

**Course Proposal: Unrepresented, unmentalized, and unformulated states: Transaction and transformation**

**Donnel Stern, PhD**

In traditional models of technique and therapeutic action, and theories of mind, the emphasis was on the revelation of unconscious mental contents. Content interpretation, which of course continues today to play a significant role in any analyst's work, was for generations unquestionably the primary aim of clinical practice and therapeutic action for just about everyone. Mental contents were understood to be representations, or symbolized experience, that pre-existed their discovery. Their revelation was understood to be a kind of highly skilled clinical labeling of these invisible contents. And therapeutic action was understood to rely on that revelation: where id was, ego shall be; or from the interpersonal or relational perspective, the treatment, by revealing what has been selectively inattended or dissociated, clarifies the relational world in a way that makes it possible to negotiate it.

In many newer models, the emphasis has changed. Some of these ideas originate in interpersonal and relational psychoanalysis; but many more of them originate outside the United States, in psychoanalytic traditions that are foreign to many North Americans (in England: Bion, Fonagy and Target; in South America: the Barangers and others; in Italy: Ferro and Civitarese, Matte Blanco; in France: Laplanche, Faimberg, Green). Each of these cultural groups, much like our own, is composed of a large number of clinicians and writers.

While the writers of these models differ in highly significant ways from one another, they have an important characteristic in common: the emphasis in all of them lies on the growth or repair of mind via creation of a new capacity for symbolization. We might say that they reach similar destinations by very different paths, or that they reach conclusions that mirror one another in this one respect, but for reasons that are often pointedly divergent.

Pre-existing mental contents in all these theories continue to exist, of course; but there is an increasing interest in the states of mind that are not symbolically represented in the mind at all. These states are instead

understood to be unrepresented, unmentalized, or unformulated. They remain to be shaped, articulated, created, or given meaning. Furthermore, problems in human living are often understood in these models to have at least as much to do with unrepresented states as they do with problematic symbolizations in the repressed unconscious.

And therefore clinical work is focused in these theories on the transformation of these unrepresented states and whatever it is that might be standing in the way of the development of new symbolic capacity. The most significant clinical outcome is the development of mind, a new capacity to think. While interpretation often continues to be significant in these perspectives, the transformative process is based less in literal interpretation and more in other kinds of analytic transactions that make new symbolization possible. One of our primary aims in this course will be to conceptualize from many points of view the nature of the analytic relatedness that tends to encourage the creation of a new capacity to think.

In these theories, even when interpretation is used, the content revealed by the interpretation is no longer necessarily understood to be what is mutative about the transaction. Instead, the interpretation is a contribution of the analytic relatedness to the growth of mind. This point can be made about every piece of writing that appears on this syllabus, however different they are in other respects. And they are indeed very different from one another!

It is often difficult to describe the nature of these mutative transactions—that will be a challenge. But it is at least clear that the process is not necessarily, or primarily, a matter of revealing hidden or distorted, pre-existing mental contents.

This course needs to be understood as a survey from a great height, because there just won't be time to understand each writer's work in the way it deserves, especially since a number of these writers will be unfamiliar to most seminar members. To spend only a week on Green or Laplanche, for instance, is hard to support unless we accept the survey mentality. What I want to establish in this course is how and why each of the writers

we will read belongs in the category I have established to contain them. I envision this course as an attempt to make the members of the seminar aware of a thematically coherent body of work that is becoming increasingly important in today's psychoanalytic world. It's an attempt to give the lay of the land. It is not, and unfortunately cannot be, an attempt to master the material it addresses. Because of time limitations, I must sometimes ask seminar members to settle for secondary sources.

Believing that North American analysts need to know what is going on in our field internationally, I have given special emphasis to analytic writing from outside the traditions most familiar to North Americans. I have focused instead on the French, English (Bionian), Italian, and South American traditions.

But while, as I've said, the writers we will read are often quite different from one another, it is also true this is a motley collection of ideas in only the geographic sense. In fact, most of the writers we will read in this course have always read one another's work, and many of them, even most, consider their work part of a certain broad consensus about the nature of psychoanalysis, a consensus rooted in the belief that their theories stay more true to the centrality of the unconscious in psychoanalysis than do theories bred in North America. This is a position with which I disagree, at least in its strong form; and so at the end of the course I have also included in this syllabus the work of relational writers who I believe tap into the same themes I am highlighting in the work of the writers from France, England, Italy, and South America. We will read these writers with the same attitude that we will read the others: in what way does their work grow from the themes of unrepresented, unmentalized, and unformulated experience, and what kinds of transactions does the work of these writers suggest lead to transformation of that unformulated material and, thus, to the growth of mind?

Each week, we will discuss the readings for the first hour or so. These discussions will sometimes need to be lectures, since some of the material, as I've said, will be unfamiliar, and much of it will be quite difficult for those who have grown up in the North American psychoanalytic world and haven't read this work. I will try to offer a pithy summary of the main themes of the work we

read as we proceed, and I will make judgments from week to week about how much explication is needed, taking my cue from seminar members. Understanding of the readings will be focused around seeing how each of them embodies the two themes of the course: 1) the sense in which unrepresented, unmentalized, or unformulated states are significant, and how this quality is conceptualized; 2) the grasp of the kinds of clinical transactions that each writer understands are key for the creation of new mentalization, representation, or formulation, and the consequent growth of mind.

For the last 40 minutes of each seminar meeting, we will have a clinical presentation, given by a seminar member or by me. In these presentations, we will try to identify the transformational qualities of the clinical material we are hearing. When we can, we will link the clinical work to the particular reading of that week, but that degree of specificity will not always be possible, given the unfamiliarity of the material. The most significant aim of the clinical presentations will be to help seminar members begin to think broadly in terms of transformational therapeutic processes and the growth of mind—the kinds of clinical practice that one might pursue if one is trying to jumpstart the capacity for symbolization.

On this syllabus I have usually asked seminar members to read no more than two papers per week. In weeks when I have been unable to avoid three, I will recommend which two should be read, if it is impossible to read all three.

I have spent most of my career teaching the work of my teachers, friends, and colleagues; and so this course is a departure for me. I feel torn about some of the choices I have needed to make to construct the course I wanted to teach. I certainly could have included more interpersonal and relational writers—some of those I have not included have written in ways that are consistent with the theme I have adopted. But I know that the work of these writers is taught well already at Postdoc, whereas the work of the writers I focus on in this syllabus is less seldom taught.

This course will be challenging, not only for candidates, but for me. Let me refer to my own difficulty first. It can be hard to teach varieties of psychoanalysis that one has not actually experienced in one's own analysis

and clinical supervision. And I have not not actually experienced firsthand any of these psychoanalytic perspectives. But I have the great advantage of knowing what it will be like for relational analysts to encounter this material, often for the first time. The course will be challenging for candidates for all the obvious reasons—but also because I will not necessarily encourage the attempt to translate unfamiliar material into familiar terms, as in, “Isn’t that the same thing we mean when we say ‘x’?” A certain amount of that kind of comparison is necessary. But as much as possible, the aim will be to grasp at least the broad outlines of these theories from within their own frame of reference.

**Proposed syllabus: Unrepresented, unmentalized, and unformulated states: Transaction and transformation**

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**Week 1: Introducing unrepresented states, unmentalized experience, unformulated experience. Please read the articles listed below prior to our first meeting. If you can't read all three, the one to skip is my review from IJP.**

The introduction to the book edited by Reed, Levine, and Scarfone focuses more on André Green than anyone else, but it is also an effective introduction to the general issues. The brief review I wrote of this book for IJP addresses the exclusion of other points of view, especially interpersonal and relational. Levine's paper ("The colourless canvas") is an excellent introduction to the entire area—with the proviso that it neglects the interpersonal and relational contribution. The very brief review of that book that I wrote for IJP conveys that point, as well as summarizing the book's arguments.

G.S. Reed, H.B. Levine & D. Scarfone (2013). Introduction: From a universe of presences to a universe of absences. In: H.B. Levine, G.S. Reed & D. Scarfone (Eds.), *Unrepresented States and the Construction of Meaning: Clinical and Theoretical Contributions*. London: Karnac, pp. 3-17.

Stern, D.B. (2015). (2015). Review of *Unrepresented States and the Construction of Meaning: Clinical and Theoretical Contributions*, by Howard B. Levine, Gail S. Reed, and Dominique Scarfone. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 96:493-498.

Levine, H. (2013). The colourless canvas: Representation, therapeutic action, and the creation of mind. In: H.B. Levine, G.S. Reed & D. Scarfone (Eds.), *Unrepresented States and the Construction of Meaning*. London: Karnac, pp. 42-71.

**Week 2: Continuing the introduction of unrepresented states, unmentalized experience, unformulated experience. Lecours and Bouchard emphasize Bion, to whose work we will return to later on, and the Psychosomatic School of Paris, especially Marty and Luquet. My paper introduces the issues from an interpersonal and relational perspective.**

Lecours, S. and Bouchard, M. (1997). Dimensions Of Mentalisation: Outlining Levels Of Psychic Transformation. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 78:855-875

Stern, D.B. (1983) Unformulated experience: From familiar chaos to creative disorder. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19, 71-99.

**Week 3: Psychic voids and nonrepresentation: André Green. Reed's paper is quite readable, which is unusual for Green himself. Green's paper, from early in the rise of this literature, is a famous statement of the inadequacy of interpretation alone to deal with unrepresented material and the need to grasp it instead through the clinical use of countertransference. This theme has become more widely circulated and accepted in the classical analytic world in the years since then.**

G.S. Reed (2013). An empty mirror: Reflections on nonrepresentation. In: H.B. Levine, G.S. Reed & D. Scarfone (Eds.), *Unrepresented States and the Construction of Meaning: Clinical and Theoretical Contributions*. London: Karnac, pp. 18-41.

Green, A. (1975). The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience)—*In Memory of D. W. Winnicott*. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 56:1-22

**Week 4: Psychic figurability: César and Sara Botella. In one of these articles, the Botellas' book, very important in the French literature, and which emerges from their understanding of Green, is reviewed by Levine. The other reading is an introduction by the Botellas to their point of view.**

Botella, C. & S. (2013). Psychic figurability and unrepresented states. In: H.B. Levine, G.S. Reed & D. Scarfone (Eds.), *Unrepresented States and the Construction of Meaning*. London: Karnac, pp. 95-121.

Levine, H.B. (2008). *The Work of Psychic Figurability: Mental States without Representation*. By César Botella Sara

Botella. Hove, England/New York, Brunner/Routledge, 2005. 212 pp.. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 77(2):639-648.

**Week 5: Nachträglichkeit, après coup, afterwardsness:**  
**Haydée Faimberg.** *Après coup* is said by some to be the concept that most clearly differentiates French and English psychoanalysis—and if that is so, it is even more true of the difference between French and North American psychoanalysis. If you read only two papers, read the two by Faimberg. Modell, however, is very readable. I recommend the few pages of his book that I have listed.

Faimberg, H. (2005). *Après coup*. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 86:1-6.

Faimberg, H. (2007). A Plea for a Broader Concept of Nachträglichkeit. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 76:1221-1240.

Modell, A. (1990). *Other Times, Other Realities: Toward a Theory of Psychoanalytic Treatment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, pp. 15-19 and 60-74.

**Week 6: Jean Laplanche: The source of mind in the need to translate the enigmatic message implanted in one's own subjectivity by the other.** Laplanche's work is not going to be easy to convey in this concentrated form; it is highly abstract and philosophical. It is also, on the other hand, very clearly organized, so that (at least in that way) it lends itself to condensed presentation. Scarfone's article is very clear and useful. I have also assigned one article by Laplanche himself, but I have done so mostly so that you can get a sense of how he writes and what he's like to read. It will be hard to grasp the article if you aren't acquainted with his work—but give it a try and we'll talk about the outcome!

Scarfone, D. (2013). A brief introduction to the work of Jean Laplanche. *Int J Psychoanal.* 94:545-566.

Laplanche, J. (2003). Three meanings of the term "unconscious" in the framework of the general theory of seduction. In: *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*, trans. J. Fletcher, J. House, and N. Ray. New York: International Psychoanalytic Books, 2011, pp. 203-222.

**Week 7: Bi-logic: Symmetry and asymmetry in the work of Matte Blanco.** A brief introduction to Matte Blanco and a clinical presentation by Lombardi. Riccardo Lombardi

begins with an introductory overview of Matte Blanco's thinking, then offers a book of clinically based chapters that loosely illustrate the ideas. I have listed here just the introduction and first (clinical) chapter. There are other secondary sources, by Rayner, that give a more complete picture of Matte Blanco; but they are too long to be practical for our purpose.

Lombardi, R. (2015). *Formless Infinity: Clinical Explorations of Matte Blanco and Bion*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-61.

**Week 8: Bion's theory of the creation and functioning of mind.** If you have no acquaintance with Bion, read the two Ogden papers first, then the one by Bion. If you do have some acquaintance with Bion, read at least the Bion paper and Ogden's "Introduction to the reading of Bion." I've given the reference for the version of Bion's paper that appears in his little book, *Second Thoughts*, because in that book the article is accompanied by a commentary on the article, written a number of years later, that is nearly five times longer than the original paper. Read it if you are so inclined. It is difficult.

Bion, W.R. (1962). A theory of thinking. In: *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Aronson, 1967, pp. 110-119.

Ogden, T.H. (2004). An introduction to the reading of Bion. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 85(2):285-300

Ogden, T.H. (2008). Bion's Four Principles of Mental Functioning. *Fort Da*, 14(2): 11-35.

**Week 9. Bion, continued. Memory and desire. This paper is a good source of discussion about his general orientation to thinking and to clinical work. Try to read all three papers for this week.**

Ogden, T.H. (2007). Elements of Analytic Style: Bion's Clinical Seminars. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 88(5):1185-1200

Ogden, T.H. (2015). Intuiting the Truth of What's Happening: On Bion's "Notes on Memory and Desire". *Psychoanal Q.*, 84:285-306.

Bion, W. R. (1967b), Notes on memory and desire, *Psychoanalytic Forum*, 2, 271-286.

**Week 10: The segué from Bion into South American field theory: the Barangers.**

Baranger, M. & Baranger, W. (2008). The analytic situation as a dynamic field. (First published in Spanish in 1961-1962). *Int J Psychoanal* (2008) 89:795-826.

Stern, D.B. (2015). Field theory in psychoanalysis, Part 1: comparing Harry Stack Sullivan and Madeleine and Willy Baranger. In: *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*. New York: Routledge, pp.

**Week 11: The sequé from Bion into Italian field theory: Antonino Ferro.**

Ferro, A. (2009). Transformations in Dreaming and Characters in the Psychoanalytic Field. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 90(2):209-230.

Stern, D.B. (2015). Field theory in psychoanalysis, Part 2: comparing Bionian field theory and contemporary interpersonal/relational psychoanalysis. In: *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*. New York: Routledge, pp.

**Week 12: The mentalization theory of Peter Fonagy and Mary Target. Four classic papers in a series called "Playing and reality," meant to be read in sequence. Read the first two papers and as much of the other two as you can.**

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (1996). Playing With Reality: I. Theory Of Mind And The Normal Development Of Psychic Reality. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 77:217-233

Target, M. and Fonagy, P. (1996). Playing With Reality: II. The Development Of Psychic Reality From A Theoretical Perspective. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 77:459-479

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (2007). Playing with Reality: IV. A Theory of External Reality Rooted in Intersubjectivity. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 88(4):917-937.

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (2000). Playing With Reality. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 81:853-873.

**Week 13: Benjamin's intersubjectivity: the third as an interactive process that creates a dialogic structure.**

Benjamin, J. (2004). Beyond doer and done to. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 73:5-46.

Benjamin, J. (2017). Playing and paradox: The uses of enactment. In: *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition theory*,

*intersubjectivity, and the third.* New York: Routledge, pp. 152-188

**Week 14: Relaxing the field, expanding the mind,  
hermeneutics: Donnel Stern**

Stern, D.B. (2009). Partners in Thought: A Clinical Process Theory of Narrative. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 78(3):701-731.

Stern, D.B. (2013). Relational Freedom and Therapeutic Action. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 61(2):227-255.

**Week 15: The work of Bromberg: Nonlinear, joint processing  
of enacted (dissociated) communication.**

Bromberg, P.M. (2008). Shrinking the Tsunami. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 44(3):329-350

Bromberg, P.M. (2000). Bringing in the Dreamer. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 36(4):685-705