



mary process and its vicissitudes, and André Green's proposal based on the recovery of the drive dimension.

The debate on these two meanings of the concept of 'unconscious' introduced by Freud underlies diverse theories that argue this subject.

The author thinks that we need to 'revisit' the 'systemic' concept of the unconscious of the first topic and to compare it to developments of the concept of the unconscious as 'psychic quality' of the second topic in order to continue to work on its difficult elucidation, as it is disseminated throughout present ramifications of contemporary psychoanalysis.

#### Response by **Werner Bohleber (Germany)**<sup>7</sup>

Given the multiplicity of psychoanalytic theories and systems of thought, it is not surprising that a wide variety of conceptions of such a key notion as the unconscious can be discerned today. These extend from the classical definition of the unconscious as the locus of repressed instinctual representatives to dissociated, unformulated self-states. The neurosciences and the cognitive sciences too, as well as developmental research, have contributed significantly to a modification of our view of the unconscious.

Any consideration of our own theoretical thinking inevitably reveals the presence of implicit theories, which every psychoanalyst has developed, and applies, in his<sup>8</sup> clinical work. These often diverge appreciably from the publicly professed and published theories (Canestri *et al.*, 2006; Sandler, 1983; Tuckett, 2008). In an analyst's mind, theories are much less elaborately formulated, and available in less self-contained form, than in their published versions. An analyst may therefore integrate diverse concepts from various preferred authors and schools into a theoretical system of reference that includes personal elements and is consistent with both his scientific and his personal pre-scientific convictions. In this way, he accumulates in the course of time a body of implicit clinical knowledge that possesses a high degree of complexity and cannot be represented directly in words.

I should like to describe implicit theoretical thinking about the unconscious on the basis of spatial conceptions. In any self-reflective questioning of one's theoretical ideas, one cannot fail to encounter the element of metaphor. This applies particularly to an abstract theoretical notion such as that of the unconscious, which can always only be inferred, but never apprehended directly by an empirical approach. The traditional, classical, conceptual edifice is a spatial one (Reed, 2003). Although we know that this geography of the mind is metaphorical, it nevertheless influences our implicit thinking. The psychic apparatus appears in our thought as a space with three superimposed strata. At the deepest level lies the system of the unconscious, which operates by its own laws and is seen as a dynamic reservoir of instinctual wishes and archaic unconscious phantasies that "proliferate in the dark" (Freud, 1915a, p. 149), exert "upward" pressure, and have to be

<sup>7</sup>Translated by Philip Slotkin MA Cantab. MITI.

<sup>8</sup>Translator's note: For convenience, the masculine form is used for both sexes throughout this translation.

uncovered. In the Kleinian model, we find alongside this conceptual complex a metaphorical space that is horizontally rather than vertically stratified, in which the unconscious processes of projective identification unfold. Parts of the self migrate into the Other, seen as an object, as if into a container, and parts of the Other are likewise assimilated into the self. A different situation, albeit similar on the metaphorical level, prevails in the dialectic of self and Other, for example, for Laplanche, who sees the unconscious as the locus of enigmatic messages from the Other. A third model, whose origins lie in more recent intersubjective theories, no longer situates the unconscious intrapsychically; instead, the interpersonal relationship itself becomes the location of the unconscious, which is enacted in the relationship. The symbolically semantic meaning of the repressed unconscious is supplemented by implicit relational knowing, which for its part may be conflictual and bear the stamp of resistances. It is a part of the dynamic unconscious. Some also invoke a two-person unconscious (Lyons-Ruth, 1999).

For Freud, the contents of the unconscious were still unequivocally defined by instinctual representatives and wishful impulses. Like many present-day psychoanalysts, I take the view that it is not principally instinctual representatives and wishful impulses that are unconscious, but that what is involved are internalized object relationships whose psychological organization can range from archaic to more highly structured levels. The same applies to unconscious phantasies, which act as guiding forces to organize psychic reality. These extend from loosely organized primitive early phantasies to stable, highly organized phantasies involving secondary-process thinking, which, for all their storylike or scenic quality, nevertheless reflect the character of the primary process (Sandler and Sandler, 1998). They can be modified or overlain by new experiences and transformed by defensive processes. Alongside these phantasies there may be unconscious assumptions or convictions – for instance, that one's aggressive impulses will lead to the loss of the object's love and to abandonment. Not every unconscious mental content can be regarded as an unconscious phantasy.

A particular form of unconscious process is in my view the unconscious communication between analyst and patient, which usually takes a subtle form. It contributes significantly to the construction of an internal image of the patient, which we use as a working model. This image is often structured scenically and cannot be expressed completely in words. It frequently alternates between the patient as a child and the patient as an adult, and includes intuitively apprehended unconscious components of the self.

Thinking in terms of systems or areas of the psyche carries the risk of seeing them as sharply demarcated from each other rather than as involving fluid transitions and continuities. Freud, for example, refers to “a sharp and final division between the content of the two systems” (conscious and unconscious) (1915b, p. 195), which as a rule arises only at puberty. In his view, the aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to make the boundaries more permeable so that derivatives of the unconscious can mediate between the two. I contend that, rather than thinking mainly in terms of areas of the psyche or systems, it would be better to regard ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ as differing degrees of organization or forms of representation of mental

material, which are characterized functionally by, for example, primary – or secondary – process thinking or by energy cathexis with attention. These organizational forms too should be imagined not as sharply divided from each other, but rather as lying on a continuum (Mertens, 2010). Such a conception of the unconscious as a characteristic form of organization of mental material is, moreover, open to the integration of recent research findings. We are now acquainted with processes other than repression that take an unconscious course but are psychoanalytically significant. For instance, traumatic experiences may be registered on a dissociated level but not represented symbolically. The domain of implicit relational knowledge should also be mentioned in this context. While not symbolically represented, it is nevertheless intentional, and hence psychodynamically important, because it may be determined by conflict and defence, as can be seen in, say, certain patterns of attachment behaviour (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010). It is not in my view essential to distinguish a relational unconscious from the dynamic unconscious. The situation is different with the non-conscious patterns of behaviour and action that are stored in implicit procedural memory, which are not organized psychodynamically and are incapable of becoming conscious. However, they can be perceived and rendered nameable in treatment, often by way of enactments.

In the last 15 years, enactment has come to be seen as a vital concept in relation to the actualization of unconscious processes. The understanding of this clinical phenomenon has contributed significantly to the opening up of ego-psychology-based, intrapsychically oriented therapeutic theories to intersubjective thinking and recognition of the analyst's subjectivity. Countertransference enactment involves the occurrence of something unexpected that is incompatible with the relevant rules of therapeutic technique. Both parties, the analyst and the analysand, come to be involved in an unconscious pattern of interaction and communication – a pattern that must be accommodated in a scene, for the analysand cannot express it in any other way (Argelander, 1970; Klüwer, 1983). Because the analyst acquiesces on the affective level – which he must do if progress is to be made – his own vulnerability and personality enter directly into the treatment. The patient's problem complex breaks like light in a prism on the analyst's subjectivity. If the interaction and affective involvement can be elucidated, one of the patient's unconscious convictions or phantasies will become verbally accessible.

The phenomenology and dynamics of enactment have been elucidated in detail in the psychoanalytic literature in accordance with the traditional basic assumptions of each school. I would emphasize that enactment by the analyst inevitably entails a certain degree of spontaneity. In other words, unlike psychically determined thinking, enactment inherently includes a probabilistic element: it has the character of an event as its occurrence is unpredictable. In this sense, enactment is a 'moment of meeting': it permits a direct encounter between analyst and analysand and eludes any determinism. I should like to distinguish this conception from two other approaches. The first is the post-Kleinian view that the boundary between thought and action performs a primary metapsychological function. In the event of a

countertransference enactment, the analyst's container function is deemed to have failed: the pressure to act could not be transformed into thought processes. Secondly, I distinguish my conception from certain relational approaches which see enactment as something that occurs continuously and ubiquitously within the analytic relationship. The analytic interaction then consistently assumes the structure of enactment.

The unconscious as it were performs a function of correction, which Laplanche calls a 'decentering of the subject'. For instance, dreams may result in a correction of attitudes and conflicted postures, thus providing the dreamer with a sense of growing personal authenticity. Some psychoanalysts have supplemented Freud's conception of the unconscious with a 'romantic' understanding, in which the unconscious also becomes the source of being-a-person. There have been many such revisions of the Freudian model in recent years, and in my view they constitute a necessary and promising correction. Like Bion, Grotstein (2009) conceptualizes the unconscious as a symbolic process that generates meanings and supplies the external world with metaphors and poetic images. Newirth (2003) invokes a 'generative unconscious', which he distinguishes from the 'repressed unconscious' and the 'relational unconscious'. He sees the 'generative unconscious' as the seat of subjectivity and of 'being a subject'. As a concept, Winnicott's 'true self' also belongs here, as does Bollas's 'unthought known' or the same author's concept of the 'idiom', which, itself unconscious, must unfold in an individual life in the form of objectivations.

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