

Different 'Scopes for Different Folks: The Unconscious(es) Appear(s) in Mexico
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Let's try an analogy between studying inner space and outer space and see how far it carries us towards understanding two presentations about the Unconscious (a part of inner space) in Mexico. I select two (Civitarse and Bohleber) not only for brevity, but also because they represent different views of the Unconscious.

Galileo ground his own lenses to make a telescope to view outer space. Since then, astronomers build better or different 'scopes to learn more about the universe. They share a consensus that we inhabit the same universe, although it varies "astronomically" depending on where one looks, where one points one's 'scope, even where one positions one's 'scope: an earth-hovering Hubble sees more clearly than one on earth, although Hubble's original distorting lens had to be replaced.

Freud made his own inner 'scope and first studied his inner life (after trials of studying others). Then, he turned his 'scope to various types of inner lives: those he called hysterical, obsessional, then 'character types,' perverts and further. He both kept extending his view into other aspects of the Unconscious, but also refined his "listening" 'scope to more effectively explore other realms of our universe, our Unconscious. While Freud wrote treatises on his evolving views of inner universe(s), such as his searchlight diagram to explain the interaction of Cs, Ucs and Pcs., he returned and returned to basic techniques of observation: he kept grinding, regrinding his lenses; he kept focusing on different areas of this inner universe to learn more about what makes us human.

(Bear with me; we're voyaging to Mexico.)

His students also tried to extend study of inner life, adapting his methods: Aichhorn ran with his street delinquents; Simmel slogged through the trenches of WWI, learning about trauma; Ferenczi took to the couch to deal with "hopeless" cases; later, Knight and others focused on other regions of the inner universe, those we now call "borderline"; Kohut turned to narcissism; others, brave venturers, such as Searles and Rosenfeld looked into psychoses. Klein and Anna Freud ground new lenses to observe child play; Winnicott, Beebe and Stern developed new 'scopes to study infants.

All these can be seen as part of the human inner universe and our psychoanalytic attempt to find, to map what is "universal" (as well what is different) about our inner lives, that region we call Unconscious.

Now, Mexico: Civitarse (Italy) and Bohleber (Germany) present their “maps” of the Unconscious. How similar, how different, and moreso, how familiar do these inner universes feel to us. The last question is central to our discipline: while other disciplines study “things out there,” we study the thing we all possess: our inner worlds, specifically here, our Unconscious. (Please read IP/net for the texts of all presentations.)

Each presenter speaks as if they have a model, even the model for a universal Unconscious.

Let’s start with Civitarse: let’s begin at his end and return to his beginning. You’ll see why. He ends insisting that analysts maintain “doubt and a critical attitude towards any form of school-related dogmatism,” a good prescription for honest, critical reading.

Then, Civitarse begins with a challenging premise: “We dream not only at night but also during the day.” He uses “dream” to look into the Unconscious he will map for us. But, what does dream mean to him compared to our current understanding of “dream.” Freud, of course laid out the basic observations to judge what a dream is: visual, compacted and odd, occurring in sleep, often forgotten, with at least two layers of construction -- manifest and latent. A half century later, Kleitman, Dement, and their colleagues (Rechtschaffen was one of my teachers at Chicago; Trosman one of their students), discovered more substance to Freud’s descriptive account: dreams occur during Rapid Eye Movement Sleep, which is initiated by the pontine-geniculo-occipital (PGO) spike, with characteristic EEG architecture and occurs perhaps 5-6 times nightly. Most are forgotten.

It seems that Civitarse’s “dream” is something different than what sleep researchers have increasingly defined over the past half century; and this empirical study of dreaming (as E. Hartmann among others have shown) fits with Freud’s definition. Perhaps Civitarse needs a different word than “dream” to describe what is the basis for the rest of his essay. We often run amok in psychoanalysis by using the same words for different phenomena or different words for the same phenomena. Say what you mean; mean what you say are good principles for writing, and possibly aims in clinical work.

Read the rest of Civitarse’s exposition of Bion’s ideas with this in mind: his “dream” is not the same as what not only Freud and sleep researchers call dream, but even what each reader here might say doesn’t feel like the dreams we can remember from last night. Civitarse senses this, when he states, “...such a definition of dreams permits a re-evaluation of the constructive/po(i)etic/aesthetic virtualities of the unconscious” (italics in original). In fact he says, “we...find ourselves speaking a completely different language.”

Bohleber tells us where his 'scope is focused, what sector of the inner universe he will describe: that very unique niche that is created between analyst and analysand in the consulting room. Perhaps what we learn here can be generalized to the rest of the (inner) universe; perhaps not completely.

Bohleber cautions us, following Sandler, that we carry implicit theories that are difficult to articulate. (Although Fonagy did this elegantly at an Am Psa meeting, when an analyst presented process notes in detail and he specified how various interventions were based on different theories.) Then, he gives us the range of understandings of Ucs from "the locus of repressed instinctual representations to dissociated, unformulated self-states."

He presents three models of implicit theories of the Ucs. based on spatial conceptions.

First, a vertical model: Ucs at deepest level, dynamic reservoir of instinctual wishes and Ucs phantasies"; Second, a horizontal (Kleinian) model, in which UCs processes unfold via projective identification; Bohleber describes as similar, LaPlanche's enigmatic messages from the Other. Third, are intersubjective theories which place an Ucs between people. (Of course, these are not mutually exclusive: one can understand the latter as a form of Transference/countransference within which intrapsychic gets played out and hopefully, then internalized, as Giovacchini wrote.)

Now, Bohleber focuses his 'scope more discretely on the Ucs communications between analyst and analysand, often a subtle process. He presses Freud's idea of making the boundaries between Ucs and CS more permeable via psa (for those who need that; some, who inhabit neighboring regions of the universe, such as psychotics, don't need help with that). He suggests a continuum between Cs and Ucs with degrees of permeability. He summarizes what processes in addition to repression may take an Ucs course: dissociation after trauma; implicit relational knowledge (which may be closer to the decades of work on attachment).

Then, he turns us to enactment, the manner in which, often by surprise, something is "actualized" in treatment. This reminds us of Winnicott's idea of the spontaneous gesture (a more elaborated version of Alexander's conscious corrective emotional experience).

Bohleber suggests that much of the above are "revisions of the Freudian model." To return to our analogy, analysts have refined the 'scope, redirected its gaze to other areas of the universe and learned much about the nature of the Ucs, at least insofar as it is manifest in our offices. Or, in more familiar terms, we have broadened the scope of psychoanalysis.

Here we have diametrical versions of the Ucs, of an aspect of inner universe: one (Civitar) describes a new version of that inner space based on newer lenses; the other (Bohleber) accumulates the visions of various workers, suggesting variations on our previous views of inner life. Paradoxically, of course, each writer writes in part from his own universe: both their versions teach us something about differing realities of the Ucs.

None of the speakers refer to child work (although most refer to theories about infancy). A good look into child work directly may give us much about our knowledge of the development of our inner universes. Astronomers can't literally return to the origin of the outer universe to learn of it; they extrapolate from distant data. Analysts can extrapolate, but beyond that, new inner universes are born each day: analysts can also study them directly to learn of their inner universe, its maturation, its development, its modification, its capacity to become a star or an uninhabitable black hole. We hope to see this in future discussions.