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Making the Invisible Visible

34099

Psychosozial-Verlag

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Making the Invisible Visible

Does the Depth-Psychological Unconscious Pose a Problem to First-Person-Perspective Methods in Psychology[1]

Bernhard Geißler

Summary

Advocates of first-person-perspective-methods (FPPM) claim that any psychological concept must be grounded in a descriptive analysis (first-person-foundationalism). It is often assumed that the concept of the unconscious is incompatible with FPPM, and that its acceptance implies the rejection of first-person-foundationalism. This view is based on the following assumption: either FPPM are generally incapable of engaging with the unconscious, or FPPM are incapable of accounting for the systematic independence of the unconscious. It is the aim of this paper to show that this assumption is wrong. I argue that a) phenomenology has access to the unconscious, b) phenomenology can account for the systematic independence of the unconscious, and c) accepting the concept of the unconscious does imply the rejection of first-person-foundationalism.

Section one displays the general relation of FPPM and conceptualization in psychology. Section two addresses the depth-psychological impression and its theoretical interpretations. Section three concerns the differences of introspection and phenomenology. Section four shows that phenomenology can engage with the unconscious by means of *mutual realizations*. In section five, the reciprocal co-dependence in mutual realizations is used to formulate an FPPM-based criterion to distinguish the preconscious from the unconscious.

Keywords: phenomenology, phenomenological psychology, depth-psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, the unconscious, theory of psychoanalysis

Zusammenfassung
Wie man das Unsichtbare sichtbar macht
Stellt das tiefenpsychologische Unbewusste ein Problem
für die Erste-Person-Perspektive-Methoden in der Psychologie dar?
Vertreter:innen der Erste-Person-Perspektive-Methoden (EPPM) fordern die deskriptive Fundierung aller psychologischen Konzepte. Es wird jedoch häufig davon ausgegangen, dass

das Unbewusste inkompatibel mit dieser Forderung ist. Dieser Ansicht liegt die Annahme zugrunde, dass entweder EPPM generell keinen Zugang zum Unbewussten haben, oder nicht für dessen systematische Eigenständigkeit argumentieren können. In diesem Artikel soll gezeigt werden, dass a) die Phänomenologie Zugriff auf das Unbewusste hat, b) die Phänomenologie der systematischen Eigenständigkeit des Unbewussten Rechnung tragen kann, und c) dass das Unbewusste den fundamentalen Anspruch der EPPM nicht bedroht.

Im ersten Abschnitt wird der generelle Zusammenhang zwischen EPPM und der psychologischen Konzeptbildung dargestellt. Der zweite Abschnitt behandelt die tiefenpsychologische Erfahrung und deren theoretische Interpretationen. Der dritte Abschnitt beleuchtet die Unterschiede von Introspektion und Phänomenologie. Im vierten Abschnitt argumentiere ich, dass es der Phänomenologie möglich ist, das Unbewusste anhand der *gemeinsamen Realisierung* zu analysieren. Die reziproke, wechselseitige Abhängigkeit der gemeinsamen Realisierung wird im fünften Abschnitt als EPPM-basiertes Kriterium vorgeschlagen, um das Vorbewusste vom Unbewussten systematisch zu differenzieren.

Schlüsselwörter: Phänomenologie, Phänomenologische Psychologie, Tiefenpsychologie, Psychotherapie, Psychoanalyse, das Unbewusste, Theorie der Psychoanalyse

1 The Unconscious as a Problem for First-Person-Perspective Methods in Psychology

The status of first-person-perspective-methods (FPPM) in psychology is controversial. Debates range from issuing their relevance for third-person-perspective methods (TPPM) to questioning their general scientific validity. FPPM, on the one hand, focus on descriptively engaging with the actual experience, unveiling its invariant structures and what it is like to have this experience as a living, embodied subject. The results FPPM aim at are thus adequate descriptions of experiences that display their invariant build up with regards to its statics (i.e., how an experience is constituted at a certain moment in time), or genetics (i.e., how an experience develops over a certain period of time). TPPM, on the other hand, aim at providing sub-experiential, naturalistic explanations for psychological phenomena. The descriptive exploration of the experiential characteristics of the subject matter is thereby of little interest. Its primary focus is the reductive or non-reductive embedment of psychic life into networks of naturalistic laws – may that be in terms of biology, chemistry, physics, etc. With regards to the relation of FPPM and TPPM, three main positions can be found in the literature:

In this paper, the position that FPPM are fundamental to psychology is going to be referred to as *first-person-foundationalism*. In particular, first-person-foundationalism maintains that FPPM descriptions a) are scientifically relevant, and b) are fundamental

to *psychological theory-cluster concepts*. Theory-cluster concepts are bundles of various explanations and theories addressing the same psychological concept, aiming at understanding the latter in all its relevant aspects (see Bermúdez 2005, 16ff.). This position is often championed by theoreticians who hold FPPM in high regard. Historically, first-person-foundationalism stems from philosophical projects such as Franz Brentano's *descriptive psychology* (1996) and Edmund Husserl's *phenomenological psychology* (1997 and 1977). From the perspective of contemporary philosophy and theoretical psychology, Shaun Gallagher's work on cognitive sciences can be referenced as an example of first-person-foundationalism (Gallagher, 2010). Note that the role of FPPM in first-person-foundationalism must be differentiated from interpretative or hermeneutical applications of first-person-perspective methods in psychological research. It is concerned exclusively with providing fundamental conceptual issues by means of eidetic analysis.

Moderate naturalism claims that descriptions resulting from FPPM a) are scientifically relevant, and b) can be part of theory-cluster concepts. However, they are neither fundamental to, nor a necessary part of the latter. In the contemporary debate, moderate naturalism is usually championed by theoreticians who maintain that *folk psychology* or *common sense psychology* play a role in the generation of theory-cluster concepts, while simultaneously taking, for example, neurosciences to be psychologically fundamental.

Radical naturalism argues that FPPM descriptions a) are scientifically irrelevant or harmful, and b) are consequently not part of theory-cluster concepts. Radical naturalism is, for example, displayed in positions such as *eliminative materialism* or *reductive neurobiological accounts*. According to this position, first-person-experience as well as all notions, concepts, and explanations stemming from it must not play any role in scientific psychology.

Throughout the history of psychology, it was repeatedly stressed that forces beyond the sphere of consciousness might be of major relevance for understanding psychic life. One of the most famous advocates of this claim was Sigmund Freud. The founding father of psychoanalysis emphasized that psychology should primarily focus on investigating *the unconscious*, which he introduced as an alternative to the traditional psychological paradigms, namely materialism and the introspective analysis of consciousness. Although the Freudian theory of a psychodynamic unconscious was never seen uncritically in the scientific and philosophical community, the idea of genuine mental entities and processes beyond the scope of the first-person-perspective became a widespread concept in psychology. Regardless of how the idea of unconscious mentality is formulated in detail, it is often viewed as posing a serious problem for first-person-foundationalism. This interpretation is grounded in the following consideration: if it is true that a) human psychic life is (at least) partially unconscious, and b) the unconscious is inaccessible to first-person-experience, then first-person-foundationalism

consequently must be wrong. If the unconscious is an important psychological notion that FPPM-descriptions cannot account for in a substantial and adequate way, first-person-foundationalism can no longer maintain its claim of conceptual fundamentality.

2 The Psychodynamic Unconscious, the Depth-Psychological Impression, and Its Methodological Consequences

As already indicated, *the unconscious* is an equivocal notion. In psychology, a basic distinction is made between theories linked to cognitive psychology and psychodynamic approaches to the issue of unconscious mentality (Kihlstrom 2015): the former theories address issues such as subliminal elements, automatic sequences, and schematics of cognition.

They are often associated with the experimental setting of cognitive sciences and the metaphorical view that the human mind works similar to a computer that processes the information it receives from its surroundings. The psychodynamic notion of the unconscious, however, revolves around concepts such as *conflict* and *repression* and is often associated with the clinical or psychotherapeutic context. Contrasting with the cognitive accounts of unconscious mentality, psychodynamic theories emphasize the active nature of the unconscious. The psychodynamic notion of the unconscious exceeds the function of passive, unrecognized (or even unrecognizable) schemas and automatisms of processing information. Some of its contents, while being kept unconscious by various defense mechanisms, keep pushing towards consciousness. In doing so they create content in which they surface in symbolic form. The psychodynamic unconscious is not only passively involved in shaping psychic life, but also creates new aspects within the latter by means of those contents that are kept from becoming conscious. These descendants of the unconscious, manifested in dreams, slips, symbolic behavior, fantasies, or even hallucinations, often appear as random or unexplainable from a non-psychodynamic perspective.

As already implied, the unconscious plays an essential role for the psychoanalytic understanding of the psyche's inherent teleology: every psychic content begins as unconscious. If it passes censorship, which itself is an unconscious process, it then precedes into the preconscious or consciousness. Only if the content in question falls victim to the censor, it remains unconscious. Leaving all potential systematic issues of this theory aside, it nevertheless illustrates the complexity of the psychoanalytic notion of *latency*, i. e., the elements of the psyche that are not immediately given in actual consciousness. This consists of psychic content (e. g., a repressed fantasy), structural instances (e. g., censorship), and comprises two psychological systems, namely the un-

conscious and the preconscious. The term *unconscious* in psychoanalysis thus refers to a specific subset of general latency that differs from its counterpart, the preconscious. Preconscious contents can become conscious under the right circumstances, but can also remain latent for random reasons (e. g., the subject's attention is centered on something else). Unconscious contents remain unconscious following a rationale of protection and stabilization. The latter contents are consequently concealed from the subject's self-experience – even if the subject actively attempts to detect them introspectively. It is exactly this combination of *affective relevance* and *non-arbitrary internal inaccessibility* that lies at the heart of the psychodynamic notion of the unconscious.

In the remaining course of this paper, the term *unconscious* will exclusively refer to the psychodynamic concept. Its contents will be referred to as *motifs*. The term motif thereby designates a certain state of affairs that is the implicitly or explicitly intended result of any strive, wish, or volition. This uncommon wording aims at sidestepping the complex discussion on which experiential types or elements the unconscious comprises (volitions, emotions, affections, perceptions, etc.).

However, how does depth-psychology justify the unusual claim of unconscious motifs in the psychodynamic sense? The main argument, already articulated in the works of Freud, is that the concept of the unconscious is necessary in order to explain (and potentially cure) psychological phenomena that otherwise appear as random and unexplainable. The most impressive examples of such phenomena are associated with psychopathology. Professionals who work with people suffering from psychological health issues are often confronted with situations in which their client's conscious intentions and their corresponding behavior, fantasies, or thoughts appear to be dissonant or even diametrically opposed to each other. The following case example illustrates such a situation:[2]

> A male client suffers from depression which he himself explains as the consequence of his incapability to find a woman who really loves him and who would be willing to start a family together. He describes that anytime a relationship appears to be sustainable and persistent, his partner reveals herself as being quarrelsome and controlling. Regardless of his honest attempts to save the relationship, it shatters step by step until a breakup is inevitable. After a couple of sessions, the therapist, based on depictions of how the last several breakups took place, understands that anytime a relation becomes more serious, the client starts showing severe interest in other women. This interest not only results in behavior which the therapist would describe as flirting and even dating but also causes disputes and emotional alienation towards his original partner. Despite the »obviousness« of the client's self-sabotage, the therapist feels the honest despair resulting from the client's unfulfilled desire for a durable relationship. Additionally, there are no indicators of dishonesty or untruthfulness with regards to what intentions and wishes the client states he

has been having. When confronted with the therapist's interpretation of the events, the client feels misunderstood or even viciously demeaned by the therapist.

As depicted in the case above, the theory of the psychodynamic unconscious can be established on the basis of a dissonance occurring between a client's credible depiction of a certain event E, their corresponding intentions and motifs, M1, and the therapist's understanding of E. In the therapist's view another set of intentions and motifs, M2, fulfills the following conditions:

1) M2 explains event E *(sufficiency condition)*.
2) M2 explains event E more coherently and completely than M1. This means that M2 explains sequences of E that cannot be explained by means of M1 and which otherwise would appear as random, unintended, or even unwanted *(explanatory surplus condition)*.
3) M2 provides an explanation for other events in the same client's life that otherwise would appear as random, unintended, or even unwanted *(repetition condition)*.
4) Although M2 satisfies the conditions 1–3, the client, even when confronted with the therapist's interpretation, is incapable or even aversive to ascribing M2 to themselves. This lack of self-comprehension differs from »normal« cases of self-misunderstanding, which are resolvable by means of reflection or feedback. It strikes the therapist as a radical and fundamental self-alienation the client suffers from *(radical inaccessibility condition)*. In the following, the experience underlying condition 4 is going to be referred to as the *phenomenon of radical inaccessibility*.

Based on the conditions 1–4, the therapist gets the impression that a systematic difference must exist between the motifs someone is aware of or can make themselves aware of, and other apparently relevant and active motifs that are radically concealed from self-experience. The impression that a systematic difference exists between various types of latent motifs will further be labeled as the *depth-psychological impression* (DPI). Although DPI is a relatively common experience for mental health professionals, its theoretical treatment as well as the resulting methodological consequences are rarely addressed explicitly. Amongst those who have been working on the issue of the depth-psychological resp. psychodynamic unconscious, two main camps can be distinguished:

2.1 The Ontological Interpretation of the DPI and Third-Person-Perspective-Methods

In most of the traditional schools of depth-psychology, DPI is interpreted in an *onto-logical* way. The apparent systematic difference of unconscious and preconscious motifs

that is conveyed by the phenomenon of radical inaccessibility is thereby conceptualized in terms of mental substances, psychic compartments, or properties of psychic content. In classical psychoanalysis, for example, the fundamental building blocks of the psyche are *mental states* or *ideas*. These mental states bear the topographically relevant properties of *being unconscious*, *being preconscious*, or *being conscious* and thereby are constitutive of the correlating psychic systems (Freud 1957, 172ff. and Gardner 1999, 148ff.). According to the ontological interpretation of DPI, questions regarding the nature of the unconscious cannot be answered by means of FPPM. This claim is grounded in the apparently trivial assumption that the limits of consciousness, which is only one of three psychic systems, must equal the limits of how experience can be described methodologically. Accordingly, any assessment of the nature of the unconscious relies on TPPM, such as *methodological naturalism* or *psychoanalytic hermeneutics*.

More specifically, two arguments can be made in order to stress the relatedness of the unconscious and TPPM:

I) *The argument of methodological incompatibility*
    According to the ontological interpretation of the DPI, the unconscious as a psychic system differs from consciousness not in a gradual way, rather a categorical way. FPPM, though, are restricted to the sphere of conscious experience, and thus to the psychic system *consciousness*. Consequently, FPPM cannot contribute to assessing the nature of the unconscious beyond trivialities such as »the unconscious is not given in consciousness«.

II) *The argument of psychology's objectivity*
    FPPM aim at engaging with the psyche from the angle of conscious and subjective experience. However, as a scientific discipline, psychology should address objective entities or processes rather than subjective experiences. By introducing the unconscious as systematically different from preconscious and conscious psychic life, and consequently as exclusively accessible by means of TPPM, psychology is provided with an objective matter of research beyond mere subjectivity. The objectivity of psychology thus depends on the concept of a rigorous unconscious. If psychology does not want to make recourse exclusively to physiological or behavioristic explanatory models, the unconscious is *the genuine psychological objectivity*.

Both of these arguments are rarely made explicit. Nevertheless, they are detectable throughout the whole history of depth-psychological literature, stretching from Freud's early writings (Freud 1953, 610ff.) to the works of contemporary theoreticians (Lo Dico 2018). The second argument, the argument of psychology's objectivity, will not be addressed any further in the remaining course of this paper. Addressing it leads to much broader philosophical issues, namely questions regarding the nature of objectivity and the characteristics of science. I, however, maintain the view that the first-person-per-

spective is a necessary element of all scientific and epistemic endeavors and consequently a) should be integrated rather than racketed from our understanding of objectivity, and b) must be methodically analyzed.

In the sections below, I will address the view perpetuated by the first of the above arguments: the so-called *incompatibility-thesis*, which holds that the concept of the unconscious and FPPM are simply incompatible. While the apparent methodic departure from FPPM that is caused by the concept of a systematically independent unconscious is unproblematic for moderate or radical naturalism, it seemingly poses a problem to first-person-foundationalism. As mentioned above, if the unconscious is systematically independent *and* exclusively accessible by means of TPPM, then first-person-foundationalism is wrong.

2.2 First-Person-Perspective Methods and the Gradual Interpretation of the DPI

Opposing to the incompatibility-thesis, theoreticians and psychologists, who champion the view that the first-person-perspective is fundamental to psychological conceptualization, reject the ontological interpretation of the DPI. It is often argued that the assumption of a systematically independent unconscious displays an unwarranted extrapolation of concepts that were originally drawn from consciousness. In other words: it is put into question if there is any reason or justification to expand the meaning of concepts and terms originally related to consciousness, such as perception, thought or emotion, to a psychic system that is exactly defined by its rigorous demarcation from the latter. Accordingly, advocates of this critique either dismiss the idea of the unconscious in general, or attempt to rethink it within the sphere of preconscious latency.

The first approach ignores the DPI, denies its theoretical relevance, or attempts to explain it in a non-psychological way. The notion of the *unconscious* is then treated as a mere metaphor for non-psychological entities such as neurobiological structures and dispositions (Searle 1992, 151ff.) or is dismissed from psychology in general (Brentano 1973, 79ff.). The second approach recognizes the DPI and predominantly focuses on investigating the latent layers of the constitution of experience. Depending on their particular theoretical background, theoreticians either formulate representational or non-representational theories of the unconscious. The former approach relates the unconscious to the *phantasmatic or imaginary layers of experience* (Brudzinska 2019 and 2006, Bernet 2003 and 1996), the latter approach to concepts such as *body-memory* (Fuchs 2012), the *drive- or instinct-related layers* of experience (Moran 2017), or *implicit content on a person's past-horizon* (Kozyreva 2018 and 2017).

Although these analyses are highly relevant with regards to understanding the latent, passive, and implicit stratum of experience in general, it is often critically remarked that they do not address the unconscious in the sense of psychodynamics, but rather that sphere of latency that is labeled as *the preconscious* by depth-psychologists. The unconscious thereby loses its systematic independence and is reduced to something that is merely gradually different from other latent motifs. Of course, understanding the general latency of experience is an important cornerstone of grasping the nature of the unconscious. Everyday life provides multiple examples of how latent motifs undoubtedly influence our thinking, feeling, or behavior and thereby often foster unintended, unpleasant, apparently incomprehensible, or even unwanted consequences. In the TV series *The Middle*, Sue and Sean grew up as neighbors. Although they always had a special relationship, they only slowly noticed their mutual affection. Sean repeatedly shows up at Sue's doorstep unannounced to ask her out but in doing so keeps insisting on the amicable nature of his invitations. Over the course of time, Sean's actions appear as increasingly irritating and annoying to Sue – a result he neither intended nor wanted. However, depth-psychologists would be reluctant to call Sean's latent motif an unconscious one. At a later stage of the show, Sean begins to reflect on his actions, recognizes his real feelings, and is then able to act in a more comprehensible and coherent way. Achieving this insight is easily achieved and is by no means accompanied by aversive emotions. The intensity with which the latent motif is concealed from Sean's self-experience is of a totally different quality than in the case of the client from the example above. Sean's case does not consist of the phenomenon of radical inaccessibility that is constitutive for the DPI that the concept of the unconscious is based on.

How is it possible, though, for an FPPM-approach to grasp the difference of preconscious and unconscious latency? It obviously is an option to resort to the TPPM-based psychological concept of defense mechanism to account for the latter's systematic independence. However, deploying this strategy provokes the question of whether we are justified in calling its results an FPPM-analysis of *the unconscious*? It rather appears to be an analysis of preconscious latency in which the phenomena triggering the DPI are subordinated to the former as mere contingent variations that do not require any independent descriptive assessment. In the attempt to defuse this criticism and to dodge the incompatibility-thesis and its unpleasant consequences for first-person-foundationalism, the following claim can be made: from the perspective of descriptively operating FPPM, there is no justification for the rigorous demarcation of preconscious and unconscious motifs.

This attempt, however, remains ignorant to the justificatory force of the DPI and to the oddity of experiencing highly relevant motifs that, metaphorically speaking, force themselves upon someone's life while simultaneously being absolutely concealed from

this person's self-experience. Considering these phenomena, it appears to be the other way around: in particular, from the perspective of a descriptive approach, it seems incomprehensible to deny these recurring and distinct experiences the significance they deserve. It eventually is the aim and purpose of FPPM to describe *experience as it is experienced*.

If FPPM aim at providing an adequate descriptive analysis of the unconscious, they not only have to account for how latency in general is involved in the constitution of experience, they also have to address the specific issues related to the DPI. Dealing with the DPI by means of FPPM appears to be particularly puzzling, since at the heart of the DPI is the phenomenon of radical inaccessibility. The latter, however, is the enthymematic foundation of the argument of methodological incompatibility. Instead of re-assessing the vast and enlightening works others already did on the latent sphere of experience (see the listed authors above), the remaining course of the paper will address the possibility of accounting for radically inaccessible motifs within the framework of FPPM. The aim of this exercise is to show that the incompatibility-thesis is a *proton pseudos* in thinking about the unconscious that is (either implicitly or explicitly) far too easily accepted even amongst those theoreticians who are fond of FPPM. I will demonstrate this possibility by showing that the unconscious is accessible to FPPM and thus further analyzable by means of the according method. Doing so presupposes that the umbrella-term *first-person-perspective-methods* comprises various independent methodological frameworks (Varela and Shear 1999). The first step of my demonstration will consist in explaining the differences of *introspection* and *phenomenology*, which are arguably the most common first-person-perspective-paradigms in the western hemisphere. In step two, I will argue that unconscious motifs are accessible to phenomenology but not to introspection.

3   Rebutting the Argument of Methodological Incompatibility I: Introspection and Phenomenology

Even in the informed circles of professional philosophy and theoretical psychology, the terms *introspection* and *phenomenology* are often used interchangeably. This is not only wrong but also surprising, given the vast paradigmatic differences of the correlating methods (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012). Due to these differences, the argument of methodological incompatibility does not concern phenomenology in the same way it concerns introspection.

As with the terms *first-person-perspective method*, *introspection,* and *phenomenology,* these are comprised of various independent approaches, which differ with regards to specific methodological aspects. Nevertheless, some key features can be found for both

that are constitutive for the respective paradigm. This section focuses solely on these key features.

Introspection, i. e., self-observation, may be one of the oldest gadgets in the philosophical toolbox. Whereas it was used implicitly throughout the history of philosophy, its methodological elaboration and refinement started with the works of Franz Brentano and Wilhelm Wundt, who attempted to establish introspection as a method in psychological research. Regardless of the specific variation, the following features are essential to the introspective paradigm (Schwitzgebel 2019):

First, introspection aims at generating knowledge of psychic events, states, or processes. Psychic states are thereby understood as isolated »intracranial« phenomena. The scope of introspection, i. e., the *sphere of psychic immanence*, includes the introspecting person's intentional directedness toward certain objects or intrapsychic representations of the latter, but not the objects themselves. Accordingly, introspection analyzes my *seeing* of the sheet of paper in front of me or the respective sheet's intrapsychic representation. The actual sheet, however, is beyond its reach. *Second*, introspection exclusively engages with the introspecting person's own consciousness. Phenomena such as *collective intentionality* or *mutual experience are consequently understood as fully reducible* to singular ecological experiences. *Third*, introspection exclusively addresses *psychic states that are currently ongoing or took place in the recent past*. This restriction serves the purpose of securing the description's validity.

The philosophical movement of *phenomenology* was founded at the beginning of the 20th century. Early phenomenologists, such as Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein soon started to contribute to the philosophical debate of their time and to the then young field of psychology. Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology, first coined the term *phenomenological psychology* and repeatedly expressed his irritation on why any informed person might assume phenomenology and introspection to be the same methodological paradigm (Husserl 1982, p. 38). What are their differences?

Phenomenology's most fundamental element is the combination of the *epoché* and the *phenomenological reduction*. The epoché is the attempt to suspend all theoretical, commonplace, and scientific knowledge and assumptions regarding the aim of the phenomenological inquiry (Husserl 1982, 60ff.). It is important to highlight that the epoché does not involve a skeptical attitude towards formerly acquired knowledge, and consequently differs from the methodological skepticism and doubt practiced in the Cartesian tradition. The epoché is an attitude of neutrality, seeking to bracket prior knowledge instead of calling it into question. The phenomenological reduction reduces experience according to the evident givenness of its contents and structures, unveiling its noetic and noematic aspects to the phenomenological analysis. Whereas the noetic aspect circumscribes experience under the emphasis of *experiencing* an object, the noematic aspect concerns the *object* as it is experienced. It is thus the case that phenom-

enology, contrasting with introspection, is not restricted to the sphere of the psychic immanence. The *phenomenological concept of immanence* includes the object of experience, for example, the sheet of paper from the example above, insofar as it is evidently given. Accordingly, the *validity of a phenomenological description* is not warranted by temporal proximity but by the *evidence* or *streak of evidence* with which the phenomenon in question or a series of phenomena presents itself. On the basis of these features, phenomenology's understanding of mutual and collective experience differs from the respective understanding of the introspective paradigm. The phenomenological paradigm endorses a robust notion of collective and mutual experience. The latter are thus not only analyzable as mere sums of ecological experiences, but as real shared experiences, including shared attitudes, objects, and even contents. This means that in addition to an FPPM-singular-mode (»I experience ...«), phenomenology also comprises an FPPM-plural-mode (»We experience ...«).

As a consequence of these vast differences, introspection and phenomenology maintain different notions of *methodological accessibility*: According to the introspective paradigm a phenomenon is methodologically accessible if it is given as my own, present or recently experienced psychic state. The phenomenological paradigm, however, maintains that a phenomenon's methodological accessibility exclusively depends on the evident character of its givenness.

Introspection's narrow conception of accessibility yields that it cannot fruitfully contribute to the task of determining the nature of the unconscious: the introspective paradigm simply has no experiential foundation on the basis of which it could engage with the unconscious. Not even those motifs that were able to reach consciousness in a cloaked or symbolic form (in form of symptoms, unintended behavior, the latent meaning of dreams or fantasies, etc.), i. e., *descendants of the unconscious*, provide a sustainable starting point for introspection. There is no timely or content-related connection resilient enough to warrant an introspective description of its unconscious origin. In a nutshell: due to introspection's paradigmatic restrictions and the resulting narrow conception of accessibility, the idea of an introspective description of the unconscious is a *contradictio in adjecto*.

Phenomenology on the other hand maintains a broad and complex notion of methodological accessibility: evident givenness occurs in various grades (spanning from the evidence of everyday experience to the evident character of necessary truths), and occurs even with regards to the different elements of even the most complex forms of shared experience.

Accordingly, the conditions of a descriptive assessment of the unconscious are different for phenomenology than they are for introspection: if an experience can be pointed out in which an unconscious motif is given evidently, phenomenology can resort to the latter as a starting point for engaging with the problem of the unconscious.

I argue that such evident experiences occur in situations that will further be referred to as *mutual realization*.

4 Rebutting the Argument of Methodological Incompatibility II: Mutual Realization as a Starting Point for a Phenomenology of the Unconscious

In the context of this article, the notion *realization* is used as a technical term. It designates situations in which a formerly latent motif is insightfully explicated, i.e., transferred into actual consciousness. *Insightful* in these regards means that a particular person is evidently experienced and acknowledged as the source of the motif arising into consciousness. Such ascriptions can occur with regards to one's own mind as well as with regards to intersubjective contexts, and thus, the minds of others.

Realizations regarding one's own mind are relatively common and occur regularly: imagine you read an exciting but complicated book addressing your favorite philosophical problem. You are completely immersed in a complex paragraph, trying to understand an argument presented in it. Absent-mindedly you walk into the kitchen, still thinking about what you just read. As you finally reach the kitchen, you promptly stop and wonder why you even went there. Suddenly you realize that you are thirsty and that you came to the kitchen for a glass of water. Although the wish for a drink motivated you latently, it successfully directed you towards a place at which your needs can be met. Now that you realized your motif of not being thirsty anymore, your thirst, urge, and wish for water has fully arrived in your actual consciousness. Simultaneously, this motif is experienced as yours and not somebody else's.

Prima facie, the concept of realizing another person's motifs might appear as irritating or ought. Nevertheless, realizations as such are not even rare but normally occur unnoticed: imagine you are a professional violin player who is part of a large orchestra. Your orchestra's literature is complicated and demands a great deal of focus. At the rehearsal, the conductor spontaneously decides to increase the emotional intensity of an intricate passage. She induces this modification by means of her body-language and the movement of her baton. While you are totally focused on playing your part correctly, you simply »go with the flow« and automatically adapt to the conductor's modifications. After the rehearsal, you realize that the idea of increasing the emotional intensity of this particular passage latently influenced your performance. Although it is you who realizes this motif, it is the conductor, who is experienced as the motifs' source.

Both examples given above issue the realization of motifs that, according to depth-psychology, are preconscious. Realizations of unconscious motifs are an essential element of depth-psychology and fundamental to important techniques such as the

analysis of transference and countertransference. However, these realizations are of a more complicated nature than the realization of preconscious motifs, for most of the time, unconscious motifs are not given with immediate evidence but only in the form of *inference-based assumptions*.

This applies to the therapist as well as to the client, who normally is the source of the unconscious motif in the therapeutic setting. The source of the unconscious motif will further be labeled as *the person concerned*. Regardless of how much material the inference of an unconscious motif is based on, it never exceeds the epistemic status of a bear, which presence I assume after I saw bear tracks near a destroyed apiary. Of course, albeit the destroyed beehive and the presumed bear tracks can have other explanations than an actual bear roaming the nearby surroundings (e. g., vandalism, a prank, etc.), their occurrence might suffice to guide rational behavior (e. g., checking the surroundings, preparing a bear spray, etc.) and even can teach us something about bears (e. g.: Sometimes bears seemingly inspect destroyed apiaries or destroy the latter themselves.). However, regardless of how many signs of the bear's presence one obtains, from an epistemic perspective, they cannot outweigh the justificatory power of an immediate encounter with the animal. What is the phenomenologist's bear-observation with regards to the unconscious? I argue that unconscious motifs are immediately and evidently given in *mutual realizations*. In such situations, an unconscious motif is expressed in the therapeutic relationship, acknowledged, and insightfully ascribed to the client by both the therapist and the person concerned. The continuation of the case-study that was already mentioned above illustrates a mutual realization:

> »Over time, the therapist forms the hypothesis that the male client's unintended sabotaging of his love-life results from an unconscious fear of intimacy and the unconscious wish to avoid the loss of autonomy the client apparently associates with it. Although the therapist repeatedly offers this interpretation to the client, the latter strongly refuses it, emphasizing that he does not fear but seek intimacy. In another session, based on the content of a guided imagery, the therapist again offers his interpretation to the client. Thereupon the client gets angry: ›I am fed up! I told you many times now that I am not avoiding intimacy. I want intimacy! I am starting to gain the impression that it is you who wants me to think that I am avoiding intimacy because you can't stand that you are misunderstanding the situation. I know perfectly well what I want, and I don't need you to question that all the time.‹ The therapist responds: ›I am merely offering you my understanding of the situation. I am not trying to dictate any thoughts to you.‹ The client, still angered, replies: ›Last week I spoke to another psychologist. She does not doubt my wish for intimacy. Maybe she already understands me better than you, although I have only seen her once.‹ The therapist is irritated because he did not know that his client is seeing another therapist. He needs a few moments to gather his thoughts. After a short period of silence, the client asks: ›Don't

you want to say something?‹ The therapist replies: ›It appears that, for a few moments, you succeeded in alienating us emotionally. As I understand it, you were seeing another therapist because you are afraid that my interpretations might restrict your autonomy to decide over your own thoughts and desires.‹ The client loses his anger and stares at the therapist in apparent surprise. He smiles and says: ›Oh, I am really doing that …‹«

In the described situation, the client's previously unconscious motif to protect his autonomy by sabotaging intimacy becomes tangible for the client as well as for the therapist. Due to the reflective, allowing, and nonjudgmental therapeutic attitude, the therapist is capable to recognize and refuse the relationship pattern the client's unconscious motif normally induces (»It appears that, for a few moments, you succeeded in alienating us emotionally.«). On the one hand, by means of the therapist's confrontation, the client can experience his unconscious motif at work and further link it with certain events, such as the repeatedly occurring break-ups he is suffering from. The therapist on the other hand, also experiences the unconscious motif as immediately given. This evident givenness is based on the combination of a) experiencing the unconscious motifs' effects on the therapeutic relationship, and b) the client's insightful realization that it is *his* unconscious motif that induces these effects (»Oh, I am really doing that …«).

The evident givenness of unconscious motifs in mutual realizations is a *reciprocal process*. On the one hand, *the Other*, i. e., the therapist in the sequence above, has an assumption with regards to the unconscious motifs of the person concerned. The Other's assumption is the result of their hermeneutical analysis of information they got of the latter's life, wishes, fantasies, dreams, etc. They experience the person concerned as credible in their rejection of the assumed latent motif, although any attempt to provide alternative explanations appears as incoherent, inauthentic, or fails completely. The Other thus experiences the person concerned as *credible in their self-alienation*, and themselves as in the possession of a *hypothetical solution* to this alienation in the form of their hermeneutical interpretation. On the other hand, the person concerned experiences important elements of their life as enigmatic, woebegone, or uncontrollable. They seek to overcome this worrying state but struggle to find a satisfying solution to their problems. The Other is experienced as a *credible interpreter*, who sincerely attempts to understand the person concerned. However, their interpretation causes irritation, anger, anxiety, or disconcertment. The person concerned cannot realize the suggested motif and experiences themselves as incapable of providing a satisfying alternative. The tension between the unrealizable (and often unwanted) interpretation and the lack of authentic and satisfying alternatives is guided by an irritating sense of alienation that is either directed towards oneself or towards the Other. This often results in a deadlock that does not provide any further insights.

In mutual realizations, however, the Other's interpretation explains a specific situation within the therapeutic setting. The Other recognizes that they were latently

influenced by the unconscious motif of the person concerned and confronts the latter with the situation. Although the respective interpretation still might cause aversive feelings in the person concerned, the role of the Other and thus the way they are experienced by the person concerned, drastically changes: the Other is no longer a mere interpreting spectator. They are practically involved with the interpreted situation and thus have the chance to act as an *authentic vis-á-vis* that reports their own part-taking, thoughts, and feelings in the respective situation, instead of giving a hypothetical interpretation from the outside. Moreover, the Other has the crucial function of *assisting* the person concerned in overcoming their aversive affections or emotions related to the repressed motif. Without this assistance, the threatening character of the latter might block the unconscious motif from reaching consciousness. It is only by means of this combination of *practically involved authenticity* and the Other's *capability to contain* aversive emotions, that the person concerned is capable of realizing their unconscious motif. Vice versa, the Other experiences the unconscious motif as evidently given by the insightful realization of the person concerned. In this evident givenness, the realized motif that latently influenced the situation appears as stemming from the person concerned.

The mutually realized motifs appear as the unconscious motifs themselves and not as symbolic representations resp. descendants of the latter. Although they are already realized and thus conscious, they are given with two clear horizons that point back into their prior unconscious form: the *systematic horizon* contextualizes the realized motif as emergent from the sphere of the unconscious, i.e., it points back towards the motif's prior status as an effective but radically concealed motif. The *personal horizon* of the mutually realized motif stretches back into the biography of the person concerned and associates the motif with various significant life events of the latter. The mutually realized motif is then no longer given as a singular phenomenon but as a reappearing theme in the life of the person concerned.

By means of these two horizons, the mutually realized motif is given as an unconscious motif in the psychodynamic, resp., depth-psychological sense: it is a highly relevant, recurring motif that nevertheless was radically concealed from the self-experience of the person concerned.

5   The Systematic Difference of Preconscious and Unconscious Motifs: The Phenomenological Reinterpretation of the Depth-Psychological Systematic

To link intersubjectivity to the intricacies of self-knowledge and the unconscious is by no means a completely new idea. Famously addressed in Sartre's *Being and Noth-*

ingness (2021), this connection was repeatedly put forward not only in qualitative psychological research (Wertz 1986) but also in psychoanalysis' *intersubjective turn* and in important meta-psychoanalytical positions such as *phenomenological contextualism* (Stolorow and Atwood 2019). Interestingly enough, it was never used to account for the systematic independence of the unconscious via first-person-perspective methods. It is this section that aims to demonstrate this possibility.

Ontological accounts provide sharp systematic distinctions by means of sub-personal theories and criteria. The classical Freudian account differentiates three psychic systems, namely consciousness, the preconscious and the unconscious, based on introspective, economical, and dynamic properties (Freud 1915). The notion of economics hereby issues the organization of the bio-psychic energy, i.e., libido, upon which a certain psychic content is grounded. The category of dynamics addresses how certain motifs behave in relation or comparison to other psychic contents. Under these aspects, the Freudian definition of the unconscious is the following: the psychological system *the unconscious* consists of contents that a) are latent (introspective criterion), b) are exclusively grounded upon the *primary process* (economical criterion), c) are *unaffected by the principles of timely succession and contradiction* and behave towards other motifs and contents by means of *condensation* and *displacement* (dynamic criterion). *The preconscious* consists of contents that a) are *latent* (introspective criterion), b) are grounded in the *primary and secondary process* (economical criterion), and c) are *affected by the principles of timely succession and contradiction* and behave to other contents in a more *stable* manner (dynamic criterion). In more recent years, the classical Freudian approach was challenged by contemporary neuro-psychoanalysis, in which certain areas of the human brain or specific brain states are associated with the constitution of unconscious content (Solms 2017 and 2018). Both approaches share the same basic strategy: the sphere of introspective latency is further differentiated by means of TPPM related criteria in order to account for the systematic independence of the unconscious.

As mentioned earlier, it is not the aim of this paper to discuss the ontological interpretation of DPI in detail or to criticize this approach in general. It aims to demonstrate that phenomenology can account for the systematic independence, and moreover, that first-person-foundationalism is compatible with the depth-psychological unconscious. The key to succeed in this endeavor is the phenomenological analysis of mutual realizations in psychotherapeutic settings. An eidetic analysis of the latter showed that the evident givenness of unconscious motifs relies on the reciprocal setting of mutual realizations. This reciprocal co-dependence provides a clear criterion to differentiate the unconscious from the preconscious. Motifs belonging to the preconscious are realizable by the redirection of attention, the increase of self-awareness or, roughly speaking, by taking a braver attitude towards aversive affections that might come to light during this process. Although the process of realizing preconscious motifs can be initiated by the

feedback of others, the realization itself is not reliant on the intersubjective context as mutual realizations are. They can be achieved without the presence, practically involved authenticity, and assistance of the Other and will further be referred to as *solitary realizations*.

Based on the elaborations above, I suggest the following reformulation of the psychodynamic systematics: The psychic system *consciousness* consists of those experiences and experiential elements that are evidently given in immediate self-experience. This narrow notion of consciousness is part of the much broader phenomenological concept of consciousness that also comprises the sphere of general latency. *Latency* consists of all experiences and experiential elements that are not evidently given in immediate self-experience but have a meaningful relation to the sphere of actuality. The sphere of latency further differentiates into the systems *the preconscious* and *the unconscious*. The preconscious consists of all motifs that are transferable into the sphere of actuality by means of *solitary realization*. The unconscious, however, consists of all motifs that are transferable into the sphere of actuality exclusively by means of *mutual realization*.

These criteria provide a way to account for all three depth-psychological systems without being reliant on sub-personal theories. I successfully showed that first-person-foundationalism is compatible with the concept of the depth-psychological unconscious. I argued that phenomenology can engage with the unconscious without falling victim to the criticism of being restricted to the preconscious. My argumentation implies that any complete phenomenology of the unconscious comprises both, an analysis of general latency and of the unconscious motifs' peculiarities concerning self-experience and realization. According to my assessment the crucial phenomenon in the latter regard is the intersubjective character and reciprocal epistemic dependency given in mutual realizations. However, at this point some remarks are necessary to avoid misunderstandings, that could follow from my elaborations:

1) Stating that the realization of unconscious motifs relies on the presence of the Other does not imply that the unconscious motifs' effectiveness is also restricted to the intersubjective context. Even if sociality proved to be a crucial factor for the constitution of the unconscious, i. e., crucial for triggering defense mechanisms, the influence an unconscious motif has on the life of the person concerned does not depend on the actual presence of others. Experiential elements such as an imaginary Other or a horizon of sociality might suffice to uphold the unconscious specific character, i. e., the combination of being effective and important but also concealed from the person concerned.

2) Stating that the unconscious is distinguished from the preconscious by means of its intersubjective conditions of realization does not mean that the unconscious itself is a socially constructed entity. One could argue that this construction has the function of rendering random or incomprehensible life-events as meaningful, or that

it serves the purpose of establishing control over previously uncontrolled psychic life and social interactions. According to this view, the construction of the unconscious then had a similar regulative purpose to promises or laws. However, from a phenomenological perspective, there is a clear difference between regulative social constructions and the unconscious: entities such as laws or promises are installed by resolution or commitment. However, they can also be revoked by similar means. Regardless of how long a promise or a law has been in place, they are part of a social reality one could in principle reject to adjust to. The unconscious on the other hand cannot be revoked or opted against. It is part of the psychic reality of the person concerned and results from their specific life. An unconscious motif's influence emerges »from within« and is not reliant on commitment or external enforcement.

3) I do not claim that mutual realizations are a necessary condition for a successful therapeutic process. As mentioned above, the »correct« adaptation of behavior (caution, preparing a bear-spray, etc.) can be initiated by the combined occurrence of bear-tracks and a destroyed apiary and is not reliant on encountering the bear face to face. In a similar fashion, a therapeutic process can have salutary effects by more mediate means, such as mere cognitive insights into unconscious motifs or the regulating and salutary function of a sufficient therapeutic relationship.

4) Another important issue I did not engage within this paper is the question of why certain motifs are concealed in the unconscious. Any phenomenological assessment of this question must resort to the analysis of the mutual realization, if the latter is phenomenology's access point to a systematically independent unconscious. Only in doing so can one potentially account for the differences of aversion and reluctance regarding the realization of preconscious motifs and the nature of resistance that fosters the radical concealment of the unconscious.

Endnotes

2   Although the given case report is grounded in real situations of a psychotherapeutic process, it is displayed in a slightly modified manner. This modification serves two purposes: first, to protect the anonymity of the client involved. Second, to condense the factual process into a transportable and comprehensible narrative.

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