

Chapter C7

MECHANISMS FOR NEUROSES

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SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

Here structural bases are proposed for various Freudian “defense mechanisms” in terms of the details postulated in Chapter C6. This leads to a provisional formulation of the distinction between neurosis and psychosis in terms of their structure, rather than the usual behavioural approach.

C7.1 What are the “normal” adaptive responses to frustration ?*Coping with frustration — good homespun advice, and beyond*

Is there any general advice one could give about how to cope with frustrating situations and dilemmas? Alcoholics Anonymous has, if memory serves me correctly, offered several items of advice in the form of a prayer for the following virtues: **(i)** the strength to change what I can, [presumably toward the solution of “dissonance“]; **(ii)** the serenity to accept what I must; and **(iii)** the grace to know the difference. As far as it goes, this is probably sound enough.

However if we want to go more deeply into this matter, we might well inquire whether we can choose an optimal-though-imperfect solution to the dissonance. This then raises questions about time-horizons and chances of “success”, and to what extent our “solution” is *fundamental* rather than merely papering over the cracks by treating the symptoms.

Mechanics of changing one’s frustration-reduction strategy

Faced with genuinely insurmountable frustration, it is obviously an adaptive procedure to “give in” and “accept the situation”; but what is this likely to entail in mechanistic-physiological terms? Such a change may be likened to the election of a *new* government, thereby discarding the old policies which had proved to be a failure in practice despite any dreams of Utopia which they might have conjured up. Where basic hereditary instincts are involved, this creates a special obstacle to “policy-change” because further scheme-elements of the original pattern are likely to continue to appear on the scene as fast as their genetic sources happen to reproduce them, (Section A3.2, above). Assuming that the genetic (M^1L) sources are immutable within the individual, it would nevertheless be feasible for the brain systems to evolve a more-or-less standardized procedure for supporting particular types of mutation in these elements, and discouraging the use of the unmodified varieties. Thus such primitive reflexes as the palmar reflex quite soon become “swamped” in amongst later complexities, and it may even be that the later developments will have “switched off” the genetic sources, to a greater or lesser extent. Anyhow, these alterations to the effective expression of basic instincts may be identified with the Freudian concept of *sublimation*, (Fenichel, 1946, page 141).

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Although these fundamental changes in aim will be away from hereditary instincts, they should nevertheless be regarded as “natural” in the sense that the genetic code has evolved in such a way as to take account of developments of this kind — which is simply to say that they are orthomaturational. This is, in fact, another example of the fact that the genetic code could not possibly foresee all eventualities, nor could it reasonably encode all the relevant “legislation” even if it could foresee the needs. Anyhow, the resulting mutated elements will be capable of operating in an orderly and adequately efficient manner, without any undue build-up of undischarged excitons which might break through in uncontrolled ways. Moreover the resulting aims are often likely to be vitally important to the individual himself, and even more so to any complex society in which he lives. The fact that different individuals will evolve different

solutions will also be valuable in producing that pluralism which makes for a particular aspect of social stability.

Other types of mental change will also be called for when one's non-hereditary *learned* mental constructs turn out to be at variance with reality in important ways. Ability to accommodate to such situations — to allow competitive structures to evolve at the expense of the old ones — will depend partly on how pluralistic or “broad-minded” one's mental organization happens to be (and this may well depend on uncommitted mental energy), and partly on the clarity of insight at higher M^1L levels.

But not all frustrations are necessarily insurmountable. The adaptive approach in such cases is obviously to try to mould the reluctant environment so that it more fully accords with one's own will; where we may take “will” to include unsublimated instinct (including the important case of seeking-for-closure), and also the aims which will so far have arisen from any sublimation. It is, of course, this striving after one's grand-or-trivial objectives which is the driving force behind mammalian endeavour; and arguably it also drives all endeavour of all animals. When such attempts are chronically frustrated without sufficiently-redeeming sublimation, then less satisfactory methods involving such things as signal-blocking will come to be used extensively, instead of just as short-term expedients. These are the “pathogenic defenses” (Fenichel, 1946, page 143 ff.), resulting in neurotic symptoms such as depression and loss of morale. For the remainder of this chapter, we will devote ourselves to considering various types of such “defense”, and sketching the sort of mechanism which might plausibly be involved.

C7.2 Denial as “hallucinatory wish-fulfilment” for some part of the situation

Denial, fiction, and ego-protection

As adults, we usually have fairly definite ideas about what is fact and what is fiction. We may choose to mislead others about the truth, but it is often supposed that “mentally healthy” adults will not *really* be taken in by their own fabricated propaganda — at least not much! In so far as we *are* able to keep control over such matters, we are probably making use of M^2L constructs — possibly including accumulated extensive-sets of “facts” and of “fictions” relating to various topics. But any such established sets must have been created in the first place, and this almost certainly will have occurred on the basis of experience and closure-forming processes. Thus in childhood, before such developments have taken place adequately, any sense of reality will quite likely depend on *ad hoc* assessments of closure — subconsciously weighing the closure-implications of various concepts, with particular attention to any bearing they might have on the self-consistency of one's own ego-supporting schemata. It would thus scarcely be surprising to find young children really believing that *they* “didn't break the dish” (or whatever). And, to the extent that adults will suffer from lapses in rational M^2L control, we may expect similar self-deception in them too.

Denial versus evidence

Almost inevitably however, there will be inconvenient self-incriminating evidence left around to disturb the equanimity of those prepared to assimilate it properly. (In the child, this might perhaps cause no great problem if he is *unable* to attend adequately to enough of the evidence simultaneously for him to detect the overall lack of closure, even if he were prepared to do so). But if the child or adult is subconsciously aware⁷² of the cognitive dissonance choice, and if it amounts to a stark choice between • maintaining the integrity of his own ego by blocking the unwelcome evidence, or • badly eroding his ego-complex by accepting the closure-destroying

⁷² At the M^1L level, perhaps?

information, then it will not be surprising if he chooses the former (**ego-preserving**) course. Usually however, there will actually be other alternatives open to him (if he is both aware of them and able to cope with their internal manipulation): He may, for instance, invoke the proposition that “This was just a mistake, and everybody makes some mistakes”, or he may incorporate the evidence *into* his ego-schema and thus take on the new role of “a bad guy”!

“Freudian energy” needed to maintain the denial

However, if the choice is made (subconsciously) to block the evidence as being “against self-security”, then presumably some sort of “jamming” signal will have to be found which will block the excitons in the pathways in question. This is likely to operate as depicted in Figure C6.7/5, with the consequent damming up of unwanted excitons which will not just conveniently fade away and are always likely to break out in one form or another as long as they are stored in this manner; so there will need to be a continual expenditure of energy to maintain the damming, as long as the threat persists or seems to persist.

There remains the problem of how the appropriate method for jamming could have been produced as soon as it seemed to be needed. The answer is likely to be that this could *not* be done intentionally without prior experience, and that this earlier investigation would have happened quite spontaneously and arbitrarily like other initial learning, with at least some of the relevant references stored away for potential future use.

C7.3 Projection and introjection as by-products of the self-organization of the ego

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Ego — the formation of a very specialized schema

Fenichel (1946, page 40) writes enigmatically that “Introjection is an attempt to make parts of the external world flow into the ego.” Similarly projection is seen as an attempt to attribute ego qualities to entities other than the ego. Moreover it is suggested by him that there is a stage of development ... “in which anything unpleasant is considered nonego, [and] anything pleasant is considered ego”. How then are we to formulate these ideas in terms of the current theory?

Back in Section C2.3 and the latter part of Section C5.2, we considered some of the likely features for the formation of extensively-defined sets within the material substrate of the brain; and it should be noted that an important aspect of this supposed procedure was that the *initial criterion* for the membership of such sets was envisaged as being *arbitrary*. This concept of set-representation was developed, via “groups”, into an explanation for *object*-representation — of which the “self-concept” or “ego” was held to be a very special case (Section C6.3, paragraph 6). At the same place, it was suggested that the most crucial criterion for a set of “self“-concepts would be whether the candidate-features responded readily to one’s own will (hands, tongue, etc.) or whether they were comparatively dilatory in this respect (Mummy, chair-leg, etc.). But such response to one’s whim is likely to be regarded as “good” if only because it will probably aid closure-formation, a process which we are taking to be inherently rewarding, (Paragraph 5 of the same section). So, even if this reasoning is only partly valid, there is some reasonable justification for adopting the implicit slogan: “Whatever is pleasurable, is something which belongs to this whim-serving set/group which represents an object called ‘me’.” That is to say, as a *first approximation*, the criterion of pleasure-serving is not so very different from the criterion: “this autonomous integrated system, subservient to my will, and possessing privileged information-gathering properties”.

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Loose mind-metaphor terminology — versus clear (more testable) statements

As for Fenichel’s words about attempting “to make parts of the external world flow into the ego”, this is obviously meant metaphorically or “mentalistically” (Hyland, 1977a, 1977b) since a

literal “physiological” interpretation seems to signify a craving for brain-surgery! The intended meaning (in terms of the current theory) would seem to be something like this:-

“Introjection is an attempt to incorporate *the schemata for* various parts of the external world into the schema which constitutes the ego”; (presumably without unduly disturbing the grouplike properties of the latter).

Such confusions between the “real” outside phenomenon and its “mental” counterpart are common enough, but now that we are getting down to more precise (if speculative) statements, it is time to be more careful over such wording — and to avoid unexplained metaphor in our main pronouncements.

Seeking to explain projection etc. via set-dynamics — hence via molecular dynamics

Anyhow introjection and projection, like denial, may readily be seen as arising naturally from primitive set-manipulations which involve the ego. Given unsuitable experiences and/or inadequate “decentering” to take in a comprehensive sample of the features of such experiences (due presumably to deficient M^1L organization at the next higher level), such merely-approximate strategies may become adopted as being (apparently) the optimal solution. They may then acquire their own system of self-stabilizing closure (based on the spurious evidence) and it will then be quite difficult or impossible to unpick the structure — or at least to do so without also breaking up the ego-structure, especially if this now depends on inappropriately introjected schemata to maintain its own closure.

C7.4 Repression as an internally-directed equivalent of denial

It was suggested, in the closing two paragraphs of Section C7.2, that denial might operate by the use of “jamming” signals that had previously been found capable of disrupting incoming information which, by now, had become unpalatable. But not all unpalatable information will appear as current external communications; much of it will already be securely stored in past memories — having seemed innocuous at the time, or having been too intrusive to be ignored. (Indeed, mere denial or ignoring will arguably never suffice to fully exclude such material from subconscious memory, once attention of some sort has fallen on it). Anyhow, given the existence of such material in memory, then it will tend to persist as a potential disrupter of existing group-like structures which are important to the general self-image structure. So, in the interest of maintaining the comparatively pleasurable closure, it will make homeostatic sense for the brain-system to emit similar “jamming” signals to exclude such *internally stored* information from the system’s own “Consciousness Centre”, and/or from other, perhaps higher, M^1L levels.

If mental energy must be expended on the denial of unpleasant external evidence whenever it happens to appear in a noxious form, then the logistic problem for blocking resident *internal* disrupters will be much more of a serious problem — presumably an unremitting full-time job, in fact. The problem will be particularly vexing wherever the unpalatable material is of a hereditary (“instinctual” or $M^{-1}L$) nature; and this will usually mean “sexual” in the wider Freudian sense. Indeed it would seem fair to claim that all cases of repression would have such a hereditary component as a major *ingredient*, though this in itself would hardly have any situational significance — so some sort of learned structure must also be involved, and it is this potentially changeable part which the therapist will perhaps regard as unadaptively constructed and possibly worth remoulding.

The inefficiency of such a system might be compared to that of an authoritarian business organization or political regime. On the one hand, there will be a considerable demand for resources to police the activities of the production-force (comparable to the expenditure of mental energy, considered above); and these measures will not necessarily even produce the immediate

effects desired if, as Townsend (1970) has suggested, the pilferers and deceivers “merely get more inventive”! On the other hand, there will be the loss of production from the interference of the policelike activities — especially when they happen to encroach on the “law-abiding” citizens; and in the present context this could be interpreted as blocking quite innocent schemata, either because their significance is misconstrued at the relevant subconscious level, or simply as a side-effect arising from inadequate specificity. Moreover, an unwelcome by-product of such blocking will be the gaps — the failures in internal closure — which will follow from the effective elimination of “group-members”. Such flaws may even rebound on the ego itself, arguably constituting the cause of depression.

Another important analogy which should certainly be mentioned here (though this is not the place to investigate its implications) is the immunological use of *antibodies* to block the development of proteins in the body, when these have been identified as foreign. This analogy is particularly apposite because there is a plausible chance that some of the actual mechanisms could be very similar to those postulated for mental repression. Perhaps the most important difference is that whereas immunology contemplates the more-or-less direct contact between chemical entities, the current mental model is prepared to encompass such influence *at a distance* via the intermediary of patterned infra-red phonon-signals.

As for the role of psychotherapy; it was early recognized by Freud (1900/1953, page 106), that it was not sufficient merely to confront the patient with *the facts* concerning his locked-on mental state, and indeed such diagnosis was a comparatively small part of the task. To confront in this indelicate way, is merely to invite denial of this intellectual (M^2L) input — and possibly broader denials involving the therapist himself or even *all* non-vital M^2L activity as “long-haired academic pie-in-the-sky”! In formal terms then, the art of the therapist might be interpreted as inducing new mental constructs which will eventually convert the existing meta-stable structure into an unstable structure which will then “roll, on its own accord” into the more valid state which will accordingly be more stable in terms of group-like properties. In other words, given a position on a “maximum” which is only optimal in a local sense, the task is to fill in the saddle between this peak and the higher, more general maximum. Without the dividing saddle-contours, the system’s own maximizing procedure will then automatically cause a move from the old meta-stable sub-peak, up *continually* toward the main peak. However this must all be done without arousing undue denial activity, and this will involve the correct balance between accessing the emotions (M^0L), the intellect (M^2L), and the more intuitive modes of the thought in between.

C7.5 Other defense mechanisms: — Isolation, Reaction-formation, Undoing, and Regression

Isolation — using higher M^3L mental activity?

In the case of *isolation*, the painful phenomenon itself is recalled without being repressed, but there is a failure of recall concerning its significance and associations. That this should be regarded as a specialized form of repression, is suggested by the fact that the patient “shows the same resistance to a demonstration of the true connection that a hysteric shows to the reawakening of his repressed memories” (Fenichel, 1946, page 155). The text continues: “Thus here again a counter-cathexis is operative; its operation consists in keeping apart that which actually belongs together [Laforgue (1929)]”. In the context of the present theory, this rather looks as though the repressing signals or counter-cathexes have chanced to disrupt the syndrome of thoughts *at the M^1L level* rather than at the more usual M^0L level (or perhaps even at the M^2L level rather than the M^1L level!). Anyhow the result would seem to be a disruption of extensive-set operation, rather than a disruption amongst its would-be members. As we shall see, and as mentioned by Fenichel and Laforgue, this is likely to have some relevance to the concept of psychosis.

The previous paragraph has taken “countercathexis” as synonymous with “blocking-signals” which have been postulated to operate in the manner of Figure C6.7/5. There is an alternative mechanistic interpretation however; and this entails considering the countercathexis as if it were a negatively-directed vector (rather than a switch relay), presumably taking the form of a negated mutant of the original scheme — and now in competition with it. One might be forgiven for doubting the stability of such a mutated arrangement without further elaborations. So let us suppose that traumatic conditions gave rise, at some stage, to support for some fortuitous *group-like* schema which both *contained* the negated mutant, and managed to be sufficiently group-like (without the original scheme) for it to survive under its own stability. Needless to say, such a structure would not mix compatibly with structures closely connected with the original scheme; and as the latter is presumably hereditary and infinitely renewable, conflicts seem bound to occur from time to time, quite possibly involving attempts at mutual repression via blocking signals — thus involving two interpretations of the “countercathexis” concept within the same general phenomenon. After all, there is no obvious reason why both types of countercathexis should not co-exist.

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Reaction formation

Anyhow, it seems plausible to associate the blocking-signal type with “repression” in general, as was done above — and to attribute the countervailing-schema-vector to the subtly different phenomenon of *reaction formation*. Given this postulated distinction, it is of some interest to see what Fenichel has to say on the matter, (page 151):-

“Do reaction formations represent a separate and independent mechanism of defense? They seem rather to be a consequence and reassurance of an established repression.”

It could well be that a blocking-signal system will always come first and perhaps remain throughout any development of vector effects. He continues:-

“But at least they specify a certain type of repression, which can be distinguished from other repressions. It is a type of repression in which the countercathexis is manifest and which therefore succeeds in avoiding oft-repeated acts of secondary repression. The reaction formations avoid secondary repression by making a ‘once for all’ definitive change of personality.”

The above-suggested new schema (containing the negated mutant) might reasonably be identified with this “definitive change of personality”; and in both cases the structure must be regarded as less than ideal — and thus, in some sense, no more than meta-stable.

Undoing

If we play wrong notes whilst practicing a musical instrument, then we may be able to make full amends by re-playing the same passage; and some types of damage can also be fully amended. Often however, no such restitution is physically possible in the “real” world, and then there is the temptation (at least at a subconscious level) to try to alleviate the feelings of guilt or inadequacy by *symbolic* correction to the original action or thought. This constitutes “*undoing*” in the psychoanalytic sense; and leads us on to the important question of just what is entailed in such “magic” or “symbolic ritual”.

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In the case of re-enactment, it may well be that a very faithful reproduction of the original event will be devised, though with a “happy ending” this time — like the rehearsing musician. But unlike the music rehearsal, the original damage was irretrievable in some way, so there will remain one very significant flaw in this ritual repeat — a flaw which must somehow be swept under the carpet, doubtless by the use of some variety of repression. We may expect that the result will then be some partially satisfying group-like structure, whose dubious stability will require ever recurring repression and/or re-enactment to sustain it.

Whereas the wishful thinking of re-enactment tries to turn the clock back and start again, the alternative approach of restitution will presumably accept the damage of the original *faux pas* but attempt to *reverse* the original process. Where this cannot be fully achieved in the real world with the original people and objects, then some more amenable substitute domain will have to be found. Such symbolic restitution might even make amends in an overall social sense through “good works”, though presumably not fully benefiting the persons originally seen to have been injured; or the restitution could be an entirely ritualistic expiation of sins. In either case there is likely to be an intellectual (M^2L) rationale to support the procedure, probably taking the form of a “repayment of a debt” — either to society, or to God, (respectively). Moreover it is arguable that in some cases this ploy will succeed, in that the resulting ensemble of structures including the ego and superego will turn out to be self-stabilizing without the need for blocking signals. This would however, presumably entail a change of aim and so fall under the heading of *sublimation*, which is considered to be non-pathological (see Section C7.1, above). But then, of course, there is no guarantee that such a satisfactory outcome will eventuate — and such failure may fairly be regarded as a form of neurosis.

So far we have considered the efforts at both re-enactment and restitution as taking place in the real world, even if it did tend to be the “wrong part” of the real world — with substitute objects, used symbolically. These transactions will, of course, have a mental counterpart; and we might well expect this mental component to exist on its own sometimes, as straightforward fantasy. Indeed, in the case of worry over trivial mistakes or transgressions, it would not be too much to expect that acceptable solutions might be found in this way — quite likely incorporating mutant material, and possibly constituting trivial equivalents of sublimation. And even if we cannot accept this as a plausible outcome for wakeful fantasizing, it does look remarkably like the “wish-fulfilling” aspects of *dreaming* which we discussed in Section C6.6.

Regression

Regression to an earlier mode of behaviour, may perhaps be best explained in terms of the Ashby conceptualization — a switching from one mode of mental organization which does not seem to be producing rewarding results, into another mode which might plausibly work better in view of its usefulness in the past. There is thus an element of purposefulness in such a change, though as the outside situation will probably no longer be suitable for the older type of response, the “purposefulness” will fall somewhat short of that identifying-of-the-suitable-occasion which was discussed in Section C4.5. It will however be an advance on the random change of Ashby’s simple homeostat system which we looked at in Section C4.4, so perhaps we should regard it as an intermediate case.

We should notice an important difference in emphasis however. Whereas Chapter C4 was concerned with the M^0L level mechanisms operating to select between $M^{-1}L$ alternatives, later generalized to viewing $M^{i+1}L$ levels as choosing between M^iL alternatives, it seems here that we should be choosing *between levels as a whole* rather than between alternatives within any one of them. Such choice between levels could be more-or-less self-regulating, or it could be under the control of some extra-hierarchical system such as “consciousness” or “attention” (see Section C6.4, paragraph 3 ff.), or quite likely *both* influences will be at work. (The self-regulation might plausibly take the form of competitive closure, with mild mutual inhibition tending to suppress the currently less-successful group-like structure). Nevertheless, we should not overlook the possibility that some aspects of “regression” might actually be “*epi-gression*” in structural terms — a return to some other schema within the same M^nL , and therefore more closely identifiable with Ashby’s paradigm, even if the appropriateness of such behaviour has now been lost for ever.

Anyhow there is something different about regression which sets it apart from other defense mechanisms. Indeed Fenichel (1946, page 160) raises the question as to whether it is a defense mechanism at all, but argues:-

“The typical compulsion neurotic, experiencing a conflict between his phallic Oedipus wishes and his castration fear, substitutes [earlier] anal-sadistic wishes for his Oedipus demands. Thus actually, regression is a means of defense [Freud (1936)]. What must be admitted, however, is that the part played by the ego in regression is different from the part it plays in all other defense mechanisms. Other defense mechanisms are set in motion by an activity of the ego ... ; in regression the ego is much more passive. ... in general, regression seems to be set in motion by the instincts which, blocked from direct satisfaction, seek a substitute.”

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(And he goes on to suggest that this is made possible by “a peculiar weakness of the ego organization” — which we may interpret as poor closure, including poor agreement with external manifest reality).

C7.6 Toward a structural definition of neurosis — and of psychosis

The usual approach to defining a phenomenon like neurosis is to seek an “operational definition” to which feasible measurements can be applied without undue difficulty, and this usually means concentrating on behavioural aspects of the phenomenon. By contrast, the philosophy of this present work has been that manifest behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg which tells us distressingly little about what is really going on; so its use for definitions of this sort will tend to be notably uninformative about structure, and only of limited applicability even for clinical purposes. If we then opt for structural definitions invoking unobservable structures, this will clearly also have serious disadvantages as far as direct practical applications are concerned, because we are left with no tangible way of measuring the state of the structure. Probably this is ultimately one of those dilemmas which we have to accept and live with, but there are ways of making the best of the situation; and one such compromise seems to be to first develop a plausible structural set of explanations together with their (structural) definitions — regardless of measurability considerations, and then look again at the behaviour to see whether we now have new insight which might enable us to make better use of the observational techniques at our disposal. Anyhow, it is in that spirit that the current search for structural definitions will take place.

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So, in the light of our present theory, what structural feature seems to characterize neurotic states in general? Posed broadly like this, the immediate answer will be equally broad and comparatively mundane; something like the following perhaps:-

“Neurosis is a state in which, as a consequence of coping with some unpleasant experience, a structural arrangement has arisen which (given the prevailing environment) precludes the evolution of better adaptive adjustment(s) otherwise available, and also remains stable despite any lay attempts to re-mould or dissolve it.”

But even if we improved on the wording of this definition, there would remain some legitimate doubt as to whether it really amounts to a useful structural definition. Maybe it is impossible to dispense with all behavioural connotations like “adaptive”, but whether this is true or not, we can perhaps amplify the statement by looking separately at *different types* of postulated neurosis-causing structure.

On the basis of the previously mentioned mechanisms, there seems to be reasonable justification for identifying two main sources of neurotic blockage; though we shall then see that there is likely to be a supportive interplay between them. Firstly there is the more-or-less permanent commitment to the use of *blocking signals* to keep disturbing ideas, inputs, or instinct, from upsetting the precarious equilibrium of the existing self-concept (ego), or some important

aspect of it. This postulated mechanism and the logistical problems it is likely to entail have already been discussed in Sections C7.2 and C7.4, so there is no immediate need to elaborate further here. Suffice it to say that it seems to be the predominant factor in *denial*, *repression*, and *isolation*.

The other main cause of neurotic deadlock takes the form of “*over-successful*” mental structures — *fixations* onto concept-ensembles which have worked well under past conditions and thereby built up a cohesion and stability which is more-or-less impervious to changes in the individual’s physical or social environment. (Social analogies to this fixation are to be found in abundance — not least amongst spectacular advances in scientific theory which turn out eventually to have been only partly right). Anyhow fixation is recognized as being intimately involved in *regression* (Fenichel, 1946, page 65 — after Freud, 1920), so we may take it to be the predominant factor in this case, and also for cases of *projection* and *introjection* — using primitive “good = me, bad = other” criteria.

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“*Countervailing forces*” — *How plausible are they in Reaction Formation?*

One might also argue in favour of a third basic factor contributing to neurosis:- the opposition of countervailing vectorlike “forces”, as considered in connection with *reaction-formation* in the previous section. This is a moot point, but here we will tentatively suppose that this phenomenon is actually a composite of both these factors together with the otherwise-benign sublimation/mutation phenomenon; hence it would be more structurally informative (and parsimonious) not to accord it separate status as a fundamental basis. It is not too difficult to imagine that a fairly simple and common mutation could insert a “not” into hereditary scheme-elements, so that these straight contradictions would then be available for competitive evaluation in Darwinian terms; and this supposition finds support in Freudian theory:

“the anti-instinct forces have an instinctual character because they are derivatives of instincts [Freud (1927)]. The instinctual attitudes of the children toward their parents are turned into forces hostile to the [same?] instincts by [*supported* by?] an introjection of the parents.”
(Fenichel, 1946, page 103).

Whether such reactions are to turn out as adaptive sublimations, or as non-adaptive encumbrances would seem to depend partly on the chance eventualities of the mutation process, and partly on the scenario of events taking place in the environment and reflected internally by introjection and other reality-oriented constructs. If these negated mutants are totally non-adaptive, then they will presumably find no closure and therefore suffer dissolution; but otherwise they might well find closure support with introjected superego constructs, thus contributing to adaptivity in a partial sense, and quite likely surviving.

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In sublimation (where the mutation is presumed to change the aim, but not actually negate the original hereditary instinct) it seems that the mutant can control the instinct without resorting to neurotogenic signal-blocking (Section C7.1, paragraph 3); here however, with straight negation, it would appear likely that such repressive attempts to “jam” out the hereditary impulses will be encouraged whenever they evolve spontaneously.

The other, more mathematically satisfying, concept of opposed vectors sounds sensible initially — but it presents difficulties when we come to think of ways it might actually operate. How could signals, *as such*, negate each other? Unless they can switch each other off (as proposed above), or destructively interfere optically at all relevant points (!), it seems that the two conflicting signals would have to wait until after they had been received by their respective antagonistic muscle-fibres, or whatever; though it is conceivable that some forms of neurotic muscle tension could be just that! Anyhow, whichever account we accept, there seems some justification for regarding reaction-formation as a composite phenomenon rather than a simple basis in its own right.

The possibility of such composite phenomena raises the question of whether repression is likely to entail *pure* signal blocking, or whether fixation entails *pure* over-stability. On the simple logical basis that one can hardly have a stable system in which all the relationships are negative, we might reasonably suppose that behind any repression phenomenon there will be an over-stable “vicious circle” group-structure — or maybe more than one. At first sight we might expect an overstable system to be • entirely self-contained with no need to try to block other signals; but then, in so far as it is non-adaptive, • conflict with other attempts at closure are bound to arise — so we may expect blocking-signals to evolve within the system somewhere, even if they do not emanate from the overstable part itself. Thus we should be prepared to consider any real “neurotic” system as comprising a finite quota of both of these components (amongst other factors like mutation), though without doubt the “proportions” and “arrangements” of these will vary amongst the various Freudian paradigms as suggested above.

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Psychosis, and how it probably differs structurally from neurosis

By contrast we may suppose that *psychosis* does not necessarily entail any such definitive self-perpetuating structure, though such structures may well have been the immediate cause of the psychotic condition — perhaps even serving to maintain it. Whereas neurosis was seen as consisting structurally of a particular type of organization for the internal information processing, psychosis may rather be seen as one or more specific *deficiencies* in such organization. Putting it rather more formally, we might say:-

“Psychosis is a state in which there has been a dissolution of one or more of those extensive-set organizing structures (in its effective collective form) on which the overall mental organization has come to depend, thus resulting in a measure of disorientation.”

This calls for several comments. Firstly, it should be distinguished from those cases in which (say) the M^2L level has not yet developed at all, so that the overall organization cannot be said to have become dependent on it. Secondly, the statement does not preclude the possible permanent or intermittent recovery of the damaged organizing agents; for instance, their subliminal remnants might well re-proliferate under suitable circumstances. Next we might hazard a guess that one way in which the dissolution could have arisen is through coming to accept essentially incompatible members into extensive-set “lists”; so that, like a social club with too mixed a membership, spontaneous disintegration is likely to follow. Fourthly, we may expect to find different types of clinical psychosis depending on which M^nL level or levels are effected, or indeed which of the (probably existing) subdivisions within such levels are the ones involved.

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Finally, where such M^nL organization is anything like persistent in its clinical manifestations, then this will not auger well for a cure by psychotherapeutic means because the therapist usually depends most on contact via the M^2L level (for at least some of the important aspects of the therapy), and this level will be most vulnerable to disruptions of the type depicted — even if it is primarily some other level which has been “dissolved”, because the M^2L level will be somewhat purposeless or undeveloped without the continuing full complement of lower levels (on which to test and prove its closure ability). Moreover a similar argument would hold for the main alternative route, the M^1L level, though here the case would be a little weaker since any M^2L failure could now presumably be eliminated from the set of contributory causes. We shall look at specific clinical symptoms in Chapter C8, below.

C7.7 Paranoia as a neurosis which may be one cause of psychosis, and therefore often exhibiting aspects of both

English and English (1958) offer the following dictionary definitions:-

“*paranoia*: ... a (rare) psychosis characterized by systematized delusions with little or no dementia.” -

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to which they add the comment that this system “though extensive, is relatively isolated and thus leaves the rest of the personality largely unaffected”. They then contrast this to:-

“*schizophrenia/paranoid*: a psychosis characterized chiefly by autistic and unrealistic thinking, hallucinations, and many often highly elaborate and systematized delusions, particularly of persecution and grandeur. The whole personality is affected and there is apt to be deterioration; hence the delusions tend to be, and especially to become with the passage of time, less systematized. ...“

To Fenichel (1946, page 147), the salient feature of paranoia is its abundant use of *projection* so that the outside world is used, sometimes unfairly, as a scapegoat for the paranoid person’s own shortcomings. Or to put it another way, he “prefers to feel dangers as threats from without” because this appears to give him more control via those “mechanisms of protection” which are actually “against external stimuli only”; (*ibid.*, after Freud, 1922). In fact: “The paranoid is sensitized ... to perceive the unconscious of others” such that this assists him to rationalize his own projection tendencies, presumably giving them the respectability of a pseudo-closure at the M^2L level as supposedly rational thought; and this “enables him to become oblivious of his own unconscious”. He will, perhaps, assume a god-like transcendent role in which he sees *himself* as exempt from requiring anything so mortal, mechanical, and dubiously-controllable as an unconscious.

Of these two accounts, the first emphasizes the psychotic features, while the second stresses the neurotic elements. Could they both be right? The view promoted here is that paranoia is *structurally* a neurosis, at least initially, but that it happens to be a type of neurosis which places the patient in a *perceived world* which has psychogenetic properties. Thus the structural neurosis is likely to first come to the attention of others via the secondary psychotic behaviour arising from it; and the process could well, in some cases, continue on further and further into psychosis — both structurally and behaviourally — as outlined in the square-bracketed paragraph toward the end of Section C6.3, on the basis of Laing (1960/1965, 1961/1971).

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By way of detail, it would seem that the neurosis would consist of a fixation onto that primitive schema (myself = good, other = bad) which we discussed in Section C7.3 as a contributing factor toward the formation of the ego or self-concept. In “normal” circumstances, childhood experiences “should” ensure that the *other = bad* concept will dissolve away through lack of external closure — given sufficient supporting experience with a friendly external world; but a hostile environment will rather serve to preserve this “basic mistrust” (Erikson, 1950). (Moreover such preservation may well be adaptive, and it is worth considering when looking at the difference between sub-cultures, or between tame and wild animals). Meanwhile the egocentric *myself = good* aspect will fail to become *decentred* (in Piaget’s sense), thus leaving the individual with an exaggerated feeling of god-like infallibility. Once such a person has reached the stage of attaining an internal closure of his M^1L structures to account for these phenomena (elaborated later into M^2L delusional rationalizations), it will be very difficult to shift them from this state — even if their suspicions are unfounded, but even more so if there is some substance to them. Nor is it difficult to see reasons for this impasse: their own conceptualization will supply them with supporting *positive feedback* whether this is valid or not, and they are not likely to accord trust to any would-be helper — even if the helper has no conscious or unconscious ulterior motives which an astute patient might detect.

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In an adequately congenial environment, such a person would probably not progress beyond mere neurosis — though of course he might, himself, cause the environment to become uncongenial! We may consider the particular danger that he will find himself placed in a situation in which he cannot avoid “contamination of his special position” due to the intrusion of the will of others onto himself. It is to resolve this dissonant situation that he takes the psychogenetic step of trying to adopt a more restricted definition of his “*inner self*” *set*, which seems to offer a new independence from the “obnoxious” environment — at the price of abandoning some of his own mental territory to it, and withdrawing further into the fortifications of his own mental “castle”; (Laing, 1960, 1961 — as above). This then, is the other extreme depicted by English and English’s definition of “paranoid schizophrenia” (above); and presumably there is some scope for equilibria in between these two extremes, in particular circumstances.