

# Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Symbolism

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'The theory of symbolism', a paper whose contribution understandably has been overlooked. This prepares the way (in Chapter 10) for presenting the FB theory, highlighting its major propositions, and illustrating its dependence on Freud's general theory. In the final chapter, I defend the FB theory by setting out the logical and psychological requirements which any theory of symbolism must meet, and showing how the FB theory, unlike its competitors, meets them.

## 7 The problem of the 'system unconscious'

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The first of the propositions which are to be rejected is the more problematic, but is the one to which critics have given less attention; this is that symbolism is the natural mode of expression of the 'system unconscious', a system with its own characteristics, contents, and modes of operation.

The unconscious and repression are two central concepts in psychoanalytic theory. Freud insisted that the 'division of the psychical into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premiss of psycho-analysis' (1923d, p. 13), he labelled the unconscious 'the true psychical reality' (1900, p. 613), and he identified repression as the 'cornerstone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests' (1914c, p. 16). As is well known, the treatment of the unconscious in Freud's writings underwent a number of changes, changes which occurred over the course of the development of his ideas, particularly with the move from the 'topographical' to the 'structural' model of the mind. Anyone who attempts to present a systematic account of these changes, and to state exactly what is involved at any particular stage of that development, soon discovers how inconsistent and confusing is Freud's material, and how difficult it is to trace the tortuous paths of the changing classifications of the unconscious ('descriptive', 'dynamic', 'systematic'), and its relations to the conscious, the preconscious, the id, the ego, the superego, and so on. Such an attempt, however, is fortunately not necessary in order to identify and evaluate the intersection of the problems of symbolism with the theory of the unconscious. These problems, I shall argue, begin with a particular conception of the unconscious.

### The qualitative ('systematic') view of unconscious mentality

While it is often remarked that Freud neither invented nor discovered the unconscious (see, e.g., Whyte 1960), it has been suggested by his sup-

porters that the originality and importance of his contribution lay in his particular treatment of it – as a separate system, which obeys its own laws: careful students have perceived that Freud's revolutionary contribution to psychology was not so much his demonstrating the existence of an unconscious, and perhaps not even his exploration of its content, as his proposition that there are two fundamentally different kinds of mental processes, which he termed primary and secondary respectively. The laws applicable to the two groups are so widely different. (Jones 1953, p. 436)

This qualitative or 'systematic' view of unconscious mentality is one to which Freud himself became increasingly and more explicitly committed, and which has received considerable support from others. According to this view, there is some essential, intrinsic difference between conscious and unconscious mental processes – unconscious processes differ from conscious processes in *kind*, and not simply by the epistemic fact of their being unavailable to consciousness. Thus Freud:

the laws of unconscious activity differ widely from those of the conscious . . . Unconsciousness seemed to us only an enigmatical characteristic of a definite psychical act. Now it means more for us. It is a sign that this act partakes of the nature of a certain psychical category known to us by other and more important characters and that it belongs to a system of psychical activity which is deserving of our fullest attention. (1912c, p. 266)

analytic investigation reveals some of these latent processes as having characteristics and peculiarities which seem alien to us, or even incredible, and which run directly counter to the attributes of consciousness with which we are familiar. (1915c, p. 170)

we cannot escape the ambiguity of using the words 'conscious' and 'unconscious' sometimes in a descriptive and sometimes in a systematic sense, in which latter they signify inclusion in particular systems and possession of certain characteristics. (ibid., p. 174)

The distinction we have made between the two psychical systems receives fresh significance when we observe that processes in the one system, the *Ucs.*, show characteristics which are not met with again in the system immediately above it. (ibid., p. 186)

It is the observation that unconscious processes exhibit a number of peculiar characteristics that reveals that they belong to a separate 'system'. In his 1915 paper, 'The unconscious', Freud devotes a separate section to 'The special characteristics of the system *Ucs.*'

The cathectic intensities [in the *Ucs.*] are much more mobile. By the process of *displacement* one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathectic by the process of *condensation* it may appropriate the whole cathectic of several other ideas. I have proposed to regard these two processes as distinguishing marks of the so-called *primary psychical process*. (1915c, p. 186)

To sum up: *exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process* (mobility of

cathectic), *aimlessness*, and *replacement of external by psychical reality* – these are the characteristics which we may expect to find in processes belonging to the system *Ucs.* (ibid., p. 187)

To be sure, Freud eventually abandoned the 'system *Ucs.*' in favour of the 'id', a move (originally made in 1923, in *The Ego and the Id*) which he felt was necessary in order to accommodate his discovery that parts of the ego and the superego are also unconscious:

We perceive that we have no right to name the mental region that is foreign to the ego 'the system *Ucs.*', since the characteristic of being unconscious is not restricted to it. Very well, we will no longer use the term 'unconscious' in the systematic sense and we will give what we have hitherto so described a better name. (1933, p. 72)

However, this move did not involve abandoning the notion of a separate system, whose contents were unconscious, and which had its own characteristics. The 'special characteristics' and functions of the system *Ucs.* were now inherited by the id. In fact, Freud continued, on occasion, to use the terms 'unconscious' and 'id' synonymously:

We have found that processes in the unconscious or in the id obey different laws from those in the preconscious ego. We name these laws in their totality the *primary process*, in contrast to the *secondary process* which governs the course of events in the preconscious, in the ego. (1940, p. 164)

#### *Implications for the concept of repression: the 'structural' approach*

With respect to the concept of repression, the compatible complement of the qualitative (i.e., systematic) view of unconscious mentality is a 'structural' account of repression. According to this view, material which is in the repressed unconscious is there because of its distinctive characteristics. Rather than the unconscious being unconscious because it has been repressed, the repressed is repressed *because it is unconscious*. No censor, no blocking mechanism, no dynamic force is required to prevent the repressed from entering consciousness. It simply *cannot* become conscious because it lacks the attributes or qualities of conscious processes. This account of repression is not in fact the one favoured by Freud, yet it is required both by his support of the systematic unconscious, and by his treatment of repressed ideas as having undergone various dissociative processes which must be reversed if the ideas are to become conscious. This view of repression could hardly be avoided once the systematic view of unconscious mentality is adopted. Further, this implication of the systematic unconscious allows Jung (and others after him) to reject the distinctively Freudian dynamic concept of repression: 'The form that dreams take is natural to the unconscious

... Dreams do not guard sleep from what Freud called the "incompatible wish"? What he called "disguise" is actually the shape all impulses take in the unconscious' (Jung 1964, p. 53). Indeed, one might suggest that this step is equivalent to demolishing completely the concept of repression.

The view of the unconscious as a separate system, with its structural account of repression, has been attractive, and has featured in a number of later developments of Freudian theory, developments explicitly devoted to elucidating the special characteristics of unconscious processes. There are three different versions of the attempt to reformulate the system unconscious, and each has been able to draw support from Freud's own material. The first is in terms of linguistic concepts, presenting the unconscious as a 'language', with its own syntactic and semantic rules (Edelson 1972; Foulkes 1978). The second is in terms of logico-mathematical concepts, presenting the unconscious as consisting of 'infinite sets' and operating according to its own 'logic' (María Blanco 1975). The third presents the unconscious as consisting of 'pre-propositional' mental states, in contrast to the propositional mental states of the conscious system (Gardner 1993).

However, from Freud's original treatment onwards, the concept of the 'system unconscious' has led to serious theoretical difficulties and confusions which, apart from obscuring the insights which *are* to be found in Freud's material, have left the unconscious vulnerable to the kind of extreme verdict recently pronounced by Varela (1995): that we have no choice but to abandon the conception of the unconscious as a substantive, causal and lawful entity, and, together with it, any reconceptualisation which stems from the Freudian original. To make matters worse, many of the resulting tensions have spread so far into other material that their origins in the 'system unconscious' have gone unrecognised. This is particularly true in the case of symbolism; the anomalies in the Freudian material have been attacked by Freud's critics, and his supporters are left struggling in vain to answer the criticisms and to make sense of Freud's account.

### Problems for the systematic unconscious and structural repression

The major criticism of Freud's formulation is that the putative peculiar 'mechanisms', 'characteristics' and 'contents' of the unconscious are *demonstrably not distinctive* of unconscious processes. To begin with, several scholars have pointed to the unsustainability of the notion that the

modes of operation identified by Freud are peculiar to unconscious processes. They are, on the contrary, just as familiar in conscious mentality, in the form of the linguistic devices of metaphor and metonymy. As Forrester (1980) remarks: 'The processes he [Freud] conceived of as specific to the dream-work – condensation, displacement – have close affinities with strictly linguistic devices (metaphor, metonymy, tropes)' (p. 7). Todorov (1982) relates this observation specifically to symbolism, pointing out that 'the symbolic mechanism that Freud has described lacks specificity; the operations that he identifies are simply those of any linguistic symbolism, as they have been inventoried, most notably, by the rhetorical tradition' (p. 248). In support, Todorov points to a number of passages in *The Interpretation of Dreams* where the connection between symbolism and metaphor is closely drawn. Further, the ubiquity of condensation and displacement in conscious mentality has been used to attack Freud's restriction of the concept of symbolism to an unconscious mode of operation. This objection applies not just to the supposed mechanisms and characteristics of the unconscious, but also to its supposed 'contents'. They too are not different *in kind*. While certain thoughts, wishes, etc. may typically be found in the unconscious, the typicality of their occurrence there is attributable to the fact that those particular thoughts and wishes tend to become the object of social or moral censure, and so are more likely to be repressed. But if they are not repressed, or if the repression is 'lifted', there is no impediment to their being or becoming conscious.

Despite these criticisms in the literature, their implications have not been driven home: if the unconscious as a system cannot be distinguished from the conscious in terms of its 'characteristics', 'mechanisms' or 'contents', then the claim that any particular kind of material (in our case, symbolism) belongs to the peculiar mode of operation of the system unconscious cannot be upheld; there simply is no such peculiar mode.

This same objection likewise undermines the more recent attempts to elaborate or reformulate the systematic unconscious.

### *The unconscious is a language*

The reformulation of the 'system unconscious' in linguistic terms is illustrated in Edelson's (1972) attempt, supported by Foulkes (1978), to assimilate Freudian dream theory (with its latent and manifest content) to Chomskyan linguistic structuralism (with its deep and surface structures). The starting point is Freud's comment that 'the dream content seems like a transcript of the dream thoughts into another mode

of expression whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation' (1900, p. 277). While it is taken for granted that the unconscious and the conscious are separate systems, the problem is that of their obvious interaction. This problem is particularly acute if the unconscious is conceived of as consisting of non-cognitive instinctual drives. As Foulkes remarks, 'so long as the unconscious is viewed as a repository of biological entities, its integration with thought or image justifiably will appear to contemporary cognitivists as exceedingly difficult' (1978, p. 22). The solution, according to Edelson and Foulkes, is to treat the unconscious as consisting of 'a finite set of underlying, personally significant propositions', which, in dreaming, are transformed into the 'infinitely various forms of dream imagery' (Foulkes 1978, p. 17) by 'a syntactic mechanism, a "parser" which ... assigns visual constituents to verbally coded propositions' (ibid., p. 174). Thus, says Edelson, what distinguishes the unconscious from the conscious is that the former consists of the deep structures from which are generated the surface structures of the latter, the dream-work processes being analogous to generative transformational rules. As for repression, it is argued that the primary motive for dream distortion (i.e., for manifest content) is not censorship, but the intrinsic constraints of the representational medium in which that content is found. Distortion is a natural result of the characteristics of the system unconscious, for 'if the special characteristics of the dream can be explained by other considerations (necessary from the point of view of the nature of a symbolic system), such as economy and representability, without recourse to the postulation of a "censor" operating in the sleeping state ... then it might be more parsimonious to accept such an explanation' (Edelson 1972, p. 268).

Now, while it is a considerable conceptual advance to recognise the *cognitive* nature of the unconscious (that amongst its 'contents' one may find, so to speak, unconscious knowings and unconscious beliefs), and it is thus legitimate to describe it as consisting of a set of 'personally significant propositions', it is not at all clear that such propositions (basically, *thoughts*) require *translation* in order to become conscious. The propositional nature of thinking does not, of course, make cognition *linguistic* in nature – but this confusion (which is addressed in the next chapter) is not relevant here. What *is* relevant is that, just as Chomsky's deep structures are not of a form which *cannot* appear in surface structures (e.g., the sentence 'the short happy boy who wanted to go to the store went with his mother' is supposedly derived from simpler underlying structures of the form 'the boy was short', 'the boy was happy', 'the boy wanted to go to the store', etc.), so latent or uncon-

scious thoughts (such as the Rat Man's 'I hate my father') may, under certain conditions, appear consciously in *exactly the same form*. As for the version of structural repression, cast in terms of the constraints on possible representations, the obvious objection is that, whatever restrictions on the dream images arise from the peculiar nature of the representational medium, they cannot account for the conscious/unconscious distinction, because they cannot account for the *direction* of the substitution, for the occurrence of the manifest, in place of the latent, content. In a classic Oedipal dream, for instance, the presence of the queen might be a 'disguise' for the mother. But the conditions of pictorial representability are *equally* applicable to each of these; it is no more difficult to represent the mother via a visual image than it is to represent the queen. Why one image, then, and not the other, appears in the dream must be explained in some other way.

#### *The unconscious has its own 'logic'*

On occasion, Freud's characterisation of the system unconscious focused on the peculiar 'logic' of its operations:

The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction ... There is nothing in the id that could be compared with negation; and we perceive with surprise an exception to the philosophical theorem that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. (1933, pp. 73–4)

The governing rules of logic carry no weight in the unconscious: it might be called the Realm of the Illogical. (1940, pp. 168–9)

In accordance with these remarks, a reformulation of the Freudian unconscious in terms of 'logico-mathematical' concepts has been offered by Matte Blanco (1975) in *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets: An Essay in Bi-Logic*. The term 'Bi-Logic' is used to indicate that the mind operates according to two, radically different, systems of logic – conscious processes according to normal, 'asymmetrical', Aristotelian logical principles, and unconscious processes according to 'symmetrical logic' (whose two principles are 'generalisation' and 'symmetry'). Freud's 'system *Ucs.*' thus becomes renamed the 'symmetrical mode of being'. From 'symmetrical logic', in which asymmetrical relations are treated as if they were symmetrical, follow all the characteristics of the system to which Freud pointed. For example, if A follows B, the unconscious treats this as if the relation were symmetrical, and assumes that B also follows A. This means that it cannot recognise a succession of movements; hence, the unconscious is characterised by 'absence of

time'. Symmetrical relations lie at the heart of symbolism, for symbolism involves a belief in the identity of symbol and symbolised. Now, because the unconscious 'does not know individuals but only classes or propositional functions which define the class' (Matte Blanco 1975, p. 139, italics in original), whenever we desire anything, we desire the whole class of things which resemble the object of desire. In the case, for example, of the unconscious symbolic representation of the breast, this object, by virtue of the infinite number of objects which bear some similarity to it, becomes an 'open class' with an 'infinite number of elements', so that: 'In these circumstances (i.e. being "breast-oriented") it is out of the question that something may be included in the list . . . and have at the same time the possibility of either being or not being a breast for the unconscious' (ibid., p. 316). Structural repression is guaranteed by the fact that the 'quality' of being unconscious is a consequence of the different logical structure of unconscious processes, with the result that 'this mode of being cannot directly enter consciousness: consciousness does not have the dimensions to contain it' (ibid., p. 69). According to Matte Blanco, there is no need for a dynamic process to keep something out of consciousness, because 'there is an intrinsic impossibility of it entering directly into consciousness, and this seems to be a point which has never been clear in psychoanalytic thinking' (ibid., p. 84, italics in original).

But this version of the systematic unconscious and structural repression fares no better than the previous one, because the operations identified by Matte Blanco as belonging to the 'symmetrical mode of being' are merely relationships between propositions (which are the objects of the propositional attitudes held by the person), such that the reasoning which moves from one such proposition to another is logically invalid. To believe that if A follows B then B follows A is simply to reason invalidly. And it is not 'the unconscious' which reasons thus, but the *person*. Furthermore, such reasoning is not *discriminative* of, because it is manifestly not restricted to, unconscious thinking. A considerable body of literature in psychology attests to the ubiquity of the conscious drawing of invalid inferences, and the prevalence of the failure to observe the law of non-contradiction. These objections reveal that the structural account of repression, according to which the unconscious cannot become conscious by virtue of its nature or structure, must also fail, for that structure turns out not to differ from the structure of the conscious.

#### *The unconscious consists of 'pre-propositional' mental states*

The most recent version of Freud's 'system unconscious', developed by Gardner (1993), presents the unconscious as consisting of 'pre-

propositional' mental states, in contrast to the propositional mental states of the conscious system. Briefly, Gardner's proposal is an attempt to defend, in the face of Sartre's (1956) critique of mental plurality and dynamic repression, the ability of psychoanalytic theory to explain human irrationality. He argues that the only defence is a structural account of repression and a systematic account of unconscious mentality. This means that unconscious mental states cannot be assimilated to conscious mental states, since the two are different *in kind*. Thus, the 'widespread view of the nature of Freud's postulation of unconscious motives – as simply transposing ordinary psychology into an unconscious key' (1993, p. 7) is erroneous. Instead, unconscious mental states, being pre-propositional, are *not* species of, or combinations of, beliefs or desires (since these latter are propositional, and so belong to the conscious system), but they *are*, nevertheless, *psychological*. There is, therefore, a psychological stratum intervening between bare behaviour and complex attributions of belief and desire' (ibid., pp. 232–3). From this, the structural account of repression follows naturally. What is repressed is 'repressed' because '*the thought itself can not be manifested in consciousness*' (ibid., p. 103, italics in original). Within this context, Gardner provides an account of symbolism which avoids the notorious problem of the censor, and depends, instead, on the notion of unconscious, pre-propositional 'seeing-as'. This process does not involve belief (and so, *a fortiori*, does not involve belief in the identity of symbol and symbolised), but is, rather, a 'non-cognitive' kind of Humean symbol/symbolised 'association'. Thus, the substitution of the symbol for the symbolised occurs 'on the border of the propositional and the pre-propositional', where 'the relevant symbolic substitution does not require an act of thought' (ibid., p. 134). Sublimation is identified by Gardner as 'an important specific form of unconscious seeing-as', in which the seeing-as is 'correlated with the acknowledgement of psychic reality'. Taking Segal's (1958) distinction between 'symbolic representation' and 'symbolic equation', exemplified in the difference between a man who sublimates his masturbatory phantasy in dreaming that he is playing a violin duet with his lover, and a schizophrenic who cannot play the violin in public because that would be equivalent to masturbation, Gardner says:

What distinguishes sublimation is a negative belief, expressing the Reality Principle, to the effect that  $S \neq X$ : a realisation that S is only a symbol. When the unconscious seeing of S-as-X is brought up against an appreciation of their real non-identity, that structure is not abolished, but rather robbed of its irrational coercive power . . . The corrective belief constitutive of sublimation need not, of course, take an explicit form . . . (Gardner 1993, p. 168)

Now, this account appears to involve a contradiction, produced by the claim that 'seeing-as' does not involve a belief in identity. If sublimation is to be distinguished from ordinary symbolism via a 'corrective' belief in the *non-identity* of S and X, such a belief can only be 'corrective' if, after all, there *is* a belief (albeit unconscious) in identity. Thus, the use of the term 'seeing-as', which is supposed to indicate a kind of mental process different from believing, is merely a way of saying that the person 'believes but does not really believe'. The term 'seeing-as' is attractive because it can disguise the contradiction involved, and so evade the problematic implication of mental plurality. More importantly, it suggests that the unconscious *does* include propositional mental states such as beliefs. Indeed, this conclusion is borne out by a consideration of Gardner's own examples. I do not have the space here to argue the case in the necessary detail. But, briefly, it is based on the following points. Firstly, it is quite unclear what Gardner's candidates for pre-propositional are. In his explicit statement of his thesis, they are wish-fulfilment and phantasy (as expounded by Klein), but he also nominates 'ideas' (the components supposedly left behind in the unconscious after repression), on other occasions 'thoughts' ('the thought itself can not be manifested in consciousness'), and, on yet other occasions, emotions. When each is considered in turn, it is not clear how any of them can escape pre-propositionality. Indeed, there are serious difficulties with the notion of pre-propositional *mental* content, of the idea of a level between 'bare behaviour' and 'propositional attitudes' which is nevertheless mental. But, even if that notion were salvageable, it appears not to serve Gardner's purpose. Either his examples (such as the Rat Man's unconscious hatred of his father) actually betray a content which is fully propositional (and so no different from conscious content), or, even if it were granted that the propositional status of the mental contents in those examples *is* uncertain, these contents are demonstrably not distinctive of unconscious mentality, and so cannot illustrate the *difference* between unconscious and conscious states.

These criticisms all point to the same conclusion. The failure of attempts to show that unconscious mentality differs from conscious mentality in non-epistemic, qualitative respects, suggests that the 'structure' of unconscious mentality (whether in terms of the relationship between propositions, i.e., in terms of the validity or invalidity of the reasoning involved, or in terms of the status of the objects as propositional or not) is not, and cannot be, different from the 'structure' of conscious mentality. Thus, the 'system unconscious' cannot be independently, intrinsically, characterisable. There is, therefore, no such system. Yet all is not lost. We are by no means forced to agree with Varela

(1995) that the concept of the unconscious should be abandoned. There is a solution at hand – ironically, in Freud's own writings. It has not been generally recognised that Freud actually presents *two* basic (but incompatible) views of the unconscious, and *two* basic (but incompatible) views of repression. Alongside the qualitative or systematic unconscious (whose complement is the structural account of repression) is a second view, one which has been overshadowed and largely neglected, both by Freud and by post-Freudian theorists. This second approach may be called the relational (or 'epistemic') view of unconscious mentality, and its complement is a 'dynamic' approach to repression.

#### *The relational ('epistemic') view of unconscious mentality*

This alternative view is seen in Freud's characterisation of unconscious mentality in what he calls the 'descriptive' sense (Freud 1912c, 1915c, 1923d, 1933). It includes both the repressed unconscious (the 'dynamic' unconscious), and the unexpressed unconscious (or 'pre-conscious'). On this account unconscious mental states are claimed to differ from conscious mental states only by the fact of their being unconscious, which fact is *relational*, not qualitative (although Freud, misleadingly, talks of unconsciousness as a 'quality' in this context, and does not explicitly identify and emphasise the relational nature of his 'descriptive' characterisation. This inappropriate use of the word 'quality' is adopted by many post-Freudians). So, a mental state is unconscious if it is *unknown*. While this may not be so clear from the English word 'unconscious', it is in keeping with the passive participial force of the German word used by Freud, whether in its adjectival form (*unbewusst*), or in its substantival form (*das Unbewusste*). This view of unconscious mentality is crystal clear in the following statements from Freud:

Now let us call 'conscious' the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware, and let this be the only meaning of the term 'conscious'. As for latent conceptions, if we have any reason to suppose that they exist in the mind . . . let them be denoted by the term 'unconscious'.

Thus an unconscious conception is one of which we are *not* aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on account of other proofs or signs. (1912c, p. 260, *italics mine*)

all the categories which we employ to describe conscious mental acts, such as ideas, purposes, resolutions and so on, can be applied to them [i.e., unconscious mental acts]. Indeed, we are obliged to say of some of these latent states that



the only respect in which they differ from conscious states is precisely in the absence of consciousness. (1915c, p. 168)

large portions of the ego and super-ego can remain unconscious and are not-morally unconscious. That is to say, the individual knows nothing of their contents. (1923, pp. 69–70)

We call a psychical process unconscious whose existence we are obliged to assume . . . but of which we know nothing. (ibid., p. 70)

In accordance with this view, Freud is acknowledging a logical point when he asserts that every mental process must begin as an unconscious one. This is because it requires a second mental act in order for the first to become conscious – that is, a mental act becomes 'conscious' (i.e., known) only when it becomes the object of a further mental act:

every psychical act begins as an unconscious one, and it may either remain so or go on developing into consciousness. (1912c, p. 264)

every mental process . . . exists to begin with in an unconscious stage or phase. (1916/17, p. 295)

there is no choice for us but to assert that mental processes are in themselves unconscious, and to liken the perception of them by means of consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense-organs. (1915c, p. 171)

Psycho-analysis regarded everything mental as being in the first instance unconscious; the further quality of 'consciousness' might also be present, or again it might be absent. (1925d, p. 31)

This approach to unconscious mentality is consistent with the view of mentality (conscious or unconscious) which regards mental processes (knowing, believing, perceiving, remembering, etc.) as *relations* between a cognising subject and a state of affairs cognised. Such a relational account has a long tradition and can be traced historically in a number of separate ideas: Aristotle's notion of the *πρὸς τι* ('towards something') of mentality, which was developed, via medieval scholasticism, into Brentano's identification of the 'intentionality' of mental states; Thomas Reid's alternative to the intermediary 'ideas' in Locke's account of mind; and William James's functionalist rejection of 'mind stuff'. It also forms a central part of the realist, relational account of mentality developed in the school of 'Andersonian Realism' (see Baker 1986) by Anderson (1927, 1929, 1930) and, for example, Passmore (1962), Mazon (1983, 1991), and Michell (1988). This account emphasises the distinction between relations and qualities, arguing that any reification of mental relations (including 'being aware of' or 'being conscious of') is

logically incoherent. Accordingly, the substantive 'consciousness' and 'unconsciousness', being just such reifications, must be rejected.

This view of unconscious mentality is also consistent with Freud's rejection of the Cartesian notion of consciousness as transparent to itself. If my knowing that *p* (or being conscious that *p*, or being aware of *p*), is a relation, then, for that knowing to be conscious (i.e., known) it must itself become the object of a separate knowing relation. In that case, the object of the second relation (i.e., my knowing that *p*) is plainly different from the object of the first relation (i.e., *p*). Further, although the second act often does occur, it is clear that such an occurrence is not entailed by the first act, and so is not a necessary or automatic accompaniment, as Descartes claimed. This is exactly the point made by James when he suggests that the stream of *consciousness* is more accurately described as a stream of '*Sciousness* pure and simple', because the 'knowing is not immediately *known*'. It is only known in subsequent reflection', and so the stream of thought must not be conceived as 'thinking its own existence along with whatever else it thinks' (James 1890, vol. 1, p. 304).

To identify a particular mental act as unconscious, then, is not to say anything about its intrinsic nature, but only to say something about its relations (i.e., that it is not known). Naturally, the relational view must include as unconscious any mental state which is unknown for any reason; that is, it incorporates both the repressed unconscious, and the 'latent' unconscious (or pre-conscious). The fact of a particular mental state's being unconscious does not imply anything about why it is so:

the disjunction between conscious and unconscious is in the last resort a question of perception, which must be answered 'yes' or 'no', and the act of perception itself tells us nothing of the reason why a thing is or is not perceived. (Freud 1923d, pp. 15–16)

#### *Implications for the concept of repression: the 'dynamic' approach*

The relational or epistemic view of unconscious mentality is compatible with a 'dynamic' account of repression, according to which an unconscious process is blocked or prevented from becoming conscious by a part of the mind which finds the content unacceptable: '*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*' (Freud 1915b, p. 147, italics in original). This is the account of repression which appears throughout Freud's writings. According to this view, the repressed unconscious is unconscious *because* it has been repressed, and can become conscious as a result of the 'lifting' of repression. Of course, this may be a complex process:



Freud himself commented on the apparent paradox, according to which informing the patient that he or she holds unconsciously a particular belief does not necessarily lead to the lifting of repression. An explanation of this fact would require sophisticated working out, would probably incorporate the thesis of mental plurality, and would certainly require a major overhauling of Freud's discussion of 'thing presentations' and 'word presentations', and their relationship to the dissociation and re-combination of 'idea' and 'affect'. However, the important point here is that, if the repression is lifted, the unconscious states will become conscious, but, since this is a relational change, the nature of those states will not change: 'we are inclined . . . to forget too readily that repression . . . in fact interferes only with the relation of the insinuated representative to one psychical system, namely to that of the conscious' (Freud 1915b, p. 147). The integration of this view of repression with the relational view of unconscious mentality is clear:

Psycho-analysis leaves no room for doubt that the repulsion from unconscious ideas is only provoked by the tendencies embodied in their contents . . . every psychical act begins as an unconscious one, and it may either remain so or go on developing into consciousness, according as it meets with resistance or not. (Freud 1912c, p. 264)

With respect to Freud's theory of symbolism, the extension of this stance is seen in what Todorov (1982) calls Freud's 'anti-romantic', 'realist' insistence that, insofar as the symbol is the manifest, and the symbolised the latent, content, what the symbol stands for in symbolism, what is disguised, is not 'ineffable' or in any way essentially different from what might, given different conditions of socialisation and repression, not be disguised. Herein lies a major distinction between Freud and Jung, a distinction which is necessarily eroded if the dynamic view of repression is abandoned.

That the dynamic account of repression requires some kind of mental plurality is obvious. Freud himself recognised this:

a dreamer in relation to his dream-wishes can only be compared to an amalgamation of two separate people who are linked by some important common element. (1919a, n. p. 581)

We should long ago have asked the question: from *what part of his mind* does an unconscious resistance like this arise? (1933, p. 68)

It is this view of repression which was subject to the famous critique by Sartre (1956), whose attack is considered by Gardner (1993) to be successful enough to warrant abandoning the thesis of mental plurality. However, if the structural account of repression fails, and the dynamic account is adopted, and if mental plurality is in any case necessitated

by other considerations, then the supposed implications of Sartre's criticisms would require re-examination.

### Clarifications and answers to criticisms

The adoption of the relational view of unconscious mentality and the dynamic account of repression allows us to reply to a number of hitherto unanswered criticisms, and to clarify several important aspects of the Freudian material. This clarification is necessary if the Freudian theory of symbolism is not to be left open to certain difficulties, which have arisen as a result of adherence to the notion of the systematic unconscious. Both the critics and the supporters of Freud fail to appreciate that these problems originate in the concept of the unconscious as a separate system, and, as a result, their attempted solutions are unsatisfactory, sometimes serving only to exacerbate the initial problems.

#### *The supposed failure of disguise*

To begin with, we can rebut Hall's (1953) attack on Freud's concept of disguise in a dream. Hall insists that he objects not to the idea that the dreamer uses symbols in the dream but, rather, to Freud's theory that the symbols hide something objectionable. One of Hall's reasons for this rejection is that the dreamer may one night have a disguised incestuous dream, and the next night have an open, undisguised dream on the same theme; in other words, for any particular person, what is latent content on one occasion may be manifest (more accurately, undisguised) content on another. Hall comments: 'What is the sense of preparing an elaborate disguise in one dream when it is discarded in another dream? I have not been able to find a convincing answer to this question in Freudian theory' (1953, p. 94).

As a matter of fact, Freud does address this question, pointing to Jocasta's remark to Oedipus that many young men dream undisguisedly of lying with their mother. True, says Freud, but 'I can say with certainty that *disguised* dreams of sexual intercourse with the dreamer's mother are many times more frequent than straightforward ones' (Freud 1909c, p. 398). Now, according to the relational view of unconscious mentality, since there is nothing about the content *per se* which requires that it be unconscious, the occurrence of openly incestuous dream content is not ruled out. Further, according to the dynamic account of repression, whether or not a particular content is subject to repression depends on motivational forces, which are liable to vary. Such variation is perfectly familiar to us in the non-psychoanalytic phenomenon of

desensitisation: a person may be desensitised to a particular objectionable content, as a result of which the resistance to that content is (temporarily or permanently) decreased or removed. Since objecting to something is a relation, and nothing can be objectionable in itself, what is affected by the process of desensitisation is the person's relation to the mental content, not the content itself. Psychoanalytic theory does not hold that the same content is always equally objectionable and equally repressed, so a dreamer may very well have a disguised Oedipal dream one night, and on the next night an undisguised Oedipal dream. Rather than undermining the psychoanalytic theory, such facts underscore the contribution of that theory, which lies in elucidating both the general processes by which particular mental contents become repressed, and the reasons for variation on different occasions. In fact, the interchangeability of disguised and undisguised content keeps faith with Freud's realism with respect to the latent content (it is not intrinsically different from manifest content, and so not incapable of constituting the manifest content).

*Freud's 'illegitimate' parallel between conscious and unconscious processes*

Another major criticism which can be answered is the attack by Macmillan (1991) on Freud's supposedly illegitimate 'playing on' the 'postulated resemblance' between unconscious and conscious mental processes. Macmillan argues that we accept Freud's theory of the unconscious because we are seduced by his claim that irrational, inexplicable mental processes may be understood by analogy with rational, explicable processes.

A further aspect of the appeal of the irrational is what Wirtgenstein called the charm of psycho-analysis, a charm coming from the resemblance which Freud's unconscious motivational explanations have to ordinary ones. For all Freud's talk of a chaotic and irrational primary process, the unconscious wishes and motives with which he explains dreams or slips of the tongue seem just like ordinary ones, acting in exactly the same way as their conscious counterparts. (Macmillan 1991, p. 605)

The arguments presented earlier indicate that Macmillan is correct to doubt the supposedly distinctive 'chaotic and irrational' processes in the unconscious, but he fails to appreciate the evidential weight of this for the soundness of Freud's parallel. Instead:

Coming to Freud for the first time, we find we already understand the purely conscious instances of motivated forgetting and have little difficulty with the preconscious ones. It is then but a short step to accepting Freud's examples of

unconscious motives along with the rest of the theory. When, in turn, we come to supposed unconscious lusts and hatreds, we have been readied to find they, too, resemble our conscious drives. Our self-applications, now easily made, produce a high level of conviction. (ibid., p. 606)

Thus, according to Macmillan, Freud fabricates the similarity between conscious and unconscious mentality:

Freud may have been aware of the charm and power of his conceptualisation of unconscious processes. Certainly he frequently capitalised on the postulated resemblance between them and conscious processes. . . . As Freud set it out, slips of the tongue varied between those supposedly produced by counter-intentions of which we are aware at the time to those produced by repressed unconscious impulses. In between are those produced by the preconscious motives or counter-intentions we can fairly readily bring back to consciousness. But, whatever their type, and wherever they are located, these counter-intentions act on the primary intention in exactly the same way. We also find Freud playing on the conscious-unconscious parallel in the *Introductory Lectures*. (ibid., p. 606)

But on the relational view of unconscious mental processes, this resemblance and parallelism is exactly what should be expected. Macmillan simply asserts that 'the appeal of Freud's parallel is inversely related to the strength of its logical foundations' (ibid.), and he points to observations by others that 'many of Freud's interpretations of parapraxes depend on a verbally competent unconscious and so contradict his basic postulate that unconscious processes are irrational and non-verbal' (ibid.). True, there is a contradiction here. But it suggests that the 'basic postulate' is false, and that there is, after all, a parallel between conscious and unconscious processes. The recognition of a verbally competent unconscious is evidence against the 'systematic' difference between conscious and unconscious. For, once again, a verbally competent unconscious is exactly what would be expected (consider, for example, the famous case of 'Bridley Murphy' (Bernstein 1956), who knew certain linguistic expressions and their meanings, yet had come to forget that she knew them).

*Clarifying the 'characteristics' of unconscious thinking*

Adopting the relational view of unconscious mentality does not prevent us from accommodating some of the insights offered by Freud in his discussion of the 'special characteristics of the system unconscious', even if those characteristics cannot be special to the unconscious. It will be recalled that Freud lists these as: exemption from mutual contradic-

tion, primary process (displacement and condensation), timelessness, and replacement of external by psychical reality.

Firstly, 'exemption from mutual contradiction' arises in the context of two related observations. Instinctual drives, representing conflicting interests, coexist in the organism and simultaneously press for gratification. These *drives*, of course, are not contradictory, but the results of their conflicting interests can sometimes be expressed in terms of pairs of contradictory assertions such as 'I hate my father' and 'I do not hate my father'. Similarly, the explanation of behaviour in terms of the causal efficacy of repressed, unconscious mental processes often includes the person's maintaining contradictory propositional attitudes, at least one of which is typically unconscious. Secondly, the so-called 'primary process' mechanisms of condensation and displacement, while not peculiar to unconscious processes, are undoubtedly involved in the complex of conscious and unconscious processes which produces substitute formations of the kind on which psychoanalysis focus. Thirdly, 'timelessness' can be taken to refer to two separate facts. The first is that the instinctual drives themselves are, so to speak, timeless; they are continuous forces pressing always for gratification (not necessarily in the sense that one is always, say, hungry, but more in the sense that one's hunger drive is always alert to, and capable of reacting to, information which is relevant to its own gratification, present or future). The second fact is that what is important in early childhood, particularly if it has been subject to repression, remains important in later life, and, further, is typically not acknowledged as belonging to the past. For example, in the phenomenon of transference, the patient does not realise that he or she is re-enacting the past in the present. Finally, 'replacement of external by psychical reality' is a general statement regarding the importance and causal efficacy of wishful thinking, phantasy, delusion, hallucination, etc., which may replace veridical perception of reality, and, typically, do so unconsciously. One way of summarising these observations is that it is not that the unconscious is 'timeless', 'exempt from contradiction', etc., but simply that the inexorability of time, the fact of contradiction, etc., are often unconsciously ignored or denied.

#### *Implications for the distinction between primary and secondary processes*

Adopting the notions of the relational unconscious and dynamic repression also provides a framework for dispelling some of the confusions, and answering some of the criticisms, surrounding the supposed distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' processes, both as they

apply to thinking in general, and to symbolism in particular. This distinction is the one which Jones (1953) identified as Freud's 'revolutionary contribution to psychology' (p. 436). On examination, however, the distinction is, at best, misleading.

Freud claims that the unconscious (or the id) is characterized by the 'primary process', which is 'irrational', and whose 'mobility of cathexes' is provided by the mechanisms of condensation and displacement. These two processes are 'distinguishing marks of the so-called *primary psychical process*' (1915c, p. 186). The term 'primary process' is also used to refer to primitive, infantile, hallucinatory attempts at instinctual gratification (in accordance with the Pleasure Principle), before the Reality Principle comes to prompt the infant to engage in the 'secondary process' of 'reality testing', i.e., to search the environment for real objects which will provide real gratification. In contrast to primary processes, secondary processes are 'rational', 'bound' (i.e., instinctual cathexes are less mobile), and involve the 'replacement of psychical by external reality'.

This characterisation of the primary/secondary process distinction, related as it is to the systematic unconscious, fails on two counts. Firstly, as has already been shown, whether we are considering the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, or whether we are referring to the irrationality of certain mental processes, the characteristics of the unconscious (and so of its primary process *modus operandi*) are not distinctive of it. Secondly, wishful thinking and hallucinatory attempts at gratification cannot occur without prior experience both of real, gratifying objects and of the loss or absence of those objects. In other words, primary process thinking, insofar as it consists of hallucinating objects of gratification, must *follow* secondary process thinking; one needs to have perceived the real object in order to be able to hallucinate it, and one needs to be experiencing real loss or frustration, in order for the hallucinatory wish to be set in motion. Therefore, the type of thinking identified in psychoanalysis as 'primary' is primary neither logically nor temporally.

There is, however, a genuine aspect of early (and so infantile) mental life which is included in the notion of primary process thinking. This is the infant's initial inability to tolerate frustration (whether in the form of the absence of gratification, or in the form of delayed gratification). The infant's immediate response to this frustration is the formation of hallucinatory wish-fulfillments (false beliefs). Naturally, such a response is insufficient, and the infant is eventually forced to abandon phantasy in favour of reality. However, if the characteristics which are supposed to distinguish 'primary processes' from 'secondary processes' are *not* dis-

inactive, and if the epithets 'primary' and 'secondary' are inappropriate in all but this last sense, the best way to avoid the confusions would be to abandon the use of these terms.

These observations lead to a number of clarifications. One of the major confusions engendered by the distinction between primary and secondary processes has been a forced gulf between the id and the ego, which are typically taken to be co-ordinate with the two kinds of processes. Jones, for example, takes Freud's distinction between the wish-fulfilment of the primary process and the reality-orientation of the secondary process, and parallels that with the difference between a reflex action and more complex reactions which involve cognitions. This is dangerously misleading; it fuels the widespread misunderstanding that cognition belongs properly to the secondary, but not to the primary process. The id, which is characterised by primary processes, is typically represented as not involving thoughts and cognition, not involving 'cognitive transactions with the external world'. Instead, such transactions, secondary processes, are held to be the function of the ego. Many 'ego psychologists' are then faced with two problems. Firstly, they object to what they perceive to be the overly strong focus by 'classical' Freudians on the id, supposedly composed of unconscious, non-cognitive, purely biological instinctual drives, and they accuse these theorists of neglecting secondary (ego) processes, of treating the ego as a later development from the id (rather than as something present at, or even before, birth). Secondly, they are puzzled by the mystery of how the non-cognitive, purely biological id can interact with the cognitive ego. These concerns and accusations rest on misunderstandings of Freud's theory, for which, admittedly, Freud may to some extent be responsible (for example, in his later characterisation of the ego as a set of control functions interfacing cognitively with the external environment). But, as Mäze (1983) has argued, this theoretical change was unsound and unwarranted. Freud's sound distinctions between unconscious and conscious mentality, reality and wish-fulfilment, rationality and irrationality, ability and inability to tolerate frustration, are not captured by his particular version of a primary/secondary process distinction, and in fact are obfuscated by the way that distinction is presented. If, however, we take the relational view of unconscious mentality, together with the genuine distinctions listed above, there is an interpretation of Freud's observations which does not lead to such misunderstandings. The interpretation consists of three points. Firstly, given that the infant can perceive, feel, etc., it is, from the very start, engaged in cognition. Thus, insofar as Freud's critics take (mistakenly) 'cognitive transactions with reality' to be the essential core of the ego, they are correct to locate the origins of the ego

alongside the origins of the id, for these cognitive transactions appear at (or before) birth. Secondly, before an object can be hallucinated, it must have been perceived. At least part of what it is to hallucinate an object is to believe falsely that the object is present, and such a false belief requires a prior true belief. Error is dependent on knowledge, as it logically must be, and the implication for psychoanalysis is that psychic life does not begin with hallucination but with veridical apprehension. Thirdly, the mystery of id-ego interaction, how a non-cognitive drive can interact with a cognitive thought, disappears once it is understood that instinctual drives are from the very beginning capable of cognising (or of being in contact, in some sense, with the infant's cognitive apparatus); thus, they are all engaged in cognitive interchanges with the environment. This is not at all to suggest, however, that the Freudian distinction between the 'primary' and the 'derivative' (in terms of a distinction between original objects of desire and their substitutes) be abandoned.

#### *Resolution of tensions in the treatment of repression*

All this takes us several steps closer to clarifying a number of significant, hitherto unresolved, tensions in psychoanalytic theory. These tensions can be attributed to a failure to see that dynamic and structural repression, stemming from two incompatible approaches to the unconscious, are incompatible. This failure has led to futile attempts by Freud's supporters to accommodate those incompatibilities within a single theoretical framework.

Amongst Freud's supporters, Wollheim (1971), for example, remarks on the apparent inconsistency between the treatment of condensation and displacement as methods of distortion used by the censor, and those same mechanisms as inherent characteristics of unconscious mental activity:

However, there is, on the face of it, a difficulty in putting these two views together. For how can condensation and displacement be imposed on unconscious mental processes by the censor if such processes inherently exhibit these characteristics? And, if they do, what need can there be for censorship? (Wollheim 1971, p. 164)

Wollheim's response is to say that the dilemma is not serious, since it depends on the 'point of view from which we regard the unconscious' (ibid., p. 165), i.e., whether we are considering the unconscious as it impinges on the conscious, or whether we are considering the unconscious in itself. This will not do; apart from the fact that condensation

and displacement are manifestly not *peculiar* to unconscious processes, the contradiction can only be resolved by rejecting one of the competing assertions.

Amongst Freud's critics, Macmillan (1991) draws attention to the same problem, and he correctly locates this within the wider context of Freud's inconsistencies regarding the characterisation of unconscious and conscious, and primary and secondary, processes. Of the way in which censorship is supposedly related to condensation and displacement, Macmillan observes:

Both processes form part of the dream-work, seemingly contributing equally to dream distortion . . . both reflect primary-process thinking . . . yet only displacement was said to be a function of the censorship . . . What the inconsistency reflects is Freud's difficulty in reconciling an explanation of dreams in terms of a regressive flow of excitation, where distortions are produced automatically, with an explanation in terms of wishes, psychological forces, and counter-forces. (Macmillan 1991, p. 269)

The confusion to which Macmillan is pointing leads to further problems for Freud, especially, as we shall see shortly, in his account of symbolism. No wonder Freud had difficulty in 'reconciling' these two accounts – the dynamic and the structural approaches to repression are simply incompatible. But the evidence suggests that Freud, for the most part, opted for the conceptually sound dynamic account, particularly when dealing explicitly with repression. Indeed, as Wollheim points out:

though Freud had thought it important to recognize that there were unconscious as well as conscious mental processes, he had never thought that, simply by paying attention to this distinction, we could arrive at . . . a dynamic, as opposed to a descriptive, view of mental life. In other words, the distinction between the two types of process could not be invoked to explain the difference in their roles. At times Freud gave different explanations of inner conflict, but he never suggested that it arose between conscious and unconscious ideas *as such*. On the contrary, from the very beginning there was implicit in his thinking a view that ran totally counter to any such facile account of the matter. For Freud's preferred explanation was in terms of incompatibility: the incompatibility lay between certain ideas, which in consequence underwent repression, and a mental agency, which exerted repression. (Wollheim 1971, pp. 174–5)

Furthermore, it seems not to have been appreciated that the elision of the dynamic approach to the Freudian concept of repression would not only remove the 'cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests', but also close the gap between Freud and Jung, leading to the Jungian demolition of the notion of motivated disguise, in favour of the intrinsic inefability of the contents of the unconscious:

The form that dreams take is natural to the unconscious because the material

from which they are produced is retained in the subliminal state in precisely this fashion. Dreams do not guard sleep from what Freud called the 'incompatible wish'. What he called 'disguise' is actually the shape all impulses naturally take in the unconscious. Thus a dream cannot produce a definite thought. If it begins to do so, it ceases to be a dream because it crosses the threshold of consciousness. (Jung 1964, p. 53)

Freud's resistance to this was based on his appreciation that any such assimilation with the Jungian position would change the whole character of psychoanalytic theory.

#### *Resolution of tensions in the treatment of symbolism*

The tensions in Freud's treatment of symbolism arise from the intersection of the two general confusions already illustrated, that is, from the attempt to accommodate two incompatible approaches to repression, and adherence to the distinction between primary and secondary processes.

The 'presenting problem' for the theory of symbolism is, *prima facie*, serious. On the one hand, Freud describes symbolism as belonging to an unconscious, archaic, primitive mode of expression (the natural mode of expression of the 'system unconscious'), an essentially 'primary process' phenomenon. On the other hand, despite the 'distinctive' characteristics of that system, the unconscious is also 'continued into what are known as its derivatives', which may be 'highly organised, free from self-contradiction, have made use of every acquisition of the system Cs. and would hardly be distinguished in our judgement from the formations of that system' (Freud 1915c, p. 190). Symbolism, like other substitute formations such as neurotic symptoms, falls into this latter category. The potential difficulties of the tension between these two characterisations did not escape Freud:

Study of the derivatives of the *Ucs.* will completely disappoint our expectations of a schematically clear-cut distinction between the two psychical systems. This will no doubt give rise to dissatisfaction with our results and will probably be used to cast doubts on the value of the way in which we have divided up the psychical processes. Our answer is, however, that we have no other aim but that of translating into theory the results of observation, and we deny that there is any obligation on us to achieve at our first attempt a well-rounded theory which will commend itself by its simplicity. (*ibid.*, p. 190)

The tension here is basically the same as that produced by Freud's inconsistent claims that symbolism depends essentially on displacement, that displacement in the dream is 'entirely the work of the dream-censorship' (Freud 1916/17, p. 174), but that symbolism is not the work

of the censorship, and is already present in unconscious thinking. Even without the dream-work, says Freud, and without the operation of censorship (whose characteristic techniques are condensation and displacement), the manifest dream would not be understandable because of the symbolism present. Freud's confused characterisation here is not borne out by his own evidence. Symbols may be already present in the unconscious in the sense I suggested earlier, that is, the similarity between potential symbol and symbolised has been perceived, but symbols do not appear in the dream *unless* there is censorship. Freud's examples of dreams illustrate that, in the absence of repression/censorship, the manifest dream is equivalent to the latent dream, containing images to be 'read' at face value only. But Freud, wishing to combine dynamic repression with the systematic unconscious, attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable – the two versions of repression. He merely asserts that the twofold characterisation of symbolism is no problem:

The copious employment of symbols, which have become alien to conscious thinking, for representing certain objects and processes is in harmony alike with the archaic regression in the mental apparatus and with the demands of the censorship. (Freud 1933, p. 20)

It is not surprising that Freud's supporters are confused, wondering and arguing about whether symbolism is strictly a primary process phenomenon, or whether it is a secondary process phenomenon, part of healthy ego development, and necessary for sublimation. They too accept the systematic unconscious, and then engage in futile attempts to reconcile the two incompatible versions of repression.

Ehrenzweig (1953), for instance, distinguishes two forms of repression: 'structural repression' which is 'inherent in unconscious form processes', and 'the superego's repression directed against the archaic or infantile contents symbolised in them'. Ehrenzweig relates this to the 'deep' and the 'surface' mind, and to the two different characterisations of symbolism:

Symbols are understood by the depth mind because they still fit into its wide frame of undifferentiated reference, but the symbols themselves – i.e. the substitution of one object for the other – would be wholly the work of the surface mind; only for the differentiating surface mind is the symbolic object differentiated from the original object which it now merely 'symbolizes'. (Ehrenzweig 1953, p. 113)

Ehrenzweig's formulation is similar to Fenichel's (1946) insistence that there is no need to feel that we must make a choice between symbolism

which is the result of censorship, and symbolism which is a characteristic mode of 'archaic thinking'.

Another strange characteristic of archaic thinking is represented by symbolism. In adults a conscious idea may be used as a symbol for the purpose of hiding an objectionable unconscious idea; the idea of a penis may be represented by a snake, an ape, a hat, an amplane, if the idea of penis is objectionable. The symbol is conscious, the symbolized idea is unconscious. The distinct idea of a penis had been grasped but rejected. However, symbolic thinking is vague, directed by the primary process. It is not only a method of distortion; it is also a part of the primary prelogical thinking. Again, the censoring ego uses regressive methods. Again, when distorting through symbolism, the ego in its defensive activities makes use of mechanisms that previously operated automatically without any intent. The use of symbols is a falling back into an earlier primary stage of thinking, by means of which intended distortions are brought about. In dreams, symbols appear in both aspects, as a tool of the dream censorship and also as a characteristic of archaic pictorial thinking, as a part of visualizing abstract thoughts. (Fenichel 1946, p. 48)

Fenichel goes on to argue that the 'regressive' nature of symbolic distortions explains two facts: firstly, 'that the symbols, being a residual of an archaic way of perceiving the world, are common to all human beings, like affective syndromes' (ibid.); secondly, 'that symbolic thinking occurs not only where distortions have to be made but also in states of fatigue, sleep, psychosis, and generally in early childhood, that is, in all states where archaic ego characteristics are in the foreground' (ibid.):

It is an essential part of archaic thinking with insufficient apperception to experience the world in symbols. However, *archaic symbolism as a part of prelogical thinking and distortion by means of representing a repressed idea through a conscious symbol are not the same*. Whereas in distortion the idea of penis is avoided through disguising it by the idea of snake, in prelogical thinking penis and snake are one and the same; that is, they are perceived by a common conception: the sight of the snake provokes penis emotions; and this fact is later utilized when the conscious idea of snake replaces the unconscious one of penis.

Primitive symbolism is a part of the way in which conceptions are formed in prelogical thinking: comprehension of the world radiates from instinctual demands and fears, so that the first objects are possible means of gratification or possible threats; stimuli that provoke the same reaction are looked upon as identical. (ibid., pp. 48–9, *italics mine*)

The distinction to which Ehrenzweig and Fenichel are pointing is genuine, but it does not depend on two different accounts of repression. If we accept the dynamic, and reject the structural account of repression, the matter begins to become clear.

To begin with, the notion of 'prelogical' thinking is misleading, inso-



far as it suggests a kind of thinking which is not fully propositional. In that regard, all thinking, whether rational or irrational, is of the same structure. We might sensibly label rational thinking 'logical', and irrational thinking 'illogical', but neither can sensibly be called 'prelogical'. However, what Fennel is identifying here when he talks of 'symbolism as part of prelogical thinking', what Ehrenzweig sees as the 'understanding of symbols' by the 'depth mind', and, it is suggested, what Freud is pointing to when he claims that symbols are 'already available' in the unconscious, is that aspect of the so-called 'primary process' which was argued earlier to be the only genuine aspect, namely, a particular failure of the Reality Principle (in terms of a false belief in the identity of symbol and symbolised). This is a failure to see that something (i.e., that symbol and symbolised are not identical) is the case. It is undoubtedly produced by what might be called the 'interested perceiving' of the instinctual drives, operating according to what Freud terms the Pleasure Principle. Thus, it may be a characteristic of infantile thinking, driven by wish-fulfilment, to be subject to particular motivated false beliefs, namely, that certain objects are identical when they are in fact not. It may also be the case that, as a result of external pressures during development, the child is forced to appreciate the real differences (the development of the Reality Principle). However, the result can be described in terms of the infant's predisposition to retain the 'archaic equation' in the id, and to make use of it by the ego in the case of the substitute symbolic formations which are described by Freud as the organised 'derivatives of the unconscious'. Furthermore, in this account one can make sense of the claims made by Ehrenzweig (1953), and by Gombrich (1963), that the pleasure derived from metaphors and symbols comes not, as Aristotle claimed, from the way in which they establish new linkages and make us see new resemblances, but from the way in which they indicate linkages never broken, reminding us of what are simply 'very wide pigeon-holes' (Gombrich 1963, p. 44).

### Summary and conclusions

A number of difficulties with which Freud's material on symbolism is faced are attributable to his treatment of the unconscious as a separate system, and to the attempts to combine its complementary structural account of repression with his preferred, but incompatible, dynamic approach. Once it is accepted that a systematic unconscious is untenable, that there is no way of *qualitatively* characterising unconscious processes as different from conscious processes, the assertion that symbolism is the natural mode of expression of the system unconscious must

be rejected; there is no such 'system'. With that rejection, and with the adoption of the relational view of unconscious mentality, comes clarification of several hitherto unresolved issues which have important implications for the theory of symbolism. (1) The accusation by certain critics, that the mechanisms of condensation and displacement cannot be restricted to unconscious processes, is no longer damaging. (2) The attempt to falsify the theory of disguise via the observation that, for the same person, what is disguised on one occasion may be undisguised on another occasion, fails; such variability is to be expected. (3) The 'criticism' that Freud illegitimately 'plays on' the 'postulated resemblance' between conscious and unconscious processes is not a criticism at all, since, once again, this also is to be expected. (4) The insights provided by Freud's 'special characteristics of the system unconscious' may be retained, provided that they are revised, and are divorced from their supposed connection with the notion of the unconscious as a separate system. (5) When the traditional formulation of the primary/secondary process distinction (i.e., in terms of the 'systems' unconscious/conscious) is abandoned, the gulf between id and ego, with all of its attendant confusions, disappears. (6) When the structural view of repression is abandoned, the explanatory power of Freud's (dynamic) theory of repression (particularly in contrast with the Jungian position) becomes clear. (7) The contradiction between the two different characterisations of symbolism to be found in Freud's material is resolved, and the genuine insights offered by that material can be identified. The post-Freudian insistence that symbolism should not be restricted to id or primary processes, that it is part of healthy ego-development, sublimation, etc., can then be accommodated.

While these conclusions can be drawn only after some revision of Freud's material, this revision does not alter the major tenets of his theory, and is consistent with his own maxim: 'we must always be prepared to drop our conceptual scaffolding if we feel that we are in a position to replace it by something that approximates more closely to the unknown reality' (Freud 1900, p. 610).