

INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

VOLUME 3

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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CHAPTER 1

FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS**1.1. Freudian Psychoanalysis – the Basics**

Freudian psychoanalysis represents one of the most influential and enduring theoretical frameworks in the history of psychotherapy. Emerging at the turn of the twentieth century, Freud's work established a comprehensive metapsychology that sought to explain human behaviour through the dynamic interplay of unconscious drives, developmental fixations, and internal conflicts. Freud's psychoanalytic model was revolutionary in its time not only because it proposed that much of mental life operates outside conscious awareness, but also because it developed a systematic method for accessing and interpreting these hidden processes. The psychoanalytic method, consisting of free association, dream interpretation, and transference analysis, aimed to uncover the repressed contents of the unconscious and integrate them into consciousness (Freud, 1917/1957; Gay, 2012).

At its core, Freudian psychoanalysis posits that the psyche is structured and conflictual, composed of interrelated systems that are in continuous tension. Freud's early topographical model, articulated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900/1953), distinguished between the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious systems. These domains corresponded to varying levels of awareness and repression. The unconscious, as the repository of repressed desires, particularly sexual and aggressive impulses, was seen as the driving force of behaviour and symptom formation. Later, Freud's *structural model* (1923/1961) refined this understanding by dividing the psyche into three agencies: the id, the ego, and the superego. These were not merely anatomical metaphors but functional constructs describing the organisation and regulation of psychic energy.

Id, Ego and Superego

The *id* operates according to the *pleasure principle*, seeking immediate discharge of instinctual tension. The *ego*, governed by the *reality principle*, mediates between the demands of the *id*, the prohibitions of the *superego*, and the constraints of external reality. The *superego*, internalised from parental and cultural authority, represents moral ideals and self-critical functions. Psychopathology arises, in this model, from the *ego*'s inability to manage these competing demands effectively, leading to anxiety and the deployment of defence mechanisms (Freud, 1936/1966). The notion of *defence*—later systematised by Anna Freud (1936/1966) and expanded by Vaillant (1992, 2021)—remains a cornerstone of psychodynamic thought and continues to inform contemporary integrative models of emotion regulation and adaptation.

Freud's model was not static but evolved as a “work in progress,” integrating new discoveries from clinical observation, neurophysiology, and culture. In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895/1966), Freud sought to anchor the workings of the mind in neurobiological processes, anticipating later developments in affective neuroscience and neuropsychanalysis (Solms, 2020; Fotopoulou & Solms, 2023). Although he later abandoned this project due to the scientific limitations of his time, Freud's enduring aspiration to ground psychological phenomena in the biology of the brain paved the way for modern neuropsychodynamic and integrative paradigms (Schore, 2019; Cozolino, 2021).

Instinctual drives

The central dynamic of Freudian psychoanalysis is the conflict between instinctual drives (*Triebe*) and the prohibitions imposed by internalised moral structures. These drives, primarily sexual (*Eros*) and aggressive (*Thanatos*), are not mere biological urges but psychical forces that seek expression through symbolic formations—dreams, symptoms, slips of the tongue, and creative acts. The analytic process, therefore, functions as a symbolic space where these forces can be recognised, interpreted, and transformed. The therapeutic relationship, particularly transference and countertransference, is the arena in which unconscious material is re-enacted and potentially integrated into awareness (Freud, 1912/1958; Etchegoyen, 2020).

In the analytic setting, the patient's *free associations* and the analyst's *interpretations* form a dialectical process. The analyst's task is not merely to reveal

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the “truth” of the patient’s unconscious, but to help the patient experience the conflictual nature of their psychic life and gradually acquire insight. As Freud famously observed, “where id was, there ego shall be” (Freud, 1933/1964)—a statement reflecting the transformative aim of psychoanalysis: to extend the domain of rationality and self-awareness over the chaotic realm of instinct and repression. This process of symbolisation remains essential in all psychotherapeutic work, particularly within integrative frameworks that aim to bridge affective, cognitive, and relational levels of experience.

While Freud’s theoretical formulations have been subject to extensive critique and revision—ranging from feminist and relational psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 2019; Aron, 2023) to neuroscience and attachment-based reinterpretations (Fonagy & Target, 2007; Schore, 2021)—his foundational ideas continue to underpin much of psychotherapeutic theory. Concepts such as unconscious motivation, developmental stages, transference, and resistance remain indispensable to the understanding of clinical dynamics across modalities (McWilliams, 2022; Beitman & Yue, 2022). Moreover, Freud’s emphasis on the *narrative reconstruction* of personal history prefigures modern therapeutic approaches that focus on meaning-making, autobiographical integration, and the co-construction of self-narratives (Safran & Muran, 2021; Stern, 2020).

In contemporary integrative psychotherapy, Freud’s legacy is most visible in the ongoing effort to link unconscious processes to embodied experience and affect regulation. Recent neuropsychodynamic research supports the idea that the unconscious is not merely a repository of repressed content but a set of implicit, affective, and procedural patterns encoded in the right hemisphere and limbic circuitry (Schore, 2019; Porges, 2021; Messina et al., 2023). This view resonates with Freud’s original intuition that the psyche is simultaneously biological and symbolic. Modern developments in affective neuroscience, predictive processing, and embodied cognition offer empirical validation for many Freudian concepts when reinterpreted within integrative frameworks such as the Integrative Strategic Psychotherapy (ISP) model.

Freud’s contribution to the evolution of psychotherapy is therefore twofold. First, he provided the conceptual vocabulary—*unconscious*, *transference*, *defence*, *repression*, *instinct*, and *ego*—that remains central to clinical discourse. Second, he inaugurated a method of inquiry that combines observation, interpretation, and empathy as instruments for psychological transformation. Despite theoretical

divergences and scientific challenges, the Freudian method continues to serve as a reference point for understanding the deeper structures of human subjectivity and the dynamic interplay between mind, brain, and relationship. In this sense, Freudian psychoanalysis represents not merely a historical school of thought, but a living epistemological foundation upon which integrative models like ISP continue to build.

1.2. The Self and the Ego in Freudian Psychoanalysis

The Freudian conception of the ego represents one of the most influential and debated constructs in the history of psychological thought. Although Freud never explicitly used the term *self* in a systematic way, his elaboration of the *ego* as the mediator between instinct, reality, and morality laid the groundwork for later theories of selfhood and personality integration. The Freudian ego, far from being a simple rational agency, was conceived as a dynamic and adaptive structure emerging from the interaction between the drives of the *id*, the prohibitions of the *superego*, and the external world. Through this complex mediation, the ego maintains psychic coherence and continuity — the early psychoanalytic approximation of what later psychology and integrative theories would call *self-organisation* (Freud, 1923/1961; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

In Freud's early writings, especially in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900/1953) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901/1960), the ego was conceived primarily as a surface system of perception and consciousness. It was an organ of reality testing and self-preservation, designed to defend against the overwhelming impulses of the unconscious. However, as Freud's clinical observations deepened, particularly in his work with neurotic and borderline patients, the ego acquired a more complex, structural role. By the time of *The Ego and the Id* (1923/1961), Freud had elaborated the *structural model* of the psyche, replacing the topographical distinction (conscious–preconscious–unconscious) with a dynamic tripartite structure: *id*, *ego*, and *superego*.

In this later model, the ego was no longer confined to consciousness; it extended into the unconscious as well. Much of the ego's activity — especially defence, repression, and distortion — was understood to occur automatically and outside awareness. The ego became the psychic manager of anxiety, employing both primary and secondary processes to mediate between instinctual demand and

social constraint (Freud, 1936/1966; Vaillant, 2021). In this sense, the ego was not the sovereign agent of reason but a negotiated construction of compromise formations between conflicting internal forces. Freud's description of the ego as "a poor creature, serving three harsh masters: the id, the superego, and external reality" (Freud, 1933/1964, p. 77) captures this dynamic perfectly.

The distinction between *ego* and *self* emerged more clearly in later psychoanalytic traditions, but its roots can be traced to Freud's reflections on the sense of identity and continuity. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961), he discussed the "oceanic feeling" — the diffuse sense of oneness that some individuals experience — as a remnant of infantile narcissism. For Freud, the ego develops by differentiation from this primary, undifferentiated state, forming boundaries that separate the self from the external world. Thus, identity originates from the *loss* of fusion, rather than its maintenance. The ego develops through successive acts of renunciation and internalisation, converting object relations into intrapsychic structures. The child's dependence on caregivers becomes gradually internalised, leading to the formation of the superego and the consolidation of self-boundaries.

In modern psychoanalytic and integrative thinking, this process corresponds to the development of *self-regulation* and *autobiographical coherence* (Schoore, 2019; Siegel, 2020). The ego's task of reality testing has its neurobiological correlate in the brain's predictive and regulatory systems — particularly in prefrontal–limbic circuits responsible for modulation of emotion and impulse control (Fotopoulou & Solms, 2023). In this sense, Freud's ego anticipated contemporary neuroscience's understanding of the brain as an *adaptive control system* balancing internal drives and external demands.

Freud's emphasis on the defensive functions of the ego culminated in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926/1961), where he redefined anxiety as a signal produced by the ego to warn of internal danger. Defence mechanisms, ranging from repression and denial to rationalisation and sublimation, are mobilised to prevent psychic disintegration. Later, Anna Freud (1936/1966) and Hartmann (1958) refined this adaptive aspect, arguing that the ego possesses *autonomous functions* independent of conflict. Ego psychology, as developed by Hartmann, Erikson, and Rapaport, thus extended Freud's model toward a more developmental and integrative perspective, viewing the ego as an organiser of adaptation, creativity, and mastery.

Contemporary research continues to validate aspects of this view. Neuropsychological studies demonstrate that self-regulation, attentional control, and emotional modulation — all classically ego functions — correspond to complex neural networks integrating the prefrontal cortex, limbic system, and right hemisphere (Schore, 2021; Cozolino, 2021). The ego's synthetic and defensive activities, long seen as metaphorical, are now understood as emergent properties of brain systems maintaining homeostasis, self-continuity, and relational attunement (Porges, 2021; Messina et al., 2023).

Freud's concept of narcissism (1914/1957) further illuminates the ego's relation to the self. Primary narcissism represents the original libidinal investment in the self, while secondary narcissism emerges when libido withdrawn from external objects is reinvested into the ego. The ego ideal and superego, which form later, regulate this narcissistic organisation through self-observation and moral evaluation. This tripartite structure of self-love, idealisation, and self-criticism foreshadows later integrative notions of *self-esteem regulation* and *internal working models* (Wallin, 2010; Fonagy et al., 2023). When this balance is disrupted — as in pathological narcissism — the ego oscillates between grandiosity and fragmentation, mirroring the instability of early attachment patterns (Kernberg, 2022).

From an integrative strategic perspective, Freud's notion of the ego's narcissistic investments parallels the ISP model's understanding of the *core self* as a dynamic equilibrium between affective, cognitive, and relational levels. Both frameworks recognise the centrality of self-cohesion and the capacity to integrate contradictory self-states within a coherent whole.

Although Freud's metapsychology focused on the ego as a functional agency, later psychoanalysts began to articulate more explicit theories of the *self* as the organising centre of experience. Heinz Hartmann (1958) and Erik Erikson (1963) expanded the ego into a developmental system, while Kohut (1971) reformulated it into the concept of *self-structure*, emphasising empathy, mirroring, and cohesion. These developments did not contradict Freud's model but extended it beyond intrapsychic conflict to include intersubjective and relational dynamics. Kohut's idea that the self requires empathic atonement for its development anticipates modern attachment theory and the interpersonal neurobiology of self-organisation (Siegel, 2020; Schore, 2021).

Freud's conception of the ego thus remains the historical precursor of contemporary multidimensional models of the self. Its functions — regulation, integration, defence, and adaptation — have been reinterpreted across cognitive, affective, and neuroscientific paradigms. Within the ISP model, these dimensions correspond to the *plastic self* and *external self*, which manage the interface between internal experience and relational reality. Freud's insights into the fragmentation and reorganisation of the ego during psychic conflict prefigure the ISP understanding of dissociated self-states and strategic reintegration through relational and emotional processing.

One of Freud's most enduring contributions is the radical decentring of consciousness. The ego, he wrote, "is not master in its own house" (Freud, 1917/1957, p. 284). This insight reshaped psychology's understanding of human agency. Far from being autonomous and transparent, the ego is subject to distortions, rationalisations, and defensive omissions. It continually misrecognises the motives of its own actions, constructing coherent narratives to preserve a sense of self-consistency (Freud, 1925/1961). Contemporary research in cognitive neuroscience echoes this view, showing that much of human decision-making, affect regulation, and moral reasoning occur automatically and preconsciously (Bargh, 2022; Lieberman et al., 2019). The ego, then, is not a static entity but a dynamic interface between conscious narrative and implicit affective regulation.

This Freudian displacement of the ego's sovereignty has had profound philosophical and clinical implications. It paved the way for existential and phenomenological critiques of subjectivity, as well as for integrative frameworks like ISP that conceive of the self as a multilayered, self-organising process rather than a unitary entity. The Freudian ego can thus be seen as the earliest conceptual step toward understanding the mind as a system of *nested levels of organisation* — biological, emotional, cognitive, and relational — each influencing the others through recursive feedback loops.

1.3. Integrating Freudian Concepts with ISP

Although Integrative Strategic Psychotherapy (ISP) inherits and honours many Freudian insights, it diverges in crucial ways from the classical psychoanalytic framework. These divergences reflect broader transformations in psychological science — from meta-psychological speculation to empirically grounded,

neurobiological, and relational paradigms. While Freud's model provided the initial scaffolding for understanding the human mind as a dynamic, conflictual, and layered system, ISP reconfigures this structure through the lenses of systems theory, attachment science, and affective neuroscience. The divergences between Freudian psychoanalysis and the ISP model, therefore, are not merely theoretical disagreements but represent a shift in *epistemology* — from the exploration of intrapsychic conflict to the mapping of integrative regulation across multiple levels of selfhood.

At the heart of the divergence lies Freud's *drive theory*, which conceptualised human motivation as governed by instinctual forces — primarily sexual (Eros) and destructive (Thanatos) — seeking discharge and homeostasis. In contrast, ISP replaces the idea of instinctual drives with a model of *systemic regulation*. Human behaviour and affect are understood as emergent from complex interactions among biological, emotional, cognitive, and relational systems (Schoore, 2019; Siegel, 2020). Rather than seeking discharge, these systems seek *integration* — the maintenance of flexible coherence between internal and external realities.

Freud's metapsychology posited an economy of psychic energy, while ISP operates within a framework of self-organisation and neurobiological coherence. The shift is from a *hydraulic model* (drives and repression) to a *cybernetic model* (feedback, regulation, and adaptation). The Freudian ego's task was to balance instinct and morality; in ISP, the self's task is to coordinate multiple regulatory domains across time and context. In this sense, ISP represents a *post-dynamic synthesis*: conflict remains, but it is reframed as an imbalance between levels of the self rather than between psychic agencies.

Freud's concept of the unconscious centred on repression — a defensive process that excluded unacceptable wishes or memories from awareness. ISP maintains the idea of an unconscious but redefines it as *implicit relational knowing* (Lyons-Ruth, 2015; Fotopoulou & Solms, 2023). Instead of being a hidden repository of forbidden desires, the unconscious is a dynamic field of non-verbal, procedural, and embodied knowledge — encoded through early experiences and interpersonal synchrony.

This re-conceptualisation carries major clinical implications. In psychoanalysis, therapeutic work involves interpretation and insight, making the repressed conscious through verbal symbolisation. In ISP, by contrast, therapeutic change often occurs through *affective atonement* and *experiential integration*. Implicit

memory is reorganised through right-hemispheric resonance, emotional mirroring, and embodied co-regulation, processes supported by neuroscience (Cozolino, 2021; Schore, 2021). Insight alone is insufficient without embodied emotional recalibration — a central difference in technique and therapeutic emphasis.

Freud viewed the psyche as governed by deterministic forces rooted in early development. The adult mind was largely the product of infantile conflicts, with therapeutic progress requiring the working-through of past fixations. ISP departs from this linear determinism, embracing *neuroplasticity* and *strategic adaptability*. The self is seen as a continuously reorganising system, capable of transformation throughout the lifespan (Siegel, 2020; Porges, 2021).

Where Freud envisioned the analyst as the interpreter of unconscious meanings, the ISP psychotherapist is a facilitator of *self-restructuring*. Interventions are designed strategically — drawing from psychodynamic, cognitive, and experiential modalities — to mobilise the self's integrative capacities. The process is therefore *non-linear*, combining insight, emotional repair, and behavioural experimentation. This marks a movement from *retrospective reconstruction* to *prospective transformation*: therapy is less about analysing the past than about enabling flexible future-oriented change.

In Freud's model, the psyche is divided into three antagonistic agencies — id, ego, and superego — whose conflicts produce anxiety and symptom formation. ISP transcends this compartmentalised architecture by proposing a *multilevel model of the self*, composed of four interdependent domains: the *proto-self*, *core self*, *plastic self*, and *external self*. Pathology arises not from conflict between psychic parts, but from dysregulation between these domains — for instance, between emotional activation (core self) and cognitive regulation (plastic self).

Where Freud located the locus of tension between instinct and morality, ISP situates it within the *disconnection between self-regulatory systems*. The focus of psychotherapy thus shifts from resolving oedipal guilt to restoring coherence among neurobiological, affective, cognitive, and relational processes. In short, Freud analysed psychic *division*; ISP cultivates systemic *integration*.

Freud's technical ideal was analytic neutrality — the therapist as a reflective mirror onto which the client projected unconscious content. In ISP, the therapist's *subjective presence* is not an obstacle but a therapeutic instrument. The psychotherapist's emotional resonance, tone of voice, and physiological regulation