Unrepresented States in Psychoanalysis: Working with Psychic voids, Non-thought and Non-representation

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NYU Postdoc Course Outline

In this class we will be engaging with patients who struggle to have access to their own internal worlds due to a blocking of their thought processes and an inhibition of the functions of representation. These are are difficult-to-reach-patients who often seem unable to connect with themselves and their own treatment. They can appear as deeply dependent, depressed and in despair, sometimes terrified or so anxious that they cannot think.

In our effort to understand and work with these patients and states we will turn to psychoanalytic writers who have addressed problems in the development of symbolic function, the capacity to represent and access experience, and the effects of an external object that was overly traumatic or overly absent. We will explore Andre Green’s concept of “The Negative,” Bion’s “Primordial Mind,” Levine’s “Unrepresented States” and the Botellas’ idea of “Figurability” and the loss of representation, among others.

Acknowledging that these concepts can appear abstract and dense, the class will strive to introduce them in a manner that will render them clear, intelligible, and above all, useful for work with these hard-to-reach patients. With this in mind, each class will involve a summary of the readings and a discussion of clinical material that illustrates the theoretical ideas. The analysts’s own internal process will be taken into account, illuminating the inter-psychic work that facilitates the transformation of the inchoate, primordial and dead into a developing function of representation.
WEEK 1: Symbolization and Non-Symbolization in Psychoanalysis


Optional Recommended Readings:


WEEK 2: The Presence of Absence: Unrepresented and Weakly Represented Mental States


Freud, S. (1923). The Ego and The Id, Chapters I and II. S.E. 19, pp. 13-27
WEEK 3: Andre Green: The Work of the Negative: Disobjectalization and blank psychosis


WEEK 4: Non-represented States and Figurability: The Work of the Botellas and Civitarese


Optional Recommended Readings:


WEEK 5: A Comparison of Howard Levine’s “Unrepresented States” and Donnel Stern’s “Unformulated Experience:” A Distinction between a Freudian Developmental Model of Psychic Structure and a Relational/Dissociation Model.


Optional Recommended Readings:


WEEK 6: The Unrepresented Unconscious: On Timeless-ness and Spaceless-ness.


Optional Recommended Readings:


WEEK 7: Primitive States – Annihilation Anxiety, Disintegration and Unintegration: Bion and Winnicott.


Optional Recommended Readings:


WEEK 8: Failures of Representation, Differentiation and the Body:


Optional Recommended Readings:

Bach, S. (In Press). The inner world, the gut and the sense of reality.