

Freud 14.
Art and Literature

See: (1927) Humor Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905)

→ Super ego presented in an amiable mood.

→ Two ways in which the humorous process takes place: (1) a simple person adopts the humorous attitude and the second person plays the part of spectator who derives enjoyment from it; (2) or it takes place between two people where the other takes no part at all in the humorous contemplation by the other.

→ In literature the author/writer describes the behavior of real or imaginary people in a humorous manner. The characters are not displaying any humor themselves. It is solely the business of the person who is taking them as his object and the reader shares in the enjoyment of the humor.

→ In sum the humorous attitude can be directed either towards the subject's own self or towards other people.

→ Pleasure linked to the humorous attitude.

→ Freud asks what is the process that takes place in the other person, i.e., the humorist, the listener express no affect and instead the other makes a joke/jest and the emotional expectancy is disappointed. For Freud there is no doubt that the essence of humor is that one spares oneself the affects (anger, pain, fright, horror, complaints) to which the situation would give rise and dismisses it with an emotional jest.

→ The mental attitude of the humorist makes a release of effect superfluous.

Freud asks: what are the dynamics of his adoption of the humorous attitude?

→ Like jokes and the comic, humor has something liberating and something of grandeur and elevation, which is lacking from other ways of obtaining intellectual pleasure.

→ Freud links this obtainment to a "triumph of narcissism," the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by provocation or reality, to let it be compelled to suffer. The ego insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world. In fact it shows that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure (the example of the prisoner being led to the gallows). Humor is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also the pleasure principle, which is able to here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances.

→ Primary to humor is the method the human mind has constructed in order to evade the compulsion to suffering, (defense function) see: Civilization and Its Discontents for a long discussion on the various methods of avoiding pain.

Difference between humor and jokes

Humor: posses a dignity, which is wholly lacking in jokes.

Jokes: Either serve to obtain a yield of pleasure or place the yield of pleasure in the service of aggression.

→ Humorous attitude-the person refuses to suffer, emphasizes the invincibility of his ego by the real world, and victoriously maintaining the pleasure principle without overstepping the bounds of mental health.

(1) Adult-child-trivializes the sufferings, which seem so great to the child.

(2) But Freud goes further and asks how it is that the adult takes on the role of the child and trivializes his own suffering (as well as the superiority of the adult).

→ The ego is not a simple entity and harbors a special agency within it called the super-ego. Sometimes they are merged or sharply differentiated from one another. Super-ego keeps the ego generally in check.

→ Freud says that we obtain a dynamic exploration of the humorous attitude if we acknowledge that the humorist's having withdrawn the psychological accent from his ego and transposed it on his super-ego. The ego appears very small and the super-ego is thus inflated, all the ego's interests are made trivial and with this new distribution of energy, it may become an easy matter for the super-ego to suppress the ego's possibilities of reacting.

→ More precisely Freud says not of transposing the psychological accent, but of displacing large amounts of cathexis.

Cathexis is the psychic energy, which is attached to the presentation of an external object or to a presentation of the self. Relates in Freud's essay on humor to the ego displacing larger amounts of cathexis onto the super-ego.

Counter cathexis (Anticathexis) denoted the psychic energy used by the unconscious ego to block the entrance of id derivatives. Destrudo is used to block libidinal wishes and vice versa, i.e., the desire to play with faces may be blocked by the desire to avoid faces and lead to an unconscious experience of the wish to wash, defense against the drives, ego function.

Case of paranoia linked to ideas of persecution from early or as result of some particular precipitating event, reveals themselves or becomes dominant because they receive sufficient amounts of cathexis. Paranoia attacks i.e. the alternation between melancholia and mania.

For Freud what is interesting in the humorist attitude lies in the super-ego condensation to the ego in order that it obtains a small yield of pleasure,

→ For Freud the humorous pleasure never reaches the intensity of the pleasure in the comic of jokes, that it never finds vent in nevtly laughter.

→ For Freud in the humorous attitude the super-ego is actually repudiating reality and is serving an illusion.

→ The main thing about the humorous attitude is its ability to say, Look! Here is the world, which seems so dangerous! It is nothing but a game for children, just worth making a jest about.

→ The super-ego speaks kindly words to the intimidated ego.

→ For Freud not everyone is capable of the humorous attitude. It is a rare and precious gift, and many people are unable to enjoy humorous pleasure that is presented to them.

And finally if the super-ego tries by means of humor to console the ego and protect it from suffering, this does.