

Perhaps we are dreaming while we are awake. Are images flowing through the unconscious, plunging, trickling or melting into the landscape of our consciousness? Is it possible that we most often repress these images, but they reemerge in their influence on our attention, experience, motivations and behavior—what we say? Mental representations are present in the unconscious mind but not viewed by the conscious ego. Glimpses of their existence are seen in dreams, art, daydreams and, if we carefully observe ourselves, our moment-to-moment visual attention to the environment.

I think of what I have seen today. A stream of images—the sun beams on the car window, a bus going by, the elevator button, a face of a colleague—our drive energy cathected to the image. My own images and the many, many drawings and artworks I have viewed serve as snapshots in my referencing the unconscious in visual language. My own visual diaries are sparked by the feelings induced when listening.

Freud wrote about art, including that there was more to understand about it than he could explain (Freud, 1910). He wrote repeatedly that displacement of the drive into artistic activity can act to curb the strength of the drive. Attachment to one's own images, in its most successful form, results in sublimation where an intricate patterning of the drive within the individual both provides a significant discharge of the impulse and an ability to become more socialized (Freud, 1905).

In several passages, Freud acknowledged the sexual arousal in looking (Freud, 1905). He states, “Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused” (pp.156). Art clearly has a strong emotional effect on the observer (Freud, 1924). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920), he asserted that

art becomes a symbolization of a painful truth to the observer who is attracted to it. It is the repetition compulsion experienced before him.

The visual can speak for the drive, impulse, wish or fear. It gives form to the formless. For instance, consider the emotional responsiveness to the circle as a symbolization of the narcissistic transference or the oedipal longings depicted in a pyramid design, three-point perspective or the powerful use of the triptych display. Is it our unconscious that promotes our attraction to such formal elements of art? Directing the drive into the creation of art, talk and other creative acts provide alternatives to destructive action in response to impulses.

This might begin with looking. What is it that becomes visually attractive? The looking serves as cathected energy, which potentially becomes directed to the couch, the room, the therapist and the internal images. It is the preverbal expression which has yet to be put into words. The visual is intrinsically connected to our narcissistic beginnings. The infant spends so many months with motor expression and visual field providing the primary stimulus regarding the world. Eye movements, their patterns and visual attention can be studied as a form of cathected drive to the world.

In this way, all of us begin our lives as artists with the careful study of the world through the light, shapes and shadows of infancy. Studies on the amodal perception of infants (Stern, 1985) indicate that young infants begin to integrate the visual stimulus with universal affects. The visual patterns of the world are translated into the early emotional experiences of the infant. For instance, the cues for the infant's feelings are stored in relation to environment, strongly influenced by the drive tension states and to live by attuning to the mother's facial gestures. The infant carefully attends to such

aspects of the mother as the shape of the mouth or eyes. It is during this period that the infant may begin developing her personal internal representations or objects of the mind--the first forms developed to shape her impulses and pre-feelings. The visual cues are formed representationally prior to words.

Spotnitz (1999), while studying the early narcissistic period of development, found that traditional methods of psychoanalysis employing insight via words and interpretation “failed to kindle the memory-images that interfere with the functioning of the schizophrenic patient because the interchanges between the primitive self and the earliest objects in which the narcissistic defense was patterned consisted primarily of impulses and prefeelings. He has to be helped to re-experience these interchanges symbolically” (pp. 166-167).

Attention to the visual while saying everything in words can integrate the past and present, the internal and external, allowing the primitive experience to be meaningful to the maturing ego. The visual can serve as a bridge connecting the primitive state to present conditions.

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