

Excerpt from *Psychanalyse et neurobiologie*, Bernard Brusset, Paris, In Press, 2022: “Neurocognitive unconscious and psychoanalytical unconscious”

Opinion

Volume 3 Issue 3- 2022

Author Details

Brusset B*

Presses Universitaires de France, France

*Corresponding author

Bernard Brusset, Presses Universitaires de France, France

Article History

Received: October 31, 2022 Accepted: October 31, 2022 Published: November 03, 2022

Opinion

Lionel Naccache defended the idea that Freud thought he had discovered an instinctual unconscious while he was discovering the cognitive unconscious, the knowledge of which is now accessible to neuroscientists: The new unconscious (Freud Christophe Colomb des neurosciences, 2006). Hence questions about similarities and differences.

The question is to know if the theory of a neurocognitive unconscious, not only syntactic but also semantic, sensitive to culture, allows the overcoming of previous quarrels and controversies (for example between cognitive psychology and neuroscience) and if it opens the possibility of a fruitful confrontation with psychoanalysis. Thus, after the scientific reductionism of “neural man” as man-machine, it is a question of psyche, of thought, of desire and of belief, and even of the function of beliefs (belief for the subject, fiction for the observer). It is therefore the action of consciousness on the various unconscious and first that which results from learning, conditioning. Consciousness, defined by “reportability”, i.e., what can be told, includes the “global workspace” (Baars: global workspace, 1988). According to Naccache, the cognitive unconscious is determined by the activation of a defined cerebral localization: a fronto - cingulo - parietal network. It comes into play when becoming aware of multiple non-specific cognitive processes (priming by conscious or unconscious subliminal perception (blindsight). Electrophysiological objectification is different depending on whether, apart from any affective involvement, the perception is conscious or It is a neo-phrenology, scientifically objectified but relativized.

Breaking with the dominant idea that consciousness is without cerebral localization, “the conscious central space” would therefore be located in the brain, but with variable geometry in the “cerebral neighborhood”. The “peripheral processors” (interpretation and production organs) can be recruited, used or not. Hence the idea of the relativity of the relationships between cerebral localizations and cognitive activity, between phenomenology (in the Anglo-Saxon sense) and physiolo-

gy. The influence of consciousness is defined by attention (“top-down attentional amplification”) as a learning-producing overinvestment. With the “neurocognitive” unconscious, the physiology/phenomenology debate is supposed to be resolved, but the question remains to know what is determining: is cerebral activation underlying (a “substrate”) or determining? Dualism, parallelism, simple correlation? The operations of consciousness mobilize the cerebral network or it is the reverse, that is to say that it would then be a question of a neurophysiological (neurochemical) work of the network and its connections.

This cognitive unconscious does not call into question the consciousness with which it is in a relationship of contiguity, association, accompaniment, without stakes, without consequences on it in the normal state. It is multiple, partial, localized according to skills and performance. Also, its functional unity is questionable. Some see in it “the regrouping of the various unconscious mechanisms which are at work in conscious psychological operations” (B and B. Lechevalier (2007)). The definition of representations by cerebral activation has the disadvantage of ignoring the distinction different levels of consciousness depending on the nature of the mental operations, their level (meta-representative and reflexive for example), their relationship to memory, to anticipation, that is to say to the activity of thinking.

The confrontation with psychoanalysis immediately comes up against differences in conception of the nature of representations, not unrelated to differences in method. The trump card of neuroscience is “the cold and systematic use of objective analysis in the third person” (Naccache, 2020, p.363). It is:

- experimentation: experimental psychology, effect of brain damage, in the laboratory in animals and, in the event of damage, in humans (as natural experimentation)
- imaging, of which we know the great progress

The unconscious is defined by the criterion of non - reportability, that is to say by functionings outside the limits of consciousness, but in



the rarefied atmosphere of the laboratory. The experimental protocol implies, as always in the sciences, the exclusion of the subject from his own psychic life.

The psychoanalytical method, like the clinical method, is diametrically opposed: it is centered by everything that is excluded a priori by the experimental method: no a priori restriction of the field of investigation, no experimentation, repetition, control variables, but a framework, a method taking into account the involvement of the observer in the observation, a practice which supposes the request for help, the subject, the word, the desire, the values, the suffering, the enjoyment and its obstacles. So, a clinic of totality, of conflict, of history, in an open theorization. Moreover, the knowledge of the individual unconscious of the patient, as "unconscious of the id", beyond the representations of the repressed unconscious, requires the constitution of an intersubjective third object which is the condition of access.

It is not without interest to try to clarify the debate by going over the differences point by point:

Language and thought as a Fabric of Fictions

Founded on bad faith, beliefs would have the following functions: exoneration from guilt, authorization, narcissistic gratification, reassurance, etc. The cognitive unconscious does not call conscience into question. There is no active internal alterity. It is represented or not, connected or not, amplified or not by downward attention. Conversely, psychoanalytic interpretation deconstructs the defensive fabric of fictions, of rationalizations, for more self-truth in the appropriation of unconscious determinisms.

Freud insists on the fundamental role of language in the awareness of internal otherness. We can say, like Anna O., psychoanalysis "talking cure". The method is based on the fundamental rule: say everything and hear yourself say to someone who is not an interlocutor but an implicit addressee. The first topic opposes the primary processes governed by the pleasure principle and finalized by the hallucinatory realization of desire (as in dreams) and the secondary processes governed by the reality principle (Freud, 1911). The preconscious comprises the representations of words and the representations of things, the unconscious only the latter. But it happens that the representations of things are disinvested in the unconscious and that the representations of words take their place and are then governed by the primary processes: the word stands for the thing.

The primary processes of displacement and condensation tend to produce the hallucinatory realization of the act: desire as realized. Under certain conditions, would dopamine have the same effect? The notion of representation in psychoanalysis includes this potential for the realization of desire. This can be compared to a major discovery of medical imaging: the actual execution of a gesture, the representation and the thought of this gesture, activate, with less functional intensity, the same regions of the brain. According to Freud, as early as 1897, there would be no "signs of reality" in the unconscious as if thought and action were equivalent.

Repression or Unconscious Instances of Control?"

The unconscious as a pre-Freudian notion, in particular "the cerebral unconscious", in the historical survey made by M. Gauchet, would be better accepted by neurobiologists than the psychoanalytic unconscious, because it does not include the notion of repression, for them unacceptable. However, one of the most recent achievements of the cognitive sciences is the process of cognitive control capable of consciously influencing the course of unconscious mental representations. Contemporary neuroscience manages to study conscious defense mechanisms. The conscious and voluntary rejection of arbitrarily associated words on a list to remember leads to their forgetting. The re-

jection process is underpinned by the activation of regions of the prefrontal cortex objectified by brain imaging. If rejection is considered unconscious, it is "in radical opposition to the cognitive neurosciences of mental control." This example clearly shows that the difference in method here entails a difference in the object of knowledge. It should be added that in psychoanalysis the conscious repression mechanism is opposed to unconscious repression and conscious means of defense to unconscious defense mechanisms which are multiple: in addition to repression, isolation, projection, splitting, denial, disavowal, foreclosure (or primary rejection The splitting of the ego was first described by Freud in 1927 to explain fetishism (Verleugnung): the ruse of reason in relation to reality ("I know well but all the same...").

Neurosciences are perhaps closer to psychoanalysis when they describe a process of inhibition between the cognitive and the affective ("the complex emotional component") whose neuronal base is the limbic system, cingulate system, entorhinal and perirhinal areas, hippocampus, amygdala, hypothalamus and also neocortex (cf. P. Buser, 2005 and 2007).

The Unconscious out of Time?

On this level, the divergences are major given the importance in psychoanalysis of temporalities, those of the "internal history", of the dream, of the transference, of the after-the-fact phenomena. According to Freud, unconscious representations are timeless like the desires and intentions they determine. On this level, the cognitive unconscious in the laboratory, linked to the activity of consciousness and incapable of strategic thought, has, in fact, no relationship with the Freudian drive unconscious capable of psychic determinism, nor with the memories of repressed childhood which can be recalled in the treatment, and which so often finds expression in dreams. Unconscious representations are instinctually invested and sources of investment: they exert an internal constraint and give rise to the psychic work of creation, mourning, elaboration of traumas, sublimation, artistic creation, etc.

Even further from what can be objectified by experimental methods, there is the unconscious of the second topic, the unconscious of the "id", made up of drive motions outside representation, finalized by impulsive action. Freud compares the id to "a chaos, a cauldron full of bubbling excitations. Contemporary psychoanalysis insists on the heterogeneity of representations (of words, things, affects and objects), levels, regimes of thought and speech. But many researchers in neuroscience and cognitive psychology have also distinguished different levels in the activity of consciousness (immediate consciousness and higher level consciousness), and it is necessary to take into account the cultural subconscious, particularly in the genesis of the superego.

Taking up the Freudian metaphor of the horse and the rider (the "it" and the Ego), Roland Jouvent (2009) showed the role of the neocortex in the learning of automatisms useful to the rider in controlling the horse (animality, primitive brain): protective effects in relationships with immediate reality for pleasure. The "(cognitive) unconscious of the structure of the brain", liable to be modified by learning and trauma, would be closer to the devices of unconscious self-preservation (including "attachment") which is, in principle, out of the sexual, out of the subject of consciousness, out of the instinctual, and on the side of the instinctual. It allows automatic correction of errors and inadequacies in elementary perceptions and cognitions. It protects from the impact of reality immediate and allows the interpretation of conscious experience in the sense of pleasure and security.

Desires and Beliefs

They are excluded a priori by the experimental method, as are also subjectivity, the subject and, a fortiori, intersubjectivity. Of particular interest are therefore research inspired by new perspectives on "social cognitions" from the "theory of mind". Its absence in autistic children has been objectified experimentally, thus matching certain



clinical evidence known for a very long time. Contemporary psychoanalysis gives great importance to early mother-child interrelations and, in treatment, to the relationship between transference and counter-transference, hence new developments in Freudian metapsychology. Interhuman communication, empathy, intersubjective phenomena in the transference relationship, generate a lot of work. As a result, psychoanalysts are more interested in research on the "interaction of the brains", functional cerebral imaging in intersubjective communication, even during interpretation, in the dream narrative (Fischer), mirror functions (Rizolatti), the mimetic relationship (René Girard), transitivity in children, imitation, empathy.

In cognitive science, the participation of the cognitive unconscious in perceptual activity is now extended to imaginary activity, that of desires and beliefs, of the "inner cinema", what an outside witness describes as interpretations, fiction. But the term fiction here takes on a global meaning, while the clinic invites us to distinguish perceptual illusion, imaginary activity such as that of play in children, psychic thought, daytime dream thoughts, myths, the family romance, infantile sexual theories, screen-memories, delirium with varying degrees of conviction, paranoid interpretative thought, religious beliefs, theoretical fictions as models, as constructions of explanatory or interpretative models, etc. Nevertheless "the fictional thus described on the basis of the effects of consciousness on the cognitive unconscious, once the latter takes into account desires and beliefs, come close to the preconscious psychic activity of the first Freudian topic, i.e., still at the mythological level. - symbolic of the unconscious. Fictions are controlled by the relationship to external reality, just as the primary processes of the unconscious governed by the pleasure principle are controlled by the secondary processes governed by the reality principle.

In short, neuroscientific research by the experimental method in the laboratory and by observing the rationalizations and beliefs of brain-injured patients, leads to a conception of conscious and non-conscious psychic activity. The extrapolation and generalization of the data from this restricted base explain the ultimately rather negative positions taken vis-à-vis psychoanalysis, the specificity of which is denied. But also disappear, the anguish, the dream, the sexuality, the love and the hatred, the human passions. Like other theories, they tend to establish the subject of consciousness as master of his psychic activity. The unconscious is reduced to the non-conscious of the vagaries of rationality, to the implicit, to the subliminal, only consciousness is capable of thought and strategy with a view to action. The absence of taking into account the psychoanalytic method (and the effects of the treatment) insofar as it gives access to what is almost inaccessible otherwise, gives all its relief to the fact that psychoanalysis is first of all the theory of a practice in which the analysis of dreams and transferences has a major role. It introduces intelligibility into complex phenomena of practice, but its applications to other fields can only be subject to controversy.

Ultimately, the differences between the neurocognitive unconscious and the psychoanalytical unconscious are very clear on three levels: representation, repression and infantile sexuality. According to Naccache (p. 262): "An unconscious mental representation is necessarily evanescent... incapable of giving rise to intentional or voluntary behavior. Neither repression as a function of unconscious misrecognition nor infantile sexuality exist. Infantile (biological) amnesia would give free rein to the fictional: what we would call a projection screen. The infantile sexual would be destined to justify the interpretative fictions of psychoanalysts: their "inner cinema"? It is therefore appropriate here to specify, beyond the theses of Naccache, the meaning in psychoanalysis of infantile sexuality in its relationship with sexuality of the adult type: the psychic and biologically determined instinct.

The Infantile Sexual

Freud writes that "the infantile is the repressed unconscious". of "Little Hans" illustrates the relationship between the phobia of horses

and infantile sexuality in its various dimensions. Subsequently, the infantile in the adult in the analytic treatment is the model of infantile neurosis (the dream of the "Wolf Man" at 4 years old). It allows the interpretation of the transference neurosis which tends to replace the neurosis of the adult by the analytical process. Recollection, dreams and transference actualization lead to the awareness of the role of infantile psychosexuality in the broad and specific sense that Freud gave it of "polymorphic perverse potential". Schematically, after the stages of pregenital sexuality (oral, anal and phallic), the complex of Oedipus, c As the nuclear complex of neuroses, it is organized in the child on the basis of experiences lived with his parents in the confrontation with the difference between the sexes and generations. It accounts for the organization of the relationships between desires and identifications. Extracted from the Greek myth, it includes incest and the murder of the rival. It has a double dimension, direct and inverted, that is to say heterosexual and homosexual, in accordance with the theory of psychic bisexuality.

Freud always opposed sexuality to another dimension, first self-preservation, then narcissism and finally destructiveness (the introduction of the death drive in 1920, notably from traumatic neuroses and the compulsion to repeat). It is then a matter of the life drives (sexuality is no more than the index) finalized by the connection, the creation of links, Eros, to which the death drive is opposed, that is to say the destructiveness, possibly deflected into aggressiveness, factor of unbinding, deconstruction, reduction of excitement to zero level, (principle of Nirvana) manifested clinically by deadly indifference.

Especially after Freud, psychoanalysts have given great importance to the initial dependence of the child vis-à-vis the early environment, vis-à-vis the mother (early maternal deficiencies, traumas, archaic anxieties). Whence the theory of an unconscious which is not only the repressed unconscious, but the denied, split, foreclosed unconscious, "the unconscious of the id", which is typical of the chaotic psychic organization of psychoses and borderline states, characterized by the importance of destructiveness, of drive violence outside of representation (the "drive motions" finalized by action). There is only a potentiality of meaning in the unrepresented.

The now recognized frequency of cases of incest and of child victims of sexual abuse or rape, with their long-term destructive effects, has once again drawn attention to the specificities of infantile sexuality. Compared to post-pubertal sexuality, it is playful, imaginary, potentially perverse polymorphic in the repressed unconscious: a self-sustaining excitement not finalized by discharge. Jean Laplanche's theory (1987) of "generalized originary seduction" completes the Freudian model of the sexual shoring up of self-preservation during experiences of pleasure and displeasure with the mother during the satisfaction of needs. Freud (1905) had described the seductive function of the mother, Ferenczi of the "confusion of tongues", and Winnicott spoke of the "orgy of suckling". According to Laplanche (1967), the child's relationships with adults, which he considers to be "a fundamental anthropological situation", include messages from adults addressed to the child which are enigmatic and potentially traumatic for him because they are compromised by their sexuality. In the absence of translation by the Ego, they are repressed and implanted (or split and intromis) in the unconscious, like the "sexual".

This theory introduces a new conception of the work of elaboration and integration of the genital sexual instinct of the adult type, genetically determined, such as it only imposes itself at puberty: instinct. This perspective implies a redefinition of infantile sexuality which clearly differentiates it from adult-type genital sexuality whose determinism, nature and goal are not the same. "This instinct is therefore epistemologically very difficult to define insofar as, in the real and concretely, it does not appear in a pure state, but in uncertain transactions with the infantile sexuality which gene in the unconscious" (Laplanche, 2007). In other words: the acquired (the "sexual") precedes the innate (the genital sexual instinct) and can compromise its establishment.

