CHAPTER TWO

Reality and the Imagination

In psychological theories imaginal phenomena—their origin, nature and functions—are most often approached through the measure of the “real.” Imagination is seen variously as a rather dangerous and tricky opponent of the real, as little more than a mimic of the real, or as a help-mate to the real—always ready to rehearse for or react to moments of the real. In all three of these relations the real is understood as that which exists factually, actually, objectively (Morris, 1969, 1085-1086). It is the objectively verifiable reality of science that is given priority—i.e., that which yields to its methods. Perception, veridical memory, logical reasoning—acts which are defined as yielding “the real”—are set in opposition to imagining. Imaginal others and scenes are contrasted to “real” others and the material world, to that which is susceptible to the checks of consensual observation. As we shall see, these actual or “real” others are given clear ontological priority, with imaginal others usually derivative from and subordinate to them—suffused as they are with the untrustworthy stuff of “subjectivity.”

In this chapter we will explore the three aforementioned relations between the real and the imaginary and their impact on conceptions about imaginal dialogues: the opposition of the imaginary and the real; the dependent, almost mimicking, relation of the imaginary to the real; and the imaginary as instrumental to one’s relation to the real. To exemplify the first of these relations, we will explore psychoanalytic and Piagetian theories. To exemplify the latter relations, we
will pursue Mead’s social theory, as well as psycholinguistic and 
Russian psychological approaches.

The Opposition of the Real and the Imaginary

...a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one. The 
motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single 
phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying 
reality. —Freud, 1907/1959, 146

What is usually called fantasy disregards one or more aspects of 
reality, replacing them by arbitrary presuppositions; it is autistic. 
The greater the number of presuppositions and connections which 
do not correspond to reality, the more autistic the train of thought. 
—Bleuler, 1912/1951, 416-411

In many psychological theories the imaginary is placed in opposition 
to the real, as imagination is contrasted with perception. The 
real in such theories is decidedly more valued. Indeed, the imaginal 
acquires value only as it approaches a replication of the real. The 
products of imagination are most often seen as deformations or 
distortions of the real—distortions conceived in the service of wish, 
and created through such sleights of mind as condensation, substitu-
tion, and negation. The psychoanalytic and Piagetian psychologies 
both construe imaginal dialogues as forms of wish-fulfillment which 
are compensatory to the harshness of “reality.”

Psychoanalytic Approaches

Just what is this real, this harsh reality that draws from us such intensity 
of wish that all manner of imaginal scenes and worlds are fashioned? 
Freud’s answer is simply, but unequivocally, the external world:

...we are...confronted with the task of investigating the 
development of the relation of neurotics and of man-
kind in general to reality, and in this way of bringing the 
psychological significance of the real external world into 
the structure of our theories. (Freud, 1911/1957, 218)

For Freud the real is that “realm of obdurate fact as ruled implacably 
and without exception by the laws of natural science” (see Casey, 
1971-1972, 663). In his theory reality has a harsh and hostile cast to it. 
The individual confronts it, but remains estranged from it (Casey,
1971-1972, 664). Indeed, the individual must confront reality from a
defensive posture, viewing it as a source of deprivation and frustration.
Out of this defense against reality arises the imaginal. In psychoanalytic
theory, it is this tense opposition between the imaginal and the
real that forms the very basis for discussion of both the functions
and the developmental course of imaginal dialogues.

Of course, we must first account for the presence of imaginal
others. These imaginal others have been discussed in the psychoanalytic
literature as object representations, introjects, incorporated others,
primary process presences, internalized others. In one carefully
elaborated system, Schafer (1968) employs the term “primary process
presences” to identify the broadly inclusive category of which
“introjects” forms a subset. He proposes that these presences can be
differentiated on the basis of how the subject experiences them spatially—as internal (introjects); external, or of indeterminate locality.
Imaginal others or primary process presences are treated in psychoanalysis’ technical discussions of hallucinations, children’s play,
imaginary companions, dreams and daydreams, and the vicissitudes
of object relations.

These imaginal others are seen as the products of internalization,
the assimilation of intersubjective relations into intrasubjective
ones. Freud’s (1940/1964) original example of this process was his
description of the development of the superego:

A portion of the external world has, at least partially, been
abandoned as an object and has instead, by identification,
been taken into the ego and thus become an integral part
of the internal world. This new psychical agency continues to carry on the functions which have hitherto been
performed by the people...in the external world: it observes the ego, gives it orders, judges it and threatens it
with punishments, exactly like the parents whose place it has taken.(205)

Thus, originally the imaginal other is seen to be fashioned after actual others, in order to facilitate interactions with the external world.
As attention to internalization grew in subsequent theorists’ work,
the figure of the superego was joined by others, and the self-regulatory
function of the imaginal other was expanded upon.

These internal objects are contrasted with external objects as follows: whereas we are “vulnerable to the independent activity of the
external object—to its abandoning, rejecting, punishing, demanding, traumatizing influences, and to its stimulating and gratifying influences too”—with the internal object one can minimize one’s vulnerability to and maximize one’s control over it (Schafer, 1968, 235). Thus some of the functions of internalization and its resulting imaginal figures are seen as enabling one to defend against reality and to seek security in an internal world where one has more control. Let us look at how psychoanalysis envisions the functions of relating to imaginal others. After this we can summarize the developmental courses prescribed for imaginal dialogues within this theoretical system.

Through relating to an imaginal other one can compensate for the absence or inadequacy of an actual other. Psychoanalysis proposes that the first object representation occurs as a hallucination of the absent breast, and later of the mother herself. When the child is confronted with an experience of a hostile or neglectful mother, a good mother may be imagined to compensate for the harshness of reality. Indeed this internal good mother may actually come to be preferred as the child experiences more of a sense of control over her; she does not present the same distressing fluctuations of mood and action as the real mother. Through imaginal dialogues one can not only supplement a deficient or discontinuous reality but, by reliving past traumatic situations and anticipating future ones, one can gain a sense of mastery and control over what in reality makes one feel weak, impotent, and inadequate.

In an imaginal dialogue the child can also interact with the voice of an adult to guide the child’s actions, thus gradually liberating herself from reliance on external censors and punishments. In such superego-type imaginal dialogues, the child is able to play out her fantasy of omnipotent aggression while also personifying the restraining influence of a budding conscience—thus protecting herself from “the terror of her own omnipotent success” (Isaacs, 1933, 229). Through introjection and identification the child shares in the strengths and qualities of the other, thereby redressing the lack of equality in most child-adult relations. Thus in imaginal dialogues the child often identifies with the parent or adult, projecting onto her imagined partner her own usual stance as a vulnerable, needy, and often naughty child. Through such dialogues one gains distance and liberation from those qualities of self that are experienced as less desirable, while sustaining
vicarious satisfaction through one's interactions with those in play and dialogue (Isaacs, 1933). This dramatic form allows different points of view to be tempered as well as expressed.

Object relations theorists (e.g., Klein, Fairbairn, Guntrip) maintain that just as one preserves the good self by isolating the bad self into a projection, one preserves the good aspect of the other by splitting those qualities of the real other experienced as good and as bad into separate personae. At an early stage of object representations, these two varieties of experienced qualities are most often isolated into different fantasy figures. This allows the child to preserve the good object and maintain a sense of security. An interesting thing about imaginal dialogues in play or daydreams is that the troublesome or "bad" aspects are not ignored or repressed, but are actively interacted with in the form of a dialogue while care is taken to protect the presence of good in self and other. Through the projection, introjection, and identification exhibited in such dialogues, the child has the power to change his psychological experience despite his powerlessness to influence his actual interactions with others. For example when the bad mother or father appears in play, the child often radically shifts the balance of power by introducing the figure of a policeman or a superhero who puts to rest the threatening behaviors of the bad mother or father.

Similarly through displacement from one object to another, less dangerous one, the child can vent his emotions without fear of retribution from the actual other for whom such feelings are felt. Aggressive fantasies, for instance, rather than being addressed to the father—who is bigger and more powerful, and on whom the child depends for support, love and approval—may be addressed in the form of an angry speech to a pretend robber. For further safety from feelings of powerlessness and fears of punishment for the expression of anger, he may imagine himself as a judge or Superman.

Through these mechanisms, as exhibited in the imaginal dialogue, the child is able to involve himself in the problematic feelings and aspects of his experience— but with the possibility of feeling a wholly different relation to them. The imaginal dialogue allows for a field of interaction between aspects of experience while leaving their presentation and resolution relatively unconstrained by the vicissitudes of reality.
Such functions implicitly describe an inner psychic world designed at first by wish where what one wants can be made to occur, as though one were godlike within the bounds of this province. This inner world is pitted against an outer world which is often felt as inadequate, discontinuous, hostile, overbearing, accusatory and punishing. With such descriptions the developmental directions proposed for imaginal dialogues are not surprising. The plurality of directions is intentionally emphasized here as psychoanalysis in its history and its present diversity of metapsychologies is far from unified regarding the fate of primary process presences. Nonetheless, some trends are widely—though not universally—shared.

It is ironic that Freud, a pioneer in presenting the reality of the psychological, should assert so forcefully the priority of the external and the material. Even after his proposal of psychical reality to account for how the strength of a fantasy of seduction might equal that of the actual experience of seduction, he retreated to suggest that perhaps such an actual seduction, though not present in the lifetime of an individual, had occurred to an ancestor (see Casey, 1971-1972, 677).

It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told to us today in analysis as phantasy—the seduction of children, the inflaming of sexual excitement by observing parental intercourse, the threat of castration (or rather castration itself)—were once real occurrences in the primeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth. (Freud, 1917/1963, 371)

Freud’s dichotomy between internal psychical reality and external, material reality was replicated even within the domain of the psychical as he ferreted out those representations that consensually converged with other people’s and those that departed. Namely, due to his partial adherence to a copy theory of perception, he postulated that internal representations are of two kinds: those which reproduce external reality and those which are “drive cathexed,” which represent the psychical reality of the dreamer (Schimek, 1975, 174). The representations in dreams and psychosis, the “primary process representations,” and those which appear to duplicate the objects of external reality were thus differentiated. The primacy afforded reality is
REALITY AND IMAGINATION

shared with secondary process representations. Thus, development of object representations is most often seen not just as increasing the degree of complexity of characterization (i.e., from polarized representation—all good, all bad, etc.—to multidimensional representations), but as an increasing degree of correspondence between object representations and individuals in the external world.

At “primitive” levels of self and object-representation, characters are polarized—all good and idealized, or all bad and persecutory. Meissner (1981) describes the early polarized figures as organized along either aggressive or narcissistic lines. The former yield “aggressive” and “victim” introjects which are either powerful and destructive or vulnerable and helpless, while the latter yield “superior” and “inferior” introjects which are either replete with a sense of specialness, grandiosity, and omnipotence or with inferiority and worthlessness. Presumably as development progresses, “the alternation and interlocking of introjection and projection produce composite introjects” (Meissner, 1981, 22). The resulting images of self and other are more differentiated, “richer, more varied, more consistent and more congruent with what objects are really like” (Krohn and Mayman, 1974, 448).

The change from polarized to multidimensional characters is presumably made possible by a change in the structure of defenses. Klein (1975b) characterizes this transition as the one between the paranoid position and the depressive position. For instance as one moves from the primitive mechanism of splitting to ambivalence, representations change from all-good or all-bad to ones which are both accepting and rejecting, loving and hating. So as one can tolerate more of reality, there is a shift from wish-laden to realistic representations.

Rather than trace the full history of these genetic ideas within the work of various psychoanalytic theorists, we will turn our attention instead to a single psychoanalytic work, Schafer’s Aspects of Internalization (1968), which attempted to summarize and critique these treatments. While proposing certain new ways of approaching the subject, Schafer conserves in his theory the basic psychoanalytic arguments regarding imaginal others and our dialogues and interactions with them. Schafer proposes a developmental continuum from primary process presences to secondary process object representations primarily along an axis of degree of congruence between actual person and representation of that person, between the psychoanalytic
real and the imaginal. Whereas primary process presences, due to the suspension of a self reflective representation (i.e., an awareness that one is thinking), are felt in the moment of daydream as presences, in secondary process representation there is no longer the imaginal presence but merely the thought of another. Primary process presences are described as object representations which are “inaccurate, unstable and timeless due to the influence of unconscious motives and ideation,” whereas secondary process object representations are “characterized by relative accuracy, stability, and a preserved temporal and spatial (external) index, and reflective processing” (126-127). “A reasonably faithful rendering of the object’s pertinent essentials” (126), its essentials in reality, is contrasted with a distorted rendering, biased by wish and by unmitigated subjectivity. Thus development coincides with the imaginal’s more accurate mirroring of reality and with a depersonification of presences.

On this last point Schafer is quite strict:

Too often, introjects are written about (and discussed in the clinic) as if they are actual persons carrying on lives of their own, with energies of their own, and with independent intentions directed toward the subject. This is how patients often experience them and describe them, but is it good metapsychology? […] The introject’s seemingly independent ability to influence the subject is its outstanding experiential quality. (Schafer, 1968, 83)

Thus Schafer concedes that a language designed to reflect our phenomenological experience of these presences would speak of them as having thoughts, feelings, motives, and agency. Such a language, descriptive of experience, is not Schafer’s concern. His is a language of efficient causal explanation. Given psychoanalytic theory, all thoughts, feelings and motives of an imaginal figure are referred back to the motives of the subject. They are “representations of the subject’s wishes and conflicts” (Schafer, 1968, 138-139). Thus from Schafer’s point of view, the primary process presence, even the “pejoratively colored persecuting introject is always doing what the subject tells it to do; its independent activity is only apparent” (139). For Schafer and other clinical theorists, development has to do with making experience conform to explanatory notions. Imaginal presences should in the end be experienced and “treated merely as the thoughts, ideas or information” (138) which theory says they are.
For Schafer the developmental question is “How does the introject lose its influence?... Put most broadly, the question is not, How is the irrational possible? but, How is the rational possible?” (136). With these considerations we reach a nexus in our discussions of reason and the imaginal, and reality and the imaginal. The irrational here is imaginal reality which diverges from external reality and the rational.

Schafer notes that “introjects” often recur without change. But rather than dealing positively with this stability of occurrence, Schafer understands it as the result of “strong, infantile, id-ego fixations...being represented by these dramatic personae” (139). From this point of view,

...introjects may be said to be instruments of the forces that oppose change; they must be assigned a mainly conservative role in the development of object relations...

The specifically conservative or fixation aspect of the introject or any other presence is seen in its representing primitive or infantile basic assumptions and wishes concerning the relation of the subject to objects. (Schafer, 1968, 131-132)

Thus people who are predisposed to create introjects and other presences and to experience them repetitively are seen by Schafer as “dominated by infantile fixations,” with “unremitting pressure of infantile wishes” and a “predilection for magical control over objects,” all of which result in a “turning away from external object relations to fantasy” (132).

Schafer does not take up the issue of primary process presences that have no definite external referents—for example monsters, witches, and space people. Clinicians, beginning with Melanie Klein, have often seen the attaching of a worldly referent onto such figures as an indication of development. Thus Klein as a play therapist might, through interpretation, hope to have the child begin to treat the witch as mother, or the hungry naughty little pig as the child herself; again a redirection of the imaginal to the real.5 Apropos our earlier discussion of the rational, Ekstein, a child analyst, attempts to befriend the patient's monster, talking directly to the “introject” in the session. His developmental goal is to introduce the monster to reason and

---

5 In this regard see also Rambert (1949).
reflection via a relationship with the therapist. He wants the monster “to become someone with whom the patient and the therapist can negotiate,” who can explain and create rationales for the patient: “the monster is changed in that he becomes more rational and subject to secondary process reasoning” (Ekstein, 1965b, 194).

As play is in psychoanalysis, imaginal dialogues are seen as a form of thinking which eventually changes into “secondary process reality-oriented thinking” (Ekstein, 1965a, 441). What results from this de-personification of thought is expressed variously by theorists. Some (such as Fairbairn) speak of an integration of imaginal egos, thus reducing their number and extending the bounds of the ego in this assimilatory project, while others, such as Kernberg, speak of how the imaginal others are integrated into the tripartite structure of id, ego, and superego. For Ekstein and others of the psychoanalytic persuasion, it is to be hoped that where “introjects ruled, capacity for object relations should be developed” (Ekstein, 1965b, 196-197).

One is reminded of the psychoanalytic literature on imaginary companions suggesting that the child who is in commerce with such companions is morbidly turning away from “real” others. Harriman (1937), for instance, wrote that imaginary companions result from a “temporary dichotomy” in one’s personality and that “real playmates cause these fantasies to disappear” (368).

From the psychoanalytic point of view it would seem that were reality more adequate, imagination might cease to dream. But given the vicissitudes of reality, the very contrast and opposition between the imaginal and the real allows the ego a realm of rest from the world. In theories of play and daydreams this realm—when not taken to an extreme—is credited with making it more possible for one to “control his real behavior, and to accept the limitations of the real world”—to adapt. Dramatic representation “furthers the development...of the sense of reality. It helps to...enhance the child’s readiness to understand the objective physical world for its own sake” (Isaacs, 1945, 210). Despite the fact that internalization is a necessary process both for the existence of an internal world and for interaction with the external world, psychoanalytic discussion of it is couched largely in terms of pathology. From the psychoanalytic perspective, the characters which result from internalization are representative of various infantile
conflicts, corresponding to different stages of development and their characteristic defenses. Their origin is located in primitive, oral, sadistic, instinctual drives (Greens, 1954). The resulting introjects are seen in terms of narcissism and aggression. The young child is described as passing from a paranoid position to a depressive one. What a choice!

In adulthood, the characters (or representations) are often inferred from reported interactions and the quality of the transference neurosis. These inferred representations of self and other are rarely invited by traditional therapies to be experienced as felt presences. When they are so experienced spontaneously, they are seen as rivaling object relations or signaling a return to more primitive, infantile preoccupations.

We find the emphasis on adaptation to external reality central to Piaget’s treatment of imaginal dialogues as well. Piaget’s theoretical system rests on his notion of adaptation as an equilibrium between accommodation and assimilation. The imaginal dialogues in symbolic play reflect the child’s unbalanced assimilation of reality to his own ego. Such imaginal experience does not reflect reality but distorts it. For Piaget (1971) the essential property of play is its “deformation and subordination of reality to the desires of the self” (339). Therefore for Piaget, development coincides with a change from such wish-fulfilling distortions of reality to play that becomes more and more adequately adapted to reality (as in the construction of games).

With regard to the ludic symbol, “progress in socialization,” for Piaget (1962b), “instead of leading to an increase in symbolism, transforms play more or less rapidly into objective imitation of reality” (139). As egocentric assimilation becomes de-centered, “play becomes as much an expression of reality as an affective modification of it” (285). When games replace early symbolic play Piaget argues that their function is not to transport the child elsewhere, but to reproduce or continue the real world. The rise of games with rules is coincident with a decline in symbolism, the former being “progressively less distorting and more nearly related to adapted work” (140).

This direction is taken with respect not only to symbolic play but to imagination in general. Piaget places imagination under the rubric of “undirected” thought, in contrast to “directed or intelligent thought.” This presumably undirected form of thought is not adapted to reality, says Piaget (1955), and creates for itself “a dream world of imagination; it tends not to establish truths, but so to satisfy desires,
and it remains strictly individual and incommunicable" (63). For Piaget (1955) imagination's laws are not the laws of experience and logic but those of "symbolism and of immediate satisfaction" (63). Once again inadequate thought and unreality (or imaginal thought and the realm it gives birth to) are paired as an inferior syzygy, compared to "reason" and "reality."

*Imagination as Derivative of and Help-mate to the Real*

As we have seen, at certain moments theories emphasize the imaginal's distortion of the real. If any development is deemed possible, an increasing realism within the imaginal is advocated. At other times, the same theories (and others) stress the imaginal as an internalization of social reality. At first, internal representations of others may appear piecemeal and subject to distortion and inaccuracy. Gradually, however, the imaginal dimension of thought provides an internal stage on which past or future "real" events—events of the external world—may be replayed or rehearsed in service of one's adaptation to reality.

For Mead imaginal dialogues, like thinking itself, result from an internalization of a social reality. The imaginal is derived from the real and remains in the service of the real, for the purpose of adjustment to the real. Like Piaget's example of an adult preparing his ideas in thought before an imaginary audience of colleagues or critics, Mead too sees inner conversations as a means of testing and rehearsing alternative solutions before one acts in reality. For Mead the imaginal dialogue is never just a mental process which exists wholly apart from action in the social world.

He takes different roles. He asks questions and meets them; presents arguments and refutes them. He does it himself, and it lies inside of the man himself. It has not yet become public. But it is a part of the act which does become public. We will say he is thinking out what he is going to say in an important situation, an argument he is going to present in court, a speech in the legislature. That process which goes on inside of him is only the beginning of the process which is finally carried on in an assembly. It is just a part of the whole thing, and the fact that he talks to himself rather than to the assembly is
simply an indication of the beginning of a process which is carried on outside. (Mead, 1936, 402)

Theologically minded colleagues and students of Mead's brought to his attention the similarities between his conceptions of the generalized other and conceptions of God. But Mead is adamant in his rejection of such a notion, adhering to social reality, the individual voices and one's generalization of these, as the only reality which the imaginal can reflect.

One of the richest compendia of imaginal dialogues in early childhood can be found in the psycholinguistic literature. For the most part psycholinguists have seen these dialogues as "imitations of communication" (Slama-Cazacu, 1976), through which the child gains practice for actual communication with real others. Slama-Cazacu, in her book *Dialogue in Children* (1976), describes these dialogues as "surrogates of communication, compensatory forms of dialogue" (35) which occur primarily when there is no real other for the child to interact with. Again the priority is the real other; the imaginal is only second best. Weir, in *Language in the Crib* (1962), sees imaginal dialogues as similar to doing grammatical exercises or instructing oneself in a foreign language. George Miller corroborates this view, proposing that "only the pleasure of increased competence could have served as a reward" for this "self imposed drill—a playful drill, admittedly—that must serve to bring what he already knows up to a level of complete automaticity" (quoted in Weir, 1962, 15). Gallagher and Craig (1978), in their research on structural characteristics of imaginal dialogues, end up seeing the function of such dialogues in private speech (what they call "monologic conversations") similarly to Weir, i.e., as "highly structured means by which the child explores semantic and conversational language categories" (116). Thus imaginal conversations are mere imitations of "real" conversations for the purpose of increasing one's competence in "real" dialogue.

Just as Vygotsky conceived of egocentric speech and its dialogues as instrumental in planning and executing actions in the external world, later Russian psychologists conceived of imagination as "the ability to form new representations on the basis of previous experience, which allows for the planning of future actions"; it is a "creative reflection of reality" (Repina, 1971, 255). In their treatment of the development of imagination, Russian psychologists give clear and consistent priority
to external, social, material reality. Novel images are seen as restructurings of previous experiences. The "observed richness of imagination" and images which depart from a focus on realism are seen as signs of weakly developed critical thinking, of "an inability to differentiate the possible from the impossible," and of a lack of knowledge about "what and how things exist in reality" (Repina, 1971, 255-256, 260). On the one hand then, the child is seen as innately concerned with realism, rejecting elements in fantasy that do not correspond to material and social reality. But on the other hand, this realism is taught to the preschooler:

The realism of a child's imagination requires an active upbringing. It is imperative that the child's imagination be developed in connection with enriching his experience by knowledge of reality, and that it not turn into an unfruitful fantasy that serves as an escape from reality. (Repine, 1971, 261)

Imagination is to remain linked to action in the material world. At the end of the preschool period, the child can imagine without acting, but this imagining is to function as a plan for action, i.e., to guide or regulate future actions in the material world.

Although Russian psychologists have criticized Western approaches to the imaginal as idealistic and bourgeois (Repina, 1971), and as lacking an appropriate emphasis on reality, this is hardly the case—even in the primary object of their critical attack, psychoanalysis.

Freud painstakingly plotted out ways in which the imaginal was derived from the real, tracing dreams back to day residue, representations to perceptions, and fantasized scenes to actual events (ancestral or otherwise). Side by side with psychoanalytic concern about the imaginal as a flight from reality, we also find acknowledgment of the ways in which the imaginal prepares one for reality. For Hartmann (1939) fantasy can be seen as a regressive detour on the way to adaptive action, in that it allows one to plan. Schafer (1968) describes many daydreams as representational in a "down-to-earth, realistic, fashion."

[They] may faithfully represent adaptive means-ends relations: communication may use organized speech and conventional gestures; action may observe the modes and
limits of space, time, and bodily organization; and so forth. These details of the daydream may be no different from those involved in realistic planning. They may represent what is conceivable according to the reality principle. (89)

Schafer also describes how experience with hostile introjects helps a person acquire “aggressive skills” which may have a “wide range of utility” (1968, 132). For Peller (1954) the imaginal dialogues of play, in addition to all their wish-fulfilling functions, also prepare the child for adult roles. And Erikson proposes that in play the child creates model situations in which he can begin to “master reality by experiment and planning” (1950, 195).

Thus in psychoanalytic theory imaginal dialogues, like daydreams in general, are placed along a continuum according to function. The proposed functions range from escaping reality and fulfilling wishes (images as distortions of the real), to replicating the real and helping one adapt to reality in a straightforward manner (images as approximations of the real). From this perspective the phantasies of art are merely “precious reflections of reality” (Freud, 1911, 224), their only value to return us to external reality (Casey, 1971-1972, 678-679). As Casey has aptly summarized Freud’s theory:

Either we confuse psychical reality with [external] reality, as in dreams and psychosis; or the two types of reality are essentially similar as in neurosis and art. In neither case is psychical reality allowed to constitute a truly autonomous realm…it its constituents are derivative from and thus dependent upon the material realm: psychical reality is in the end more the shadow of external reality than its equal. (674)