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Werner Bohleber, Juan Pablo Jiménez, Dominique Scarfone, Sverre Varvin, Samuel Zysman

## **Unconscious Phantasy and its Conceptualizations: An Attempt at Conceptual Integration**

### **Abstract**

That there is a lack of consensus as to how to decide between competing, at times even contradictory theories, and about how to integrate divergent concepts and theories is well known. In view of this situation, the IPA Committee on Conceptual Integration (2009-2013) developed a method for comparing the different versions of any given concept, together with the underlying theories and fundamental assumptions on which they are based. Only when situated in the same frame of reference do similarities and differences begin to appear in a methodically comprehensible and reproducible form. After having studied the concept of enactment followed by the publication of a paper in this journal in 2013, we proceeded to analyze the concept of unconscious phantasy while at the same time continuing to improve our method. Unconscious phantasy counts among the central concepts in psychoanalysis. We identified a wide range of definitions along with their various theoretical backgrounds. Our primary concern in the present paper addresses the dimensional analysis of the semantic space occupied by the various conceptualizations. By way of deconstructing the concepts we endeavored to establish the extent to which the integration of the different conceptualizations of unconscious phantasy might be achieved.

**Key words:** unconscious phantasy, conceptual research, conceptual integration

### **I. Introduction**

Acknowledging the plurality of theories in psychoanalysis constituted a liberating advance within the analytic community, but it also concealed a potential inhibitive factor in attempts to integrate concepts. In fact, to date, there is no consensus on how to decide in favor of one or the other competing, at times mutually contradictory theory, and how to integrate divergent concepts and theories. In response to an initiative by IPA

President, Charles Hanly, from 2009 to 2013, an IPA Committee on Conceptual Integration<sup>1</sup> studied the possibility of integrating concepts which, originating in different psychoanalytic traditions, differ entirely with respect to their fundamental assumptions and philosophies. In view of the theoretical and clinical diversity of psychoanalytic concepts, we realized the necessity to develop a method for comparing the different conceptualizations and their underlying theories and, further, to place them in a frame of reference which would allow for a more objective assessment of similarities and differences. Using this method, we began by studying the concept of enactment the results of which were then published in a paper<sup>2</sup>. This was followed by a study of unconscious phantasy.

Unconscious phantasy is one of the central concepts in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Due to its clinical and theoretical importance, all psychoanalytic schools have developed their own concept of unconscious phantasy. In view of the pluralistic status of theory, it is hardly surprising to discover a large number of definitions, ranging from the classic wishful activity and psychic representative of instincts to a definition of a “not-me experience” as enacted in the analytic relationship.

In order to limit the spectrum of investigation, we were obliged to make a selection of the main papers. We have established a canon of important contributions from different psychoanalytic traditions: from *Kleinian* psychoanalysis Isaacs (1948), Segal (1991; 1994), and Britton (1995; 1998); from the *Contemporary Freudians* Sandler/Sandler (1994); from the modern American *Ego Psychology* Arlow (1969a; 1969b) and Abend (2008); from *Self Psychology* Ornstein/Ornstein (2008); from *Relational Psychoanalysis* Bromberg (2008); from *French psychoanalysis* Laplanche & Pontalis (1968), and Aulagnier (1975).

## **II. A Model for Comparing Concepts Applied to Unconscious Phantasy**

In group discussions we reflected repeatedly on the “philosophy” of integration on which our model is based. Recognizing the plurality of concepts is imperative. There are

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<sup>1</sup> The members were Werner Bohleber (chair), Juan Pablo Jiménez, Dominique Scarfone, Sverre Varvin, Samuel Zysman. Until August 2010, other members also included Dale Boesky, and until November 2012, Peter Fonagy.

<sup>2</sup> Bohleber et al. 2013.

several perspectives and horizons under which phenomena are studied and conceptualized. Consequently, integration is an ideal to which we must adhere without thereby falling prey to the illusion that it can ever actually be attained. We are convinced, however, that steps towards better integration are possible, albeit that we may only expect to achieve a partial integration. With this in view, there can be no justification for partisan or geopolitical reductionism. As we have observed, the terrain is shot through with many difficulties and potential misunderstandings between discussants. As Grossman (1995) and Hamilton (1996) have indicated, there is a danger that theories can come to represent the inner identity of a group to which the analyst wishes to be a part. Furthermore, he or she enters into an attachment relationship to specific theories which, in turn, convey to him or her a sense of security. Theories are also “internal objects” (Zysman, 2012). This function of theory has become a particularly relevant factor in controversial discussions, as is often the case where the concept, such as unconscious phantasy, happens to be one of the most central concepts of psychoanalysis. Our own experience in group discussions has been that the various members became personally involved to a far greater degree than was the case in discussions on “enactment”. It took time to identify tensions, to focus on them in discussion and to open-mindedly follow one of the member’s detailed explanations of his theoretical convictions.

We have developed a model comprising five steps:

Step 1: The history of the concept

Step 2: Phenomenology of the concept

Step 3: The rules of discourse when discussing concepts

Step 4: Dimensional analysis of the concept

Step 5: Integration as an objective

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the steps, we would like to emphasize that our task is not to provide a detailed discussion of unconscious phantasy as such, but to elaborate a conceptual map or a schema for classifying the various conceptualizations.

### Step 1: History of the Concept “Unconscious Phantasy”<sup>3</sup>

The history of the concept “unconscious phantasy” dates back to the Studies on Hysteria (Breuer & Freud, 1893-95), the Fliess papers (particularly May 25, 1897, p. 252), and the Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895). Earlier terms used for the same concept (such as “unconscious ideas”, Breuer & Freud, 1893-95, p. 222) were later subsumed under “phantasy”. According to Freud’s “central usage” – a term introduced by Bott Spillius (2001) – phantasies are wish fulfillments arising from instinctual frustrations due to repression. The theoretical background originates in Freud’s topographical model. While phantasies may be conscious, they may pass over to the preconscious from where they are retrieved once again. This standpoint remained unchanged following the introduction of the structural model. Freud differentiates between two forms of unconscious phantasies: “Unconscious phantasies have either been unconscious all along and have been formed in the unconscious; or – as is more often the case – they were once conscious phantasies, day-dreams, and have since been purposely forgotten and have become unconscious through ‘repression’” (1908, p. 161). This expression “unconscious all along” puts us in contact with what Freud referred to as primal phantasies (Urphantasen). *Freud* claimed that they are transmitted phylogenetically, as memories from mankind’s prehistory. They are not a product of repression: they are mankind’s current phantasies of primal scene, seduction, and castration.

The Kleinian approach introduced by *Susan Isaacs* (1948) in the Controversial Discussions at the British Society, introduces radical changes to the concept.

Unconscious phantasies are not limited to the repressed phantasies, but are the mind’s content underlying – and accompanying (at least) from birth onwards – the entire structure of mental functioning. This entails accepting the existence of an early psychic activity which, however rudimentary, establishes the infant’s connection to an external world. The introduction of the concept of projective identification (Klein, 1946) pursued

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<sup>3</sup> The spelling of the word “phantasy” is heterogeneous in psychoanalytic literature. The Kleinians use “phantasy” in order to differentiate unconscious phantasies from conscious ones. Other psychoanalysts have adopted this spelling. North American analysts prefer mostly “fantasy”. In our text we follow the orthographic usage of the authors we discuss. For the most part, we use “phantasy” in our arguments.

this direction yet further in stressing the idea that the introjection of objects is preceded by projective identifications on them. Existing “real” objects are not the “real” contents of our mind; our internal objects are unconscious phantasies about given “real” objects. According to Klein and her disciples, unconscious phantasies exist prior to the acquisition of verbal language, and the non-verbalized ones are primarily expressed through feelings, sensations, and corporal states and movements. They may be equated with what Bion referred to as pre-conceptions in his theory on the development of thinking. From the clinical perspective, unconscious phantasies are also the stuff of which transference is made. In the Kleinian clinical approach, the analysis of the transference phantasies represents the via regia to the problems of the patient and to the interpretation thereof. A first ever approach to unconscious phantasies as a co-construction by the patient and the analyst was made by Willy and Madeleine Baranger (1961-62). They started from Isaacs’ classical definition and, based on the dialogical nature of psychoanalytical therapy, and with references to Merleau-Ponty and to the concept of “field” in the Gestalt psychology, they postulated the existence of a shared “psychoanalytic field” where a “field fantasy” can be identified and analyzed. Many problems coming to the fore in this perspective, as e.g. communicational consequences of mutual projective identification, were dealt with by David Liberman (1974). The Kleinian expansion of the concept also highlights the intimate connection of unconscious phantasies with human creativity. Accordingly, *Hanna Segal* explores the relationship between unconscious phantasies and symbolization, and children’s play (equated to free associations) with art and sublimation. She asserts that art and play differ from dream and daydream “because unlike those they are also an attempt at translating fantasy into reality” (1991, p. 101).

In modern North American ego psychology *Jacob Arlow’s* conception of unconscious fantasy remains the most influential (1969a; 1969b). In contrast to the Kleinians, for Arlow the difficulty of the concept arises from the fact that unconscious fantasies are composed of elements with fixed verbal content, and that they have an inner consistency, namely, that they are highly organized. Arlow used the term fantasy in the sense of daydream, and finds it of greater relevance to speak of unconscious fantasy function as a constant feature of mental life. He grouped fantasies around basic childhood wishes. Arlow adopts a visual model to illustrate the interaction between fantasy thinking and the perception of reality. Two centers of perceptual input supply

data from both the inner and outer eye. Whereas, unconscious fantasy activity supplies the 'mental set' in which perceptual input is perceived and integrated, external events, by contrast, stimulate and organize the reemergence of unconscious fantasies. However, the function of a third agency of the ego is to integrate, correlate, judge, and discard the competing data of perceptual experience. The result is a composite mixture of the two inputs. Not only the id, but ego and superego also play a part in the formation of unconscious fantasies. They are compromise formations.

As Contemporary Freudians, *Sandler and Sandler* (1994) criticize the Kleinian extension of the concept of unconscious phantasy as covering practically every variety of unconscious mental content and thereby overloading it. The Sandlers sought to solve the conceptual problem by distinguishing between two sorts of unconscious phantasies: past unconscious and present unconscious phantasies. Phantasies of the past unconscious occur in the first 4-5 years of life. They are only accessible by reconstructions based on the patient's material and our interpretations of the past as are rooted in psychoanalytic theory. Phantasies in the present unconscious may be considered partial derivatives of the past unconscious. When the adult individual experiences pressure of any sort his immediate unconscious response issues from his past unconscious as a move towards action or phantasy. However, these derivatives that undergo changes over the course of development, are linked more closely to representations of present-day persons, and are subject to a higher level of unconscious secondary process functioning. In so far as they arouse conflict they disturb the equilibrium of the present unconscious. Here, the entire range of defense mechanisms together with compensatory mechanisms comes into play. Phantasies in the present unconscious function in an adaptational manner by way of involving constant defensive modifications of self- and object representations, and in so doing repeatedly restore the individual's equilibrium. They have a stabilizing function that maintains safety and well-being in the face of disruptive urges of various kinds, such as humiliating experiences. In the self-psychological conceptualization of *Ornstein and Ornstein* (2008) the drive wishes are no longer motivating factors of the unconscious fantasy and its content. This place is now occupied by environmental responses. Unconscious fantasies have a variety of contents directly dependent on environmental influences and specific, individual childhood experiences. If the environment is good enough, fantasies become the source of many of our passions and ambitions. If caretakers are unavailable, or humiliate and

treat the child sadistically, unconscious fantasies may become the foundation for symptomatic behavior and for retaliative fantasies. The Ornsteins describe two classes of unconscious fantasies that depend on the dual function of self-object transferences. Not only are they repetitions organized by traumatic experiences, they also represent the search for an experience capable of inducing a desired change. These hopes for change are then organized into a so-called “curative fantasy”. This may be organized at various levels of consciousness, and assumes the form of a deep inner conviction that some, very specific experiences, must first be undergone for recovery to begin.

*Philip Bromberg* (2008) is a representative of the relational perspective. For the latter, unconscious fantasy has lost its universal character as representative of the drives, and has become a function of dissociated self-states that aids symbolization. In the first stage, the fantasy is a “not-me” experience, dissociated from self-narratives and from narrative memory. It is largely unsymbolized by language and, in the transference-countertransference relationship, assumes the function of an enactment. If areas of dissociation are no longer foreclosed and the capacity for internal conflict has already begun to develop, this would provide an opportunity for symbolizing the enactment. The enactment creates a new perceptual context and allows its symbolization as an unconscious fantasy. In this process the unconscious fantasy has a hermeneutic function along the way from an action to the conscious understanding of the analytic relationship.

Contemporary findings in *developmental research* have introduced some new ideas on unconscious fantasy. Freud’s concept of primary process thinking, such as early cognitive functioning in infants and young children, which also manifests itself in the production of unconscious fantasies, was not supported. Research has shown that the child acquires an implicit knowledge of interaction with the caretaker at an early stage, and forms expectations and interactional representations thereof. These representations are considered the basic building blocks that constitute unconscious fantasies. They assume the form of unconscious belief statements about the self and the other, and the patterns of their relationship. Here, unconscious is understood as being that which is only implicitly available to the child. Developmental research confronts psychoanalysis with findings emphasizing the significance of exogenous events and their mental representations. While this ongoing debate is interesting, the question remains as to how, if at all, this kind of research can be integrated into the various psychoanalytic

concepts of unconscious fantasy (see for example *Erreich, 2003; Lyon, 2003; Litowitz, 2007; Eagle, 2011; Schimek, 2011*).

The reader now has, perhaps, an impression of just how divergent are the conceptualizations of the different psychoanalytic schools. What they all take for granted is that this concept describes a phenomenon that emerges in the analyst's mind at some point of the psychoanalytic process. Our second step now involves taking a closer look at this clinical phenomenon.

### Step 2: Unconscious Fantasy as Clinical Phenomenon

The description of the process whereby the analyst's mind embraces the idea that an emerging phenomenon in the relationship with the patient can be defined as unconscious fantasy is important. Monitoring countertransference has become a key tool in this process. The analyst is oriented to going beyond the explicit words of the patient in an endeavor to unveil what we may call unconscious experience. He seeks to obtain a picture of the patient beyond his immediate and concrete presentation. Hence, the focus shifts to the inconsistencies within the patient's verbal narrative and the relation of the former to non-verbal behavior. Sooner or later, both analyst and patient will face a discontinuous, somewhat fragmented and inconsistent reality. Very slowly, a creative process evolves in the analyst's mind by way of selecting certain relations within the network of possible relations as these are established in the patient's presentation. No matter what these relations are, they will inevitably lead us to an unfamiliar world. We select those facts that appear closest to our own world, thus allowing us to participate in the patient's world. A shared world begins to take shape, a kind of joint "illusion" that overlaps in the otherwise respective worlds of the patient and the analyst; this shared world "appears" in the analyst's mind as a fantasy, that is, as a complex visual image – a short figurative narrative – which simultaneously describes multiple dimensions in the patient (and in the analyst), within the 'here and now' of the analytic relationship. The unconscious fantasies we "find" during the process of "discovering" the patient's inner world constitute a way of describing the experience of the unconscious as it emerges at the interface of the analyst's and patient's interpersonal/intersubjective contact.

Implicit in the phenomenology as described in the above, is a close theoretical relation between the concept of enactment and that of unconscious fantasy. It would be

erroneous to think that enactment acts out a fantasy existing prior to the act itself. What the analyst calls unconscious fantasy is rather the verbal articulation of an unsymbolized affective experience. Consequently, the illusion that the fantasy exists prior to the affective shared experience, or prior to the act itself, would belong to the phenomenology of unconscious fantasy. The concept of unconscious fantasy can thus be understood as a metaphor that assists in understanding the patient's psychic material and behavior.

However, it is at this point that a controversy arises with respect to the idea of a genetic continuity of unconscious phantasies. For Kleinians, above all, phantasy exists prior to the affective shared experience in the analytic session. Based on metapsychology, this argument is something that phenomenology is incapable of solving alone, since it refers to a broader and more complex epistemological problem, namely, how we come to know others' minds. Here, the point is that as psychoanalysts we attempt to draw meticulous distinctions between the patient's phantasy world and our own, without thereby excluding the possibility that the one resonates or interacts with, and may actually exercise a mutual impact upon the other.

### Step 3: The "Rules of Discourse" Regarding the Concept of Unconscious Phantasy.

In our previous work (Bohleber et al., 2013) we identified seven criteria for assessing the extent to which a concept is unique. Here, we carry out the same assessment with unconscious phantasy.

In terms of *relevance*, there is no problem whatsoever. Unconscious phantasy is inextricably embedded in psychoanalytic theory.

As for *refutability*, the idea is to search for the possibility in which a clinical state points to the lack of unconscious phantasy. At any rate, at the phenomenological level it is possible to imagine situations in which no unconscious phantasy can be accessed.

The *operational definition* refers to the procedure by which it is possible to invoke the workings of an unconscious phantasy. In this connection, the sources vary, ranging from the first-person, second-person and third-person perspectives. We rely, above all, on the heuristic value of the concept in making sense of otherwise absurd symptoms and other clinical manifestations.

In sum, these first three criteria seem to have been more or less well met.

*Internal consistency* is made more problematic by the fact that there is no general agreement as to whether a true difference can be established between conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious phantasy. While, for some, there is a radical difference both in the nature and function of these levels, for others (beginning with Freud) the three levels form a continuum and are without major ontological differences. However, one may assert justifiably, that with respect to unconscious phantasy proper all usually refer to the same general idea, with any differences emanating chiefly from the broader theoretical context.

Speaking of context, *contextual or intra-theoretical consistency* is probably the one criterion posing the greatest challenge to any smooth integration of the concept. **Let us begin by making clear that what we mean to reach by this criterion is not an agreement between different theories, but to ensure that any given concept belongs to- and is not contradictory with- psychoanalytic theory at large. If it is not intra-theoretically consistent, then the concept must be reformulated or rejected, or else the theory must be revised in order to accommodate the recalcitrant concept. As for** unconscious phantasy may be said to belong to a considerably large cluster of psychoanalytic concepts, and is thus naturally consistent with the theory as a whole; the problem here is that these concepts overlap significantly. Consider, for instance, such concepts as complex, infantile theory, personal myth, family romance, unconscious wish, psychic reality, internal object, reminiscence etc. The problem, as one can see, does not lie in the concept of unconscious phantasy itself so much as in the theory as a whole. Some seem to be at the same level, while others may appear as subordinate concepts.

For the same reason, the criterion of *parsimony* is poorly met since these related concepts all refer to unconscious phantasy.

Finally, due to its exclusively psychoanalytic origin, unconscious phantasy can receive little in terms of *extra-analytic convergence*, in the sense that no biological or other non-analytic means can really support or deny its existence and the function psychoanalysts attribute to it.

#### Step 4: The Dimensional Analysis of the Different Concepts of Unconscious Phantasy

The dimensional analysis of the different concepts represents the core step in our approach. Here we attempt a detailed analysis of the concept's "meaning- space". As we have shown in the above, concepts do not possess a single unambiguous, determinable

meaning, but rather a spectrum of meanings. Our method aims to secure a comprehensive meaning-space that enables us to place the different versions of the concept within it. It is a multidimensional, not merely a three-dimensional space – in our case a five-dimensional one. The positions the various conceptualizations of unconscious phantasy may assume in dimensions of this space will show us whether they belong to the same conceptual "family", or if divergences in the meaning context and in the construction of psychic reality make all integration impossible. We have identified five dichotomized dimensions which we now move on to discuss in greater detail.

### **III. Dimensional Analysis of the Concepts of Unconscious Phantasy**

#### Dimension 1 (reality factor): Phantasy Endogenously Generated/Total Imagination vs. Accurate Representation of Actual Events

The relation between fantasy and reality has always preoccupied psychoanalytic theory. The German word "Phantasie" is rather used to denote the imagination and less the capacity of imagining. "Phantasie" invariably contains an illusory element. We go further in claiming that if there is no element of reality, then fantasy as a whole would be a complete illusion, or delusion. Hence, the polarity of pure imagination and external reality is part of the structural definition of fantasy. As *Laplanche & Pontalis* have shown, Freud consistently sought firm ground for fantasies in reality: First in real seduction, in spontaneous sexuality and finally in a hypothetical past as the actual grounds of primal fantasy. Freud found the solution to this problem in the creation of an intermediate field: psychic reality. However, as *Laplanche & Pontalis* emphasized that "the difficulty and ambiguity lie[s] in the very nature of its relationship to the real and to the imaginary, as is shown in the central domain of fantasy" (1968, p. 3). Let us now consider the ways in which the different conceptions of unconscious fantasy attempt to solve this conceptual difficulty. We employ the idea of a continuum extending from "pure intrinsic factors" to "fantasy as an accurate representation of reality" so as to bring order to the different conceptions.

We situate *Kleinian* conceptions close to one pole of the continuum. For Kleinians, the entire content of the unconscious mind consists of unconscious phantasies. They

operate within the world of imagination, whereby thought in reality and rational action cannot operate without concurrent and supporting unconscious phantasies. For *Isaacs* phantasy is the psychic representative of instinct. Phantasy lends mental existence and form to instinct. The infant experiences desire as a specific phantasy without words, such as: "I want to suck the nipple". The reality factor here is the sensations and affects that give phantasy a concrete bodily quality, a 'me-ness'. *Isaacs* emphasized that the earliest phantasies are an internal and subjective reality, but are from the outset concomitantly "bound up with an actual, however limited and narrow, experience of objective reality" (1948, p. 86). *Segal* describes how, in normal infants, phantasy is tested to see whether satisfaction may be obtained from the object. It implies the infant's capacity to perceive a reality different to phantasy. *Segal* speaks of an "in-built attitude to the world" in phantasies which allows for repeated reality-testing (1994, p. 400). This attitude is based on a depressive-position organization.

*Britton* (1995; 1998) adopts a different position. Phantasies are generated and persist unconsciously from infancy onwards. They have no consequences unless belief is attached to a phantasy. For *Britton* belief is the function that confers the status of reality to phantasies. Reality testing helps beliefs become knowledge. In this sense, beliefs occupy an intermediate position between pure fantasy and external reality.

For *Arlow* (1969a), understanding the unconscious fantasy has been substantially hindered by drawing too sharp a line between unconscious and conscious, as *Kleinians* do. For *Arlow*, fantasies are grouped around certain basic instinctual wishes. He uses the concept of unconscious fantasy in the sense of unconscious fantasy thinking. The ego's perceptual apparatus operates simultaneously in two different directions. It looks outward towards the sensory stimuli of the external world of objects, while focusing inward, reacting to a constant stream of inner stimulation. The organized mental representation of this stream of inner stimulation is fantasy thinking. It includes memory schemata related to the significant conflicts and traumatic events of the individual's life. Fantasy and perception constantly intermingle. While unconscious fantasies occasionally have subtle forms, they can also have an intrusive and powerful influence in organizing perceptual data into illusions, misconceptions and parapraxes. However, in principle, fantasy and objective reality can be separated once again. The

analyst ought to search for unconscious fantasy in order to help patients distinguish between their unconscious fantasy and reality.

For *Sandler and Sandler* (1994) unconscious phantasies, as part of the past unconscious involve age-appropriate secondary processes as well as primary process functioning. Constant pressure is exerted to anchor phantasies that form part of present unconscious in reality. Wishful past unconscious phantasies arising in the preconscious have to be modified, disguised or repressed by mechanisms of defense before entering consciousness. The actualization of our unconscious wishful phantasies has to be achieved in a way that is plausible to us. For the Sandler, reality and the affects experienced in reality have an important organizing function for unconscious phantasies.

For *Ornstein and Ornstein* (2008) environmental responses to the child's developmental needs are crucial for the formation and variety of unconscious fantasy content. Depending on the child's environment fantasies can become beneficial for the development of passions and ambitions, or they can act as pathogenic agents. Under these latter circumstances, unconscious fantasies are organized by traumatic experiences. In treating such patients unconscious fantasies of hope and expectations for reparative experiences have a curative function. Unconscious fantasies have a variety of contents that depend directly on environmental influence and specific individual childhood experiences.

For *Bromberg* (2008), the concept of unconscious fantasy possesses only a heuristic power of giving meaning to an action or an enactment with the status of an unformulated experience. An unconscious fantasy is a not-me experience dissociated from self-narrative and from narrative memory. Should a sphere of dissociation no longer be encapsulated but dissolves as happens in the analytic relationship, then the generative elasticity of fantasy makes room for the multiple realities and multiple self-states of both patient and analyst. Some enactments are capable of creating a new perceptual context allowing it to be symbolized as an unconscious fantasy.

If we situate the different concepts on a continuum of the "reality factor" dimension in which phantasy, as total imagination, is situated at one pole, and phantasy, as accurate representation of actual events, at the other, we may then classify them in the following way:

Total imagination	Accurate representations of actual events
X-----	-----X
<i>Isaacs Segal Britton</i>	<i>Arlow Sandler/Sandler Ornsteins Bromberg</i>

When comparing them one observes that only partial integration of some concepts seems possible. The Kleinian concepts of Isaacs, Segal, Britton, the ego psychological concept of Arlow and Sandler's concept all outline a constant reciprocal interplay between reality and unconscious phantasy which form a mix of fact and phantasy. The differences and divergences result from the accentuation or weight placed on fact or phantasy, whereby Kleinians lean more towards phantasy, and Arlow and Sandler more towards reality. For the Ornsteins, the agent for forming unconscious fantasy is the experience of reality, particularly the caregiver's responses to the developmental needs of the child. The background for this position is the results of developmental and attachment research on the naïve cognition of the child and the possibility of veridical perception.

In structural terms, Bromberg adopts a position similar to that of the Ornsteins: fantasy as result and expression of real, previously unformulated experience.

Dimension 2: Essentialism versus Nominalism: Unconscious Fantasy as Underlying Structure of Mental Life, or as an Interpretive Category

In the following, we attempt to classify the various texts of our canon according to two questions: Firstly, is unconscious fantasy an organizing structure of mental life, existing independently of the analyst's interpretive activity? And secondly, as relating to the first question: is unconscious fantasy observed directly, or else only inferred from observable behavioral evidence?

1. We begin by considering the *Kleinian* texts (Isaacs, 1948; Segal, 1994; Britton, 1995) which, located at one end of the spectrum, fall into what we can call *essentialism*, namely, that the concept of unconscious fantasy is defined by its underlying nature whereby analytic work primarily consists in the 'apprehension' of the unconscious phantasy; the very act of interpreting does not modify the inferred phantasy. In a successful treatment, unconscious phantasy, of course, changes, though as a result of the process as a whole.

*Segal and Britton* essentially agree with *Isaacs*, who according to Klein, holds that unconscious phantasies are the primary content of unconscious mental processes. Segal (1994) and Britton (1995) start out from the idea of the structuring function of unconscious phantasy for mental life. Kleinians believe in a very early active ego involved from the outset in object relations consisting in unconsciously phantasized actions of love and hate as are associated with the good or bad maternal breast, the mother's body, and the parents' sexual life. The earliest phantasies remain directly connected with somatic experience and are non-visual. In later development they may be expressed visually through verbal terms. And yet, as Isaacs clearly states, "unconscious phantasies are always inferred, not observed as such" (Isaacs, 1948, p. 73).

2. We can place *Bromberg's* text (2008) at the other end of the spectrum in this dimension. For the latter, the phenomenon denoted by the concept of unconscious fantasy is acknowledged as a dissociated, affect-driven experience rather than a form of repressed symbolized thought. What is assumed as evidence of a buried unconscious is an illusion created by the interpersonal/relational nature of the analytic process during the on-going symbolization of unprocessed affect. As cognitive and linguistic symbolization gradually replaces dissociation, increased self-reflection fosters the illusion of something emerging which, though always known, has been previously warded off. Ergo, unconscious fantasies are co-constructed or, more emphatically, though they do not pre-exist in the unconscious mind of the child or of the patient, they do come to life during the very process of relating with significant others throughout the course of personal development or in analysis, by interpreting enactments. Bromberg's position can be classified as *radical nominalism*, in short, that the existence of unconscious fantasies is understood as a given by virtue of the analyst's interpretive activity; the concept possesses only heuristic value. In this context, the question as to whether unconscious fantasies are inferred is superfluous.

The other authors in our canon can be situated along different points of a continuum extending from Isaacs at one end, through to Bromberg at the other. They may be classified as *moderate nominalists* who contend, namely, that while something real exists as "unconscious fantasy", it is possible to modify/construct this psychic reality by way of interaction with 'external reality', either by way of significant others or by the analyst through interpretation.

3. For Aulagnier (1975), all psychic processes are representational activities accompanying the development of subjectivity. There are, however, different kinds of representations. The first step in this development is the *primal (originaire) process*, during which the infant mind recognizes the pleasant or unpleasant quality of emerging stimuli that provide initial orientation in relating to world. This process is governed by the postulate of "self-procreation", namely, that representation as such is the activity that creates the state of pleasure and that prefigures the complementary object (the breast). The act of representation is the *pictogram* that may be of "conjunction", when the experience is pleasurable, or of "rejection", when the experience is predominantly of displeasure. The second step in subjectivization is the process of *primary and scenic* representation, which is a *fantasy* understood as the imaginary fulfillment of desires to avoid suffering caused by the absence of the initial link with the mother. The third moment is the *process* of secondary and ideational representation with the apparition of ideation as representation, language and thinking, the seat of the ego. Unlike the Kleinian conception, in the primary process, the proper place of unconscious fantasy, recognition of external reality and of a mother who frustrates is already implicit; unconscious fantasy is the way the child appropriates an otherwise foreign reality. However, the mother may modify the fantasy life of the child: Through what Aulagnier refers to as *primary violence*, the mother, both by way of interpretation and in being motivated by her desire, imposes in the child's psyche options, thoughts, ways of circulation and the discharge of pleasure, etc. In this sense fantasy life is open to interaction; her conception thus departs from the Kleinian view that conceives psychic reality as being more autarkic.

4. Sandler and Sandler (1994) may be grouped typically as *moderate nominalists*; namely, while agreeing that there is some structure in the psyche that might be called unconscious phantasy they also argue that there are different ways of construing it, each with different consequences for analytic treatment. The phantasies assumed as existing in the past unconscious are our own reconstructions based upon the patient's analytic material, on our *interpretation* of the past. This interpretation, moreover, is rooted in our psychoanalytic theory of mental functioning and our theory of child development. However, contrary to this, phantasies in the present unconscious exist in the 'here-and-now', are accessible to analytic work, are more closely linked with representation of

present-day persons, and are subject to a higher level of unconscious secondary-process functioning. Thus, unconscious transference phantasies exist in the present unconscious, not in the past unconscious.

5. Arlow's (1969a, 1969b) and Abend's (2008) texts may be placed in the same category, for they both contend that there is no sharp distinction between daydreaming and unconscious fantasy and that conscious and unconscious fantasy activity is a constant feature of mental life. Hence, they prefer to speak of *unconscious fantasy function*. Unconscious fantasies tend to be clustered around certain basic instinctual wishes, affording a means of wishful gratification; different versions of related fantasies may appear at different developmental stages and yet include defensive components as well as superego components, along with the important wishes they contain. To this extent, they seem to be essentialists, and are in this sense closer to Kleinian ideas. "We tend to regard [unconscious fantasies] as *concrete entities in patient's minds* whose presence we first infer, then detect, and finally reconstruct... We think we can detect underlying formations [...] that we call unconscious fantasies, and which are giving shape to the surface material" (Abend 2008, p. 124; our italics). We tend to think of them, however, as *moderate nominalists*, especially Abend when asserting that "evaluation of the data of experience and outcome is a process that is itself *not entirely free of the influence of the evaluator's unconscious fantasy function*, as Arlow's formulation makes clear" (2008, p. 126; our italics). They assume, moreover, that fantasies, like all clinical material, may also be affected by actual experiences.

6. Finally, the Kohutian Ornstein & Ornstein (2008) may likewise be grouped among moderate nominalists, albeit closer to Bromberg inasmuch as they both recognize the crucial importance of the analyst's participation in the patient's mental processes. For these authors, so-called self-object transferences contain unconscious fantasies that organize early traumatic experiences and reparative unconscious fantasies of hopes and expectations.

In sum, the possibilities of integration between the authors of the canon along the dimension considered depend on the role the authors assign to the other and to the analyst during an analytical session, in the constitution of the phenomenon 'unconscious fantasy'. In this sense, there are more possibilities for integration between moderate nominalists when disregarding either pole, namely, Kleinian essentialists and radical

nominalists like Bromberg.

### Dimension 3: The Problem of the Organizational Dimension of Unconscious Phantasies.

Although, for the most part, the question is addressed only indirectly in the canonical texts, differences may be discerned among the various schools of thought with respect to organization. In his text “The Unconscious” (1915) Freud thought of phantasy as an intermediate yet highly organized formation between the systems Ucs. and Pcs. In *Klein*, unconscious phantasies are essentially that which constitutes the unconscious, in other words relations between unconscious objects. In such a conception, firstly, the primitiveness of phantasies does not rule out a high degree of organization, and, secondly, organization does not necessarily reflect symbolic value. At the other end of the spectrum, relational/intersubjective psychoanalysts such as *Bromberg* feel that they would rather do without unconscious phantasy. Hence, Bromberg deems the question of organization as most likely irrelevant. He does, however, concede the possibility of a posthumous narrative that constructs what other schools have considered as being an ontologically existent unconscious phantasy. For their part, *Ego psychologists* and *Contemporary Freudians* would probably acknowledge a variable degree of organization in accordance with their view of a continuum that spans from daydreaming to unconscious phantasy and depending on the degree to which phantasy is subject to primary process. It may well be said of the “*French school*”, in spite of its many variants, that it not only views organization as a feature of phantasy but, for instance, gives phantasy itself an organizational role in the creation of symptoms. This is conspicuous in *Lacan* when positing a central phantasy that organizes the existential stance of the subject.

That said, we believe that the question must be addressed differently. Above all, a sound epistemological procedure should, in our view, enquire into legitimate inferences, as in terms of unconscious phantasies that might be extracted from clinical practice – especially in view of the fact that such phantasies can, indeed, only be articulated in the après-coup of the analysis of clinical phenomena. Phantasies are, by definition, described retrospectively, either directly by the person entertaining them (conscious phantasies, daydreams) or indirectly through the work of reconstruction by the analysand and the analyst. This après-coup character poses a formidable challenge when seeking to determine the degree of organization in unconscious phantasies, and

where the same would hold, at least to some extent, for conscious and preconscious phantasies. For the implication is that these are never accessible to naturalistic description: they resist analysis as positive entities the constituents of which could be dismantled so as to determine their architecture.

Hence, there is no way of distinguishing between a phantasy supposedly present “in” the unconscious layers of the psyche, and its eventual construction or reconstruction by the analytic dyad. Consequently, it is impossible to establish whether a phantasy formulated at some point in the session was more or less organized in its supposedly “initial” state, or if its degree of organization merely reflects the pre-conscious/conscious capacity for elaboration as the subject becomes increasingly capable of formulating, in situ, the phantasy in question. For instance, instead of imagining that a well-formed phantasy is already “there” and waiting to be uncovered, one might just as well posit an unconscious kernel of mnemonic traces forming a very “primal” presentation in the mind (e.g. *Aulagnier’s* pictogram; *Freud’s* “Ding” in contrast to “predicate” in the Project). This quite “raw” or non-elaborated form may serve as the starting point of a process whereby a truly psychic script becomes more elaborate the closer it approaches the state in which it can be articulated in words. In such a case, one may be tempted to believe that it was highly organized from the start. One might also imagine that the nucleus remains in its “raw” state, as reflected only in non-verbal manifestations (e.g. acting out, somatization, hallucinatory experience). The bottom line is that unconscious phantasy need not be deemed an entity but rather a living process; not a state of affairs to be uncovered, but a way of elaborating the dialectical relationship between external and psychic realities. In any case, all we can really establish is whether or not the subject (or the analytic dyad) was capable of formulating a more or less elaborate phantasy, regardless of the nature of the unobservable unconscious contents or processes. In other words, we can only ascertain the capacity for “phantasizing” (i.e. arriving at a formulated, hence conscious phantasy as the end-product) and not the existence of such phantasy “in” the unconscious, as is true of any other assertion about unconscious ‘content’.

#### Dimension 4: Unconscious Phantasies “Global” or “Particularized”.

In our work we endeavor to infer the patient’s phantasies since our interpretations would otherwise be subject to error. This is why the concept is a constant presence in

theoretical and clinical writings; when not explicit it can be perceived as an underlying presence. Some papers in literature on the subject define unconscious phantasies predominantly as findings related to particular life situations, with precise and specific content (referred to as 'particularized'). Others, with a different perspective, tend to describe them rather as unconscious permanent companions, encompassing a broader range, or even the complete extent of a human life, including mental products (referred to as 'global'). Inevitably, each author's theoretical position about the nature of unconscious phantasies as such becomes evident in their descriptions. At the same time, pathogenic or curative capabilities are also attributed to them. When expanding on this dimension focus will be placed both on the terms "global" and "particularized", together with their theoretical assumptions, also in an attempt to establish their impact on the definition of the concept.

A more detailed revision of all existing views held on this matter would go beyond the scope of this paragraph, but a few examples may help to grasp the key issues involved. The first concerns the difficulty in drawing a clear boundary between "global" and "particularized" phantasies. *Arlow* (1969a), for example, sees phantasies as compromising formations between ideals, standards, and considerations of reality. In this perspective, phantasies may be considered as defensive maneuvers linked to "disturbances of conscious experience" facilitating expression to all the components. Up to this point it might seem acceptable to speak of particularized phantasies; but *Arlow* also speaks of a "streaming" of fantasies, memories, experiences and reality testing, which apparently justifies entertaining both categories, global and particularized, as present. *Kris* is evidently more disposed to present phantasies as "global", relating them to family romances and personal myths: "The autobiographical self image has taken the place of a repressed fantasy" (1956a, p. 674). Interestingly enough, he refers to one of *Anna Freud's* (1951) statements, which is worthwhile citing in this connection: "What the analytic patient reports as an event which had taken place once appears in the life of the growing child as a more or less typical experience, which may have been repeated many times. Her suggestion, then, is that analysts tend to be misled by the "telescopic character of memory" (*Kris* 1956b, p. 73).

A second, important issue to consider is the temporal perspective: the unconscious is timeless, but its productions are spotted consciously in the measurable times in which we live. In turn, the psychoanalytic process that develops (consciously) in measurable time can be seen from two different perspectives: synchronic and diachronic. Characterizing phantasies as either global or particularized is difficult outside these temporal references (see A. Freud's quotation above). Inferring an unconscious phantasy can be made at any given moment during a session, which may mislead us into believing that their existence is due, and extends only to, those moments in which we infer them. To avoid this error we must recall that there are different reasons why we frequently fail to identify an existing phantasy. Clearly, when we succeed in identifying an active phantasy at a given moment during a session we dispose over better possibilities for correct interpretation; we might say that in such circumstance we were "synchronized" with the patient.

Sometimes, it is not possible to obtain this idyllic picture, and only in the long run (the diachronic perspective) is it possible to infer active phantasies in a previous stage of the treatment along with the present ones. One may consequently infer lost opportunities of interpretation, and if there was not such loss the accuracy of past interpretations may become accessible to assessment. In any case, what we cannot rule out is the presence of the same phantasy, its transformations, or else different phantasies throughout the course of a psychoanalytic process as these depend on the patient's psychopathology and development. "Global" and "particularized" phantasies, therefore, (in so far as these terms are used to refer to their intrinsic nature) can coexist in given clinical situations. The same terms, when used chiefly as adjectives, supposedly aid the identification of unconscious phantasies expected as having distinctive traits. This entails some difficulty when it comes to defining clear limits in the use of each separate term; hence, it is not easy to sustain them as a basis for inclusive classification. However, they may well instead be used in more limited contexts for qualifying given unconscious phantasies, such as at specific moments in a session or at some stage over the course of analysis. From this point of view, we may assume some interrelation with the analyst's interventions, as these may be valid only in specific circumstances, or which may be assumed over the course of treatment.

A caveat connection relating to the title of this dimension might consist in the following questions: a) does the existence of phantasies depend of our inferences, or is the

converse the case? And b) the nature of unconscious phantasies may largely be inferred from their contents, but do these suffice for "ontological definition of them"? To speak of a "particularized" phantasy is to refer to a precise phantasy in a given person, though one may also assume that it forms part of a wider repertoire of phantasies common to mankind ("global"). A provisional conclusion would be that the categories "global" and "particularized" can best be employed in cases in which we are able to explicitly delineate the limits within which we apply them. Epistemologically, it is impossible to discard the coexistence of both categories in clinical material of the same patient; all we may claim is that either we did or did not find them in a given material.

Freud not only reformulated his theories; in some cases he retained opposing opinions throughout his life, though specifically retained one of them. With respect to unconscious phantasies, he never relinquished his pivotal idea: phantasies are wish fulfillments induced by instinctual frustration and repression (we ought not to forget that repressions constituted the building blocks of the unconscious). He also maintained, however, that some may have been unconscious "all along" and formed in the unconscious. Following the latter line of thought, primal phantasies as well as primary repressions were the "attractors" of the repressed element and constituted an aid to the formation of the unconscious. In light of the dimension currently under discussion, adhering to one or the other of these assertions may be important. One may claim that the category "particularized" appears more compatible with the classical definition as linked to repression and wish fulfillment. Conversely, the existence of phantasies unconscious "all along" seems more compatible with the category "global". Naturally, there is no lack of instinctual conflict in them, though it may better be expressed in broader terms, such as "ways to be in the world" and "longings for psychic stability", which may be active over extended periods of time. In this sense, compatibility with the category "global" and the Kleinian hypothesis of unconscious phantasies as the permanent correlates of every psychic activity seems more feasible.

We conclude with a brief comment on "curative" (*Ornstein & Ornstein, 2008*) or "pathogenic" qualities attributed to unconscious phantasies. These are terms used for findings relating to individual persons and later "generalized". The risk here is that such generalizations contain personal and ideological elements, since the semantic content of the terms we use are always subject to cultural changes simultaneously affecting both patient and analyst. Hence, the logical conclusion would be that this is a matter to be

considered separately in each case. One must also consider, therefore, alternative ways to understand such supposed attributes in unconscious phantasies. One may claim with reservation that, in themselves, phantasies are neither curative nor pathogenic, but that their structure and formal traits are such that we are able to grasp the existence of those pathogenic or curative characteristics of the person with the phantasy. By extension, this would also appear compatible with “global” phantasies: while different persons may have similar phantasies, the fact of their being curative or pathogenic differs in each case.

The question as to whether we may assume the existence of some degree of theoretical integration where we used the word “compatible” is now open. By way of a very tentative, positive answer, a reformulation of basic theoretical hypotheses – even partial – might to some extent be possible, and would necessarily entail concurrence on commonly employed terms. Naturally, this would necessitate further, in-depth discussion.

#### Dimension 5: The Age at which Phantasy Formation is Possible: Available from Birth on vs. Available only in the First or Second Year of Life

This dimension concerns the conception of early infant mental life, its characteristics, its origins and development. Does early mental life have the character of phantasy and, if so, at what stage does phantasizing commence? Furthermore, as previously discussed, in what form do infantile phantasies influence adult mental life?

Freud held that no unconscious and conscious life exists in the infant during the first six or seven months of life. In an attempt to solve the problem of emerging phantasies as part of mental life, Freud postulated the notion of primal phantasies or "Urphantasien". These are inherited (phylogenetic) memory traces of prehistoric events elaborated as individual phantasies. For Freud, phantasy is connected with the origin of the drive. He further held that phantasy constitutes the object of the sexual drive when drive-related wishes are not met, and when autoerotism creates a phantasy scene that may provide some satisfaction. Phantasy thus creates sexuality. Phantasies have an organizing function in mental life; they constitute attempts at wish-fulfillment, primitive defense (turning against oneself, projection, negation and so forth), and conflict mastery. Phantasies interact with life experiences, and thus form phantasy life. The ambiguity inherent in Freud's position laid the grounds for divergent positions in psychoanalysis

regarding the way in which and at what stage phantasy life is initiated, what kind of developmental line was conceptualized, and the status phantasy might occupy in mental life.

For *Kleinians*, unconscious phantasies are present "as mental expression of instincts" (*Isaacs*, 1948, p. 80) from birth on and, further, that the aim and direction of the impulses "is inherent in the character and direction of the impulse itself, and in its related affects", (*Isaacs*, 1948, pp. 85-86). While Freud maintained that primal phantasies help in organizing drive-related wishes and impulses, here they become "inherent", as if the impulses themselves contained the organizing factor.

*Laplanche & Pontalis* (1968) suggest that the pre-historical origin of primal fantasies might be understood as a "prestructure actualized and transmitted by the parental fantasies" (p. 16).

This line of thought was developed further by *Aulagnier* (1975). She postulated mental activity from early infancy as primal processes necessitating the word of the Other for the development of fantasies capable of preparing the infant for symbolic and narrative functions. Unconscious fantasies are based on the infant's largely self-created pictograms that represent the experience of being loved or rejected. Unconscious fantasies are created in the infant's bodily relation to the Other's/mother's body and formulated according to this Others' discourse. The child would only achieve separateness and triangulation if the mother is capable of representing a third position, which implies *not* being its sole object. Fantasies are thus more organized and are developmentally later than primal processes and pictograms.

For *Ornstein & Ornstein* (2008), fantasies commence very early in infant-caregiver interaction. They are related to self-object relations, internal and external. For the Ornsteins, unconscious fantasies emerging in analysis with adults derive from mental representations of gratifying experiences (giving rise to development and creativity) or from frustrating experiences (giving rise, for example, to curative fantasies as mentioned earlier).

*Sandler & Sandler* (1994) distinguish present and past unconscious phantasies.

Phantasies are constituted early in mental life. The phantasies of the past unconscious issuing in early childhood are different from the phantasies of present unconscious. They "date from before the construction of the repression barrier and the resulting infantile amnesia" (1994, p. 390).

Without specifying when it "starts", for *Arlow* (1969a) and *Abend* (2008), fantasies relate to childhood. They are grouped together around certain basic childhood wishes and experiences. One version of the fantasy wish may represent a later version or defensive distortion of an earlier fantasy.

One fundamental tenet of *empirical developmental research* is that mental activity exists at least from birth onwards, and that these processes relate both to innate dispositions and infant and child interaction with caregivers and others. *Erreich* (2003) proposes that the infant develops relational knowledge at an early stage, and that this is based on mental capacities described as wishful thinking, veridical perception and naive cognition. She poses the question as to whether this relational knowledge can be conceptualized as fantasy. She maintains that there is a need for a mental construct capable of encompassing these three mental capacities, and goes on to argue that the concept of unconscious fantasy may be a suitable construct facilitating the integration of knowledge on early development as elaborated in developmental research in psychoanalytic theory. *Erreich*, consequently, retains the term unconscious fantasy and defines it as unconscious belief statement resulting from the intersection of all three mental capacities and the inborn temperament of the child.

Freud's position that infant mental life is characterized by primary process thinking was not confirmed by developmental research. *Litowitz* (2007) argues, however, that even though recent research on children's mental processes cannot sustain primary process as a model for their mental processes, the unique contribution of psychoanalysis in this field demonstrates how children use mental processes for motivational purpose and how, in this context, they construct unconscious fantasies.

*Bromberg* (2008), on the other hand, doubts whether the concept of unconscious fantasy can be retained as a characterizing developmental process. However, that the dissociated parts have a developmental history represented in procedural memory, albeit not as unconscious fantasies with motivational characteristics, would seem inherent in his position.

A developmental line of unconscious phantasy could then briefly be summarized thus:

	pre-birth	0-1yrs.	1.5 yrs.	1.5+yrs.
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Freudian	phylogenetic memory	self-part-object relations	self-whole object representation	towards object-constancy/permanence
Post-Freudian Pluralism	pre-conceptions	development of models of relations to others/caregivers = unconscious fantasy	several models to different caretakers	consolidation of relational knowledge: unconscious fantasies
Attachment theory Cognitive developmental research	temperament	Mentation: wish, veridical perception, naive cognition	Attachment: secure, avoidant, enmeshed RIGS	Unconscious/conscious relational knowledge
Interpersonal position		Dissociated: procedural and implicit knowledge	Dissociated: procedural and implicit knowledge	Dissociated: procedural and implicit knowledge

Is integration possible with respect to this dimension?

There seems to be a consensus that infants and children are involved with the world from the outset, and that active/motivated mental processes are set in motion for the purpose of mastery, adaptation and defense. Theorists such as *Aulagnier* seem to be in accord with developmental research when demonstrating how the development of the child's ability to form phantasies and its propensity for symbolic thinking depends on the interaction with the mother and her capacity to be in a third position. The concept of innate or primal phantasies proposed by Freud and retained to a large degree by *Kleinians* is apparently incompatible with this view.

However, the concept of unconscious phantasy does not depend on the idea that the infant's/child's mentation is characterized by primary process thinking. Moreover, – according to *Erreich* and *Litowitz* – findings in developmental research are compatible with the concept of unconscious phantasy and its early development. This view is also implicit in *Ornstein's* and *Ornstein's* perspective. For the *Kleinians* unconscious phantasy is the expression of the instincts as influenced by interaction, thus illustrating a

significant divergence to *Bromberg's* merely heuristic and tentative use of the concept in connection with procedural unsymbolized memory.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Is Integration of the Different Concepts of Unconscious Phantasy Possible?**

Today, the concept of unconscious phantasy is incorporated in different theories and their respective perspectives. Pragmatically considered, unconscious phantasy has become a rather flexible concept. Sandler, though understanding it as being a consequence of the elastic nature of psychoanalytic concepts, would caution that concepts “can only be stretched to a certain point before they snap” (1994, p. 388). This could result in the concept assuming an amorphous character concealing within it the danger of abandoning the idea of comparing the different versions for points of convergence or divergence.

With our model, we have chosen five dimensions for analyzing the meaning-space of concepts. A number of dimensions thus distinguish the different versions of the concept “unconscious phantasy” very well, demonstrating that while some versions share similarities, others are so divergent that they resist integration with at least a few of the other versions. Above all, these key divergences turn on the fundamental assumptions of the various school traditions as these combine with different metapsychological frames of references and with unresolved epistemological problems.

We would like to give a brief illustration of these problems by way of two topics:

1. Unconscious phantasy is one of the central concepts of psychoanalysis. However, with regard to the question as to the centrality of this concept, differences remain between the school traditions. For Kleinians, it is *the* central concept. Unconscious phantasy is the primary mental activity present from birth onwards. The unconscious is quasi identical with unconscious phantasies, and reality thinking cannot operate without unconscious phantasies. For Kleinians, psychoanalysis stands and falls with the concept of unconscious phantasy. The other conceptions of unconscious phantasies tend to be more specific and limited in form. The content of the unconscious is not identical with unconscious phantasies and the conception of reality thinking is different. For Arlow, the Ego Psychologists, the Sandler and Contemporary Freudians, the significance of the concept of unconscious phantasy represents greater value than the Ornsteins ascribe to

it, who do not differentiate conscious from unconscious phantasies, as is the case for Bromberg, who opts for retaining it because of its heuristic value.

The differences are created by the position reality occupies as an independent factor related to unconscious phantasy. For Kleinians unconscious phantasy is the basic mental activity underlying all later thought that gives specific form to the reality we encounter. For Arlow, there is a constant interplay between reality (perception) and unconscious phantasy, though, in principle, they can be separated again. For Kleinians and for Arlow drives constitute the instigator of unconscious phantasies, for Sandler the stabilizing function of unconscious phantasy so as to eliminate painful affects and maintain safety is added to the drives as instigator. Other conceptions, however, abandon the drives as instigator and substitute it by reality. Phantasy is constructed from experiences in reality. Results of developmental research support the argument that unconscious phantasy is an unconscious belief statement formed from the child's wishful thinking, veridical perception and naïve cognition. The Ornsteins and Bromberg emphasize disturbing, traumatic and dissociated "unformulated" experiences as the instigator of conscious or unconscious phantasies. Here, one might ask whether we can start with "real experiences" without looking for the relationship of this reality with unconscious phantasies. However, such a dialogue about reality and unconscious phantasy would be conducted with different basic assumptions and background metapsychologies. This we consider to be one of the essential problems regarding the question of the integration of concepts and theories.

Ludwik Fleck (1935) – whose philosophy and sociology of knowledge has become increasingly influential in recent decades – has coined the term "thought collective" which has a special "thought style". Thought collectives construct so-called "systems of opinion" and possess "solidarity of thinking". Fleck emphasized that our perception of a clinical fact is formed by the thought collective of which we are part, as well as its style. For one colleague, a particular fact is clearly conceptualized or has a specific "Gestalt", whereas, for another it either remains unclear or he/she has a different understanding thereof. Only if the "constraint of thought" is loosened and an "inter-collective" exchange of ideas initiated would a change of meaning with respect to concretizations of theoretical statements then be possible. We hold that *Fleck's* description of thought

collectives is transferable to psychoanalysis and its various schools. The work of our committee is just such an example of “intercollective” exchange. Each of us has studied one particular step of the model together with one particular dimension and its different conceptions. Inevitably, each of us set his own theoretical priorities in the description of dimensional problems. This was followed by a group discussion where the objective was to integrate the divergent points of view in a final description of a particular step and dimension in the model. The reader will gain an impression of our different approaches and priorities in the analysis of each of respective dimension. We should again emphasize, however, that one of our working principles was to hold our own psychoanalytic theoretical preferences in the balance in an attempt to do justice to each conceptualization. It was a precondition for using our model as a frame of reference for comparing the concepts of unconscious phantasy as it was for highlighting the degree to which they diverge and converge.

2. As our dimensional analysis has shown, there are epistemological differences between the conceptions. Is unconscious phantasy an analyst and patient construct as it emerges in the analytic process, or has the patient the unconscious phantasy “in himself”? In other words, is it ontologically existent as a concrete entity in the mind? For Freud unconscious phantasies can only be partially known. They are to be inferred from the derivatives of the unconscious itself. Kleinians agree that while unconscious phantasies must be inferred from the patient’s clinical material, their existence is independent of the inference. Arlow thinks similarly on this matter. He speaks of an unconscious fantasy function. The stream of inner stimulation is organized by fantasy thinking. The Sandlers adopt a middle position: past unconscious phantasies are our reconstruction as based on clinical material. Relational psychoanalysts are situated at the other end of the spectrum, as we see especially in the case of Bromberg. For them unconscious fantasy is the patient/analyst co-construction of an experience which had hitherto remained unformulated. These divergences must be subject to rigorous epistemological discussion. One such epistemological position might be that unconscious phantasies must, by definition, be described retrospectively. They are understood as patient/analyst constructs. Another position would be that unconscious phantasies exist independently of a retrospective definition by analyst and patient. They are accessible to naturalistic description.

With respect to the various viewpoints regarding the world of phantasies, it would be undoubtedly advantageous to adopt a position capable of tackling several epistemological problems. To this end we propose the following procedure:

1- We acknowledge that whatever we believe about unconscious phantasy (pre-existing structure yet to be uncovered or “end-product” of a process) ultimately rests on the manifest articulation thereof (i.e. on the “end-product”).

2- By acknowledging that we can only describe the overt articulation of a phantasy, we are spared the problem of how to distinguish between unconscious, preconscious and conscious phantasies. Indeed, at any level of consciousness, phantasy life shares the following characteristics:

a) Phantasy is a private creation of the mind and belongs to a different kind of reality than the shared one (i.e. it constitutes what we call psychic reality);

b) Phantasy, at any level, is presented to mind as an accomplished wish, or fear, and therefore represents the manner in which the psyche has been capable of dealing with the challenges posed either by external reality or internal demands. Hence, we are not required to choose, for example, between positing phantasy as the expression of the drives (Klein) or as a response to the enigma of the other (Laplanche). In all cases, either by way of its content or by the mere fact of its being created, a phantasy amounts to a form of compromise between the satisfaction of the internal pull – whether referred to as drive or some other designation – and taking into account the existence of the other (of outer reality). This approach to phantasy life has brought us closer to an approach that facilitates a description of phenomena independently of theoretical preferences.

We propose, therefore, focusing on the description of the elaborative capacity of the subject (aided or unaided by the analyst). We have thus shifted the spotlight away from a content that could not be described directly, to a readily observable capacity or process, and achieve this by reference to a shared clinical material. Indeed, whether we believe we express the phantasy as it “was” in the unconscious, or else entertain the idea that we have “constructed” the content from an unfathomable primal source, in either case we demonstrate precisely the capacity of formulating a phantasy as phantasy. In so doing, we also spare ourselves the question as to whether or not we believe that unconscious phantasies exist at all, since we are neither required to assert nor deny

such a prior existence in order to describe the process of elaboration which, in the end, does formulate phantasy as phantasy.

This epistemological starting point helps us hold our own theoretical preferences in the balance. While this is not the place for a discussion of the far-reaching epistemological problems implicit in the divergent concepts of unconscious phantasy, it does not imply that we deny the complex relationship between something inferred and the question as to its independent existence. The articulation of our inference of an unconscious phantasy does not merely “attach words” to what is inferred. Assuming that the articulation is not too far off the mark, it will tap into “something” at work

unconsciously. But should we go further and attempt to state what this “something” really “is”, we would be obliged to discuss the subject of controversial epistemological starting points. Some theories operate on the basis that unconscious phantasy exists and “is”, while others resist going beyond claiming that the formulation of a phantasy is precisely what is meant by the word formulation: it lends that “something” form.

With our model we have studied the differing and diverging conceptualizations of unconscious phantasy. We have deconstructed them in our various steps. And with our dimensions we have sought to identify their differences and similarities for the purposes of discussing the problem of the possibility of integration. Judging of their veracity is beyond the scope of our working principle. Clearly, considerable ground has yet to be covered with respect to the comparison and possible integration of divergent psychoanalytic concepts: A veritable work in progress.

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