

CHAPTER 3

The Ego's Defensive Operations Considered as an Object of Analysis

THE RELATION OF THE EGO TO THE ANALYTIC METHOD

The tedious and detailed theoretical discussions contained in the last chapter may for practical purposes be summed up in a few simple sentences. It is the task of the analyst to bring into consciousness that which is unconscious, no matter to which psychic institution it belongs. He directs his attention equally and objectively to the unconscious elements in all three institutions. To put it in another way, when he sets about the work of enlightenment, he takes his stand at a point equidistant from the id, the ego, and the superego.

Unfortunately, however, the clear objectivity of this relation is clouded by various circumstances. The analyst's ab-

sence of bias is not reciprocated; the different institutions react to his efforts in different ways. We know that the id impulses have of themselves no inclination to remain unconscious. They naturally tend upward and are perpetually striving to make their way into consciousness and so to achieve gratification or at least to send up derivatives to the surface of consciousness. As I have shown, the analyst's work follows the same direction as, and reinforces, this upward tendency. Thus to the repressed elements in the id he appears in the light of a helper and liberator.

With the ego and the superego the case is different. Insofar as the ego institutions have endeavored to restrain the id impulses by methods of their own, the analyst comes on the scene as a disturber of the peace. In the course of his work he abolishes repressions which have been laboriously achieved and destroys compromise formations whose effect, indeed, was pathological but whose form was perfectly ego syntonic. The analyst's aim in bringing the unconscious into consciousness and the efforts of the ego institutions to master the instinctual life are contrary to one another. Hence, except insofar as the patient's insight into his illness determines matters otherwise, the ego institutions regard the analyst's purpose as a menace.

Following the lines of the exposition given in the last chapter, we shall describe the ego's relation to the work of analysis as threefold. In exercising the faculty of self-observation, of which I have given some account, the ego makes common cause with the analyst; its capacities in this direction are at his service and it transmits to him a picture of the other institutions, drawn from such of their derivatives as make their way into its territory. The ego is antagonistic to the analysis, in that it is unreliable and biased in its

self-observation and, while conscientiously registering and passing on certain facts, falsifies and rejects others and prevents them from coming to light—a procedure wholly contrary to the methods of analytic research, which insists on seeing everything that emerges, without discrimination. Finally, the ego is itself the object of analysis, in that the defensive operations in which it is perpetually engaged are carried on unconsciously and can be brought into consciousness only at a considerable expenditure of effort, very much like the unconscious activity of any of the prohibited instinctual impulses.

DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCT, MANIFESTING ITSELF AS RESISTANCE

In the last chapter I tried for the purposes of this study to draw a theoretical distinction between the analysis of the id and that of the ego, which in our practical work are inseparably bound up with one another. The result of this attempt is simply to corroborate afresh the conclusion to which experience has led us: that in analysis all the material which assists us to analyze the ego makes its appearance in the form of resistance to the analysis of the id. The facts are so self-evident that explanation seems almost superfluous. The ego becomes active in the analysis whenever it desires by means of a counteraction to prevent an inroad by the id. Since it is the aim of the analytic method to enable ideational representatives of repressed instincts to enter consciousness, i.e., to encourage these inroads by the id, the ego's defensive operations against such representatives automatically assume the character of active resistance to analysis. And since, further, the analyst uses his personal influ-

ence to secure the observance of the fundamental rule which enables such ideas to emerge in the patient's free associations, the defense set up by the ego against the instincts takes the form of direct opposition to the analyst himself. Hostility to the analyst and a strengthening of the measures designed to prevent the id impulses from emerging coincide automatically. When, at certain moments in the analysis, the defense is withdrawn and instinctual representatives can make their appearance unhindered in the form of free associations, the relation of the ego to the analyst is relieved of disturbance from this quarter.

There are, of course, many possible forms of resistance in analysis besides this particular type. In addition to the so-called ego resistances there are, as we know, the transference resistances, which are differently constituted, and also those opposing forces, so hard to overcome in analysis, which have their source in the repetition compulsion. Thus we cannot say that every resistance is the result of a defensive measure on the part of the ego. But every such defense against the id, if set up during analysis, can be detected only in the form of resistance to the analyst's work. Analysis of ego resistances gives us a good opportunity of observing and bringing into consciousness the ego's unconscious defensive operations in full swing.

DEFENSE AGAINST AFFECTS

We have other opportunities besides those provided by the clashes between ego and instinct for a close observation of the activities of the former. The ego is in conflict not only with those id derivatives which try to make their way into its territory in order to gain access to consciousness and to

obtain gratification. It defends itself no less energetically and actively against the affects associated with these instinctual impulses. When repudiating the claims of instinct, its first task must always be to come to terms with these affects. Love, longing, jealousy, mortification, pain, and mourning accompany sexual wishes; hatred, anger, and rage accompany the impulses of aggression; if the instinctual demands with which they are associated are to be warded off, these affects must submit to all the various measures to which the ego resorts in its efforts to master them, i.e., they must undergo a metamorphosis. Whenever transformation of an affect occurs, whether in analysis or outside it, the ego has been at work and we have an opportunity of studying its operations. We know that the fate of the affect associated with an instinctual demand is not simply identical with that of its ideational representative. Obviously, however, one and the same ego can have at its disposal only a limited number of possible means of defense. At particular periods in life and according to its own specific structure, the individual ego selects now one defensive method, now another—it may be repression, displacement, reversal, etc.—and these it can employ both in its conflict with the instincts and in its defense against the liberation of affect. If we know how a particular patient seeks to defend himself against the emergence of his instinctual impulses, i.e., what is the nature of his habitual ego resistances, we can form an idea of his probable attitude toward his own unwelcome affects. If, in another patient, particular forms of affect transformation are strongly in evidence, such as complete suppression of emotion, denial, etc., we shall not be surprised if he adopts the same methods of defense against his instinctual impulses and his free associations. It is the same ego, and in all

its conflicts it is more or less consistent in using every means which it has at its command.

PERMANENT DEFENSE PHENOMENA

Another field in which the ego's defensive operations may be studied is that of the phenomena to which Wilhelm Reich (1933) refers in his remarks on "the consistent analysis of resistance." Bodily attitudes such as stiffness and rigidity, personal peculiarities such as a fixed smile, contemptuous, ironical, and arrogant behavior—all these are residues of very vigorous defensive processes in the past, which have become dissociated from their original situations (conflicts with instincts or affects) and have developed into permanent character traits, the "armor-plating of character" (*Charakterpanzerung*, as Reich calls it). When in analysis we succeed in tracing these residues to their historical source, they recover their mobility and cease to block by their fixation our access to the defensive operations upon which the ego is at the moment actively engaged. Since these modes of defense have become permanent, we cannot now bring their emergence and disappearance into relation with the emergence and disappearance of instinctual demands and affects from within or with the occurrence and cessation of situations of temptation and affective stimuli from without. Hence their analysis is a peculiarly laborious process. I am sure that we are justified in placing them in the foreground only when we can detect no trace at all of a present conflict between ego, instinct, and affect. And I am equally sure that there is no justification for restricting the term "analysis of resistance" to the analysis of these particular phenomena, for it should apply to that of all resistances.

SYMPTOM FORMATION

Analysis of the resistances of the ego, of its defensive measures against the instincts, and of the transformations undergone by the affects reveals and brings into consciousness in a living flow the same methods of defense as meet our eyes in a state of petrification when we analyze the permanent "armor-plating of character." We come across them, on a larger scale and again in a state of fixation, when we study the formation of neurotic symptoms. For the part played by the ego in the formation of those compromises which we call symptoms consists in the unvarying use of a special method of defense, when confronted with a particular instinctual demand, and the repetition of exactly the same procedure every time that demand recurs in its stereotyped form. We know¹ that there is a regular connection between particular neuroses and special modes of defense, as, for instance, between hysteria and repression or between obsessional neurosis and the processes of isolation and undoing. We find the same constant connection between neurosis and defense mechanism when we study the modes of defense which a patient employs against his affects and the form of resistance adopted by his ego. The attitude of a particular individual toward his free associations in analysis and the manner in which, when left to himself, he masters the demands of his instincts and wards off unwelcome affects enable us to deduce *a priori* the nature of his symptom formation. On the other hand, the study of the latter enables us to infer *a posteriori* what is the structure of his resistances and of his defense against his affects and in-

¹ This point is noted in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (Freud, 1926), see also p. 43, where this passage is quoted.

instincts. We are most familiar with this parallelism in the case of hysteria and obsessional neurosis, where it is especially apparent between the formation of the patient's symptoms and the form assumed by his resistances. The symptom formation of hysterical patients in their conflict with their instincts is based primarily on repression: they exclude from consciousness the ideational representatives of their sexual impulses. The form of their resistance to free association is analogous. Associations which put the ego on its defense are simply dismissed. All that the patient feels is a blank in consciousness. He becomes silent; that is to say, the same interruption occurs in the flow of his associations as took place in his instinctual processes during the formation of his symptoms. On the other hand, we learn that the mode of defense adopted in symptom formation by the ego of the obsessional neurotic is that of isolation. It simply removes the instinctual impulses from their context, while retaining them in consciousness. Accordingly, the resistance of such patients takes a different form. The obsessional patient does not fall silent; he speaks, even when in a state of resistance. But he severs the links between his associations and isolates ideas from affects when he is speaking, so that his associations seem as meaningless on a small scale as his obsessional symptoms on a large scale.

ANALYTIC TECHNIQUE AND THE DEFENSE AGAINST INSTINCTS AND AFFECTS

A young girl came to me to be analyzed on account of states of acute anxiety, which were interfering with her daily life and preventing her regular attendance at school. Although she came because her mother urged her to do so, she showed

no unwillingness to tell me about her life both in the past and in the present. Her attitude toward me was friendly and frank, but I noticed that in all her communications she carefully avoided making any allusion to her symptom. She never mentioned anxiety attacks which took place between the analytic sessions. If I myself insisted on bringing her symptom into the analysis or gave interpretations of her anxiety which were based on unmistakable indications in her associations, her friendly attitude changed. On every such occasion the result was a volley of contemptuous and mocking remarks. The attempt to find a connection between the patient's attitude and her relation to her mother was completely unsuccessful. Both in consciousness and in the unconscious that relation was entirely different. In these repeated outbursts of contempt and ridicule the analyst found herself at a loss and the patient was, for the time being, inaccessible to further analysis. As the analysis went deeper, however, we found that these affects did not represent a transference reaction in the true sense of the term and were not connected with the analytic situation at all. They indicated the patient's customary attitude toward herself whenever emotions of tenderness, longing, or anxiety were about to emerge in her affective life. The more powerfully the affect forced itself upon her, the more vehemently and scathingly did she ridicule herself. The analyst became the recipient of these defensive reactions only secondarily, because she was encouraging the demands of the patient's anxiety to be worked over in consciousness. The interpretation of the content of the anxiety, even when this could be correctly inferred from other communications, could have no result so long as every approach to the affect only intensified her defensive reaction. It was impossible to make that

content conscious until we had brought into consciousness and so rendered inoperative the patient's method of defending herself against her affects by contemptuous disparagement—a process which had become automatic in every department of her life. Historically this mode of defense by means of ridicule and scorn was explained by her identification of herself with her dead father, who used to try to train the little girl in self-control by making mocking remarks when she gave way to some emotional outburst. The method had become stereotyped through her memory of her father, whom she had loved dearly. The technique necessary in order to understand this case was to begin with the analysis of the patient's defense against her affects and to go on to the elucidation of her resistance in the transference. Then, and then only, was it possible to proceed to the analysis of her anxiety itself and of its antecedents.

From the technical standpoint this parallelism between a patient's defense against his instincts and against his affects, his symptom formation and his resistance, is of great importance, especially in child analysis. The most obvious defect in our technique when analyzing children is the absence of free association. To do without this is very difficult and that not only because it is through the ideational representatives of a patient's instincts, emerging in his free associations, that we learned most about his id. After all, there are other means of obtaining information about the id impulses. The dreams and daydreams of children, the activity of their fantasy in play, their drawings, and so forth reveal their id tendencies in a more undisguised and accessible form than is usual in adults, and in analysis they can almost take the place of the emergence of id derivatives in free association. However, when we dispense

with the fundamental rule of analysis, the conflict over its observance also disappears, and it is from that conflict that we derive our knowledge of the ego resistances when we are analyzing adults—our knowledge, that is to say, of the ego's defensive operations against the id derivatives. There is therefore a risk that child analysis may yield a wealth of information about the id but a meager knowledge of the infantile ego.

In the play technique advocated by the English school for the analysis of little children (Melanie Klein, 1932), the lack of free association is made good in the most direct way. These analysts hold that a child's play is equivalent to the associations of adults and they make use of his games for purposes of interpretation in just the same way. The free flow of associations corresponds to the undisturbed progress of the games; interruptions and inhibitions in play are equated with the breaks in free association. It follows that, if we analyze the interruption to play, we discover that it represents a defensive measure on the part of the ego, comparable to resistance in free association.

If for theoretical reasons, as, for instance, because we feel some hesitation in pressing the interpretation of symbols to its extreme limits, we cannot accept this complete equation between free association and play, we must try to substitute some new technical methods in child analysis to assist us in our investigation of the ego. I believe that analysis of the transformations undergone by the child's affects may fill the gap. The affective life of children is less complicated and more transparent than that of adults; we can observe what it is which evokes the affects of the former, whether inside or outside the analytic situation. A child sees more attention paid to another than to himself; now,

we say, he will inevitably feel jealousy and mortification. A long-cherished wish is fulfilled: the fulfillment must certainly give him joy. He expects to be punished: he experiences anxiety. Some anticipated and promised pleasure is suddenly deferred or refused: the result is sure to be a sense of disappointment, etc. We expect children normally to react to these particular occurrences with these specific affects. But, contrary to expectation, observation may show us a very different picture. For instance, a child may exhibit indifference when we should have looked for disappointment, exuberant high spirits instead of mortification, excessive tenderness instead of jealousy. In all these cases something has happened to disturb the normal process; the ego has intervened and has caused the affect to be transformed. The analysis and the bringing into consciousness of the specific form of this defense against affect—whether it be reversal, displacement, or complete repression—teach us something of the particular technique adopted by the ego of the child in question and, just like the analysis of resistance, enable us to infer his attitude to his instincts and the nature of his symptom formation. It is therefore a fact of peculiar importance in child analysis that, in observing the affective processes, we are largely independent of the child's voluntary cooperation and his truthfulness or untruthfulness in what he tells us. His affects betray themselves against his will.

The following is an illustration of what I have just said. A certain little boy used to have fits of military enthusiasm whenever there was any occasion for castration anxiety: he would put on a uniform and equip himself with a toy sword and other weapons. After observing him on several such occasions I guessed that he was turning his anxiety into its

opposite, namely, into aggressiveness. From that time I had no difficulty in deducing that castration anxiety lay behind all his fits of aggressive behavior. Moreover, I was not surprised to discover that he was an obsessional neurotic, i.e., that there was in his instinctual life a tendency to turn unwelcome impulses into their opposite. One little girl appeared to have no reaction at all to situations of disappointment. All that could be observed was a quivering of one corner of her mouth. She thereby betrayed the capacity of her ego to get rid of unwelcome psychic processes and to replace them by physical ones. In this case we should not be surprised to find that the patient tended to react hysterically in the conflict with her instinctual life. Another girl, still in the latency period, had succeeded in so completely repressing her envy of her little brother's penis—an affect by which her life was entirely dominated—that even in analysis it was exceptionally difficult to detect any traces of it. All that the analyst could observe was that, whenever she had occasion to envy or be jealous of her brother, she began to play a curious imaginary game, in which she herself enacted the part of a magician, who had the power of transforming and otherwise influencing the whole world by his gestures. This child was converting envy into its opposite, into an overinsistence on her own magical powers, by means of which she avoided the painful insight into what she supposed to be her physical inferiority. Her ego made use of the defense mechanism of reversal, a kind of reaction formation against the affect, at the same time betraying its obsessional attitude toward the instinct. Once this was realized, it was easy for the analyst to deduce the presence of penis envy whenever the game of magic recurred. We see, then, that what we acquire by applying this principle is

simply a kind of technique for the translation of the defensive utterances of the ego, and this method corresponds almost exactly to the resolution of the ego resistances as they occur in free association. Our purpose is the same as in the analysis of resistance. The more completely we succeed in bringing both the resistance and the defense against affects into consciousness and so rendering them inoperative, the more rapidly shall we advance to an understanding of the id.