

DIVISION 39 LECTURE (a rough pre-final draft)

THE UNCONSCIOUS AS A KNOWLEDGE PROCESSING CENTER

Arnold H. Modell, M.D.

For presentation New York April 13, 2008

The theme of this meeting, "knowing and not knowing" challenged us to reconsider a fundamental aspect of human nature, the relationship between our unconscious and our conscious mind. Psychoanalysis from its inception has focused on the connections between unconscious knowledge and conscious awareness. Unconscious knowledge can be defined in two ways: how can we know something without being aware of it? And how can we be aware of something that we don't know? In either case let us assume that the unconscious mind knows -- that the unconscious retains in memory a lifetime of emotionally significant experiences and emotionally salient fantasies. This would include the memory of those experiences with one's

caretakers that occurred prior to the age of two with three, prior to the age of retrievable memories. We may be unable to recall such memories because prior to that age the hippocampus, that structure in the brain that is necessary for the recall of a memory has not yet matured. These memories remain as unthought knowings. Such memories have also been referred to as somatic memories, indicating that our body remembers even if we can't remember. All of this is to indicate that the unconscious is a source of knowledge but not only a source of knowledge, but as I plan to illustrate, the unconscious is the area of the psyche in which knowledge is processed.

With regard to the theme of our meeting, knowing and not knowing, we need to be reminded that this subject was implicit in Freud's initial understanding of symptom formation in the hysteric patient. The hysteric patient's defenses against unwanted thoughts and feelings are never completely successful, what is repressed returns in another form. In the case history of Elizabeth von R., she knew and she didn't know that she was in love with her brother in law. Similarly in the case of Dora, Freud interpreted her nervous cough as the expression of the wish to have oral sex with Herr K. As Freud noted, Dora knew about the sexual practice, but didn't know that she knew. Freud

explained that an unconscious process cut off one psychological group from another so that at the same time one knew and didn't know.

The idea of the unconscious as the area of the mind in which knowledge is processed is explicit in Freud's explanation of the formation of dreams as he outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There he states that unconscious processing is a solidly established fact and that the unconscious must be assumed to be the basis of all psychological life. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he posited an unconscious processing of symbolic and metaphoric elements that are combined by means of condensation and displacement. The result is the dream that we remember when we are conscious and awake. As you know the dream makes use not only of the knowledge contained in unconscious memory, but also the knowledge of recent experiences, those day residues of the past 24 or 48 hrs that are woven into the dream process to combine with memories extending from the present back to early childhood. This unconscious process continues after we wake up and may affect our mood and will determine our associations to the dream. The manifest associations that Freud reported in response to his dream of the Botanical Monograph, Freud described was "like finding ourselves in the factory of thought". We know that

dream thoughts penetrate our waking thoughts, and the unconscious can be viewed as the factory from which these thoughts emerge.

This insight of Freud's, that symbolic processing occurs unconsciously, and extends into our waking experiences has had a profound but largely unacknowledged influence on cognitive science. It is now widely assumed in neurobiology and cognitive science that information is processed unconsciously. Neurobiologists and cognitive scientists have been for various reasons unwilling to recognize Freud's seminal contribution to the science of the unconscious. They are more likely to recognize that they have been influenced by Chomsky's theory that an unconscious symbolic process interprets the syntax of spoken language. Whether Chomsky was in turn influenced by Freud we do not know, but others have recognized this parallel between Chomsky's theory of language and Freud's theory of the unconscious mind that he described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The Freudian unconscious is not customarily viewed as a knowledge processing center. This is due to the fact that Freud radically altered his initial vision of the unconscious that he described in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, because of his later commitment to instinct theory. Freud never disclaimed his description of unconscious

processing in dreaming, but he viewed it as a special instance and put it aside when he re-characterized the unconscious, not as an area in which knowledge is processed, but as a place of conflict between instincts seeking discharge and the forces of repression that prevents, instinctual derivatives, thoughts, feelings and fantasies, from becoming conscious. The primary function of this revised unconscious was not the processing of knowledge but to prevent unacceptable impulses, wishes and fantasies from becoming conscious. In his introduction to his 1915 paper *The Unconscious* Freud states that everything that is repressed must remain unconscious, but he also noted that the unconscious has a wider compass, that the repressed is only part of the unconscious and does not cover everything. But Freud does not say what this other part consists of. Freud writes in that paper "the nucleus of the unconscious consists of instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses." In the 1915 paper Freud further states that "the content of the unconscious may be compared with an aboriginal population of the mind. If inherited mental formations exist in the human being -- something analogous to instincts and animals -- these constitute the nucleus of the unconscious." At the end of his life, when he wrote *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* Freud now viewed the unconscious not as potentially adaptive but as a danger to the self.

The id was seen as the ego's internal enemy he said "immediate and unheeding satisfaction of the instincts, such as the id demands, would often lead to perilous conflicts with the external world and to extinction." This unfortunate revision of his early understanding of unconscious process has contributed, I believe ,to a turning away from psychoanalytic theory.

We see that Freud's initial brilliant insight regarding the unconscious processing of symbolic elements was obscured and obfuscated by his later commitment to instinct theory. I'm not suggesting that we abandon Freud's concept of the dynamic unconscious, but as I shall later discuss, we need to radically revise our understanding of repression and the other so-called "defense mechanisms".

Had Freud not replaced his earlier conception of the function of the unconscious he might have seen an analogy between the adaptive, synthetic function of the unconscious processing that occurs when we dream and the adaptive function of unconscious process that is present while we are awake. For I believe that an unconscious metaphoric process, analogous to dreaming is continuously operative while we are awake. I visualize this waking metaphoric process as a

kind of unconscious scanning that attempts to match current emotional experiences with old memorial categories.

Let me now provide two clinical anecdotes to illustrate how this unconscious process operates, how the memory of trauma unconsciously interprets ongoing experience in the here and now. These illustrations can be viewed as examples of the transference of everyday life with which we are all very familiar. In one example the memory of trauma is retained and fully conscious while in the other example the memory of trauma cannot be retrieved. I believe that whether one unconsciously remembers a traumatic experience or does not remember that experience has little or no influence upon the unconscious process itself. What is salient is the unconscious process; consciousness is a mere bystander.

When this woman was a little girl she had a loving relationship with her father that was irrevocably lost when her father became brain-damaged as a result of an industrial accident. As an adult she was compulsively driven to uncover defects and men almost as if it were a matter for survival. These presumed defects were then selectively perceived to the exclusion of whatever other virtues might be present. For example, she noted that her husband was driving slowly, overly

cautiously, and in her judgment incompetently. She then wondered whether he was developing brain damage or becoming precociously senile. She became enraged at him and then was guilty because of the irrationality of her reaction. The intensity of her rage frightened her. She thought she is going a bit crazy, as if she had momentarily fallen into a time warp. For driving with her husband re-created in her imagination a similar scene from childhood when she was a five-year-old little girl sitting next to her father in the family car. As a result of his illness, her father was visually impaired and could barely see the road, and she was terrified that they would be killed.

This clinical fragments illustrate that the memory of a traumatic experience when matched metaphorically with an analogous experience in current time sets in motion an unconscious and involuntary interpretation of the meaning of that particular experience. The unconscious is timeless and she perceived no difference between the past and present. An unconscious metaphoric process created an identity of meaning, an example of the transference of everyday life. The fact that the memory of this traumatic relationship with her father was fully conscious had no effect on the unconscious processing of meaning.

In the following example the memory of trauma could not be recalled as the traumatic experience occurred before the hippocampus had matured. This is an example of an unthought known. A man who happened to be a psychiatrist, became intensely frightened if he noted any indication of irrationality or what he feared to be craziness in his wife. This state of affairs was in contrast to the ease and comfort he had in dealing with irrationality in his patients. He did quite well with very sick patients, especially schizophrenics. The meaning of his intense anxiety in response to his wife's presumed irrationality could be traced to the fact that the age of two with three, the time is uncertain, he inferred that he was a witness to his mother's having had a spontaneous miscarriage. He was unable to remember the event but he did reconstruct that in all probability his mother became "hysterical" and was emotionally distraught for an undetermined period of time. He supposed that he felt as if his mother had suddenly and inexplicably gone crazy. When this man then became panicked as a response to his wife's presumed irrationality, we can infer the presence of an unconscious metaphoric process that melded or blended this childhood memory with his current perceptions and found a correspondence. An unconscious process equated his wife and his mother. He could tolerate craziness in his patients, upon whom he was not dependent, because they clearly were not his mother. In

contrast to the woman with the brain-damaged father, this man could not recall the memory of his mother's miscarriage. I believe however that even if he had been able to recall that memory this would not have had any effect upon the unconscious process that I have described. We should not overestimate the importance of conscious awareness, again what is salient is the unconscious process that continues to operate whether or not memories can be recalled. We must assume, and I believe that our clinical practice reinforces this assumption, that an unconscious interpretive process informs conscious experience. We are all of aware of the extent to which unconscious fantasy interprets conscious experience. It is this unconscious process and not consciousness that is the determining factor. In this regard it seems to me that we may have overestimated the significance of whether or not a fantasy is conscious or unconscious. For the unconscious effects of certain fantasies that are crucial to the self will become manifest whether or not these fantasies are conscious or remain unconscious. For in a fundamental sense unconscious thought precedes conscious thought and it is the unconscious thought that is determinant. In these two examples an unconscious thought process scanned current conscious experience to find a metaphoric equivalence between present and the past. This process was aided by the fact that unconscious perception

synergistically combined with the memories of this affectively salient experiences. Unconscious perception and unconscious interpretation are seamlessly linked.

In a letter to Fliess in 1898 Freud states: "consciousness is only a sense organ; all psychic content is only a representation; all psychic processes are unconscious." And later in 1915 Freud states: "in psychoanalysis there was no choice for us but to assert that mental processes are in themselves unconscious and to liken the perception of them by means of consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense organs." The crucial phrase is: "mental processes are in themselves unconscious". A radical view to which I subscribe, is that all mental processes originate in the unconscious, and that an unconscious process precedes all conscious thought and feeling. Unconscious thoughts and unconscious emotional processes are the determining forces in mental life. Consciousness is only an observational faculty; and in itself does not cause anything.

A striking confirmation of this conception of the independence of unconscious thought from consciousness was recently provided by an investigation using functional magnetic imagery. This experiment demonstrated that complex mental processes, such as the

comprehension of language and the use of the imagination can occur unconsciously in the waking state without the participation of conscious awareness. In 2006 a group of British researchers report in the journal *Science* the results of the functional magnetic resonance imaging study of a 23-year-old woman who suffered extensive brain damage following a car accident. She was judged to be in a vegetative state. However, the cycle of sleep and wakefulness was preserved and the patient was awake while the study was performed. Although she appeared to be completely unresponsive, she was asked to imagine playing tennis and also was asked to imagine moving around her house. Surprisingly, after these instructions, identical motor areas of her brain were activated as compared to normal controls. Although she remained unconscious her brain was able to process and understand the verbal instructions of the researchers and to imagine very specific motor activities, such as moving around her house and playing tennis, which in turn activated corresponding motor areas of her cortex. The research group that reported this finding could not believe that this process occurred entirely unconsciously and suggested that the patient's brain must have preserved some degree of conscious awareness although there was no evidence for this. This paper sparked a debate and other research groups published responses that took issue with the author's conclusion that the patient

retained some degree of conscious awareness. These critics believed, as I do, that complex mental processes such as speech comprehension and imagination occurred entirely unconsciously. The study again demonstrates that consciousness is only a sense organ, and is not necessary for the processing of knowledge. Imagining a scene and comprehending speech are indeed extremely complex processes which in this patient occurred entirely unconsciously.

We have long recognized that the unconscious metaphoric process that occurs in dreaming has great synthetic powers. One prominent example that is often quoted is that given by the chemist Friedrich August Von Kekule of how his discovery of the closed carbon ring structure of organic compounds was suggested to him in a dream in which a snake seized hold of its own tail. Many scientists report that what is essential for their creative discoveries is a process in which they turned away from linear declarative thought. They found it necessary to put conscious to one side. When Einstein was asked to describe the psychological aspect of his creative thinking he said that it was necessary for him to engage in what he described as "combinatory play" before there is any connection with logical construction and words.

Artists have also been aware that their unconscious self contains unknown knowledge and great synthetic powers. Conscious discursive, linear thought was seen as an obstacle that stood between their conscious self and a deeper source of more authentic unconscious knowledge. Some writers and painters, as we know, use alcohol and drugs to anesthetize their conscious mind to enable them to contact this unconscious knowledge. As psychoanalysts we use the more benign method of free-floating attention. We avoid linear thinking through free association and nonlinear thinking can be enhanced by approaching dreamlike reveries such as Bion recommended. We do all we can to facilitate the powers of unconscious perception. As psychoanalysts we train ourselves to listen with what Theodore Reik, some years ago described as our third ear. We hope to enable our unconscious mind to perceive our analysand's unconscious communications.

Turning aside the conscious mind is a method that is also used by experts in other fields as well. This was illustrated in the recent best-selling book *Blink* written by the New Yorker journalist Malcolm Gladwell. He described how a marble statue, a grave marker, dating from the sixth century B.C. was judged by experts to be a fake. This statute, previously authenticated by scientists who used rational,

secondary process thinking, was about to be purchased by the Getty Museum. However, the museum was rescued by a group of art experts who immediately, within the blink of an eye, as it were, recognized the statue to be a fake. One expert Thomas Hoving the former director of the Metropolitan Museum immediately felt an "intuitive repulsion". Another expert, who habitually used free association when examining art, came up with the word "fresh". These experts unconsciously used their decades of professional knowledge to overrule the conclusion of scientists who relied only on linear, logical, thought. Gladwell described how successful politicians and salesman also train themselves to use unconscious perception in judging the other's intention, by watching the other's body language and facial expression. Of course politicians can be mistaken as when Bush looked up into Putins' eyes and thought that he found his soul.

If the unconscious is the area of the mind that processes knowledge, how then do we understand the dynamic unconscious, that Freud believed to be the consequences of repression? How does the dynamic unconscious fit into the processing of knowledge? We know that belief in a dynamic unconscious is a fundamental assumption of classical psychoanalysis, a theoretical assumption that distinguishes psychoanalysis from other forms of psychology. I don't question the

existence of a dynamic unconscious but I view it as a particular kind of knowledge processing. The dynamic unconscious is that area of the unconscious mind that specializes in the negation of knowing and feeling that is linked to conflict. In Freudian theory the dynamic unconscious is the product of repression but, as I shall shortly discuss, we need to fundamentally revise our concept of repression itself.

In order to see how the dynamic unconscious can be integrated into this broader conception, we need to consider how Freud's dedication to instinct theory influenced his understanding of the process of repression. Again, Freud had it right before he developed instinct theory. Freud's thinking underwent a transformation from considering repression as a highly individualized process unique to the individual to conceptualizing repression as an impersonal process, something analogous to a physiological response, an automatic tropism. Such automatic responses do exist but I believe them to be a special case. Freud had it right in 1896 in his letter to Fliess when he understood that repression was directed against memory. This letter shows an uncanny insight into the nature of repression and memory. He introduced the concept of *nachträglichkeit* that is fully consistent with contemporary neuroscience's understanding of memory. In this letter he described how memory was constantly recontextualized in

accordance with later experience. He was thinking especially of the memory of sexual pleasure from the excitement derived from specific erogenous zones, pleasures that later with the subsequent moral development of the child would be felt to be unacceptable. Pleasure then became un-pleasure, and the un-pleasure itself became a signal for defense. Freud also spoke of abandoned erotogenic zones. Repression organized memory in accordance with developmental epochs. What is acceptable at one stage of development may evoke disgust in a later stage. He wrote "at the boundary between two such epochs a translation of psychic material has taken place. I explain the peculiarities the psychoneurosis by supposing that this translation has not taken place in the case of some of the material which has certain consequences." He explained and defined repression as a failure of this translation. Repression, the negation of knowing and feeling was correctly understood by Freud as a highly individualized unconscious selective process. To maintain our preferred self-image, at each developmental stage, the self unconsciously selects and forgets unacceptable memories, wishes and fantasies. In this fashion an unconscious process reorganizes memory. If repression serves to maintain a preferred image of the self, this process would also take into account the impact of culture. For culture also becomes the arbiter of what is acceptable or unacceptable. For example, in 1901

Freud interpreted Dora's nervous cough as a displacement of her unconscious knowledge of oral sex. Such a displacement would be unthinkable in today's teenager, whose knowledge of oral sex far from being unconscious, may be superior to that of her analyst.

By 1915, some 20 years after the Fliess letters Freud had an entirely different view of repression. Repression was no longer viewed as a process directed against memory but as a process directed against instincts and their derivatives. Instinctual derivatives consist of thoughts, feelings and fantasies. Freud no longer referred to his metaphor of repression as a failure to translate memory in accordance with subsequent experience. What was of significance was not individual experience as contained in memory, in Freud's later view repression was not directed against memory but directed against the instincts. The prohibition against incest was thought to be universal and the fantasies and wishes derived from the Oedipus were automatically brought under repression. As Freud believed these instincts to be the common inheritance of all of humanity, Freud now viewed repression largely as a universal, impersonal process in response to the vicissitudes of internal economic forces. Repression therefore became de-individualized. One cannot be certain of Freud's motives that underlie his unwavering commitment instinct theory, but

I suspect that he supposed that in doing so he was furthering the establishment of psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline. He believed that by placing instincts at the center of his theory of the unconscious he was aligning psychoanalysis with what he thought to be contemporary evolutionary theory. He viewed the unconscious id to be the repository of what we would now describe as humanities collective DNA.

In his attempt to be scientific, Freud made what philosophers might describe as a category mistake. He substituted a uniform, impersonal, quasi-physiological concept for the idiosyncratic, highly variable experience of the individual. Minds differ but bodies are (more or less) the same. Physiological processes are fairly uniform when they are compared to minds. Compared to the enormous range of individual differences that exists between minds, we share a more or less similar physiology in our bodies. Although Freud did not dwell on the term mechanism he did refer to the mind as an *apparatus*. Freud's category error was perpetuated by ego psychologist who enshrined the term *defense mechanisms*. The term *mechanism* belongs to the domain of physical objects and when applied to mental life it is a thoroughly misleading metaphor. Machines have no individuality, they are all stamped from the same mold. This is the opposite way of how we

should think of repression. Repression is not a uniform mechanism, it is the outcome of an unconscious selective process that is unique to each one of us. Repression is one expression of the organization of our unconscious self.

We retain a magical belief that if we give something a name, it forms a category and what we label as such must all refer to the same thing. We come think of denial and repression as if these terms represent some kind of uniform process. As I said, I believe each one of us responds to undesirable thoughts, painful memories and painful feelings in our own unique fashion. We each have our own style and method in dealing with painful experience, interpreted from the perspective for our entire life history. What we fail to remember and what we are unable to feel is also part of our imagination. Memory and imagination are thoroughly intertwined as we construct changing images of ourselves.

This same individualized construction is also true for denial, negating something that is real. Here too as with repression denial is informed by the needs and requirements of the self. We all maintain a preferred image of ourselves whatever that image may be. For example, a man who believed in his nearly omnipotent capacity for problem solving

thought that divorce was unthinkable. For if he gave up on his marriage this would conflict with his preferred self-image as a problem solver. He needed to believe that he was capable of solving any problems that beset him. Divorce would represent a failure in problem solving. He therefore denied what was obvious to his friends and his family, that his wife never loved him and in fact was entirely self-serving.

Unconscious knowledge may be negated by repression and denial but unconscious knowledge may also be unavailable to consciousness because of an inability to select what is of value to the self. We select a value through self reference, if one loses self feeling that reference point is also lost. This is a very different process from that of repression.

Feeling oneself to be alive and in the world is something that we usually take for granted. This inner feeling of vitality is analogous to the feeling of the existence of our body, when we pinch ourselves, and feel that sensation, we affirm that we are alive. This inner feeling of vitality and aliveness of the self becomes noticed only in its absence. We all are acquainted with analysands who describe themselves as dead, empty or in an extreme cases they feel as if their sense of self

is like a black hole. Some might take desperate measures and do dangerous things in order to artificially restore a sense that they are alive. By experiencing danger they know that they feel and hence they know that they exist. This absence of self feeling, and absence of a sense of aliveness, is not necessarily accompanied by an inability to feel anxiety, anger or sexual excitement or guilt. That is to say, self feeling is something apart from other customary emotions. This absence is more like the absence of a sensation as if one touched one's skin and felt nothing. It is if the self has become anesthetized.

When this occurs the consequences can be disastrous, for the individual has lost touch with all that they value.

For example, a young man also felt dead inside and had no feeling of psychic aliveness. He allowed himself to accumulate \$300,000 of credit card debt. He knew and didn't know the serious consequences that this debt burden would have on his future life. As in the other example, the absence of the sense of aliveness made him unable to simulate the future consequences of his present actions. An essential function of the self was lost. In order to select what is of value to ourselves and to anticipate the future consequences of our present actions, our selves must be invested with feeling. The absence of self

feeling makes it impossible to know what is of value to the self and makes it impossible to model and anticipate future expectations. When self feeling is lost, there is not only an inability to select what is of value to the self but there is also an inability to create a virtual reality by means of imagination.

As psychoanalysts we are clinically acquainted with this phenomenon, but the importance of self feeling has not been sufficiently recognized by academic psychologists or philosophers. The phenomena of self feeling should not be confused with consciousness taken as a whole. Self feeling to be sure is an aspect of consciousness but it is not the same as consciousness itself. This neglect of self feeling by philosophers and academic psychologists may be due to the undue influence of Descartes who believe that thinking rather than feeling was the proof one's existence. It is not that I think therefore I exist but that I feel therefore I exist. In this regard I was very interested to learn that Aristotle and the ancient Greek Stoic philosophers did recognize the importance of self feeling, and awareness of the aliveness of the self. They believed that this sensation transcended the classical five senses and referred to it as a kind of inner touch. They further believed that self feeling also existed in animals because animals know that they are alive. They did not confuse self feeling

with consciousness because the concept of consciousness was yet to be formulated. These ancient philosophers recognize the importance of feeling the vitality of the self, an idea that was later lost probably through the influence of Descartes who deemphasized feelings in favor of thinking.

This lack of knowing due to the absence of self feeling was illustrated in the example of the man who didn't know that having \$300,000 in debt would have serious consequences. As I noted, not knowing through lack of feelings is quite different from the lack of knowing due to repression. The young Freud understood that repression was the failure of the reorganization of memory, a failure of translation. In these anecdotes illustrating the loss of self feeling, the failure is not about of memory but the consequence of an inability to select what is of value to the self. The psychological process is quite different from that of repression and denial. One man undoubtedly knew that if he did not use contraception his girl friend could become pregnant, and the other man also knew that massive debt would be ruinous. But these pieces of knowledge were not invested with feelings and therefore have no value to the self. In addition, when the self lacks a sense of its own vitality, a sense of its own aliveness it is also unable to simulate or imagine the future consequences of one's actions. One

loses knowledge of the future. Our unconscious self interprets the meaning of the present moment in order to anticipate the future, this process fails if the self lacks feelings.

It is nearly self-evident to states that the unconscious self determines what we know. The unconscious self includes the salient memories of our entire life. These memories are subject to an unconscious metaphoric process that scans current experience searching for similarities and dis-similarities. This aspect of our dreaming mind is going on all the time while we are awake

If these unconscious processes are the determining forces in mental life, if consciousness is only a bystander, why do we believe that knowing is better than not knowing, what then is the value of insight? Does self knowledge lead to a degree of freedom from involuntary and uncontrollable unconscious processes, my answer would be yes. Insight, conscious self-awareness, extends the feeling of the agency of the self. Recall Freud's aphorism "where it was there shall ego be" I would modify this slightly to read "where it was I shall be". This is to say, that one aim of psychoanalysis is to transform the realm of involuntary processes into the domain of conscious self-awareness. To state it differently: One aim of psychoanalysis is to expand the agency

of the self, which in turn increase the freedom of the self. The distinguished neurologist Kurt Goldstein said "there is only one transcendent motive by which human activity is initiated: the tendency to actualize oneself". To actualize oneself means that one expresses what is unique about one's self. Again, this expression requires a feeling of agency. We expand the agency of the self through the creation of new meanings. We do this by means of the freedom of the imagination. As I've been emphasizing meaning construction is primarily an unconscious process and it is this unconscious process that causes things to happen. As I believe that unconscious processes are causal there is therefore no absolute freedom for the agency of the self but only degrees of freedom. We are here confronted with the ancient problem of free will and determinism. Some may argue that the agency of the self is only an illusion but it is an illusion without which we cannot live.

As I noted, the agency of the self does not represent an absolute freedom but only a relative freedom . If the agency of the self is enhanced through the creation of new meanings, we know how the creation of new meaning is impaired in the presence of trauma. Trauma results in a constriction of the freedom of the imagination. As we know, one of the consequences of traumatic events or traumatic

relationships is a restriction in the ability to create new meaning. Transference taken in its broadest sense, whether it occurs within the treatment relationship or in everyday life constricts the degree of the freedom of interpretation of experience in the here and now. This can be illustrated in the example I gave of the man who interprets his wife's presumed irrationality as if he was seeing his mother's craziness. This interpretation was involuntary and lacked any measure of uncertainty and complexity. If he had been self-aware his interpretation of his wife's behavior would have included a measure of uncertainty that would allow for alternative interpretations and would have represented a greater degree of freedom. We can say that the agency of the self is enhanced through the unpredictable combinatory power of thought that creates new meaning.

In closing I hope that I have convinced you that we need to revise our theory of the unconscious and the notion of defense mechanisms. My thesis that the unconscious is the area of the mind in which knowledge is processed is not new or particularly original as this was Freud's initial insight that he expressed in his letters to Fliess and was explicit in his masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams*. I believe that these ideas were also implicit in Freud's earlier understanding of hysterical symptomatology. Unfortunately, as I have repeatedly

noted, his later adherence to instinct theory obfuscated and hid this initial insight

If the unconscious is viewed as the area of the mind in which information is processed, the unconscious can no longer be defined simply as that which is repressed. While we need to retain the idea of repression as a descriptive term, I also suggested that repression can no longer be thought of as a defense mechanism. Indeed I believe the idea of defense mechanisms itself to be an antiquated concept. To be sure, repression is an unconscious process, but I view repression as a highly individualized selective process that is the expression of individual selves. Repression is not a uniform process as if it were a physiological mechanism. As I noted earlier, Freud made what philosophers describe as a category mistake regarding repression when he substituted an impersonal ,uniform process for the idiosyncratic unconscious selection of the self. This paper then represents a plea to recognize the transcendence of individuality. In a profound sense our selves sculpt our unconscious minds.