

PSYCHOLOGY *and* ART

by ANDRÉ STRAUSS

'But even Freud is not enough. In the hands of Freud, psychoanalysis was a living organism in constant evolution. Since Freud's death orthodox psychoanalysis has become a closed, almost scholastic system, itself no exception to the general cultural trend towards stereotypy and sterility. Rigorous probing reveals that the entire metapsychological foundations of psychology need reinterpretation. It is well known that orthodox psychoanalysis has been unable to make much out of Freud's later concept of the death instinct; even the earlier and supposedly better established concepts of sexuality, repression, and sublimation need reformation.'

(Life Against Death, The Psychoanalytical Meaning Of History, Norman Brown, Wesleyan University Press, 1959.)

This essay does not purport to be academic. The author does not assume the right to evaluate any facet of experience from a hypothetical dispassionately critical position. While it is obvious that categorical statements will be made, they will be made in terms of himself as an organism, caught in space and time, and in the possession of a history, but essentially limited by these conditions. The author does not presume to speak for questionable abstractions.

With the inception of psychoanalysis as a postulated vehicle for the interpretation of human behaviour and its elaboration into a system based on scientific observation and clinical procedure, its essentially metaphysical basis has gradually become displaced by the belief that its factual nature must constitute a truth. It has therefore become a mechanical science. In an age largely encamped in the service of Dialectical Materialism, where any equation has validity only in terms of its demonstration as a visual phenomenon, there has arisen simultaneously a depraved evaluation of the nature of the 'fact'. Only when this has been reevaluated, only when the 'fact' constitutes an 'interpretation' of experience, can the fallacy disappear. Both Science and Religion are endangered by the vice of accepting unquestionable initial postulates. What is demanded is an examination of the essential nature of the vehicles

by which they effect their formulation. Only when it is realised that articulacy has in its employment only a symbolism can these various systems be seen for what they are. To cope with this misinterpretation there has arisen in the twentieth century the concept of the Semantic approach to the meaning of languages. This science has justly argued that the human organism tends to read into experience the structure of the language which he uses. It is not my concern here to demonstrate the applicability of various definitions employed by Semantics, but merely to demonstrate that in the face of Semantics, the language, in no matter what form it may appear, whether in the services of literature, mathematics, science, or logic, remains essentially a symbolism, and therefore merely a structure for the communication of experience. In the light of this, the essentially hypothetical nature of psychological postulates is retained, and it can be seen merely as a structure among structures for the evaluation of experience. For it will be noted that the language (again in the general sense) does not move toward experience, but parallel to it. It may be argued that certain terminologies are less capable of satisfying experience than others, and rightly so. But simultaneously it must be recognised that there exists no universally infallible symbolic structure. The mathematical equation cannot and does not pretend to deal with the world of feeling. Caught in this fallacy the utility psychologist or psychiatrist often fails to appreciate the privacy of the subjective world. It becomes impossible for him to conceive of the delusions of the paranoid as having any reality whatsoever. In fact, the definitions of psychology are often undermined by its own practitioners who assume the possibility of a clinical approach and thereby grant themselves immunisation from the human condition as structured by their own science. This is the result of the fallacious interpretation of the concept of the 'norm' as an absolute rather than as a concept introduced in order to regulate variables. In effect, the insistence by the individuals on the capacity for objective judgements, which can alternatively be phrased as the resistance of the individual to any acts of consciousness other than

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the cognitive, must surely constitute in terms of the Freudian equation merely a demonstration of the principle of repression.

From neurotic symptoms, dreams and errors to a general theory of human nature may seem like a long step. Granting that it is a long step, Freud could argue that he is entitled to explore the widest possible application of a hypothesis derived from a narrow field. He could take the offensive and claim that traditional theories of human nature must be regarded as unsatisfactory because they have nothing to say about these peripheral phenomena. What theory of human race, except Freud's, does have anything significant to say about dreams or insanity? And are dreams and insanity really negligible factors on the periphery of human life.

But the truth of the matter is that Freud maintains that to go from neurotic symptoms, dreams and errors, to a new theory of human nature involves no further step at all. For the evidence on which psychoanalysis erects the hypothesis of the repressed unconscious entails the conclusion that it is a phenomenon present in all human beings. The psychopathological phenomena of everyday life, although trivial from the practical point of view, are theoretically important because they show the intrusion of unconscious intentions into our everyday and supposedly normal behaviour.

Even more theoretically important are dreams. For dreams, also 'normal' phenomena, exhibit in detail not only the existence of the unconscious but also the dynamics of its repression — the dream censorship. But since the same dynamics of repression explained neurotic symptoms, and since the dreams of neurotics are the clue to the meaning of their symptoms and differ neither in structure nor in content from the dreams of normal people, the conclusion is that the dream is itself a neurotic symptom. We are all therefore neurotic. At least dreams show that the difference between neurosis and health prevails only by day; and since the psychopathology of everyday life exhibits the same dynamics, even the waking life of the 'healthy' man is pervaded by innumerable symptom-formations. Between normality and abnormality, there is no qualitative, but only a quantitative difference, based largely on the practical question of whether our neurosis is serious enough to incapacitate us for work.' (Ibid.)

On his seventy-fourth birthday, at a function given in his honour, Freud declared that his was not the discovery of the subconscious, but merely the creation of a means for its evaluation. Its discovery, he maintained, was due to the poets. In the light of this statement, it seems that a whole new interpretation can be thrown on the nature of the creative process. Through the centuries attempts have been made to evaluate the nature of the arts without there ever having appeared a really adequate theory. For an activity so essentially serious in nature, an activity possessing the capacity of so great an effective symbolic potency the tendency has been, by and large, to accept it with the confused veneration which denotes a lack of enthusiasm as to discovering its actual nature and the pressures which produced it. No greater fallacy has ever been uttered than 'Art for Art's sake', and on the syntactical level, no more meaningless a phraseology could be invented. Generally speaking, the creative process has been accepted as arising out of the most brilliant minds of any period for the greater glory of the particular culture which produced that mind. The creative process has perpetually been confused with 'taste' (another concept which has never been adequately explained) and it is only in this century, as a result of the structure offered by psychoanalysis, that there has been any concern with the necessity for redefining it.

It is the contention of the writer that the basic purpose or meaning, and hence the pressure which produces it, is therapeutic; that the creative process with its ramifications of an elaborately formal symbolism corresponds almost directly in nature to the dream. However, inasmuch as the creative process does not find equal articulation, but is confined to a few members of the cultural group, it becomes obvious that an elaboration of the concept must be propounded before it can become acceptable. Obviously, the creative mind must be motivated by some neurosis which is not mutually exclusive of all the members of a society, or conversely it must receive its propulsion from a condition which demands at least the creation of a highly complex symbolic sequence in order to satisfy or resolve itself. Furthermore, the nature of the creative act is to develop a symbolic sequence, or rather a subjective equation for experience which nevertheless must satisfy the disease of the particular mind. One answer as to why the symbolism

should become so highly developed (what has, for instance, been described as the 'internal logic' of poetry, music, painting, the novel, etc.) is that it attempts characteristically to recreate experience into an equation which stimulates a genuine experience. In fact, it is perpetually attempting to propagate subjective dimensions, or to create symbolic structures which the human organism could himself occupy. Without attempting to provide the extensive definition of its processes, the symptom symbolism, or syndrome, is equivalent to that of the schizoid and schizophrenic. It may be of interest to record here that in a recent sample taken from the group of contemporary American composers, 58% demonstrated neural patterns clinically diagnosed as schizophrenia. The problems remains, however, as to how the creative mind, while apparently demonstrating the watertight evidence of an advanced neural aberration, nevertheless retains the capacity for a successful manipulation of the ego within the group.

In the field of literature, the group of writers selected for the purposes of this essay covers the period from roughly immediately before the appearance of the Freudian equation up till the present day. Inasmuch as such a survey would, in order to adequately explicate its premises, need to be of book length. For the purposes of this essay, it is therefore only possible to provide a few suggestions and to severely limit itself in order to provide at least a clarity of intentions.

The work of Fyodor Dostoevsky has earned him a reputation of daemonic possession. The following extract is taken from a work which appeared in 1864 and described itself as '*Notes From Underground*' the title being in itself significant.

'I want to tell you, gentlemen, whether you care to hear it or not, why I could never become an insect. I tell you solemnly, that I have many times tried to become an insect. But I was equal not even to that. I swear, gentlemen, that to be too serious is an illness — a real thoroughgoing illness. For man's everyday needs, it would have been quite enough to have had the ordinary human consciousness, that is, half or quarter the amount which falls to the lot of a cultivated man of our unhappy nineteenth century, especially one who has the fatal ill-luck to inhabit Petersburg, the most theoretical and intentional town on the whole terrestrial globe. (There are inten-

tional and unintentional towns). It would have been quite enough, for instance, to have the consciousness by which so-called direct persons and men of action can live. I bet you think I am writing this from affectation, to be witty at the expense of men of action; and what is more, that from ill-bred affectation I am clanking my sword like an officer. But, gentlemen, whoever can pride himself on his diseases, and even swagger over them.

Though, after all, every one does do that; people do pride themselves on their diseases, and I do, may be, more than any one. We will not dispute it, my contention was absurd. But yet I am persuaded that a great deal of consciousness, in fact, is a disease. I stick to that. Let us leave that too, for a minute. Tell me this: why does it happen at the very, yes, at the very moments when I am most capable of feeling every refinement of all that is 'good and beautiful', as they used to say at one time, it would as though of design happen to me not only to feel but to do such ugly things, such that . . . Well, in short, actions, that all, perhaps commit; but which, as though purposely occurred to me at the very time when I was most conscious that they ought not to be committed. The more conscious I was of goodness and of all that was 'good and beautiful', the more deeply I sank into my mire and the more ready to sink into it altogether. But the chief point was that all this was, as it were, not accidental in me, but as though it were bound to be so. It was as though it were my most normal condition, and not in the least disease or depravity, so that at last all desire in me to struggle against this depravity passed. It ended by my believing that this was perhaps my normal condition.'

Initially it is intriguing to discover at this date an equation of behaviour which involves the theory of a repressed unconscious as well as a possible vehicle for its cure. More significant for the purposes of this essay is the relationship which holds between the writer and the hero. Is it possible for the hero, a fragmented entity in himself, to be so clearly articulate, in effect so distanced from his condition. It may even be possible to ask the peculiar question of whether a person whose universe was similarly structured could possess the additional motivation of desiring to clinically describe it. In short, what is the purpose of '*Notes From Underground*'? To rephrase the question; of what significance

would it be to the writer as he exists in the context of his hero to adopt the further context of the dispassionate observer of that condition, i.e. as he exists as the actual writer? The fact that both Freud and a body of writers arrived more or less simultaneously at a new vehicle for the analysis of human behaviour can be prosaically ascribed to the fact that the Kantian (*Cogito ergo sum*;) definition had exhausted itself. What is noteworthy, however, is the new role into which the creative mind is precipitated by the postulate of a subconscious. Initially he becomes the observer of himself (the whole trend of Existentialist thought has demonstrated, not a corporate body of thought and its elaboration, but a persistent and relentless pursuit of the 'self') inasmuch as he now possesses the capacity for differentiating various levels of existence within himself. He becomes his own mirror. It may of course be argued that this constitutes a new tendency in say, literature, but upon closer examination will reveal that the whole process of creative thought has revolved around a similar pivot, but has merely employed different conceptual structures for its analysis. We have in Dostoevsky the concept of consciousness as being 'sick'; we have the therapy suggested as being the conscious acceptance of that sickness, and furthermore we have the implication that the process of acculturation must inevitably produce that sickness. All three of these evaluations are later to be echoed by Freud. Nevertheless, if one is to postulate the premise of the creative act being in itself and by itself a therapeutic act created in terms of a schizoid or schizophrenic condition, then this definition must, in a sense, be capable of expansion into a wider field. Furthermore, it must be postulated that the individual must be capable of precipitating and withdrawing himself from that condition. In other words, the creative mind induces a schizoid or schizophrenic condition within himself (he creates a so-called 'alter ego') in order to explore the symptoms and processes of his 'own' subconscious, and consequently, by so doing, effects a therapy. This is of course, too glib. Freud himself, at the end of his life, maintained that the processes of psychoanalysis were 'both intolerable and interminable'. The subconscious is not a shallow recess, nor are the profits of sublimation (in the Freudian sense) in any way a cure-all. Before proceeding further, we should turn to various other writers.

The following two excerpts are from Rilke's *The Notebooks Of Malte Laurids Brigde*:

'One comes along, one finds a life, ready-made, one only has to put it on. One wants to go or is forced to go: well, no trouble at all: voilà votre mort, monsieur. One dies at random; one dies whatever death happens to belong to the disease one has: for since one knows all the diseases, one knows that the different lethal conclusions belong to the diseases and not to the human beings; and the sick person, as it were, doesn't have anything to do.'

'We discover that we do not know our role; we look for a mirror; we want to remove our make-up and take off what is false and be real. But somewhere a piece of the disguise that we forgot still sticks to us. A trace of exaggeration remains in our eyebrows; we do not notice that the corners of our mouths are bent. And so we walk around, a mockery and a mere half, neither having achieved being nor actors.'

The following excerpt is taken from an essay entitled *Self-Deception* by Sartre.

'To escape from these difficulties people gladly have recourse to the unconscious. In the psychoanalytical interpretation, for example, they use the hypothesis of a censor, conceived as a line of demarcation with customs, passport division, currency control, etc. to re-establish the duality of the deceiver and the deceived. Here, instinct, or if you prefer, original drives and complexes of drives constituted by our individuality, or individual history, make up reality. It is neither true nor false since it does not exist for itself. It simply is, exactly like this table, which is neither true nor false in itself, but simply real. As for the conscious symbols of the instinct, this interpretation takes them not for appearances but for real psychic facts. Fear, forgetting, dreams, exist really by virtue of concrete facts of consciousness, in the same way as the words and the attitudes of the liar are concrete, really existing patterns of behaviour. The subject has the same attitudes to these phenomena as the deceived to the behaviour of the deceiver. He establishes them in their reality and must interpret them. There is a truth in the activities of the deceiver; if the deceived could reattach them to the situation where the deceiver establishes himself and to his project of the lie, they would become integral parts of the truth, by virtue of the behaviour of lying. Similarly there is a truth in the symbolic

acts; it is what the psychoanalyst discovers when he reattaches them to the historical situation of the patient, to the unconscious complexes which they express, to the blocking of the censor. Thus the subject deceives himself about the meaning of his conduct, he apprehends it in its concrete existence but not in its truth, for lack of being able to derive it from the original situation and from a psychic situation which remains alien to him.'

Now inasmuch as the human organism is capable of employing a structure of duality in order to explain phenomena within himself, or rather to be in a position from which meaning can be attributed to those phenomena, the further question arises as to whether the mode of any particular creative mind produces a further bifurcation in the act of creation. It seems possible that this may be the case. If we accept the condition of creativity as being a process whereby an organism attempts to establish a symbol structure by which his own symptoms may be made articulate, then generally speaking he is attempting a duality by positing a patient-physician relationship within himself. It should be remembered at this point that the continuum of time in the creative symbolism is an abrogation of that individual's actual history, that in the capacity of physician, the individual is not involved in the process of suffering experience but merely to evaluate a suffering which is construed as occurring to the patient in the relationship. This condition is an induced condition, for the moment that the particular mind is once more precipitated into an objective, or factual historical context he once more becomes vulnerable to his actual history. Obviously the creative act, just as an act of articulacy, is a defence mechanism, but its peculiar nature is that of the schizoid and schizophrenic conditions.

To elaborate the concept, it may be added that the structure employed by the mind in this capacity is frequently capable of assuming a dominant role within the personality. Even as the fact merely constitutes the application of meaning to experience, so the employment of a structural context may become progressive until the organism is engulfed. This then must constitute a schizoid condition.

Observable in the creative mind is the condition of an anguish arising out of that condition, inasmuch as the organism tends to consider itself entombed or contained in a dimension which is separate from itself as an active entity in a public or objective dimension. The essential nature of the creative act is essentially a passivity, the organism exists merely as an onlooker, and because this passivity seems to offer the possibility of a lessened vulnerability to situations, the tendency is to adopt that structure as permanent. Although the so-called Existentialist thinkers have been branded as individuals, it is not in their capacity for action. Most noteworthy of these thinkers is their conception of their own isolation coupled with a withdrawal from the world of experience. There is the tendency to operate in a vacuum, a vacuum which becomes a tomb. Obvious too is their preconception with a world of petrified things. In another sense, Shakespeare, too, is frequently perturbed by a duality, which in his case is structured into the attribution of a condition of evanescence belonging to the physical world. This is most markedly demonstrated, not only in Hamlet, but in Prospero as well, and appears as the hidden theme throughout the sonnets. John Donne was another mind haunted by the same fear.

However, if the creative act is in fact a therapeutic act (employing the same devices active in the schizophrenias) then the problem occurs as to whether there is the possibility of an active therapy — a problem which applies directly to the principles of psychoanalysis as well. At this point only timid statements can be proffered, for while the contemporary trend is toward a belief in the chemical roots and alleviation of the insanities, psychoanalysis has by no means disproved itself. It may at this point be suggested that the actual physical act of creation is the pivot upon which the therapy hinges, for while the organism continues to act under the impulsion to externalise his condition, any full-blown dementia-praecox condition can obviously not occur. It may be argued that some deeper agency of self preservation is the motivating agency in this situation, or it might be that the secretion of poisons in the cerebral tissues is not sufficient to totally disarrange the neural sequences, to the extent where they impede his capacity for work or superiority in certain relationships.