

Unconscious (sb. & adj.)

to symptoms by virtue of their structure of compromise and their function of wish-fulfilment*.

Seeking to define the unconscious as a system, Freud lists its specific characteristics as follows (3b): primary process (mobility of cathexis typical of free energy*); absence of negation, of doubt, of degrees of certitude; indifference to reality and exclusive subordination to the principle of pleasure and unpleasure (whose aim is the restitution, by the shortest available route, of perceptual identity*).

IV. Finally, Freud sought to anchor the specific cohesion of the system *Ucs.* and its fundamental distinction from the system *Pcs.* by introducing the economic notion of a 'cathexis energy' * peculiar to each system. The unconscious energy is supposed to apply to ideas that it cathectes or decathectes, while the transposition of an element from one system to another is effected by a withdrawal of cathexis on the part of the first and a recathexis on the part of the second system.

But this unconscious energy—and herein lies a difficulty of the Freudian view—appears at times as a force attracting the ideas and resisting their coming to consciousness (this situation obtains in the theory of repression, where the attraction exerted by the elements already repressed works hand in hand with repression by the higher system) (4); at other times, however, the unconscious appears instead as a force trying to make its 'derivatives' * emerge into consciousness—a force only contained thanks to the vigilance of the censorship (3c).

V. Topographical considerations must not blind us to that *dynamic* force of the unconscious so often stressed by Freud: on the contrary, topographical distinctions should be seen as the means of accounting for the conflict, for repetition and for resistances.

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As we know, from 1920 onwards the Freudian theory of the psychical apparatus is subjected to a thoroughgoing revision: new topographical distinctions are introduced that no longer coincide with those between unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious. In fact, although the chief properties of the system *Ucs.* reappear in the agency of the id, the other agencies of ego and super-ego also have an unconscious origin and an unconscious portion ascribed to them (see 'Id', 'Ego', 'Super-Ego', 'Topography').

(a) Although Freud himself never connected primal phantasies (*Urfantasien*) with the hypothesis of primal repression (*Ursprüngung*), it is impossible to avoid noticing that they fulfil almost identical functions relative to the ultimate origin of the unconscious.

(1) FREUD, S., 'A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis' (1912g), G.W., VIII, 433; S.E., XII, 262.

(2) Cf. FREUD, S., letter to Hliess dated December 6, 1896, *Inf.*, 185-86; S.E., I, 233.

(3) Cf. FREUD, S., 'The Unconscious' (1915d): a) G.W., X, 294; S.E., XIV, 195 b) G.W., X, 285-88; S.E., XIV, 186-89, c) G.W., X, 280; S.E., XIV, 181.

(4) Cf. FREUD, S., 'Repression' (1915d), G.W., X, 250-51; S.E., XIV, 148.

Undoing (what has been done)

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D.: Ungeschehenmachen. Es.: annulacion retroactiva. -Fr.: annulation retroactive. -A.: renderer non accaduto or annullamento retroattivo. -P.: anulação retroativa.

Psychological mechanism whereby the subject makes an attempt to cause past thoughts, words, gestures or actions not to have occurred; to this end he makes use of thought or behaviour having the opposite meaning.

We are concerned here with a compulsion of 'magical' aspect which is especially characteristic of obsessional neurosis.

Freud gives a cursory description of 'undoing' in the case-history of the 'Rat Man' (1909d), where he analyses 'compulsive acts [...] in two successive stages, of which the second neutralises the first'. The 'true significance' of such acts 'lies in their being a representation of a conflict between two opposing impulses of approximately equal strength; and hitherto I have invariably found that this opposition has been one between love and hate' (1a).

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926d) Freud again spotlights this process, now giving it the name of 'Ungeschehenmachen': to make null and void. He looks upon it, along with isolation*, as the typical form of defence in obsessional neurosis, and he describes it as a magical procedure. He shows in particular how it is at work in the rituals of obsessional patients (2a).

Anna Freud lists undoing in her inventory of the ego's defence mechanisms (3) and it is generally so categorised in the psycho-analytic literature (4a).

It should be pointed out that the mechanism in question takes various forms. Sometimes an act is 'undone' by an opposite one (as when the Rat Man replaces a stone in the middle of the road after having earlier moved it to the side lest the carriage of his lady friend should run into it). At other times the same act is repeated but the meaning attached to it—whether conscious or unconscious—is the opposite one. Or again, the act of undoing may be con-terminated by the act it is supposed to annul. These last two modes of undoing are illustrated by an example given by Fenichel (4b): a subject reproaches himself for having wasted money by buying a newspaper; he would like to undo his purchase by asking for his money back, but he dare not do so; he feels that to buy another paper would relieve him, but by this time the newsstand has closed, so finally he takes out a coin to the value of the paper and throws it to the ground. Freud refers to such sequences in terms of 'diphasic' symptoms: 'An action which carries out a certain injunction is immediately succeeded by another action which stops or undoes the first one even if it does not go quite so far as to carry out its opposite' (2b).

The classification of undoing among the ego's defence mechanisms also raises the question whether the 'second stage' involved is to be treated merely as a product of the defence. The variety of clinical instances of undoing rules out such a simple answer. Indeed instinctual motives are generally in evidence at both stages, particularly in the shape of the ambivalence* between love and hate; in some cases, in fact, it is the second stage that best displays the triumph of the instinct. In Fenichel's example the subject's entire behaviour indubitably constitutes a symptomatic whole.