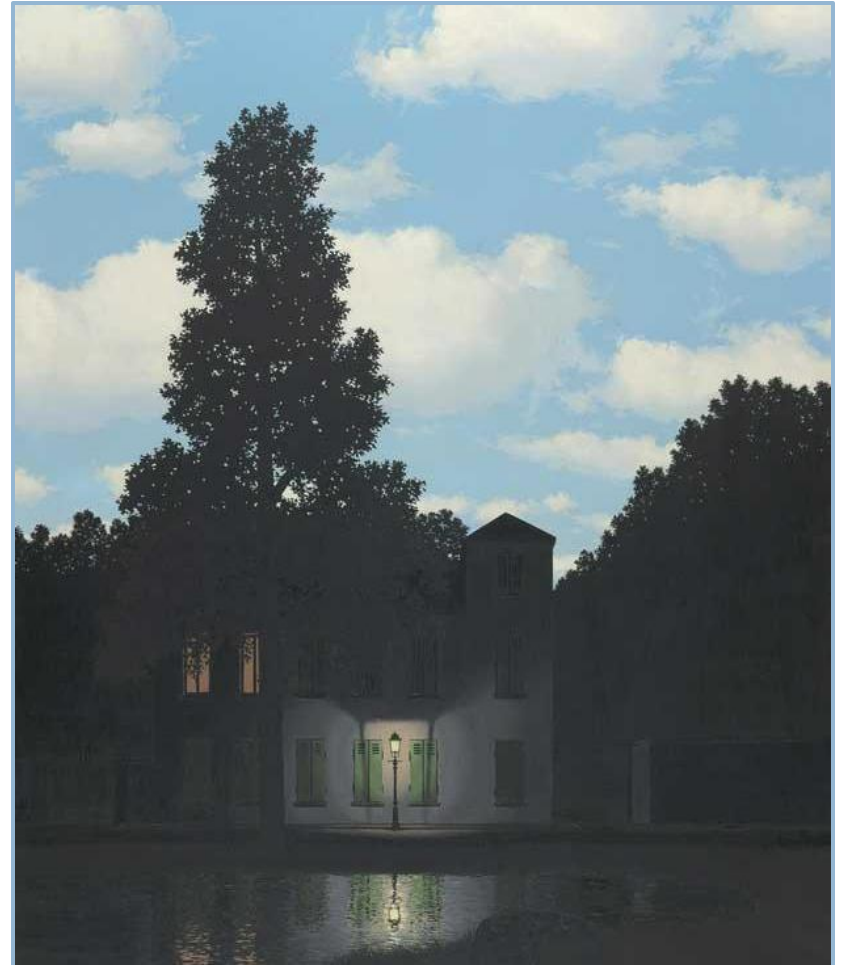


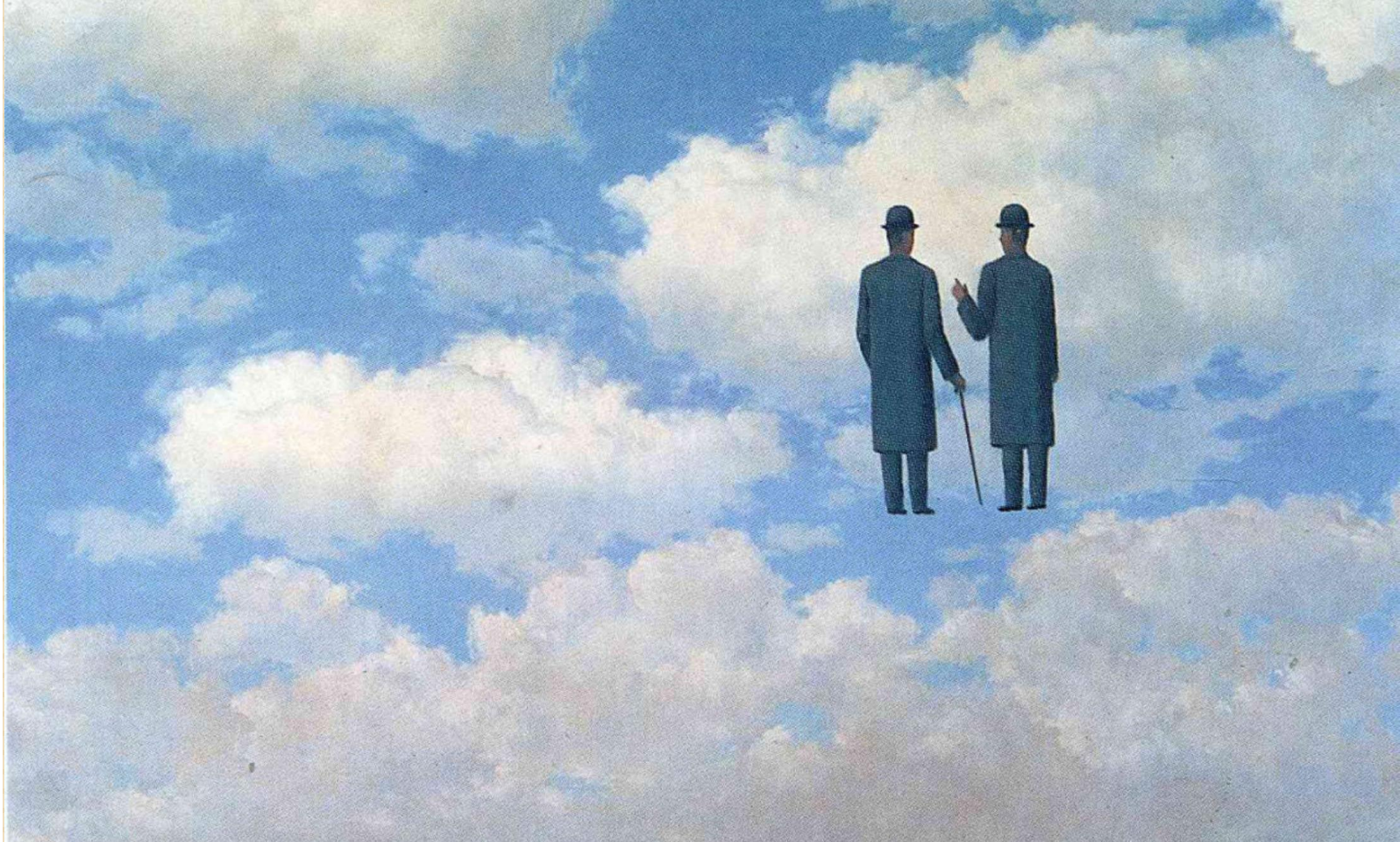
THE UNCONSCIOUS

Dr Tanya Lecchi, Inner Citadel Institute

Content outline

- Unconscious phantasy
- Unformulated experience
- Free associations.





Unconscious phantasy and transference

LaFarge (2014)

Core Thesis

- Phantasy and transference are the defining features of psychoanalytic work.
- All human experience has a dual aspect: it's shaped by both conscious, contemporary reality, and unconscious phantasy (Isaacs, 1952; Arlow, 1969).



Unconscious Phantasy

- Phantasies are unconscious (British spelling distinguishes from 'fantasy,' which is conscious) (LaFarge, 2014).
- They form early in life, bound up with object relations (Klein, 1946).
- Phantasy organises memory, shaping how past experiences are recalled and re-experienced.

Nature of Transference

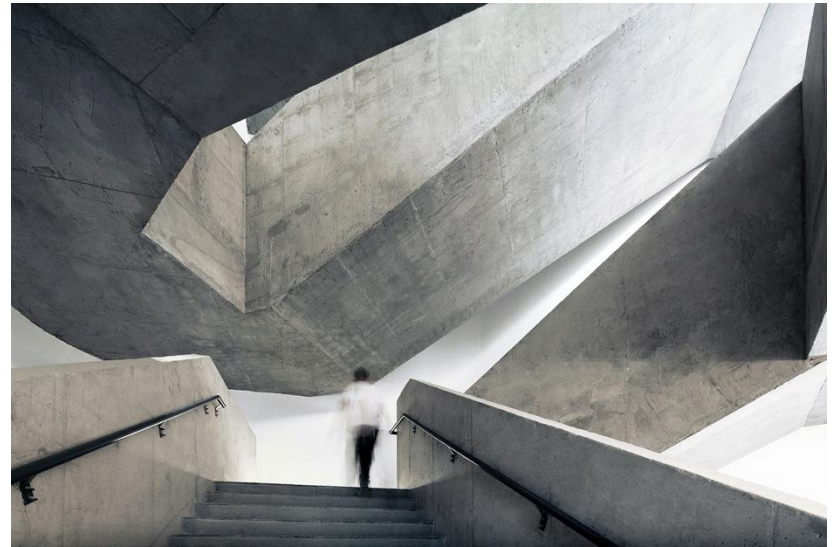
- Transference is the emergence of phantasies and their associated object relationships in the analytic relationship.
- It is not a mere replica of historical events, but a fantasy-mediated organisation of the past within the present (Freud, 1899; Arlow, 1969).

Dual Nature of the Analytic Relationship

- Exists as both:
 - ▣ A contemporary, real relationship, and
 - ▣ An unconscious, phantasy-infused relationship.
- Countertransference arises as the analyst's own unconscious is activated by the patient's material (Racker, 1957).

The Analytic Setting as 'Stage'

- The consulting room becomes a stage where unconscious dramas are enacted (Bleger, 1967).
- The frame (time, place, frequency) is invested with phantasy and functions as a container or its failure (LaFarge, 2014).

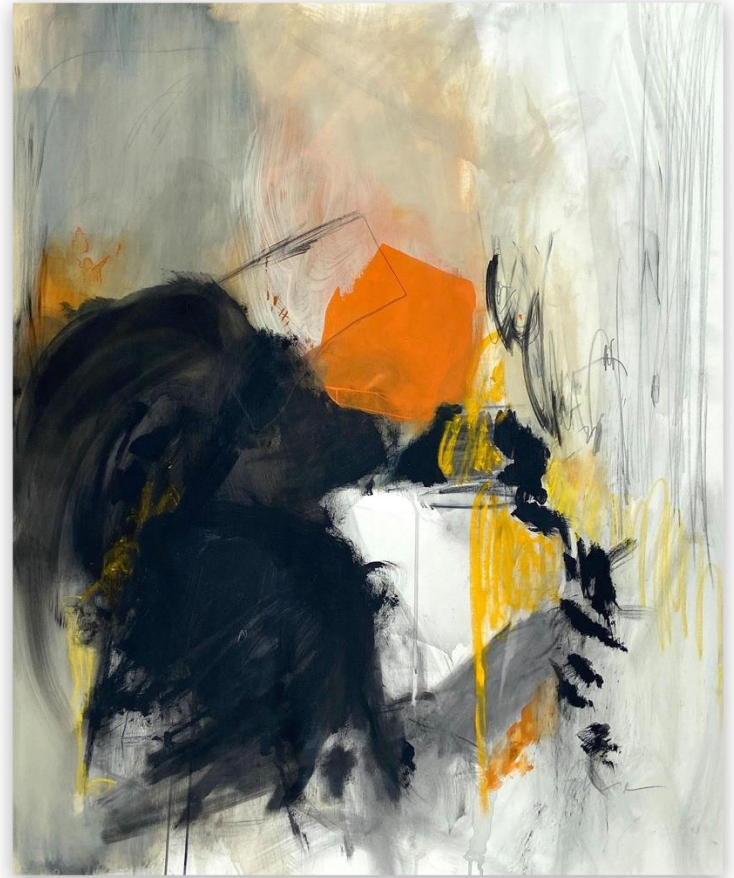


Action in Analysis

- Action is an essential mode through which phantasy is expressed.
- It may:
 - ▣ Bypass thought
 - ▣ Defend against intolerable meanings
 - ▣ Evoke complementary roles in the analyst (Joseph, 1983; Sandler, 1976).
- Action should be analysed, not enacted; it must become part of the narrative of the analysis (LaFarge, 2014).

Multiplicity of Meaning

- Every communication and event has layered meanings – no final or singular meaning can be assumed.
- Analyst aims to foster a process of meaning-making, not closure (Schafer, 1983).



Analyst's Subjectivity

- Analyst's experience is also shaped by unconscious phantasy.
- Requires ongoing self-reflection and openness to multiple versions of the patient and the self (LaFarge, 2004b).
- Analyst's interpretations may open access to previously defended or dissociated material.

Technical Implications



- Emphasis on free association, minimal directive input.
- Analyst strives to observe how material emerges – its sequence, context, and manner – not just what emerges.
- Importance of revisiting actions/events to access hidden or layered meanings.

Conclusion

- Psychoanalysis provides a unique arena for making unconscious phantasy visible and meaningful.
- Central aim: facilitate the co-creation of meaning within a containing, reflective, and interpretive process that remains open-ended (LaFarge, 2014).



Stern's response to LaFarge

Donnel Stern (2014)

Context and Background

- Stern responds to LaFarge from the standpoint of interpersonal and relational psychoanalysis.
- LaFarge's views reflect contemporary Freudian thought with Kleinian influences.
- Historical divide: interpersonal psychoanalysis (e.g., Sullivan, Fromm) diverged from Freudian ego psychology in the 1930s.

Core Theoretical Differences

Interpersonal psychoanalysis

- Rejects libido theory, dual instinct theory, psychosexual stages.
- Questions centrality of Oedipus complex.
- Emphasises language, culture, and interpersonal relations.
- Centres therapeutic action in the here-and-now.
- Asserts that both analyst and patient's subjectivity shape the analytic field.

Freudian psychoanalysis

- Continues to rely on concepts like phantasy as central to unconscious life.
- Views phantasy as an amalgam of wish, defense, and superego.
- Clinical phenomena interpreted through unconscious psychic reality.

Phantasy: Necessity or Inference?

- LaFarge asserts phantasy as essential to clinical understanding.
- Stern challenges the inevitability of phantasy:
 - ▣ It is an interpretive construct, not directly observable.
 - ▣ Like many psychoanalytic concepts, it becomes "normalised" and treated as fact.
 - ▣ Posits that unconscious phenomena can be interpreted in non-phantasy-based ways.

Hermeneutic and Constructivist Framework

- Stern draws from hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger, Gadamer):
 - ▣ All understanding is interpretation.
 - ▣ Experience is emergent and created in each moment.
 - ▣ Consciousness and unconsciousness are shaped by interpersonal meaning-making.
- Challenges psychic determinism:
 - ▣ The mind and experience are non-linear and unpredictable.
 - ▣ Theories of the unconscious must account for this emergent complexity.

Unformulated Experience (Stern's Alternative to Phantasy)

- Proposes concept of "unformulated experience":
 - ▣ Not yet symbolised, structured, or consciously represented.
 - ▣ It is ambiguous, potential experience, shaped by the interpersonal field.
 - ▣ Consciousness emerges through interpretation within relational dynamics.
- Experience is not repressed, but often not formed at all, due to dissociation.

Defense Mechanisms: Repression vs. Dissociation

- Traditional Freudian view: repression hides unacceptable content.
- Stern's view: dissociation prevents certain experiences from becoming formulated at all.
- Based on subtle, unconscious avoidance (e.g., “glimmers of meaning” or “feelings of tendency”).
- Influenced by William James and Herbert Fingarette's work on self-deception.

Implications for Clinical Practice

- In Stern's interpersonal view, clinical change depends on:
 - ▣ Relaxing the constrictions of the interpersonal field.
 - ▣ Facilitating emergence and formulation of previously unformulated experiences.
 - ▣ Understanding unconscious content as contextual, relational, and emergent, not necessarily phantasy-based.
- Emphasises freedom and openness in therapeutic dialogue.



The colourless canvas

Levine (2012)



Introducing key ideas

Freud's Evolving View of the Unconscious

- Early Freud (1900, 1901): psychoanalysis as uncovering repressed thoughts, memories, wishes – once conscious but now hidden (Freud, 1900, 1901).
- Later Freud (1915, 1923): distinguished between the repressed (structured, symbolised) unconscious and a broader category of unstructured, pre-symbolic forces (Freud, 1915, 1923).
- These 'proto-psychic' or unrepresented elements are active yet lack form, language, or meaning.

Represented vs. Unrepresented Mental States

- Represented mental states: organised, articulable, symbolised; part of the dynamic unconscious (Freud, 1915).
- Unrepresented/weakly represented states: inchoate, unsymbolised psychic material that has never been mentally 'known' or formed (Levine, 2012).
- These elements make a 'demand upon the mind' for transformation (Levine, 2012; Botella & Botella, 2005).

Figurability and the Work of Representation

- 'Figurability': the process of transforming formless mental states into represented, thinkable ones (Botella & Botella, 2005).
- An intersubjective process, unfolding within the analytic relationship (Levine, 2012).
- Moves from force to meaning, from the inchoate to psychic structure.

Theoretical Influences

- Draws on Freud's metapsychology and how it was expanded by later theorists:
 - ▣ Bion (1970): emphasised the unknowable nature of raw experience ('O') and the limits of containment.
 - ▣ Green (2005a, 2005b): linked unrepresented states to decathexis, foreclosure, and failures in representational linkage.
 - ▣ Botella & Botella (2005): developed the idea of figurability as central to psychic work.

‘Experience’ vs. ‘experience’

- Experience (capital E): raw, unprocessed, pre-symbolic reality (akin to Bion’s ‘O’); inherently traumatic unless transformed (Levine, 2012).
- experience (lowercase e): mental content that has been symbolised, organised, and made accessible to thought.
- Transforming Experience into experience enables psychic integration and symbolic creation (e.g., art).

The 'Colourless Canvas' – Freud Revisited

- Freud's metaphor (1905): psychoanalysis as sculpture (revealing) vs. painting (adding).
- Many patients today lack repressed traces to uncover – nothing is hidden because nothing was formed (Sparner, 2010).
- The analyst's work shifts from revealing to co-creating meaning.

The Representational Imperative

- The psyche is governed by a ‘compulsion to represent’ (Rolland, 1998; Levine, 2012).
- This imperative can be catalytic (activating mental work) or traumatic (if it overwhelms the mind’s capacity to symbolise).
- Representation protects and organises the psyche, forming affect-laden, meaningful narratives.

Clinical Implications

- In many cases, analysts are not uncovering the repressed but participating in the creation of psychic meaning.
- Raises critical clinical and ethical issues:
 - ▣ Is the analyst facilitating the emergence of the patient's true self (Winnicott)?
 - ▣ Or potentially imposing an alien, false self (Ahumada, 1994; Levine, 1999)?



On Representation

Defining 'Representation'

- In common usage, representation implies:
 - ▣ Standing in for something (e.g., a word representing an object)
 - ▣ Re-presenting or bringing forth again a past experience or image.
- Freud understood representation as the foundation of psychic reality: using signifiers to connect present perception with past emotional and relational experiences.

The Function of Re-presentation in the Mind

- The mind doesn't simply recall; it 'presents again' – bringing a scene or memory to life with affective meaning (Levine, 2012).
- These re-presentations are linked to other internal happenings, forming associative networks.
- This process creates perspective and meaning, making felt experience thinkable (Green, 2010).

Representation and the Absent Object

- Freud (1900): the ability to represent an absent object is essential to developing the capacity to think.
- Representation bridges the gap between presence and absence – keeping what is no longer perceptible alive in the mind.
- Sparer (2010): without representation, patients become action-bound, unable to process in the absence of the object.

Bion on Representation and Thinking

- Bion (1965): without a 'notational system', patients can't think in the absence of the object – they must act or discharge somatically.
- Bion does not separate thought from affect; true thought is emotionally invested and psychically active.
- Patients may have moments or areas of failed representation, leading to impoverished psychic functioning (Levine, 2011a).

Green on Representation as Binding and Linking

- Green (2010): to represent is to ‘make present’ in the object’s absence.
- Involves binding: associating new representations with past ones, linking memory, affect, phantasy, imagination, and meaning.
- Psychic work entails giving form to feeling, and linking that form to other symbolic systems.

Formation of Representation

- Initial registration (or inscription) of events is not enough to create representations.
- Requires psychic work: transforming raw impressions into integrated, affectively meaningful constructs.
- Freud: such psychic capacity arises in early relational experiences (e.g., infant feeding linked to the image of satisfaction).

Failures and Absences of Representation

- What about inscriptions that have not become representations?
 - ▣ They remain ineffable, non-symbolic, unusable in thought
 - ▣ Transformation into representation is required for them to be processed (Bion, 1970).

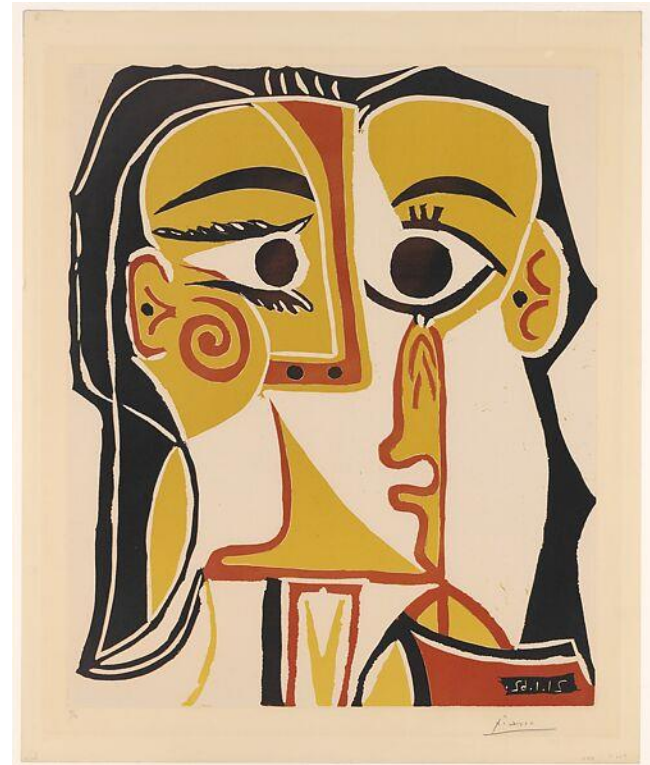
- Green (2005a, 2005b): foreclosure, decathexis, and psychic voids result in representational gaps, often filled by rigid pathological organisations and destructive phantasies.

Representation, Affect, and Thought

- True thought (Levine, 2011a) depends on:
 - ▣ A history of emotional satisfaction.
 - ▣ The ability to link perception, memory, and feeling into a coherent psychic network.
- Representation is thus not just mental, but affective — it gives meaning, form, and symbolic potential to experience.

Theoretical Challenges

- Representation is always partial; experience can never be fully symbolised (Bion's O vs. K distinction).
- Psychoanalysis faces the challenge of finding language to speak of pre-psychic or unrepresented mental states (Green, 2010).



From Interpretation to Creation – Expanding the Analyst's Role

- Classical analysis helps patients uncover the hidden but structured unconscious.
- Some patients, however, require help in creating a dynamic unconscious – initiating or strengthening representations.
- The analyst may unconsciously participate in constructing psychic meaning, especially when working with pre-symbolic or unrepresented states.
- Representation must be formed before it can be repressed and uncovered.

Analytic Action – Figuration, Resonance and Co-construction

- Analytic action includes internal acts of emotional resonance, reverie, and intuitive figurability, not just verbal interpretation.
- The analyst absorbs the patient's sensorial turbulence and may give it form (representation) via spontaneous, intersubjective processes.
- Figuration is a co-constructed event, shaped by both patient and analyst subjectivity.
- This action may be non-verbal, affective, or even behavioural (e.g. bodily presence, tone, timing).

Clinical Application – Working with Non-neurotic Patients

- With non-neurotic patients (Green, 1975), or in non-neurotic sectors (Bion, 1957), speech may not symbolise, but evacuate or discharge.
- Patients may present amorphous affect, fragmented self-object images, and unsymbolised experience.
- Analyst may need to help create language, build associative links, and bind affect to meaning.
- Analytic action becomes a repair of psychic fabric, not just interpretation of existing threads.

Clinical Manifestations of Failed Representation

- Failures or weaknesses in representation underlie many familiar clinical phenomena:
 - ▣ Impulsivity, eruptive affect, blind discharge
 - ▣ Psychic deadness, somatic symptoms, rigid defensive organisations
 - ▣ Perversion, addiction, destructive guilt, and negative therapeutic reactions.
- These states reflect psychic material that is:
 - ▣ Not yet representable or
 - ▣ Only weakly inscribed, unlinked to symbolic networks or language.
- Such material cannot yet be thought about, spoken, or reflected upon.

Transformative Outcome of Successful Analytic Process

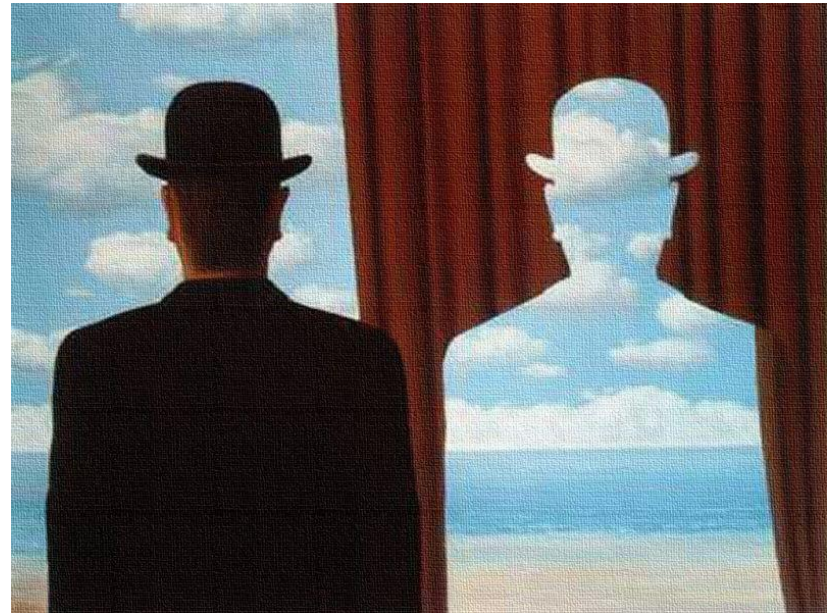
- Vague somatic and affective states become:
 - ▣ Linked to words, images, and symbolic meaning
 - ▣ Embedded in associative chains and narrative sequences.
- This transformation allows patients to:
 - ▣ Reflect, communicate, and regulate affect
 - ▣ Delay action and think instead of act
 - ▣ Develop more coherent and integrated psychic functioning.

Key points on analytic action

- The analyst's task:
 - ▣ Not only to uncover the dynamic unconscious but also to create it.
 - ▣ In cases of weak/unrepresented psychic material, analyst must:
 - Receive unmetabolised projections
 - Engage in transformative acts of figuration and emotional resonance
 - Offer these back to the patient in usable symbolic form.
- Characteristics:
 - ▣ Intersubjective and co-constructed
 - ▣ Often intuitive, spontaneous, not purely deductive
 - ▣ May involve internal acts, but sometimes requires external, catalytic acts.

The Analytic Field

- Who "owns" the representation that emerges?
 - ▣ The patient?
 - ▣ The analyst?
 - ▣ Both? Either? Neither?
- Both and either (Levine, 2012).
- The emergent representation may belong to neither analyst nor patient.
- A phenomenon of the analytic field or third – a shared psychic space (Baranger et al., 1983; Ogden, 1994; Winnicott, 1971).





Unconscious thinking and free associations

Bollas (2009)

Christopher Bollas and Unconscious Thinking

- Revives Freud's distinction between repression and reception (the mind's capacity to unconsciously perceive, absorb, and organise experience without it ever becoming consciously recognised).
- Modern analysts focus largely on repression, neglecting reception, which creates a selective bias in listening and theory.



Unconscious Communication

- Transference and countertransference convey unconscious meaning.
- Character expresses the self much like free association.
- Character is experienced, not consciously grasped.
- Introduces the idea of the “unthought known.”



Openness and Object Use

- Analysts must remain open to the logic of the unconscious.
- Patient communicates internal world through diverse channels.
- “Object use” involves allowing oneself to be affected by the patient’s unconscious.
- Avoid imposing pre-existing theories or selecting content in advance.

Listening Without Preconceptions

- The patient should speak freely, without censorship.
- The analyst listens intuitively, without filtering or interpreting prematurely.
- A striking word or phrase may be repeated to support emergence of meaning.
- Non-selective attention allows unconscious themes to surface.

Immersion in the Analytic Process

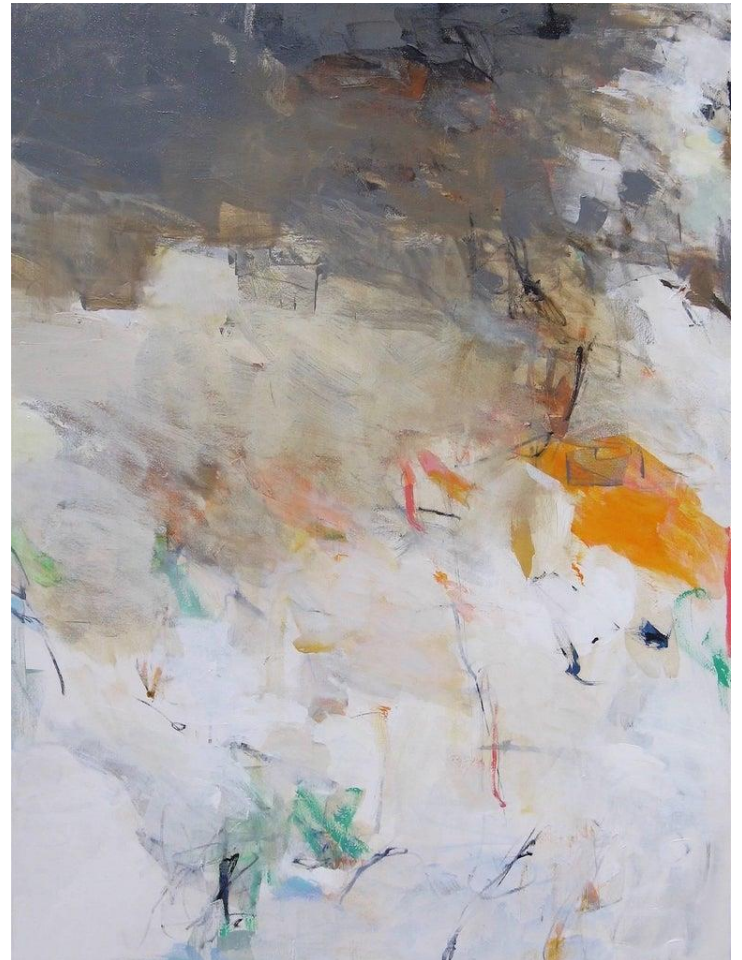
- Effective analysis requires the analyst to be fully immersed.
- Analysts may not be able to explain why something was said.
- Meaning often emerges retrospectively, after the fact.
- Free association enables access to unconscious experience.

The Infinite Question

- Encourages curiosity and questioning, not rushed interpretation.
- The unconscious works with images, sounds, gestures, not just words.
- Like dream-work, unconscious thought moves through various forms.
- Analysts should listen to sessions in their raw form.

Supporting Unconscious Thinking

- Analysis is about receiving, not enforcing change.
- Aim: to support the development of unconscious thinking in the patient
→ the primary goal of psychoanalysis



Thinking as Ongoing Questioning

- Mental life involves continual unconscious questioning.
- The analyst must stay open to what may come next.
- Often, the patient will answer a question before even asking it.
- Interpretation arises from following associations, not leading them.

Unconscious Life in Process

- Unconscious life is not fixed, but continually evolving.
- Influenced by both internal and external objects.
- Bollas insists on a continuity between dreaming and waking life.
- Hesitation is essential for genuine association – pushing leads to compliance.

Free Association as Creative Process

- Free association is not randomness, but creative self-expression.
- Requires time, patience, and a non-directive attitude.
- Pressuring the patient may result in a false self response.
- Bollas advocates for restoring free association as central to analysis.



Next session – Transference