

A METAPSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE THEORY OF DREAMS - (1917 [1915])

We shall discover in various connections how much our enquiries benefit if certain states and phenomena which may be regarded as normal prototypes of pathological affections are brought up for purposes of comparison. Among these we may include such affective states as grief and being in love, as well as the state of sleep and the phenomenon of dreaming.

We are not in the habit of devoting much thought to the fact that every night human beings lay aside the wrappings in which they have enveloped their skin, as well as anything which they may use as a supplement to their bodily organs (so far as they have succeeded in making good those organs' deficiencies by substitutes), for instance, their spectacles, their false hair and teeth, and so on. We may add that when they go to sleep they carry out an entirely analogous undressing of their minds and lay aside most of their psychical acquisitions. Thus on both counts they approach remarkably close to the situation in which they began life. Somatically, sleep is a reactivation of intrauterine existence, fulfilling as it does the conditions of repose, warmth and exclusion of stimulus; indeed, in sleep many people resume the foetal posture. The psychical state of a sleeping person is characterized by an almost complete withdrawal from the surrounding world and a cessation of all interest in it.

In investigating psychoneurotic states, we find ourselves led to emphasize in each of them what are known as temporal regressions, i.e. the amount of developmental recession peculiar to it. We distinguish two such regressions - one affecting the development of the ego and the other that of the libido. In the state of sleep, the latter is carried to the point of restoring primitive narcissism, while the former goes back to the stage of hallucinatory satisfaction of wishes.

¹ This paper and the following one are derived from a collection which I originally intended to publish in book form under the title 'Zur Vorbereitung einer Metapsychologie' ['Preliminaries to a Metapsychology']. They follow on some papers which were printed in Volume III of the Internationale Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse ('Instincts and their Vicissitudes', 'Repression' and 'The Unconscious'). The intention of the series is to clarify and carry deeper the theoretical assumptions on which a psycho-analytic system could be founded.

It is, of course, the study of dreams which has taught us what we know of the psychical characteristics of the state of sleep. It is true that dreams only show us the dreamer in so far as he is not sleeping; nevertheless they are bound to reveal at the same time characteristics of sleep itself. We have come to know from observation some peculiarities of dreams which we could not at first understand, but which we can now fit into the picture without difficulty. Thus, we know that dreams are completely egoistic and that the person who plays the chief part in their scenes is always to be recognized as the dreamer. This is now easily to be accounted for by the narcissism of the state of sleep. Narcissism and egoism, indeed, coincide; the word 'narcissism' is only intended to emphasize the fact that

egoism is a libidinal phenomenon as well; or, to put it in another way, narcissism may be described as the libidinal complement of egoism. The 'diagnostic' capacity of dreams - a phenomenon which is generally acknowledged, but regarded as puzzling - becomes equally comprehensible, too. In dreams, incipient physical disease is often detected earlier and more clearly than in waking life, and all the current bodily sensations assume gigantic proportions. This magnification is hypochondriacal in character; it is conditional upon the withdrawal of all psychical cathexes from the external world back on to the ego, and it makes possible early recognition of bodily changes which in waking life would still for a time have remained unobserved.

A dream tells us that something was going on which tended to interrupt sleep, and it enables us to understand in what way it has been possible to fend off this interruption. The final outcome is that the sleeper has dreamt and is able to go on sleeping; the internal demand which was striving to occupy him has been replaced by an external experience, whose demand has been disposed of. A dream is, therefore, among other things, a projection: an externalization of an internal process. We may recall that we have already met with projection elsewhere among the means adopted for defence. The mechanism of a hysterical phobia, too, culminates in the fact that the subject is able to protect himself by attempts at flight against an external danger which has taken the place of an internal instinctual claim. We will, however, defer the full treatment of projection till we come to analyse the narcissistic disorder in which this mechanism plays the most striking part.

In what way, however, can a case arise in which the intention to sleep meets with an interruption? The interruption may proceed from an internal excitation or from an external stimulus. Let us first consider the more obscure and more interesting case of interruption from within. Observation shows that dreams are instigated by residues from the previous day - thought-cathexes which have not submitted to the general withdrawal of cathexes, but have retained in spite of it a certain amount of libidinal or other interest. Thus the narcissism of sleep has from the outset had to admit an exception at this point, and it is here that the formation of dreams takes its start. In analysis we make the acquaintance of these 'day's residues' in the shape of latent dream-thoughts; and, both by reason of their nature and of the whole situation, we must regard them as preconscious ideas, as belonging to the system Pcs.

We cannot proceed any further in explaining the formation of dreams till we have overcome certain difficulties. The narcissism of the state of sleep implies a withdrawal of cathexis from all ideas of objects, from both the unconscious and the preconscious portions of those ideas. If, then, certain day's residues have retained their cathexis, we hesitate to suppose that they have acquired at night so much energy as to compel notice on the part of consciousness; we should be more inclined to suppose that the cathexis they have retained is far weaker than that which they possessed during the day. Here analysis saves us further speculation, for it shows that these day's residues must receive a reinforcement which has its source in unconscious instinctual impulses if they are to figure as constructors of

dreams. This hypothesis presents no immediate difficulties, for we have every reason to suppose that in sleep the censorship between the Pcs. and the Ucs. is greatly reduced, so that communication between the two systems is made easier.

But there is another doubt, which we must not pass over in silence. If the narcissistic state of sleep has resulted in a drawing in of all the cathexes of the systems Ucs. and Pcs., then there can no longer be any possibility of the preconscious day's residues being reinforced by unconscious instinctual impulses, seeing that these themselves have surrendered their cathexes to the ego. Here the theory of dream-formation ends up in a contradiction, unless we can rescue it by introducing a modification into our assumption about the narcissism of sleep.

A restrictive modification of this kind is, as we shall discover later, necessary in the theory of dementia praecox as well. This must be to the effect that the repressed portion of the system Ucs. does not comply with the wish to sleep that comes from the ego, that it retains its cathexis in whole or in part, and that in general, in consequence of repression, it has acquired a certain measure of independence of the ego. Accordingly, too, some amount of the expenditure on repression (anticathexis) would have to be maintained throughout the night, in order to meet the instinctual danger - though the inaccessibility of all paths leading to a release of affect and to motility may considerably diminish the height of the anticathexis that is necessary. Thus we should picture the situation which leads to the formation of dreams as follows. The wish to sleep endeavours to draw in all the cathexes sent out by the ego and to establish an absolute narcissism. This can only partly succeed, for what is repressed in the system Ucs. does not obey the wish to sleep. A part of the anticathexes has therefore to be maintained, and the censorship between the Ucs. and the Pcs. must remain, even if not at its full strength. So far as the dominance of the ego extends, all the systems are emptied of cathexes. The stronger the Ucs. instinctual cathexes are, the more unstable is sleep. We are acquainted, too, with the extreme case where the ego gives up the wish to sleep, because it feels unable to inhibit the repressed impulses set free during sleep - in other words, where it renounces sleep because of its fear of its dreams.

Later on we shall learn to recognize the momentous nature of this hypothesis regarding the unruliness of repressed impulses. For the present let us follow out the situation which occurs in dream-formation.

The possibility mentioned above - that some of the preconscious thoughts of the day may also prove resistant and retain a part of their cathexis - must be recognized as a second breach in narcissism. At bottom, the two cases may be identical. The resistance of the day's residues may originate in a link with unconscious impulses which is already in existence during waking life; or the process may be somewhat less simple, and the day's residues which have not been wholly emptied of cathexis may establish a connection with the repressed material only after the state of sleep has set in, thanks to the easing of communication between the Pcs. and the Ucs. In both cases there follows the same decisive step in dream-formation: the preconscious dream-wish is formed, which gives expression to the unconscious impulse in the material of the

preconscious day's residues. This dream-wish must be sharply distinguished from the day's residues; it need not have existed in waking life and it may already display the irrational character possessed by everything that is unconscious when we translate it into the conscious. Again, the dream-wish must not be confused with the wishful impulses which may have been present, though they certainly need not necessarily be present, amongst the preconscious (latent) dream-thoughts. If, however, there were any such preconscious wishes, the dream-wish associates itself with them, as a most effective reinforcement of them.

We have now to consider the further vicissitudes undergone by this wishful impulse, which in its essence represents an unconscious instinctual demand and which has been formed in the Pcs. as a dream-wish (a wish-fulfilling phantasy). Reflection tells us that this wishful impulse may be dealt with along three different paths. It may follow the path that would be normal in waking life, by pressing from the Pcs. to consciousness; or it may bypass the Cs. and find direct motor discharge; or it may take the unexpected path which observation enables us in fact to trace. In the first case, it would become a delusion having as content the fulfilment of the wish; but in the state of sleep this never happens. With our scanty knowledge of the metapsychological conditions of mental processes, we may perhaps take this fact as a hint that a complete emptying of a system renders it little susceptible to instigation. The second case, that of direct motor discharge, should be excluded by the same principle; for access to motility normally lies yet another step beyond the censorship of consciousness. But we do meet with exceptional instances in which this happens, in the form of somnambulism. We do not know what conditions make this possible, or why it does not happen more often. What actually happens in dream-formation is a very remarkable and quite unforeseen turn of events. The process, begun in the Pcs. and reinforced by the Ucs., pursues a backward course, through the Ucs. to perception, which is pressing upon consciousness. This regression is the third phase of dream-formation. For the sake of clarity, we will repeat the two earlier ones: the reinforcement of the Pcs. by the Ucs., and the setting up of the dream-wish.

We call this kind of regression a topographical one, to distinguish it from the previously mentioned temporal or developmental regression. The two do not necessarily always coincide, but they do so in the particular example before us. The reversal of the course of the excitation from the Pcs. through the Ucs. to perception is at the same time a return to the early stage of hallucinatory wish-fulfilment.³

We have already in *The Interpretation of Dreams* described the way in which the regression of the preconscious day's residues takes place in dream-formation. In this process thoughts are transformed into images, mainly of a visual sort; that is to say, word-presentations are taken back to the thing-presentations which correspond to them, as if, in general, the process were dominated by considerations of representability. When regression has been completed, a number of cathexes are left over in the system Ucs. - cathexes of memories of things. The primary psychical process is brought to bear on these memories, till, by condensation of them and displacement between their respective cathexes, it has

shaped the manifest dream-content. Only where the word-presentations occurring in the day's residues are recent and current residues of perceptions, and not the expression of thoughts, are they themselves treated like thing-presentations, and subjected to the influence of condensation and displacement. Hence the rule laid down in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and since confirmed beyond all doubt, that words and speeches in the dream-content are not freshly formed, but are modelled on speeches from the day preceding the dream (or on some other recent impressions, such as something that has been read). It is very noteworthy how little the dream-work keeps to the word-presentations; it is always ready to exchange one word for another till it finds the expression which is most handy for plastic representation.¹

Now it is in this respect that the essential difference between the dream-work and schizophrenia becomes clear. In the latter, what becomes the subject of modification by the primary process are the words themselves in which the preconscious thought was expressed; in dreams, what are subject to this modification are not the words, but the thing-presentations to which the words have been taken back. In dreams there is a topographical regression; in schizophrenia there is not. In dreams there is free communication between (Pcs.) word-cathexes and (Ucs.) thing-cathexes, while it is characteristic of schizophrenia that this communication is cut off. The impression this difference makes on one is lessened precisely by the dream-interpretations we carry out in psycho-analytic practice. For, owing to the fact that dream-interpretation traces the course taken by the dream-work, follows the paths which lead from the latent thoughts to the dream-elements, reveals the way in which verbal ambiguities have been exploited, and points out the verbal bridges between different groups of material - owing to all this, we get an impression now of a joke, now of schizophrenia, and are apt to forget that for a dream all operations with words are no more than a preparation for a regression to things.

The completion of the dream-process consists in the thought-content - regressively transformed and worked over into a wishful phantasy - becoming conscious as a sense-perception; while this is happening it undergoes secondary revision, to which every perceptual concept is subject. The dream-wish, as we say,

¹ I also ascribe to considerations of representability the fact which is insisted on and perhaps over-estimated by Silberer that some dreams admit of two simultaneous, and yet essentially different interpretations, one of which he calls the 'analytic' and the other the 'anagogic'. When this happens, we are invariably concerned with thoughts of a very abstract nature, which must have made their representation in the dream very difficult. We might compare it with the problem of representing in pictures a leading article from a political newspaper. In such cases, the dream-work must first replace the text that consists of abstract thoughts by one more concrete, connected with the former in some way - by comparison, symbolism, allegorical allusion, or best of all, genetically - so that the more concrete text then takes the place of the abstract one as material for the dream-work. The abstract thoughts yield the so-called anagogic interpretation, which, in our interpretative work, we discover more easily than the true analytic one. Otto Rank has justly remarked that certain dreams about their treatment, dreamt by patients in analysis, are the best models on which to form a view of these dreams which admit of more than one interpretation.

is hallucinated, and, as a hallucination, meets with belief in the reality of its fulfilment. It is precisely round this concluding piece in the formation of dreams that the gravest uncertainties centre, and it is in order to clear them up that we are proposing to compare dreams with pathological states akin to them.

The formation of the wishful phantasy and its regression to hallucination are the most essential parts of the dream-work, but they do not belong exclusively to dreams. They are also found in two morbid states: in acute hallucinatory confusion (Meynert's 'amentia'), and in the hallucinatory phase of schizophrenia. The hallucinatory delirium of amentia is a clearly recognizable wishful phantasy, often completely well ordered like a perfect day-dream. One might speak quite generally of a 'hallucinatory wishful psychosis', and attribute it equally to dreams and amentia. There are even dreams which consist of nothing but undistorted wishful phantasies with a very rich content. The hallucinatory phase of schizophrenia has been less thoroughly studied; it seems as a rule to be of a composite nature, but in its essence it might well correspond to a fresh attempt at restitution, designed to restore a libidinal cathexis to the ideas of objects.¹ I cannot extend the comparison to the other hallucinatory states in various pathological disorders, because in their case I have no experience of my own upon which to draw, and cannot utilize that of other observers.

Let us be clear that the hallucinatory wishful psychosis - in dreams or elsewhere - achieves two by no means identical results. It not only brings hidden or repressed wishes into consciousness; it also represents them, with the subject's entire belief, as fulfilled. The concurrence of these two results calls for explanation. It is quite impossible to maintain that unconscious wishes must necessarily be taken for realities when once they have become conscious; for, as we know, our judgement is very well able to distinguish realities from ideas and wishes, however intense they may be. On the other hand, it seems justifiable to assume that belief in reality is bound up with perception through the senses. When once a thought has followed the path to regression as far back as to the unconscious memory-traces of objects and thence to perception, we accept the perception of it as real. So hallucination brings belief in reality with it. We now have to ask ourselves what determines the coming into being of a hallucination. The first answer would be regression, and this would replace the problem of the origin of hallucination by that of the mechanism of regression. As regards dreams, this latter problem need not remain long unanswered. Regression of Pcs. dream-thoughts to mnemonic images of things is clearly the result of the attraction which the Ucs. instinctual representatives - e.g. repressed memories of experiences - exercise upon the thoughts which have been put into words. But we soon perceive that we are on a false scent. If the secret of hallucination is nothing else than that of regression, every regression of sufficient intensity would produce hallucination with belief in its reality. But we are quite familiar with situations in which a process of regressive reflection brings to consciousness very clear visual mnemonic images, though we do

¹ In the paper on 'The Unconscious' we recognized the hypercathexis of word-presentations as a first attempt of this kind.

not on that account for a single moment take them for real perceptions. Again, we could very well imagine the dream-work penetrating to mnemonic images of this kind, making conscious to us that was previously unconscious, and holding up to us a wishful phantasy which rouses our longing, but which we should not regard as a real fulfilment of the wish. Hallucination must therefore be something more than the regressive revival of mnemonic images that are in themselves Ucs.⁶

Let us, furthermore, bear in mind the great practical importance of distinguishing perceptions from ideas, however intensely recalled. Our whole relation to the external world, to reality, depends on our ability to do so. We have put forward the fiction that we did not always possess this ability and that at the beginning of our mental life we did in fact hallucinate the satisfying object when we felt the need for it. But in such a situation satisfaction did not occur, and this failure must very soon have moved us to create some contrivance with the help of which it was possible to distinguish such wishful perceptions from a real fulfilment and to avoid them for the future. In other words, we gave up hallucinatory satisfaction of our wishes at a very early period and set up a kind of 'reality-testing'. The question now arises in what this reality-testing consisted, and how the hallucinatory wishful psychosis of dreams and amentia and similar conditions succeeds in abolishing it and in re-establishing the old mode of satisfaction.

The answer can be given if we now proceed to define more precisely the third of our psychical systems, the system Cs., which hitherto we have not sharply distinguished from the Pcs. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* we were already led to a decision to regard conscious perception as the function of a special system, to which we ascribed certain curious properties, and to which we shall now have good grounds for attributing other characteristics as well. We may regard this system, which is there called the Pcpt., as coinciding with the system Cs., on whose activity becoming conscious usually depends. Nevertheless, even so, the fact of a thing's becoming conscious still does not wholly coincide with its belonging to a system, for we have learnt that it is possible to be aware of sensory mnemonic images to which we cannot possibly allow a psychical location in the systems Cs. or Pcpt.

We must, however, put off discussing this difficulty till we can focus our interest upon the system Cs. itself. In the present connection we may be allowed to assume that hallucination consists in a cathexis of the system Cs. (Pcpt.), which, however, is not effected - as normally - from without, but from within, and that a necessary condition for the occurrence of hallucination is that regression shall be carried far enough to reach this system itself and in so doing be able to pass over reality-testing.¹

In an earlier passage² we ascribed to the still helpless organism a capacity for making a first orientation in the world by means of its perceptions, distinguishing

¹ I may add by way of supplement that any attempt to explain hallucination would have to start out from negative rather than positive hallucination.

² 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'.

'external' and 'internal' according to their relation to its muscular action. A perception which is made to disappear by an action is recognized as external, as reality; where such an action makes no difference, the perception originates within the subject's own body - it is not real. It is of value to the individual to possess a means such as this of recognizing reality, which at the same time helps him to deal with it, and he would be glad to be equipped with a similar power against the often merciless claims of his instincts. That is why he takes such pains to transpose outwards what becomes troublesome to him from within - that is, to project it.

This function of orientating the individual in the world by discrimination between what is internal and what is external must now, after detailed dissection of the mental apparatus, be ascribed to the system Cs. (Pcpt.) alone. The Cs. must have at its disposal a motor innervation which determines whether the perception can be made to disappear or whether it proves resistant. Reality-testing need be nothing more than this contrivance.¹ We can say nothing more precise on this point, for we know too little as yet of the nature and mode of operation of the system Cs. We shall place reality-testing among the major institutions of the ego, alongside the censorships which we have come to recognize between the psychical systems, and we shall expect that the analysis of the narcissistic disorders will help to bring other similar institutions to light.

On the other hand, we can already learn from pathology the way in which reality-testing may be done away with or put out of action. We shall see this more clearly in the wishful psychosis of amentia than in that of dreams. Amentia is the reaction to a loss which reality affirms, but which the ego has to deny, since it finds it insupportable. Thereupon the ego breaks off its relation to reality; it withdraws the cathexis from the system of perceptions, Cs. - or rather, perhaps, it withdraws a cathexis, the special nature of which may be the subject of further enquiry. With this turning away from reality, reality-testing is got rid of, the (unrepressed, completely conscious) wishful phantasies are able to press forward into the system, and they are there regarded as a better reality. Such a withdrawal may be put on a par with the processes of repression. Amentia presents the interesting spectacle of a breach between the ego and one of its organs - one which had perhaps been its most faithful servant and had been bound up with it the most intimately.²

What is performed in amentia by this 'repression' is performed in dreams by voluntary renunciation. The state of sleep does not wish to know anything of the external world; it takes no interest in reality, or only so far as abandoning the state of sleep - waking up - is concerned. Hence it withdraws cathexis from the system Cs. as well as from the other systems, the Pcs. and the Ucs., in so far as the

¹ Cf. a later passage on the distinction between testing with regard to reality and testing with regard to immediacy. ['Relitätsprüfung' and 'Aktualitätsprüfung'.]

² I may venture to suggest in this connection that the toxic hallucinoses, too, e.g. alcoholic delirium, are to be understood in an analogous fashion. Here the unbearable loss imposed by reality would be precisely the loss of alcohol. When the latter is supplied, the hallucinations cease.

cathexes in them obey the wish to sleep. With the system Cs. thus uncathected, the possibility of reality-testing is abandoned; and the excitations which, independently of the state of sleep, have entered on the path of regression will find that path clear as far as the system Cs. where they will count as undisputed reality.¹

As regards the hallucinatory psychosis of dementia praecox, we shall infer from our discussion that that psychosis cannot be among the initial symptoms of the affection. It becomes possible only when the patient's ego is so far disintegrated that reality-testing no longer stands in the way of hallucination.

In what concerns the psychology of dream-processes we arrive at the result that all the essential characteristics of dreams are determined by the conditioning factor of sleep. Aristotle was entirely right, long ago, in his modest pronouncement that dreams are the mental activity of the sleeper. We might expand this and say: they are a residue of mental activity, made possible by the fact that the narcissistic state of sleep has not been able to be completely established. This does not sound very different from what psychologists and philosophers have said all along, but it is based on quite different views about the structure and function of the mental apparatus. These views have this advantage over the earlier ones, that they have given us an understanding, too, of all the detailed characteristics of dreams.

Finally, let us once more glance at the significant light which the topography of the process of repression throws for us on the mechanism of mental disturbances. In dreams the withdrawal of cathexis (libido or interest) affects all systems equally; in the transference neuroses, the Pcs. cathexis is withdrawn; in schizophrenia, the cathexis of the Ucs.; in amnesia, that of the Cs.

¹ Here the principle of the insusceptibility to excitation of uncathected systems appears to be invalidated in the case of the system Cs. (Pcpt.). But it may be a question of only the partial removal of cathexis; and for the perceptual system in especial we must assume many conditions for excitation which are widely divergent from those of other systems. - We are not, of course, intending to disguise or gloss over the uncertain and tentative character of these metapsychological discussions. Only deeper investigation can lead to the achievement of a certain degree of probability.