In the spring of 1957, word came of a special convocation to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Harvard Psychological Clinic, and to mourn the imminent destruction of the dear old frame building at 64 Plympton Street which had been its local habitation most of those years. The invitation to present a paper galvanized me to complete an attempt I had begun a few years earlier to find relationships between Rorschach primary-process scores, on the one hand, and an interesting dimension of cognitive style developed by my close colleague George S. Klein from the work of a Dutch psychologist Stroop (1935).

I recall with great pleasure the June weekend in Cambridge when the convocation was held. It was a reunion of old friends and an occasion to become acquainted with a number of the gifted younger people who had had the opportunity to work with Harry Murray and Bob White after my time and to catch from them the lasting excitement of studying lives in progress.

The Clinic had been my true alma mater, one that had sheltered George Klein too during his brief stay at Harvard before coming to NYU as my first recruit for our Research Center and eventually its formal co-director. For the rest of our joint working lives (ended by his tragically premature death in 1970), we strove to recreate in a very different physical setting some of the intellectual ambiance of that richly stimulating Clinic on Plympton Street.

The pages that follow contain the text of my presentation at that warm and nostalgic occasion. The footnotes were added for publication in an Indian journal, the editorial board of which I had recently joined, and I have as usual slightly retouched the text to bring the theoretical vocabulary up to date.

Cognitive Controls and Primary Processes

During this anniversary year, I have had the great pleasure of realizing a dream that had been with me throughout the 13 years since I left Harvard. At the Research Center for Mental Health in New York University, we have finally gotten under way a program of interrelated researches\(^1\) cast in a\[Subsequently reported in several papers and a book (Barr, Langs, Holt, Goldberger, & Klein, 1972).\]
familiar mold: a sizable group of experimenters, some of them graduate students, some more elderly types like George Klein and myself, who are directing the work, all carrying out our personological researches on the same small group of subjects, who are intensively studied and assessed (see Murray et al., 1938). When someone invents a better general model for research in this area, I hope I shall not be so much blinded by sentiment and nostalgia as to be unable to adopt it; meanwhile, the old model seems to have plenty of power and mileage left in it.

Our researches cluster around three major themes, all of which are related by the kind of psychoanalytic ego psychology that we profess: the problem of perception and cognition without awareness (e.g., Klein, Spence, Holt, Gourevitch, 1958), the problem of the structural organization of cognitive processes (e.g., Gardner, Holzman, Klein, Linton, Spence, 1959), and the problem of their relationship to motives and to primitive, archaic modes of thinking (e.g., Pine & Holt, 1960 [Chapter 10, below]). In a more telegraphic style, we speak of these as the problems of preconscious cognition, cognitive controls, and primary process.

The work I want to describe briefly includes both of the latter two themes. It began with the decision to try to make Freud’s concepts of primary and secondary processes concrete and operational enough to work with them experimentally. The familiar defense mechanisms and a few other concepts had been explored and exploited frequently in the laboratory, but none of these was as central to psychoanalytic theory as this neglected pair of basic concepts.

Let me remind you briefly of some definitions: the primary process is thinking that is dominated by wishes, rather than by fidelity to reality and logic; and it is characterized by certain formal properties, chiefly the dreamwork mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and symbolization, and autistic rather than rational logic. The secondary process corresponds more closely to the official version of human thought promulgated by logicians and philosophers, as the realistic exercise of reason. It is purposive, organized for effective goal-striving instead of being wishful. This contrasting pair of definitions is intended to bring to mind an image of a continuum defined by its idealized poles, not a simple dichotomy.

Freud never offered a concise, pointed definition of the primary process: rather he provided us with a number of somewhat heterogeneous descriptive characterizations (e.g., Freud, 1900a). And, in fact, others after him have found it difficult to state any single, simple defining principle that would include everything recognized by analysts to be part of this ancient common heritage of mankind, shared by sage and savage, child and madman alike.

Nevertheless, if we want to take a more or less standard sample of cognitive behavior, such as the Rorschach performance, and make a microscopic scrutiny of the protocol for evidences of the primary process, Freud’s writings and those of other analysts offer many concrete and helpful guide-