The discovery of the characteristics of the system Ucs is the most creative and fundamental of Freud's discoveries, because it is on these characteristics that his greatest contributions to psychology, especially all those pertaining to dreams, are based. We have indirect evidence that he valued them particularly. In his preface (1, p. xxxii) to the third English edition of The Interpretation of Dreams (1931) he mentions that 'it contains, even according to my present-day judgement, the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make. Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime.'

On the other hand we know from Jones (4, p. 34) that there were in Freud's writings three things of which he thought highly; one was the last chapter of this book, another his essay on 'The Unconscious'. Now both these rest, so to speak, on the foundations given by the characteristics of the system Ucs, and in both the study of these characteristics occupies a prominent place. Finally, in his New Introductory Lectures (3, p. 99) he comments: 'It is constantly being borne in upon me that we have made far too little use for our theory of the indubitable fact that the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time. This seems to offer us the possibility of an approach to some really profound truths. But I myself have made no further progress here.' This reference to one of the characteristics is worded in a manner that leaves no doubt as to his estimate of its importance. It is obvious that what he says about this particular one could be applied to all. Yet recent analytic researches are, on the whole, sadly uninterested in this fundamental topic.
It is worth remarking that the terminology employed on this subject seems to have changed in the course of years. In The Interpretation of Dreams (1, pp. 588–609, esp. p. 597) Freud distinguishes between the primary and the secondary process; and in his work on 'The Unconscious' (2, pp. 118–122) he included the first as one of the 'Special Characteristics of the System Ucs', while earlier he seems to have employed the term primary to designate them all.

These characteristics, we know, are:

i. Absence of mutual contradiction between the presentations of the various impulses. 'When two wishes whose aims must appear to us incompatible become simultaneously active, the two impulses do not detract one from the other or cancel each other …' (2, p. 119). A consequence of this is what he has called the absence of negation.

ii. Displacement.

iii. Condensation.

These two constitute the distinctive traits of the primary process.

iv. Absence of time, in short 'no relation to time at all' (2, p. 119) which comprises lack of temporal ordination and lack of alteration by the passage of time. It seems to me highly probable that the second is a necessary consequence of the first.

v. Substitution of psychic for external reality. In psychiatry, especially in relation to schizophrenia, this characteristic is sometimes designated as literal interpretation of metaphor.

These characteristics might be called the laws by which the system Ucs is ruled. Their inspection soon reveals that any process of thought which conforms to them differs widely, for this very reason, from the habitual logic of scientific thought, which in a rather vague and on occasions even inexact manner is frequently designated by the name of Aristotelian logic. But it cannot be said that the processes in the system Ucs happen without conforming to any logical law, for in that case we should only witness a chaos; and if there were a chaos there could be nothing predictable, therefore Freud could not have described the characteristics mentioned at all. There must, then, be implicit in these characteristics one or more logical principles different from those by which
scientific thought is ruled. Thus the inevitable conclusion is that *if laws of the system Ucs exist, and if they do not conform to the principles of scientific logic, they must conform to some logical system that at least in some respect is different from scientific logic.* The laws of the system Ucs could then be the consequence of principles of this logical system; in any case they would conform to it.

Formation of two principles

Here I must mention that I personally approached this problem when studying *schizophrenic thinking*, in which I was able to find a conformity to certain principles. When examining the matter more closely I became aware that such principles referred essentially to the characteristics of the system Ucs and that schizophrenic thinking was only a particular application of them.3

To enter directly into the matter, the study of schizophrenic thinking shows that it conforms to two definite principles. The first is the representative of conscious normality or, in other words, of a type of thinking identical with scientific thinking: it is not something different from either. The simultaneous operation of both the first and the second principles may frequently be seen in the same mental product. On the other hand, consideration of these principles, especially the second, reveals that they constitute that aspect or part of schizophrenic thinking which corresponds to the thinking of the system Ucs.4 For this reason we shall describe them in terms of the latter.

I. The thinking of the system Ucs *treats an individual thing* (person, object, concept) *as if it were a member or element of a class* which contains other members; it treats this class as a subclass of a more general class, and this more general class as a subclass of a still more general class, and so on.

It seems that the notion of class can be understood by reading or hearing this principle, and I shall illustrate with only one example. John is an element of the class of men, Teresa of the class of women. The class of men (males) is a subclass of the class of rational animals, and the class of women is another subclass of the same class. The class of rational animals is a subclass of the class of animals, and this is itself a subclass of living beings.

The second principle is formulated thus:
II. The system Ucs treats the converse of any relation as identical with the relation. In other words, *it treats relations as if they were symmetrical.*

*This principle represents the most formidable deviation from the logic on which all the scientific and philosophic thinking of mankind has been based.*

To quote an example. If John is the brother of Peter, the converse is: Peter is the brother of John. The relation which exists between them is symmetrical, because the converse is identical with the direct relation. But if John is the father of Peter, the converse is: Peter is the son of John. In this case the relation and its converse are not identical. This type of relation which is always different from its converse is called asymmetrical. What the second principle affirms is that the system Ucs tends to treat any relation as if it were symmetrical. In the example given: if John is the father of Peter, then Peter is the father of John. *In Aristotelian logic this is absurd; in the logic of the system Ucs it is the rule,* as we shall see in a moment.

A careful examination of the manner in which this principle is formulated will reveal that according to it *in the logic of the system Ucs it is permitted, but not obligatory, to treat as symmetrical relations which in scientific logic are not so considered; in other cases (such as the case of time, to be considered in a moment) it can be affirmed that the system Ucs does not know certain asymmetrical relations which in scientific logic are familiar.* I have not found a law which permits us to know or to foresee when relations are treated as symmetrical and when they are not. The most I could say here is that *the system Ucs resembles a child who is learning to speak* and who at times conforms to the laws of grammar at other times leaves them aside.

(Emphasis added by Riccardo Lombardi, M.D.)