primary-process thinking or mentation, are characteristic not only of the id but of many processes of the ego and superego as well, both normally and pathologically (see Chapter 7). We know that primitive modes of ego functioning can contribute to highly valued activities, such as artistic or scientific creativity, for example, as well as to jokes, to

play, and the like. In these cases, as we have noted earlier, we speak of regression of ego functioning in the service of the ego (Kris, 1934). Thus it will not be necessary for the structural theory to explain such phenomena as condensation and displacement in dreams by attributing the dream work exclusively to one division of the mental apparatus. It will instead emphasize the part played in the dream work by ego regression.

Bearing in mind the points just listed, how shall we proceed to formulate a theory of dream psychology on the basis of the structural theory?

First of all we may note that, like the topographic theory, the structural theory assumes that despite the general quiescence of function during sleep there are certain energies of the mind which remain active.<sup>1</sup>

Second, according to the structural theory, the mental energies which remain active during sleep initiate dreaming. They, and the mental processes associated with them, constitute the latent content of the ensuing dream. This latent content derives from the instinctual derivatives of the id on the one hand and from the impressions and cares of the preceding day on the other.

Thus far we see that the structural theory of dreams is essentially identical with that of the topographic theory. However, when we leave the question of the initiation of a dream and of its latent content, and turn instead to the dream work, this congruity no longer holds true.

The structural theory assumes that the energy associated with the latent dream content activates various unconscious

<sup>1</sup> The recent electroencephalographic studies of dreaming suggest that these energies are active during a particular stage of sleep only, rather than throughout its duration (for references see Fisher and Dement, 1963). However, this qualification is not decisive for our present purpose.

ego and superego functions just as might happen during waking life. Some of the ego functions assist or guide the instinctual energies toward satisfaction,<sup>2</sup> while other ego functions, e.g., the defenses, oppose the gratification just referred to, acting in conjunction with superego demands. However, it is also possible for superego demands to join forces with an id impulse, e.g., a masochistic or a sadistic one, as well as for the defensive functions of the ego to be directed against the prohibitions or demands of the superego, just as they may be against id derivatives. In other words, the dream work consists of an interplay, often a very complicated one, though at other times quite simple, among id, ego, and superego, of which the final result is the manifest dream.

It will be noted that this interplay, however simple or complicated it may be, is no different from what happens when an instinctual impulse is activated during waking life. During waking life as well as during sleep, what finally happens in the individual's mental life is the result of an interplay among the conflicting and cooperating tendencies of id, ego, and superego.<sup>3</sup> Yet the end result of this interplay in waking life is not a dream. How can one account for this difference in terms of the structural theory?

Our answer is as follows. (1) There is a regressive alteration

<sup>2</sup> Since the individual whose mental processes we are describing is asleep, instinctual satisfaction will ordinarily be essentially limited to a fantasy of instinctual gratification. This limitation does not always hold, however. The most striking example of this is that of a sexual orgasm during a dream, but there may also be coordinated muscular movements of various sorts, including chewing, sucking, or swallowing, or there may be tears, salivation, vocalization, urination or defecation, etc. In other words, instinctual discharge during sleep, though it characteristically gives rise to a wish-fulfilling fantasy, need not be limited to fantasy alone. It may also result in various gross somatic manifestations.

<sup>3</sup> This principle applies with equal force to parapraxes (Brenner, 1955b).

in many of the functions of the ego during dreaming. (2) There is a similar regressive alteration in superego functioning during dreaming. (3) Instinctual wishes and fantasies stemming from the id play a larger role in dreaming than they do in most adult, waking, mental phenomena. We shall discuss each of these points in turn.

With respect to regression of ego functions, we assume that this is a consequence of the sleeping state (Freud, 1917a). Perhaps, as noted above, it is a consequence of a particular stage of sleep, identifiable electroencephalographically. More than this we cannot say about the cause of the regression of ego functions which is such a striking characteristic of the mental activity during dreaming, i.e., during the dream work and the perception of the manifest dream. We can say much more, however, by way of description of the nature of these regressive alterations and of their consequences. Let us begin by specifying, as far as possible, just what regressive changes characterize ego functions during sleep.

If we attempt to list the functions involved, we must certainly include reality testing, thinking, language, defenses, integrative ability, sensory perception, and motor control. Some of these obviously overlap, others might be subdivided, but since any list would be subject to some qualification, let us take the one just given and consider each of the items in it.

We shall begin with reality testing. More specifically, we are concerned with that aspect of reality testing which has to do with the ability to distinguish between what is perceived of the outer world and what is the result of something going on in one's own mind: the ability to distinguish (outer) fact from (inner) fancy. The dreamer is unable to do this.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> With occasional exceptions to be discussed below.

full of representation by allusion, representation by the opposite, representation of the whole by the part, or vice versa (Freud, 1900). In a word, the dream work is characterized by that type of mentation, normally dominant in childhood, which is generally referred to in the psychoanalytic literature as primary-process thinking. In particular, the dream work is characterized by the use of symbols in the psychoanalytic sense of the word. Finally, as Freud pointed out (1900), a realistic attitude toward time, toward space, and toward death, as well as the usual adult requirements of logic and syntax are grossly defective or absent. All of these changes are attributable to a regressive alteration of various aspects of the ego functions of language and of thinking. In each case we can observe that the dreamer's mind is functioning in a primitive or infantile manner.

The ego's integrative function is also regressively altered during sleep. Freud (1900) noted the participation of this function in the dream work from the start of his researches, identifying it at that time as the tendency to secondary revision or elaboration. However, despite many exceptions, dreams are not as a rule harmonized and integrated with respect to their various component parts to nearly the same degree as we expect ordinary waking thoughts, or even day-dreams, to be. The dreamer, like the child, is less concerned with unity and consistency than is the waking adult, even though, as Freud noted, the integrative function of the ego plays a part in dream formation.

One of the most striking of the changes in ego functioning during dreaming, and the one most significant in clinical work, is the diminution of the ego's defenses. Freud related this diminution to the paralysis of motility during sleep: since action is impossible, wishes are not so dangerous. It seems likely, however, that more is involved than a realistic

[ 125 ]

His ability to test reality has regressed to a stage characteristic of infancy, to a time of life when, as an infant, he was unable to distinguish between the events of the outer world and those of the inner one. Traces of this stage normally persist well into childhood, as witness the child's tendency to treat his fantasies and games as real at least during play-time. It is not rare for a young child to have an imaginary companion for many months or even years, a companion who is as real and present to the child as any of the objectively real persons of his environment. It is the regressive alteration of the function of reality testing that accounts for the fact that the conscious result of the dream work, i.e., the images of the manifest dream, are as real to the dreamer as are waking fantasies to the small child.

Since thinking and the use of language are so intimately associated, we may conveniently consider them together. There are numerous manifestations of the regressive alteration of these functions during dreaming. For example, the dreamer tends to think as the child does, in concrete, sensory images, usually visual ones, rather than in words, as is characteristic for adult, waking thought. This regression to an infantile mode of thought accounts for the fact that most manifest dreams consist of visual images: a dream is something that the dreamer sees in his sleep. It will be recalled that Freud (1900) originally accounted for this characteristic of dreams by postulating a need for plastic representation to thinking in visual images, the dreamer deals with words and language in a regressive way. There is a clearly evident tendency in the dream work to play with words, to equate words that sound alike, and to pun, as there is in childhood. There is likewise clearly evident a regression in other, closely related aspects of thinking. The dream work is

[ 124 ]

appraisal by the dreamer of the defensive value of his own immobility during sleep. The dreamer's diminished defensive opposition to his instinctual wishes does in fact resemble the limited defensive capacities of the ego of a small child. If this resemblance is significant, the diminution of ego defenses during dreaming should be considered to be at least in part a regressive alteration of the defensive function of the ego.

Finally, as we know, the ego functions of sensory perception and motor control are also profoundly altered during sleep. In the case of these two functions, however, it is not so clear that the alterations to be observed are due to regression. They seem to be due rather to a diminution or suspension of the particular ego function in question. For example, the nearly complete suspension of purposeful motor activity which is a regular concomitant of sleep does not seem to differ qualitatively from voluntary suspension of motor function during waking life. As far as we can judge, it does not involve regression to patterns of motor activity or quiescence which are characteristic of infancy or of early childhood.<sup>5</sup> Sensory perception during sleep seems likewise to be diminished or suspended, rather than to regress to an

<sup>5</sup> It may be objected that the fact that in sleep a positive Babinski reflex may appear is suggestive of a regression in the functioning of the motor apparatus on which ego control of motor activity is so very dependent, and that since there is evidence of regression in the motor apparatus it is sensible to assume that there is regression in ego functioning as well. A satisfactory evaluation of the validity of this argument must await more precise information concerning some of the pertinent facts. For example, does the Babinski reflex appear during the same stage of sleep as that in which the dream work takes place? The reverse might be true, i.e., it may be that the Babinski appears only during very deep sleep, whereas the dream work may perhaps go on only during light sleep, as the electroencephalographers suggest. It may also be that a more detailed knowledge concerning other aspects of motor functioning during sleep, e.g., somnambulism, would be pertinent to the question whether the alterations in the ego function of motility which are attendant upon sleep are properly to be considered regressive or not.

earlier pattern or mode of functioning. Indeed, we are familiar with instances in which the diminution of sensory perception during sleep appears to be a selective inattention to certain stimuli, inattention of a sort with which we are quite familiar in adult, waking, mental functioning. Thus, for example, a sleeping parent will waken promptly to a baby's cry, while ignoring other, louder noises, just as a waking person perceives some sounds while ignoring others.

It will be remembered from what has been said in the chapters on regression and on the primary and secondary processes that the regressive changes in ego function which we have been discussing can be viewed as the result of a diminution or stripping away of those relatively late acquisitions of mental life which impose on our thinking the requirements of syntax, logic, and a generally realistic attitude toward life. The infantile modes of mental activity which are so conspicuous in the dream work are not absent in normal, adult, waking life. On the contrary, their presence and influence are obvious and are by no means to be viewed with disrespect as Kris (1934) and others have emphasized (Brenner, 1955a). Thus the regressions in ego functioning characteristic of dreaming may be ascribed to a selective suppression or abandonment of function, one which affects later acquisitions more profoundly than it does earlier ones. We see here the aptness of Freud's (1917a) somewhat humorous analogy between the psychic changes incident to sleep and the physical preparations for it: the removal of clothes, eyeglasses, and other prosthetic appliances, and the resumption of the costume, or lack of it, of babyhood.

Another aspect of the diminution and regression of ego functions during sleep is that the degree to which it occurs with respect to any particular function may vary considerably from dream to dream and even from one part of a dream

tions as defenses and reality testing. It appears, nevertheless, that superego regressions contribute substantially to the infantile character of the mental processes involved in the dream work and in the manifest dream as well. For example, when displeasure accompanies the direct or distorted fantasy of instinctual gratification in a manifest dream, it is far more often anxiety than guilt. What would produce guilt or remorse in waking life is more apt to produce fear of punishment during a dream, just as it normally does during early childhood when the superego is still in process of formation. Similarly the dreamer, like the child, seems to be more nearly exclusively guided by *lex talionis* than is the waking adult. He is also more prone to project his guilt impulses onto the person of others, while he identifies himself with the disapproving and punishing judge, and finally, he is more likely to instinctualize punitive suffering, i.e., to react masochistically. It is apparent that each of these characteristics of dream life represents a regression on the part of the dreamer to a more infantile stage of superego development and functioning. Isakower (1939) and others have asserted that spoken words in the manifest content of a dream are related to the participation of superego function in the dream work. Such a relation is indicative of a regression during dreaming to a stage of superego development when commands and prohibitions were contained in the spoken words of the dreamer's parents and had not yet been internalized. Finally, one may surmise that the fact that instinctual wishes often find a more direct and conscious expression in dreams than would be permitted them in waking life bespeaks a diminution of the superego's functioning to a more childish level as well as a diminution of the ego's defenses. We must remember in this connection that the link between superego functioning and the institution and maintenance of anti-

to another. This fact should occasion no surprise in analysts, who are used to observing evidences of such alterations from day to day and from minute to minute in their analytic patients. In dreams, as we shall see, the dream work may regressively utilize nonverbal, visual thinking in one part of a dream, while verbal thoughts, characteristic of mature mental functioning, appear in another part. Indeed, visual elements and verbal thoughts may appear in a manifest dream simultaneously. Thus, in applying the structural theory to the problem of dreaming, it is important to remember that according to the structural theory, regression of ego functions is both selective and variable.

One may also conclude from such detailed observations of ego functioning as those noted here that the dream work, like waking mentation, is characterized by the simultaneous interplay of mature and primitive or infantile ego functioning; to use more familiar, though less correct terms: the simultaneous interplay of primary- and secondary-process thinking. It is only that in waking life the more mature forms of ego functioning tend to predominate, while in the dream work less mature forms of ego functioning predominate; at least they are more conspicuous and relatively more important than they normally are in waking life. It is apparent from all of these considerations why the mental phenomena of waking life to which dreams bear the closest relationship are those in which there is a substantial degree of regression of ego functions: neurotic or psychotic symptoms, parapraxes, and the various instances of regression in the service of the ego, such as daydreams, jokes, etc.

So much for ego regression during dreaming. Superego functions also show clear evidence of regressive alteration during dreaming, though superego regression has attracted less general attention than has regression of such ego func-

instinctual defenses by the ego is a particularly close one. The defenses against the drives are normally maintained by the ego at the behest of the superego, once the superego has been firmly established as a system of the mind.

Now for the third point that we proposed to discuss, namely, the fact that instinctual wishes and fantasies stem from the id play a larger role in dreaming than they do in most adult, waking, mental phenomena. That this is true seems self-evident. The explanation for it seems equally evident: during sleep the mental representations of external reality are largely decathected. The only things that matter to us are our own wishes and needs. This is one aspect of what Freud (1917a) emphasized as the increase in narcissism during sleep. Since the instinctual fantasies which comprise the id aspect of the latent content of a dream are so largely infantile in content, it is understandable that they too convey an infantile character to the dream which they stimulate.

We may now summarize the theory of the dream within the framework of the structural theory which we have just outlined. We begin by repeating that despite the general quiescence of mental functioning during sleep certain energies of the mind remain active. These, and the mental processes associated with them, constitute the latent content of the dream. This latent content derives from the instinctual derivatives of the id on the one hand and from the impressions and the cares of the preceding day on the other. The dream work consists of a mutual interplay among the various tendencies of id, ego, and superego, tendencies which may reinforce one another, may cooperate with one another, or may oppose one another. Such an interplay occurs as a regular state of affairs during waking life as well. However, during sleep various ego and superego functions are regressively altered. Moreover, a relatively large part is played in

the dream work by infantile, wish-fulfilling fantasies, since a relatively smaller part is played by the claims of external reality, which are largely decathected during sleep. As a result, mental activity during dreaming is much more infantile in many ways than is mental activity during waking life. Condensation, displacement, representation by allusion, by opposites, by symbols, representation in concrete, visual images, disregard for time, space and death, in a word all the familiar characteristics of the dream work are due to ego and superego regression, plus the infantile nature of much of the latent content from which the dream work takes its origin. Finally, it is as a result of regressive alteration of the ego function of reality testing that the dreamer believes that what he dreams is not fantasy, but reality.

#### SUPERIORITY OF THE STRUCTURAL THEORY OF DREAMS OVER THE TOPOGRAPHIC THEORY OF DREAMS

In this section we propose to compare the explanations of dreaming by the topographic and the structural theories in order to support our thesis that the latter should replace the former. For this purpose we have chosen to examine four features of dreaming which are readily observable, and to contrast the inadequacy of the topographic theory to explain the available data in each case with the satisfactory nature of the explanation offered by the structural theory. Following this we shall discuss the advantages which accrue in everyday clinical work from understanding the dream within the framework of the structural theory.

The four features of dreaming we shall discuss are (1) the dreamer's conviction that the dream is real; (2) punishment dreams; (3) censorship and secondary revision during the dream work; and (4) evidences of variation in regression during dreaming. We shall see that in the first two cases

Freud himself decided in favor of the explanatory concepts of the structural theory.

(1.) The topographic theory explains the dreamer's belief in the reality of the manifest dream by the fact that the elements of the manifest dream are sensory images (Freud, 1900, 1917a). The dreamer, accustomed to accepting the testimony of his senses as proof of reality, believes the manifest dream is real: seeing is believing. However, Freud rejected this explanation as inadequate to explain the facts. He wrote, "we are quite familiar with situations in which a process of regressive reflection brings to consciousness very clear visual mnemonic images, though we do not on that account for a single moment take them for real perceptions" (1917a, p. 231).<sup>6</sup> He went on to say that we could readily conceive the possibility that the dream work might do the same, so that its results would be a wishful fantasy that would be very appealing, but which would not be real to the dreamer. The explanation which he proposed in place of the one given by the topographic theory derives from the structural theory, even though in 1917 a published statement of the structural theory was still six years in the future. What determines whether visual images are accepted as real or not, Freud wrote, is the operation of the capacity for reality testing. Of this capacity he said, "We shall place reality-testing among the major *institutions of the ego*, alongside the censorships" (1917a, p. 233; italics in the original).

(2.) Freud discussed punishment dreams in addenda to *The Interpretation of Dreams* contained in the 1911, 1919, and 1930 editions of that work, as well as in "Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation" (1923b), which would have been incorporated into the main text in

<sup>6</sup> For an additional reference to such phenomena, see section iii of "Constructions in Analysis" (Freud, 1938).

1923 except for the expense involved in a new edition. In 1911 Freud related punishment dreams to masochistic tendencies.<sup>7</sup> Later, however, he expressly contradicted this earlier statement. In 1919 and 1923 he wrote that punishment dreams are not to be attributed to a repressed, instinctual wish, i.e., to masochism, but rather to the operation of the self-critical agency of the ego, and in the 1930 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* he referred to this agency by the term currently familiar to us, i.e., the superego. Here then is a second instance where Freud considered an explanation offered by the topographic theory to be inadequate and where he substituted for it an explanation by the structural theory.

(3.) Freud observed that both the censor and the need for secondary revision (in structural terms, both the integrative function of the ego and the ego's defenses) operate throughout the dream work. He wrote "We must assume . . . that from the very first the demands of this second factor [i.e., the factor of secondary revision] constitute one of the conditions which the dream must satisfy and that this condition, like those laid down by condensation, the censorship imposed by resistance, and representability, operate simultaneously in a conducive and selective sense upon the mass of material present in the dream-thoughts" (1900, p. 499). Yet the idea that the dream work takes place in the system *Ucs.*, which is so fundamental to the explanation of the dream offered by the topographic theory, makes it impossible to explain satisfactorily how the progress of the dream work can be so

<sup>7</sup> In addition, Freud pointed out that a pleasure-giving wish might be present in the latent content of a punishment dream. In the case of the examples he cited, which he called "parvenu" dreams, he detected in the latent content the wish to be young again, as though the dreamer was thinking, "It's true I was poor and lowly then, but I was young; my whole life was before me!"

process, under the influence of the censor and of the need for secondary revision of the system *Pcs.*? Whichever way we phrase our question we are confronted with a logical impasse. Freud was very clear about the facts: censorship and secondary revision do not operate only after the dream work within the system *Ucs.* is over. In most dreams, perhaps in all, they influence the course of the dream work within that system as well. Yet according to the topographic theory, the dream work takes place in the system *Ucs.*, i.e., according to the primary process, while the censoring tendencies and the need for secondary revision belong to the system *Pcs.* and therefore function according to the secondary process. It appears that the topographic theory does not fit the facts.

In the case of the structural theory, however, there is no such discrepancy between fact and theory. As we have several times noted, the structural theory explains the dream work as an interplay among id, ego, and superego. Thus it postulates that ego functions, in this case defenses and integrative functions, participate in the dream work throughout its course. We must remember that the structural theory was devised in order to offer a better explanation than could the topographic theory of the interaction among drive derivatives, anti-instinctual tendencies, and self-punitive tendencies within the mind. It is to be expected, therefore, that it accounts better than can the topographic theory for the aspects of the dream work which are under discussion here, just as it does for punishment dreams.

4. As has already been noted, it was clear to Freud as soon as he had first successfully penetrated the mysteries of dream interpretation that during dreaming the mind functions in a more primitive and infantile way than during waking life, i.e., that during the dream there occurs a profound regression in mental functioning. We have also noted that the

[ 135 ]

influenced. Both the demand for secondary revision and the censor are mental functions which the topographic theory attributes to the system *Pcs.* The demand for secondary revision requires that mental processes in the systems *Pcs.* and *Cs.* must conform to certain requirements of logic, causality, etc., while the censor bars from access to the system *Pcs.*, and through it to the system *Cs.*, whatever mental processes belonging to the system *Ucs.* are in conflict with the demands of the censor. How, therefore, is either factor to be conceived of as influencing the dream work, the flux of energies within the system *Ucs.* itself, i.e., of functioning within that system, and of doing so long before there is any question of the energies of the system *Ucs.* intruding into the other systems of the mind?

It may properly be objected that the question just raised is a poorly phrased one. It supposes that the systems *Ucs.* and *Pcs.* are two distinct regions or provinces of the mind which may be analogized to distinct geographical areas. As Freud (1915b) pointed out, this supposition is really an oversimplification, though one that is convenient, and good enough for many purposes. The more correct statement of the topographic theory is that those mental phenomena which follow the laws of the primary process (condensation, displacement, tendency to immediate discharge) comprise the system *Ucs.*; those phenomena which as the result of a specific hypercathexis follow the laws of the secondary process (delay of discharge, conformity to external reality, logic, etc.), comprise the system *Pcs.* (see Chapter 2). But this correction or refinement makes it no easier to explain how the censor and the demand for secondary revision can influence the course of the dream work. If the dream work proceeds in the system *Ucs.*, i.e., according to the primary process, how can it at the same time be proceeding according to the secondary

[ 134 ]

topographic theory accounts for this regression by locating the dream work in the system *Ucs.*, and that this means that according to the topographic theory the mental regression during dreaming is both uniform and complete. In fact, however, it is easy to observe when one examines the data that regression during dreaming is usually selective and often fluctuant. That is, not all ego and superego functions are usually equally involved, and the degree of regression of any single function may vary from moment to moment during dreaming.

As an example of fluctuation in the degree of regression of an ego function we may call attention to the fact that exceptionally, but by no means rarely, one or several elements of a manifest dream are not accepted as real by the dreamer. Instead they are accompanied by some such thought as, "This is only a dream." The topographic theory has a difficult time explaining this phenomenon. If the thought, "This is only a dream," is accepted as a part of the dream, then it cannot, in the framework of the topographic theory, be considered as a valid or meaningful comment by the dreamer any more than any other element of the manifest dream can be taken at face value. It must be considered to be the result of a process of condensation and displacement which has taken place in the system *Ucs.* and to be understandable only after the dreamer's associations have been obtained. Yet it was clear to Freud (1900, pp. 488-489) that the thought, "This is only a dream," could be a valid comment despite its appearance during the manifest dream. Indeed he correctly understood it to be motivated by the impending development of anxiety, or similar displeasure, and to serve the function of avoiding such a development. As long as he had only the topographic theory to work with, however, Freud was forced to resolve the difficulty by making an arbitrary

assumption. He removed the thought, "This is only a dream," from the realm of dream psychology and attributed it to the activity of a waking part of the mind, even though the thought had occurred during sleep. He wrote, "In my view the contemptuous critical judgement, 'it's only a dream,' appears in a dream when the censorship, which is never quite asleep, feels that it has been taken unawares by a dream which has already been allowed through. It is too late to suppress it, and accordingly the censorship uses these words to meet the anxiety or the distressing feeling aroused by it. The phrase is an example of *esprit d'escalier*<sup>8</sup> on the part of the psychical censorship." The structural theory, on the other hand, has a simple and satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon without any need for recourse to an *ad hoc* explanation. The thought, "This is only a dream," indicates a change in the dreamer's ability to test reality. The degree of regression and consequent impairment, by adult standards, of this particular ego function has diminished for the time being, and the dreamer realizes that what he sees and thinks is not real, but a dream. Here is a case of fluctuation in degree of regression. It contradicts the topographic theory, but is readily explained by the structural one. We may add that the structural theory is wholly in harmony with Freud's keen observation concerning the motivation and function of the phenomenon in question. As Freud realized long ago, in most cases the temporary improvement in reality testing just described serves a defensive function: it prevents or minimizes the development of anxiety or of other displeasure during a dream.

What we have just discussed is an example of fluctuation

<sup>8</sup> Freud used the French phrase in the original, though there is an exactly equivalent German one: *Treppennwitz*. Heath defines it as "afterthought; cleverness after the event."

of the degree of regression of an ego function during dreaming. As an example of partial regression we may take the function of visual representation. We have noted that in most dreams thoughts are typically translated into concrete sensory terms, usually visual ones. This is evidenced by the fact that a manifest dream is typically something seen by the dreamer: it is a collection of visual images. But many dreams have not only sensory elements in the manifest content. Many have verbal thoughts as well which are of the ordinary, waking sort. For an example we have only to turn to the first dream in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the familiar dream of Irma's injection. Here we find, half a dozen lines down in the text of the dream, the words, "I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble." It is clear that this thought is not just a description of a visual image. It is part of the manifest content of the dream. In fact it is the content of a fear. A few pages farther on (p. 109), when Freud is giving his associations to each element of the dream, he restates this element in these words: "I was alarmed at the idea that I had missed an organic illness." Moreover, this element of the manifest dream is a result of the dream work, just as the visual elements are, and it is to be understood only from the dreamer's associations to it. In this case the associations given have to do with the wish to be free of any responsibility for Irma's incomplete cure, a wish which is fundamental to the whole of the dream. The latent content of the particular element that we have mentioned is given by Freud in these words: "If Irma's pains had an organic basis, once again I could not be held responsible for curing them;<sup>9</sup> my treatment only set out to get rid of hysterical pains" (p. 109).

<sup>9</sup> The translation in the *Standard Edition* is misleading. A more correct translation would read: "If Irma's pains had an organic basis, it would not be my obligation to cure them. . . ."

Such examples are not rare. Verbalized thoughts are often found in the manifest content of a dream along with its visual and other sensory elements. When we do find them we know from experience that they are not ordinarily to be taken at face value. Like dream images, verbalized thoughts which are a part of the manifest dream must be associated to if their meaning is to be discovered.<sup>10</sup> We see, therefore, that there are exceptions to the statement that in dreaming the ego functions of thought and language regress to the stage in which thoughts and ideas are expressed in visual images. Some of the latent dream content is in fact represented visually, far more of it than would be the case in waking life. But in many dreams, some at least of the latent content is represented by verbalized thoughts as it would be in waking life. In other words, here again is a regression which is not total and uniform, as the topographic theory would require, but is rather selective, as the structural theory predicts. The topographic theory of dreaming cannot account for the appearance of verbalized thoughts as such in a manifest dream. It must either ignore them or attribute them to some sort of mental functioning during sleep other than the dream work proper (Freud, 1900, pp. 488-489).

Illustrations of this point could be multiplied at will. In essence, what they do is to illustrate from examples in dream psychology what has already been said in Chapter 6 with respect to mental functioning in general, namely, that regression is characteristically selective and often fluctuant, rather than global and uniform.

It appears, therefore, that the structural theory has definite advantages over the topographic one as a basis for a theory of dream psychology. First, the structural theory explains better the dreamer's conviction that his dream is real while

<sup>10</sup> The thought, "This is only a dream," is an exception to this rule.

he is dreaming it. Second, it affords a satisfactory explanation of punishment dreams. Third, it accounts for the participation of the censorship and of the need for secondary revision throughout the course of the dream work. Fourth, it accounts for the observation that the regression in mental functioning during dreaming is not complete and uniform, but is rather selective and variable. We may recall that Freud himself took note of the first two of these instances of the inadequacy of the topographic theory in explaining dreaming.

Now we ask what can be said of the practical value of viewing dreams within the framework of the structural theory rather than of the topographic one. Granted that it may be advantageous to do this as far as theory is concerned, what advantages accrue from doing so as far as day-to-day analytic work is concerned?

We may perhaps best answer this question by reviewing a bit of psychoanalytic history. In the early days of analysis the analyst's chief aim was to arrive at an understanding of his patient's unconscious, sexual wishes as quickly as possible. Any obstacles or resistances in the way of this goal were to be circumvented or overcome without ado, and dreams were highly prized for the assistance they offered the skilled analyst in discovering his patient's unconscious wishes. The idea that analyzing resistances in a systematic, genetically oriented way is an essential part of normal analytic procedure had yet to be clearly formulated. The aim was to get to the unconscious as quickly as possible, and the dream was the royal road to the unconscious.

The stages of development in the technique and goals of analysis that have supervened since those early days have already been discussed in Chapters 5 and 8. We shall not review them here. Their result has been that ego and super-ego analysis have come to be essential parts of our daily work

alongside of their predecessor, which is today often called id analysis. We try today to understand the patient's inner conflicts, not merely the infantile wishes which comprise the instinctual aspect of those conflicts. We try to make clear to each patient both the anti-instinctual and the instinctual aspects of his conflicts and to trace the history of both back to the experiences and events of childhood which were decisively important in determining the original nature of his conflicts, their subsequent course, and their influence on the various aspects of his mental development.

We still welcome the aid dreams have to offer in id analysis. It may happen, for example, that the analysis of a dream will give the first clear indication of the nature of the instinctual wishes which a patient is unconsciously warding off by means of defenses which we are still in process of analyzing. But we have found that dream analysis can tell us much more about unconscious mental conflicts than merely the instinctual wishes involved in them. For example, when a patient dreams about a symptom, we expect to learn more about both sides of the conflict which underlies that symptom, and not only about the instinctual derivatives associated with it. Thus we expect to learn from the analysis of our patients' dreams about the nature of the fears associated with their instinctual wishes, about their unconscious need to punish themselves, and even about the defenses which at the moment they are unconsciously employing in their struggles against their wishes (see, for example, Arlow, 1953).

It seems fair to say that many, probably most analysts use dreams in these ways during their analytic work with patients. In so far as they do so, they are *in fact*, whether they realize it or not, applying the conceptual framework of the structural theory to the problems of dream psychology and

dream interpretation. They are using dreams in the analysis of ego functions, e.g., defenses, as well as in the analysis of the superego, and no longer solely for id analysis. The fact that such usage is already so widespread should be the best answer to the question. "Is the structural theory superior to the topographic one with respect to the practical, everyday problems of dream analysis in psychoanalytic practice?"

We hope that we have accomplished our purpose: to show that the changes which distinguish the structural theory from the topographic one are essential to a satisfactory explanation of dreaming, and that the conceptual framework afforded by the structural theory is the more useful practically as well as theoretically. In pursuing this purpose we have had occasion to outline a theory of dream psychology using the conceptual framework of the structural theory as a base. Such an outline is long since overdue, and will, we hope, prove fruitful.

We may conclude this chapter by reminding the reader that Freud (1900) emphasized that the explanatory concepts which he proposed in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* were not derived from the study of dreams alone. On the contrary, they form a psychological theory, the topographic theory, as we call it now, which was derived from his study of neuroses<sup>11</sup> as well as of dreams, and which is as applicable to the mental processes involved in the genesis of neurotic symptoms as it is to the dream work (See Chapter 2).

Freud clearly stated his opinion that no theory of mental functioning could rest upon the study of a single category of mental phenomena, such as dreams, however profound the study in question might be. Dreams, according to Freud, must be related to other mental phenomena, phenomena

<sup>11</sup> Also, though less importantly, of jokes and of the psychopathology of everyday life.

which have been studied earlier and are better known, i.e., neurotic symptoms. By the same token, again according to Freud, one of the tasks of a theory of the mind, if it is to be considered a satisfactory theory, is to make clear to us the place which dreams and dreaming occupy in mental life with respect to other mental phenomena. Our theory should tell us what dreams have in common with such phenomena, as well as the ways in which they differ from them.

In attempting, therefore, to include dreams among those mental phenomena to which we apply the structural theory, we are in fact following the same course of action which Freud pursued more than half a century earlier. We are maintaining that a proper understanding of dreams requires that the theories we use explain or apply not only to dreams but to the wide range of other mental phenomena with which we are familiar as well, both normal and pathological; phenomena for the understanding, study, and treatment of which the structural theory is our best existing tool.