When we refer to unconscious influence in psychoanalysis, what do we mean? Do we intend to refer to an objective presence in psychic life, a thought or an affect or a memory that somehow exists as a fact, but outside our ken? Or do we intend to refer to an absence, something missing in experience, an unconsidered or undeveloped implication? Is unconscious material fully formed and merely awaiting uncovering or discovery, or is it potential experience that remains to be spelled out? How should we think clinically about questions such as these?

Consider the dream of a man in his 30s going through a divorce and feeling so sad and bereft that he can scarcely imagine a different kind of future. In his dream he is driving very carefully on an icy mountain road. Around him thick snow is falling. It is silent and cloudy, and the landscape is dull and colorless—black, white, and shades of gray, evoking (in his associations) his depression over his divorce. As he rounds a turn in the road, which hugs the shoulder of the mountain, the sun appears very suddenly, shining brilliantly in a cloudless and intensely blue sky, and he is faced with a breathtaking mountainside of glittering snowfields and intensely green trees. It seems to him at that moment, inside the dream, that this vista is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen, and he is filled with a feeling of great happiness and fulfillment.

After listening to other associations to the dream, the man's analyst tells him that he believes the dream is a way of depicting previously unimagined inner resources that the patient will be able to use
to make a new life. The patient, deeply moved, feels immediately the truth of this interpretation.

Was the content of the analyst's interpretation already "there" in the patient's unconscious prior to the analyst's intervention?

As a better example: A 21-year-old man, in the first stages of a treatment, reports a dream in which he finds himself on a dark street confronted by several men. There is a sense of menace. He is frightened, but he also has the sense that he has done something that has angered his adversaries, though he does not know what it is. He feels resigned to whatever happens; he feels vaguely in the wrong. The dream ends without an attack actually taking place. In his associations, the patient focuses for some time on what his transgression could have been: perhaps he has tripped over one of the youths; perhaps he has stepped in front of one of them in line; perhaps he has criticized the driving of one of them.

After getting nowhere in particular by looking into where each imagined transgression might lead, the analyst eventually tells the patient that, by comparison to the sense of menace, the transgressions he imagines seem insignificant. The analyst also tells the patient that he knows retaliation can sometimes be out of proportion to the provocation, especially in New York City (which is where the patient and analyst live), but that it is important to remember who the author of the dream is. Why, he asks the patient, does he think he might have portrayed justice so cruelly? The patient responds that he had not noticed the fact that his imagined provocations were paltry, but that he can see it is true as soon as the analyst mentions it. He then tells the analyst that, in fact, he even feels guilty and ashamed if he goes to the store for bread and the store has run out: he should have known in the first place to go to another store. With increasing momentum, and even excitement, the patient begins to put together an interpretation of the dream based on his relationship with his father, who (it now emerges) has always blamed the patient unreasonably for things that could not possibly have been his fault. If the father could not find his shoes, for instance, he might insist that the patient had hidden them, when in fact the patient had not, and never had. The patient was sure his father fully believed his own accusations, because he would scream and sometimes curse at his son, who felt badly, despite his initial certainty that he did not take the shoes on purpose. Perhaps, the patient would think, he had accidentally pushed them under a piece of furniture. Perhaps, even if he hadn't lost them, he should have been able to find them. Or perhaps (if the screaming went on long enough), he would think that he might have forgotten about hiding the shoes.

The father's paranoia and his toxic impact on his son's reality testing become disturbingly apparent. But how should we understand the patient's interpretation of the dream? Did it exist prior to the analyst's intervention? Did it exist prior to the patient's capacity to put it into words?

Here is another example, this time of the patient's perception of the analyst. A young woman reads an article in the newspaper about the thinking of a particular psychoanalyst, then comes to her session and tells her analyst that she wishes for "something more" in his response to her. It is not specific content the patient finds wanting, but a certain kind of understanding that the other analyst (according to the patient's reading of the article) seems to be able to convey. The patient's own analyst does not convey this understanding, the patient says. She muses that prior to reading the article, not only could she not have said what she felt deprived of, she could not even have said that she was missing something. She cannot put into words how she thought about these matters before. In fact, she believes there were no words available to her. She cannot recapture what the "missing" was like then, because she would have to use the words she did not find until later. She recognizes, she says, that this means she can do no more than provide a description in the present.

Was this patient's experience of missing something already present "in" the patient before her reading of the newspaper article? Was that feeling of missing something already "there" prior to her first words for it?

These questions do not have to be answered with a simple yes or no. As a matter of fact, they cannot and should not be answered simply. Unconscious meaning is a slippery idea. On the one hand, we have all those data we have cited for generations: dreams, paraphrases, symptoms, transference—the phenomena that were so compelling to Freud. We are so used to believing that these phenomena are the visible evidence of invisible, nonverbal, and (if we could but see them) clearly defined unconscious structures that we have lost track of the fact that we are making an interpretation when we think this way. The belief that a single, very particular latent content underlies the phenomenon we see is one of those interpretations that feels like a simple fact. And it feels that way even though, in daily clinical work, we seldom, if ever, have the confidence that we have really captured a preexisting latent content in words.
More often than not, we lack the confidence that we have "nailed down" the unconscious meanings our patients present to us in their conduct and experience. We are uncertain; we consider alternatives. Early in our careers, especially during the years when we are still prone to the belief that someone else, someone more experienced or capable than we are, would know exactly what a dream or a symptom means, we lack that comfortable feeling we imagine we would have if we could just see more clearly. Even later on in our professional lives, once we have developed more comfort in not knowing, we tend to understand the ambiguity of our experience as the joint result of our limitations and the complex distortions of the defenses that intervene between the patient's unconscious meaning and its effects. We rarely consider that our difficulty might be, instead, directly related to the nature of that which we are trying to understand, or to the intrinsic ambiguity of our interpretive task. We so take for granted the idea that the content of the unconscious has one particular meaning that we tend not even to imagine alternative theories. Having lost its status as a perspective or a hypothesis, the idea has been taken up into our everyday sense of things and is simply the expectable state of affairs, as if it were a feature of the natural world.

I do not intend to deconstruct the notion of an unconscious merely awaiting verbal labels; that major task is a different kind of effort than the more clinical one I am undertaking. By the same token, though, the idea of a fully formed unconscious influencing conscious experience in ways that are simply objective or factual deserves to be challenged. I here mount a challenge of that sort, but I do so not so much by taking issue with the older view as by exploring the clinical implications of a newer one: What can be gained from a conception of unconscious meaning as unformulated? The inquiry provoked by this question will take us beyond the particular concept of unformulated experience to the hermeneutic, constructivist conception of mind and experiencing in psychoanalysis that I have already begun to present in chapter 1.

WHAT IS UNFORMULATED EXPERIENCE?

When a patient is finally able to think about a previously unaccepted part of life, seldom are fully formulated thoughts simply waiting to be discovered, ready for exposition. Instead, what is usually experienced is a fresh state of not-knowing, a kind of confusion—a confusion with newly appreciable possibilities, and perhaps an intriguing confusion, but a confusion or a puzzle nevertheless. One is curious. Before, one could not even have said there was anything to learn; now one realizes for the first time that one does not know—and, by implication, that one has not known.

Unconscious clarity rarely underlies defense. On the evidence of our observations of them as they emerge in awareness, the perceptions, ideas, and memories we prefer not to have, the observations we prefer not to make, are often murky and poorly defined, different in kind than they will be when the process of articulation has reached the level of words. The moments of confusion may be quite brief, barely noticeable, or they may be lengthy, becoming either deeply intriguing or disturbing. "Unformulated experience" is the label I have chosen to refer to mentation characterized by lack of clarity and differentiation. Unformulated experience is the uninterpreted form of those raw materials of conscious, reflective experience that may eventually be assigned verbal interpretations and thereby brought into articulate form.

The phenomenon is analogous to an experience most people have had at twilight, when the light is dim and unreliable and familiar shapes can be hard to recognize. Once in a while, at a moment like this, or in a dimly lighted room, one sees something, but simply cannot make a coherent visual experience out of it. Whatever one is seeing stubbornly resists coalescing into an identifiable shape, and one hangs in the perceptual lurch. The affective accompaniment ranges from playful interest to a sense of awe, dislocation, and disorientation so severe it can be nauseating. Among children, more rarely adults, fears sometimes shape the ambiguity, so that fright or terror results. For a three-year-old in a dimly lit room, the ambiguous shape of a towel draped over a chair may assume sentience, perhaps malevolence. But most of the time, in a few moments the unformulated percept falls together into some familiar shape, and one is relieved. One may be left, however, with an increased awareness of the ubiquity of interpretation in our psychic lives, a suspicion that even the coherent perception, when it emerges, is an interpretation, just one that happens to fall easily into place.

One seems to develop a coherent percept at the very same moment in which one is first able to give words to what one is seeing. Just as well-formed percepts do not exist "in" or "behind" the indistinct, unrecognizable experiences of twilight shapes, well-formed cognitions do not exist in or behind the unformulated states that precede them. Rather, the well-formed version remains to be shaped. The
unformulated is not yet knowable in the separate and definable terms of language. Unformulated material is composed of vague tendencies; if allowed to develop to the point at which they can be shaped and articulated, these become the more lucid kind of reflective experience we associate with mutually comprehended verbal articulations.

But at this point the analogy of the indistinct object fails, because our uncertainty about the identity of such an object can generally be resolved in only one way. With additional illumination, everyone sees the same form. There is very little ambiguity about a cat located directly under a shining streetlamp, for example, even if it can be hard to make visual sense out of the same cat lurking in the shadows; once the lights go on, that towel draped over the chair, so ambiguous a figure in half-light, immediately becomes the same thing to everyone.

But most of what people talk about in psychoanalytic treatment allows a much wider range of interpretation than well-lighted cats and towels. These other kinds of experience, especially social experiences, are not so inevitably bound to a stimulus. They are much less likely to be divided into perceptual units in just the same way by everyone. Once we move on from perception to consider other levels of meaning, the number of different interpretations that can be made of the same stimulus multiplies by leaps and bounds.

The more a particular kind of experience is the result of an implicit interpretive process, the more variation we can expect to find among different people's versions of it. For example, we should expect to find a very high degree of complexity and variability in the comprehension of gesture or the attribution of intention. There are opportunities at almost every turn, literally from one moment to the next, for interpretive variation.

Most of the material of a psychoanalysis can be experienced in more than one way by the two participants involved. This is so even when the two agree on the basic nature of the people and events under discussion. The way each of us shapes moment-to-moment experience is the outcome of our characteristic patterns of formulation interacting with the exigencies of the moment. Because "exigencies of the moment" almost always refers to happenings with other people, real or imaginary—"illusory," in Sullivan's description—the resolution of the ambiguity of unformulated experience is an interpersonal event. That is, what we think at any particular moment is not only a function of our inner worlds—our histories, our characters, the structured unconscious activities that contribute to the organization and continuity of experience. That view is familiar enough: one person characteristically experiences differently than another. What I want to lay special stress on, though, is the formative influence on all of our experience of the ongoing interpersonal transaction, not only on the feelings and thoughts that we react with, but the very nature of what is possible for us to formulate. The analyst, like the patient, can know only what the interpersonal field he co-creates with the patient allows him to know.

The meaning in a particular unformulated experience, if it is ever spelled out, may take any one of the more precise forms toward which it moves. It is content without definite shape. In the words of the philosopher Jacques Maritain (1953), it is "a beginning of insight, still unformulated, a kind of many-eyed cloud . . . a humble and trembling inclosion, yet invaluable, tending toward an intelligible content to be grasped" (p. 99). The poet and essayist Paul Valéry (in Ghiselin, 1952) puts it this way: "The fact is that every act of the mind itself is always somehow accompanied by a certain more or less perceptible atmosphere of indeterminacy" (p. 99). In William James's (1890) metaphor, each of us "sculpts" conscious experience from a block (or a stream, as James would have it) of the unformulated that might have been carved in other ways.

The revelation of meaning is more often creation than the discovery of a preexisting truth. Yet to be useful, the newly created meaning must be recognizable. It must fit the stimulus, and it must fit better than the meaning that came before. "Insight into an unconscious wish," writes Herbert Fingarette (1963), "is like noticing a well-formed 'ship' in the cloud instead of a poorly formed 'rabbit.' On the other hand, insight is not like discovering an animal which has been hiding in the bushes" (p. 20).

THOUGHT AND AFFECT

Experience is all of a piece. One does not think and feel at different times, but rather is constantly engaged in the more inclusive task, usually quite invisible, of constructing experience. Affect is not only a reaction to seeing the "ship" instead of the "rabbit"; it is just as much a part of the process of shaping the new percept. The separation of thought and affect has been a feature of Western philosophical and psychological theorizing since Plato. Indeed, though there is now reason to believe that thought and feeling are inextricable on even the level of neurophysiology (Damasio, 1994), it remains heuris-
tically useful at times for experimentalists and theorists to define these processes as independent sets of events that interact with one another. But in psychoanalysis, such a separation is misleading, because in clinical work the sole concern is how people actually experience. In the end, what matters most is what the participants can sense or know directly, because it is immediate experience that transforms mere inference into conviction.

Nevertheless, psychoanalysts are obviously members of their cultures, and because the European world has so often unthinkingly considered thought and affect separately, psychoanalysts often have done the same. As a result, the words "cognition" and "thought" are sometimes used in clinical discussions as if they refer to intellectualization, which of course is inauthentic by definition; and "feeling," "affect," or "emotion," when referred to separately, tend to be idealized, as if the phenomena the words describe are the only genuine or authentic aspects of experience. Yet neither authenticity nor affect of course, is an "ingredient" of experience, as if it could be added like oregano.

If thought and feeling are an indivisible unity, cognition, which it is convenient to define as an amalgam of the two, should be construed as a continuous process of worldmaking, a psychic endeavor on the borderland between psychology and epistemology (cf. Barnet, 1980). Even when one can observe a separation of thought and feeling, the separation is a seeming, an appearance, not a natural division. Consider isolation of affect and intellectualization, which are defined precisely by the intention to split the unity of experience; or think of psychosomatic symptoms, conversions, hysterical affect, and inexplicable panic attacks, which may be dissociated from words precisely because that characteristic makes them useful in defense.

And so the process of formulating experience is as much the clarification of emotion as it is the articulation of semantic meaning, and unformulated experience refers not only to the germs of words, but of passions as well. When the process of formulation has progressed, feelings can be worded and language is woven with emotion.

**REIFICATION**

We assume breaks or separations between cognitive phenomena for which we have different words—or rather, our culture's inescapable everyday language of cognition makes the assumption. These assumptions guide the way language seems to formulate thoughts, feelings, perceptions, memories, and so on—in discrete units. We have no consensually validated means of expressing the way a memory melts into a thought about the present, or the way one thought or feeling verges into another. To the careful observer, it sometimes seems that there is a pinprick of a moment during this melting or verging during which it is impossible to say where one instance ends and the next begins. And as soon as we have one thought, the next begins to arise from within that one in just the same way. Clinical psychoanalysis, to me, is firmly rooted in phenomenology.

To be accurate, then, at least on the level of the fine-grained introspective account I favor, I would have to accomplish the impossible task of describing experience while avoiding the idea that we experience in chunks or pieces, just as I would have to avoid the division of thought and feeling, because these characterizations require a process of abstraction. I would have to represent consciousness as a smooth and seamless stream, as William James (1890) did. Consider his description of a thought.

Let anyone try to cut a thought across the middle and get a look at its section, and he will see how difficult the introspective observation of the transitive tracts is. The rush of the thought is so headlong that it almost always brings us up at the conclusion before we can arrest it. Or if our purpose is nimble enough and we do arrest it, it ceases forthwith to be itself. As a snowflake crystal caught in the warm hand is no longer a crystal but a drop, so, instead of catching the feeling of relation moving to its term, we find we have caught some substantive thing, usually the last word we were pronouncing, statically taken, and with its function, tendency, and particular meaning in the sentence quite evaporated. The attempt at introspective analysis in these cases is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks [p. 244].

Generally, we lose sight of the fact that our ongoing habit of breaking experience into discontinuous pieces is a process of abstraction. ("Speech," writes Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 17, "tears out or tears apart meanings in the undivided whole of the nameable.") We take for granted the existence of discrete experiential units as if they were features of the natural world—as if the phenomena the common words describe (e.g., thought, feeling, perception) demand this kind of description and no other.
In our language, it would be extremely difficult to discuss experiencing if we could not depend upon this assumption that "a" thought and "a" memory (a "feeling," for that matter, to recapitulate the argument I just made about cognition) are "real." The very title of this book is itself a reification of this kind. And as I begin to make an argument for a hermeneutic way of understanding what "unconscious" means, at times I will need to resort to even more stubbornly opaque reifications, notions like structured unconscious meaning, unconscious experience, and mental representation.

Yet what we are all talking about, in referring to content or structure or experience, is not a thing at all, but certain processes, ones that have continuity over time. Some have more continuity (organization), some less; but each is a channel, or a current, if you will, along which meaning can flow. Such processes result in our long-term readiness to construct experience in particular, stable ways and, often enough, our insistence on such constructions. In psychoanalysis, we refer to these processes, variously, as character, schemata, transference and counter-transference, internal object representations, imagos, unconscious fantasies, and so on. Therefore, when we use words like structure, content, and representation in reference to experiencing, what we really intend to refer to is the plethora of processes in any one person's psychic life that keep reproducing experience in meaningfully similar shapes. We are referring to the interpreter's organizing activity.

Roy Schafer's (1976, 1978) solution to the problem of reification in psychoanalysis is to convert all descriptions of psychological events into a language that recognizes their status as activity ("action language"). I am drawn to Schafer's aims here, and I admire his rigor. But in the end, for me, the awkwardness of action language overcomes its rigor and rightness. Writing and speaking that way forces linguistic expression in directions it does not go by itself, and so, in the attempt to say things correctly, one loses some of the things one wanted to say. That price might be one a philosopher should pay; but for me, ease and flexibility of expression is worth the price I must pay to use it.

PROGRESSIVE CLARIFICATION: EXPERIENCE AS EMERGENT

Everyday introspection leads us to believe that reflective experience—the kind of experience we can stand back from and observe—just arrives. It has no precursors. One moment an experience is not there; the next moment it is. It would appear from this impression that experience "jumps" or "leaps" into existence. From nothing comes something, and all at once. The transition from absence to presence, or from one presence to another, is like the change in what appears on a movie screen from one cut to the next. As the camera angle changes, the new perspective is suddenly there, without lag or delay, without the necessity of focusing or developing the image. We are presented with something that is immediately crisp and clear.

When we introspect very carefully, however, attending to our own processes of experiencing on the finest level of differentiation we can muster, our observations tell a different story. Each moment's experience grows from the experience of the moment before; the process of growth is a process of progressive clarification. Progressive clarification, or the process of emergence, is closely related to the idea of "microgenesis," defined and introduced by Heinz Werner (1956) as the sequence of necessary steps that must occur in the unfolding of a psychological phenomenon. When applied to the development of thought from one moment to the next, microgenesis conveys precisely what I intend in referring to the process of formulating the unformulated. As Arieti (1962) states, "Wherever development occurs it proceeds from a state of relative globality and lack of differentiation to a state of increasing differentiation, articulation and hierarchic integration" (p. 279).

But microgenesis describes the minute developmental life of each thought, in and of itself. I want to focus instead on the development of each moment's conscious experience out of the experience of the one before—or, to be more thorough, the development of the present moment's conscious, explicit, linguistically articulable experience out of the conscious and unconscious mental activity, verbal and nonverbal, that took place in the preceding moment. The progression of mental activity, including that part of it that arrives in awareness, is organic and continuous. Sometimes, after the fact, the way one moment developed from the previous one comes to our attention; more often, it does not.

Despite the regularity of this progression, though, the outcome of the next moment is seldom predictable. A welter of futures is alive in each clinical instan; we cannot know which ones will be called into being in the next moment by the unique and unutterably complex combination of factors that we call the ongoing analytic interaction. The fascination of psychoanalysis is precisely the opportunity to study this progression as it occurs. The next moment just happens, and
that "just happens" goes on continuously. Sometimes we can then retrace its history, or at least, what we take its history to have been.

Clinical psychoanalysis, then, like its object of study, is an emergent activity. Each moment, for each participant, is implied in some way by the moment each of them experienced just before. Each moment that actually comes alive was one of the unformulated possibilities.

By unformulated experience, I intend to refer to two phenomena. One is molar and long-term: in this sense, unformulated experience is the sum total of all the knowable, communicable implications that have never been spelled out, perceptions that have been habitually passed over, and so forth. The molar conception can be related to the ongoing organizing activities—character, for example—that supply life with continuity. The other phenomenon is molecular and short-term: unformulated experience as the moment-to-moment state of vagueness and possibility from which the next moment's articulated experience emerges. In practice, these two uses of the term often overlap, because a thought that is habitually unformulated is also part of each moment's potential experience, part of the raw materials that may be tapped for the construction of the next moment's experience.

Everyone faced with the same stimulus array, then, ought to have the same perception. Any lack of clarity in a psychic element, or any variation from the perceptual norm, must be the consequence of later events than perception itself. The particular "later events" Freud proposed as the engines of these distorting effects, of course, were the twin pressures of drive and defense. Freud's emphasis was less on the moment-to-moment construction of new experiences than on the self-deceptive recombination of old ones. And these old experiences were lodged in the unconscious.

The contents of the Freudian unconscious and the materials of the primary process, both of which certainly seem to qualify as inchoate, are not actually unformulated. It is true that in Freud's work, the associations between elements and the form of the elements themselves are fluid, but cognitions in the Freudian scheme, even when they are disguised, are never anything less than fully realized. They are well-defined carriers of meaning that could be represented in language if one's ego, or one's defenses, would "allow" it. But there is no evolution in form as meaning reaches consciousness. In the Freudian scheme, as a matter of fact, the "real" meaning—the wish or desire that is the source of the conscious idea—can exist only in the unconscious. The conscious representation of experience is actually the paler form. For Freud, in entering consciousness an unconscious meaning must shed its original (primary process) attributes and emerge tamed. There is a loss of information. In contrast, in order to enter consciousness, an unformulated thought, if it is the unconsidered implication of a previous formulation, or an alternative formulation, may actually become "more itself." In these cases, as the thought arrives in awareness, it sometimes actually attains a greater degree of the kind of structure it already had. A vague narrative, for instance, becomes a precise one. In those other cases in which unformulated experience already has a high degree of nonverbal structure (such as, for instance, an unconscious fantasy), what occurs during verbal articulation is a change in form—but the forms are merely different. One is not superior to the other; there is no loss of information.

A hermeneutic or interpretivist understanding of experiencing, then, is that the act of interpretation gives reflective experience its articulate, verbal form. In such an account, the very process of formulation—the process of coming to know in words—assumes a significance and complexity it does not have in Freud's theory. The process of coming to know is more than the shedding of disguise or the eschewal of distortion. This point may actually give the processes of
inquiry and interpretation even greater significance than they had to Freud, because these activities now become part of the construction of new meaning, not just the revelation of the old. Movement and change in a particular treatment is therefore more the reflection of an increasing willingness and capacity to perceive and interpret novelty than it is the outcome of bringing to light previously existing truth. Therapeutic action is more often a matter of greater curiosity and freedom of thought than of increased access to preformulated memories.

Today, partially because of data and theories that have accrued since Freud wrote, it is clear that experience, even at its most basic perceptual levels, is not simply given. Most of those who have considered this question over the last several decades, psychoanalysts and cognitive scientists alike, have conceived perception to be an active process, not just the passive registration of unambiguous stimuli. George Klein (1976), for instance, one of the first psychoanalysts to make this conceptual leap, reviewed the considerable literature on active perception that had already accumulated in the 1960s, and concluded that “a unit of reality is any perceived and confirmable coherence” (p. 57). An array of events becomes coherent, he continued, through a process shaped partially by one’s intentions. He eschewed the problem of “exact” or “accurate” perception, because he believed that there are an infinite number of ways reality can be viewed. This multiplicity meant to him that not only accurate perception, but even exhaustive perception—the mere grasp of the full range of possibilities—was quite impossible. The adequacy of a perception could be judged, he thought, only by the degree to which it served the purpose that gave rise to it. To a significant degree, Klein believed, even in those early days of hermeneutics in psychoanalysis, that what we perceive is significantly determined by what we intend to perceive.

It seems that we continuously construct our pictures of the world according to unconscious cognitive rules, or algorithms. None of us can say, for instance, how we perform such automatized activities as driving a car or riding a bicycle. We just do these things, despite their level of complexity. Another simple example is the accessing of information. We do not know, for example, how we come up with the right sequence of numerals when we are asked for a familiar phone number. And consider more complex processes. We really have no idea how it is that we manage to speak coherently, making our meanings known to others, without paying the slightest attention to how we choose the multitude of words we use to do so. The process is, for the most part, effortless. We do not know how we recognize faces, make judgments, or perceive other people’s emotional states or behavioral dispositions. On a very high level of complexity, consider the fact that chess masters frequently cannot specify their strategies (deGroot, 1965; cited by Lewicki, 1986).

Even at its most basic levels, experience is not wholly given; we also make it, or construct it, though seldom do we have a conscious hand in the process. It seems that we can be unaware of cognitive material not only because we refuse to acknowledge that we know it, but also because it has not yet been spelled out. It has not yet attained a form in which consciousness can—or will—grasp it.

STRUCTURE IN UNCONSCIOUS MEANING

But of course, as I have already taken pains to say, in presenting the nonverbal structure of unconscious meaning as a constraint on reflective interpretation, the fact that we have a good deal of latitude in the formulation of experience hardly implies that we have complete freedom. There is a range within which our interpretations of the world around us are acceptable and plausible, but there are also boundaries around any kind of experience beyond which we cannot assert an interpretation without appearing grossly inaccurate or downright crazy.

In the treatment situation, beyond these limits, if the analyst claims a relationship between an articulated meaning and the vague or unformulated mental activity that preceded it, this is experienced by the patient as false, or even ridiculous. If you tell a patient that the explanation for his silence is anger when it is not, the patient can generally tell you that you’re wrong, even if he cannot yet substitute wording that more precisely and convincingly describes his state. The structure in unformulated experience is like a figure emerging from a dense fog. There is contour there, but it is fuzzy. It could be a person. It could be a rack of clothes being pushed toward you by someone behind it. It could even be a dancing bear. But it couldn’t possibly be an elephant or an automobile.

FORMULATION AS THE ATTRAITION OF MEANING

Return once again to the image of the towel over the chair in the darkened room: What exactly is the coherent percept that one eventually makes out of it?
The coherent percept is a meaning. It is not as if the sensory information changes when the percept falls together. Rather, one is finally able to see what the image means. As a second, similar example, let me offer the image that greeted me recently on a sidewalk in New York. As I approached a truck parked across the sidewalk, I seemed to be seeing the view ahead through a huge sheet of glass that was being carried on the side of the truck, presumably to repair a window in one of the brownstones on the block. Such trucks and their cargo are not terribly uncommon sights. Yet there was something wrong. The view through the sheet of glass was... well, it was just not right. I got that same odd, vaguely queasy feeling I have already described, because what I was seeing was supposed to make sense, but it did not. A scant moment later, I realized that the glass was not the huge window I had taken it to be, but an equally large mirror, and that what was being reflected in it was a cokeyed perspective of the street behind me. It was not until I was able to assign the contextually accurate meaning to the mirror, and thus to the view it framed, that I could settle my ontologically jangled nerves.

There is no easily identifiable metaphor for unformulated experience in this example, as there was in the towel over the chair, because the percept that eluded me was preceded, not by a vague, undifferentiated one, but by a quite explicitly inaccurate one. What I want to illustrate by offering this instance is merely how experience depends on the meanings we assign to it. The illustration shows that even when experience just "arrives" in our awareness (that is, when we do not sit and "figure it out"), as it most often does, we have played a much larger role in its formulation than we have any idea. In this example, without any kind of explicit awareness of doing so, I approached the truck with a ready-made interpretation about the view across the sidewalk: it was the kind of view one sees through a window. It was not until I could see both my interpretation, or pre-conception, and the alternative to it, that I could formulate a different perception. Interestingly, despite a rather large change in the meaning of what I saw, nothing changed in the appearance the scene offered me. Analogously, in psychoanalysis we frequently and repeatedly discover new meanings for events that, in and of themselves, never change.

If we are asked exactly what is unformulated in unformulated experience, then, we can say that it is meaning. When we accomplish a new formulation, we have created a new meaning. Sometimes a new meaning entails new perceptions, memories, fantasies, and so on; sometimes it does not.

Some time ago, Eugene Gendlin (1962, 1964) described a similar phenomenon, which he described as "felt meaning." The phenomenological quality of felt meaning is very close to what I am describing as unformulated experience, and so I close this introductory chapter by quoting at length one of Gendlin's (1964) particularly evocative descriptions.

[A] felt meaning can contain very many meanings and can be further and further elaborated. Thus, the felt meaning is not the same in kind as the precise symbolized explicit meaning. The reason the difference in kind is so important is because if we ignore it we assume that explicit meanings are (or were) already in the implicit felt meaning. We are led to make the felt, implicit meaning a kind of dark place in which countless explicit meanings are hidden. We then wrongly assume that these meanings are "implicit" and felt only in the sense that they are "hidden." I must emphasize that the "implicit" or "felt" datum of experiencing is a sensing of body life. As such it may have countless organized aspects, but this does not mean that they are conceptually formed, explicit, and hidden. Rather, we complete and form them when we explicate [pp. 113-114].