

Discussion: Toni Greatrex

The Unconscious As A Knowledge Processing Center, A. Modell

I think this is a ground breaking paper because it suggests we change metapsychology, our basic *paradigm* (Kuhn). Arnold focuses our attention on the original Freud, namely his theories of dreaming and conscious and unconscious processes. It makes me feel the same way I did when I shed my girdle in the revolution of the sixties. "I can breathe again!" I believe Arnold is leading us into a deconstruction of psychoanalytic metapsychology, which was the best theory of mind of the 20 century. Then what must follow is a theoretical recontextualization, a new paradigm.

Not everyone in our group felt this way. Other views included, "We can't do away with structural theory." "I don't really get the import of Arnold's paper. Of course the unconscious is an information processing function among other things. How could it not be?" "It seems to me our field has too long been concerned with establishing what Freud said or not, as opposed to seeking the truth."

Kuhn used to concept *paradigm* to underscore that every human endeavor is confined to a culturally determined time period and that future generations must reconfigure paradigms to prevent their demise. In recent decades psychoanalytic reconfiguration has come from self psychology, relational psychology and attachment theory.

However, there is the problem of psychoanalytic metapsychology, which seemed like an ultimate truth to many of us in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Of course, so was "the schizophrenogenic mother."

Arnold has been one of the most influential theoretical thinkers of our generation and has contributed to the inexorable process of change in our theoretical concepts. When we realize that all psychological concepts are creations of our imagination, we find we are in the same category as physicists and philosophers of the last century. Freud was in good company, for the most significant advances in the last century did not come from empirical observation but from reasoning. Einstein and quantum mechanic physicists used equations. Russell, Whitehead, the "logical positivists" and early Wittgenstein stated that language and propositions determine our reality. Having recently bandaged the Cartesian split between reason and emotions, we nevertheless must continue to rely on prescient reasoning. Perhaps we do so even more so as we try to correlate neurophysiological findings with human experience.

Freud's contemporaries, including Fechner, believed that for anything to be mental, it had to be conscious. And, of course, most 20 century psychologists, especially behaviorists, neurologists, as well as most

neuroscientists, were firm in that belief. Thus, even a century later, the revolutionary essence of Freud's daring hypothesis remains.

Arnold deepens his thesis that "the task of the unconscious is to process knowledge" throughout this paper. His view is informed by Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and *topographical theory*. Here are some quotations that expand his proposition.

- 1) The unconscious retains in memory a lifetime of emotionally significant experiences and emotionally salient features. P.1
- 2) The unconscious is the area of the psyche in which knowledge is processed. P.2
- 3) Quoting Freud, the unconscious must be assumed to be the basis of all psychical life. P.2
- 4) Elaborating on Freud and Chomsky's theory that an unconscious symbolic process interprets the syntax of spoken language, Arnold states that "symbolic processing occurs unconsciously." The neuroscience equivalent is that "information is processed unconsciously." P.3
- 5) [*There exists*] an analogy between the adaptive, synthetic function of the unconscious processing that occurs when we dream and the adaptive function of conscious process that is present while we are awake." P.5
- 6) ...an unconscious process, analogous to dreaming is continuously operative while we are awake.this waking metaphoric process is an unconscious scanning that attempts to match current emotional experiences with old memorial categories." P. 5
- 7) The unconscious is timeless and perceives no difference between past and present. P. 5 (my addition; The only other timeless feature of our universe is Singularity, the event horizon of a black hole, when/where matter becomes so dense that time disappears. And, of course, this is a conjecture not a fact.)
- 8) ...an unconscious process precedes all conscious thought and feeling." P.8
- 9) The dynamic unconscious processes knowledge that specializes in the negation of knowing and feeling that is linked to conflict. P.12

What about consciousness?

Arnold, agreeing with Freud, states that "What is salient is the unconscious process; consciousness is a mere bystander." P.5

This position was revolutionary in the 1890's and totally stood Kant's "transcending function of consciousness" on its head.

Freud writes, in a letter to Fliess in 1998, “consciousness is only a sense organ; all psychic content is only a representation; all psychic processes are unconscious.” “Consciousness is only an observational faculty, a sense organ; and in itself does not cause anything.”

This position troubles many of us. Genetic and cultural evolution is ongoing. Human consciousness is an amazing, dynamic, genetic and cultural process that continues to evolve.

Conscious processes like thought, feeling, awareness, selection, and focus organize the unconscious processes, prioritize them, create linearity, add the time dimension, add volitional executive control functions and feed information to the unconscious functions. (Wm. James: selection, focus, will)

Consciousness is necessary to adapt the reflective, imaginative self to all possible environments; physical and social ones, cognitive ones, reading-writing ones, musical ones etc. I can understand consciousness being likened to a symphony conductor who continuously draws on unconscious knowledge, as he directs various sections of the orchestra to play. I cannot understand it “causing nothing”, a mere receiving station. The conscious self orchestrates.

For decades we have been struggling with the definitions and functions of intrapsychic and intersubjective states and processes. While we were spending so much time struggling to gain awareness and acceptance of relational dynamics, we placed intrapsychic processes in the background. The results of those efforts include the recognition of the dynamic unit of infant/parent and the process of co-construction. Arnold places private, intrapsychic, unconscious processes back on center stage. However, to me this only makes sense if we look at the functions of conscious and unconscious processes as a continuous, dynamic co-construction.

What about implicit relational knowing?

This paper suggests there are no differences between the position of the BCPSG and notion of mental unconscious knowledge processing systems. In 1915 Freud did say that it is a very remarkable thing that the unconscious of one human can react upon the other without passing through consciousness (p.194).

It discusses psychological unconscious processes, not neurophysiological ones. Consequently, the divide between mental and neurophysiological processes is not narrowed. Also, this paper does not include contemporary relational, attachment, and neuropsychological developmental perspectives. Future theories must be centered on developmental perspectives.

Arnold noted that Edelman believes that there is an unconscious process that is neurophysiological and that there is nothing between that and consciousness. I'm not sure we really know what that means. However, Arnold and David Mann, following Crick and Koch, feel that there is a middle layer between micro and macro. Does this apply to both mental and neurophysiological processes? At the neurophysiological level this recursive, parallel processing layer must include human mirror neuron systems, self and other systems, embodied, cross modal perceptual systems that include emotions. I would place everything we have learned about mid-brain systems, the limbic system, memory systems, dreaming systems, and prefrontal cortex (Schoore) systems into this configuration. However, apparently, Ray Jakendoff (*Languages of the Mind*) also conceptualizes a middle (mental?) layer to understand processes that occur when we hear a sound and create words. This echoes Bucci's subsymbolic processes.

Freud's contemporary, Wm. James, introduced us to pragmatism, which asks not that ancient philosophical question, "*what is it?*" but instead focuses our attention on "*how does it function?*"

Here Arnold distills current psychoanalytic complexity into two questions: "how can we know something without being aware of it? And how can we be aware of something we don't know?" (The category of attentional processes which subsume dissociation and include defense mechanisms, address this paradox).

In this paper the 'how does this work' approach leads to a deconstruction of instinct theory, structural theory and defense mechanisms. None of us believes that we will do away with these concepts. Rather we must rework them. And this recontextualization of id, ego, superego, which currently feel like mental furniture, will rest on emotional and cognitive mentalization capacities. We need to understand these capacities both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. And, of course, they will be informed by current scientific and psychological models, including post Piagetian psychology, Vygotsky, ToM, Simulation theory etc. Needless to say, if we create a workable synthesis, this will have a mythological cast for our descendents. But if we don't evolution will trim this branch of knowledge.

Metaphor, Symbolism, Self, Defense Mechanisms, Memory, Attentional Systems

These concepts are crucial to ontogenetic and phylogenetic evolution. We will explore them in the fall and winter.