

# ***IMAGINATION, THE ARTS AND PLAY:***

## ***WHAT THE LION MAN TELLS US.***

....In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Shakespeare has Theseus say "*And, as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.*"

### **INTRODUCTION**

Shakespeare's imagination gave us poetry and plays showing a profound insight into an understanding of our human condition. Freud's imagination, using many facets of the arts, i.e. poetry, novels, myths and the visual arts as well as his own self-analysis, gave us psychoanalysis and with it an understanding of the power of our unconscious.

In "The Interpretation of Dreams" (Freud, 1900) Freud provided us with a psychoanalytic understanding of how to use our dreams as the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of our minds. The dream itself he regarded as an outcome of dream-work, a process of transformation. Thereby latent dream-thoughts are turned into the manifest dream, possible of being understood and therefore known via a process of interpretation. In essence, it is the activity of imagining while we sleep which produces the dream, making insight, understanding, new thoughts and knowledge possible (Freud, 1905).

The intention of what follows is to explore the way our capacity to imagine can transform by use of the arts the raw material of the emotionally sensed unknown to something known, to some real object although not necessarily to a physical image despite the common etymology of "image" and "imagination." Not unlike dream-work, the arts are used for the expression of what

emerges from our inner world, i.e. phantasies feelings, day dreams, ideas. Whilst some of these expressions can often manifest themselves in a hazy, fleeting and thereby vague form, they may nevertheless initiate, often in a pressing way, a need or a wish for them to be expressed in order to be known.

In order to find a suitable entry into exploring imagination and its power through using the arts to create meaning out of “airy nothing” a good example to use is the creation of the “Lion Man” sculpted 40,000 years ago by ice age hunters (Figure 1). In considering the example it will be useful to include consideration both of how imagination has been referred to psychoanalytically and of attempts to define imagination psychoanalytically. These considerations are, however, inconclusive - it does not seem possible to arrive at a definition or a useful psychoanalytic concept of exactly what imagination is.

It is nevertheless possible to elucidate the function of imagination. Imagination, in particular imaginative use of the arts and the use of imagination in play, enables us to give shape to the outside world, making it understood and known and thus real. The use of the arts achieves this via transformation of feelings into a piece of art, whether this be a visual object, music, dance, poetry or prose.

For the present purposes the arts are seen as imaginative activity, transforming feelings into an expressed form when these feelings cannot easily be verbalized, rather than as activity aimed purely at producing something of aesthetic value. Art from this perspective is not art for its own sake but a necessary tool to deal with life itself. This is well put by Ellen Dissanayake, a social psychologist whose approach comes from the perspective of evolutionary biology and departs from the position of contemporary aesthetics in relation to art. Her view of art is an ethological one, seeing it as having a biological core, deeply embedded in our way living (1995). For Dissanayake, making art is a behavioural tendency - the arts have been integral to human evolution and they are biologically essential.

According to Dissanayake,

The arts, in concert with ritual ceremonies, play, laughter, storytelling, synchronized movement, and the sharing of self-transcendent, ecstatic emotions, are no less evolutionarily salient and intrinsic to our humanness than individual conflicts of interest (1995 p.12).

Before delving more into the relationship between imagination and the arts it is worth a diversion to a more specific but preliminary consideration of imagination as understood in psychoanalysis.

## **IMAGINATION FROM THE PSYCHOANALYTIC VIEWPOINT**

Imagination is so central to the human mind and to the mind's link to the use of the arts that further exploration, limited as it might be, seems worthwhile. An underpinning of psychoanalytic theory is an obvious requirement for doing so but other different domains of knowledge, like neuroscience, evolutionary biology, perceptual psychology, anthropology and the social sciences also have contributions to make.

Imagination is a concept that resides in our imagination - we imagine what imagination is. In our imagination we each hold our own unique personal picture of the world, including, in a circular fashion, what we understand imagination to be.

Given this limitation it is not surprising that a review of the psychoanalytic literature finds no universal definition and, further, indicates that imagination has not been much explored as a psychoanalytic concept in its own right. Britton pointedly asks,

But what is and where is the Imagination in any modern model of the Mind?" and "How can we conceive of it in psychoanalytic terms? (1998, p.1).

When imagination is mentioned - and it is mentioned in abundance - it emerges that the meaning of the word varies depending on the point of view of the author and on the context in which it is mentioned. Furthermore, imagination is often conflated with the concepts of phantasy and creativity. This conflation arises from the fact that psychoanalytic concepts cannot be indubitable, timeless and universal because of the subject matter they are dealing with. Imagination is one of them. Psychoanalytic concepts can be hazy and therefore prone to suffering diversity of definition in differing contexts - as is the case for imagination. Attempts have nevertheless been made to define imagination albeit without bringing about a shared theoretical psychoanalytic construct for it.

A review of existing references to imagination in psychoanalytic writing shows but few attempts to define it. However, it is often linked to the need for acquisition of meaning and of knowledge. Freud refers to this need in his “Three Essays on Sexuality” (1905) where he speaks of the child’s sexual phantasy and curiosity driving the thirst for knowledge. Freud called this “*Wissenstrieb*”. The literal translation of this from German to English is “drive for knowledge” but Strachey called it an “*epistemophilic impulse*” (Britton 1998, p.3). Today Strachey’s translation is used in English interchangeably with “*epistemophilic instinct*”.

Whether a drive, an impulse or an instinct, the mental activity of searching for knowledge and ultimately for meaning seems based on the ability of humans to imagine. Although what is searched for might not have been clearly perceived, touched or viscerally known beforehand, once imagination has made it possible to find it and thereby to know it, it has been called into existence. In the words above of Theseus, airy nothing has been given a name. Furthermore, not only does imagination give access to the meaning of an “airy nothing”, but that meaning can then be symbolized through artistic expression.

Before going further into psychoanalytic views of imagination it will be useful for the present purpose of relating the arts and imagination to one another to return to the arts, specifically the example already mentioned, i.e. The Lion Man sculpture.

## IMAGINATION AND THE LION MAN

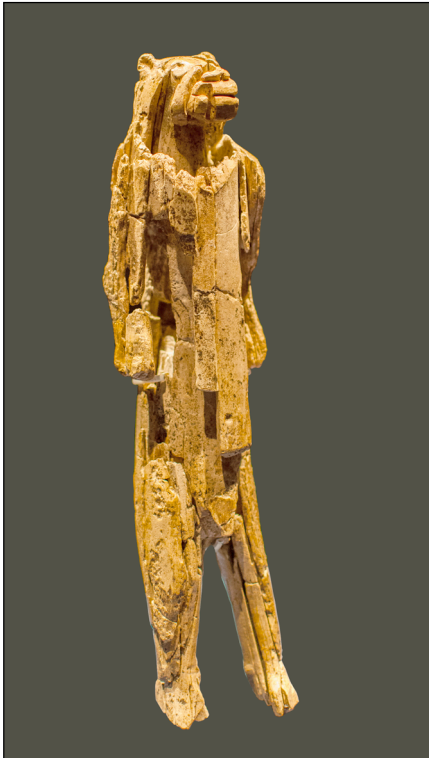


Figure 1. The Lion Man.  
Dagmar Hollmann  
Wikimedia Commons  
Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

The Lion Man. is usually housed in the museum of Ulm in Germany. It was displayed in the British Museum's exhibition "Living with Gods, peoples, places and worlds beyond" from 2nd November 2017 to 8th April 2018 where it was one of two items of particular relevance to the present considerations. The exhibition as a whole explored our enduring need to find meaning and our ability to find it through imagination and belief, not necessarily through perceived reality. It showed how belief can take many forms, from religion to art, rituals, myths and story telling.

The Lion Man is an example of artistic expression arising from the use of imagination. It is a sculpture dating from the last Ice Age. Not only is it a striking example of the

relationship between imagination and artistic endeavour but also its existence contributes to evidence that the minds of our ice-age ancestors were already functioning like those of modern humans (Cook, 2013).

The Lion Man itself was the first of the exhibits at the British Museum's exhibition, standing splendidly alone at the entrance, isolated from other exhibits, and apparently greeting arriving visitors. This 40,000 year-old sculpture, a fragile and yet powerful and compelling piece of art, was unearthed in 1939 as scattered fragments of a mammoth tusk in a cave in Germany.

With the onset of the Second World War the fragments were stored away in a museum cupboard for the duration. To the world's astonishment, when the fragments were finally put together in 1989, a remarkable 30cm high sculpture emerged - that of a human body with the head of a cave lion. Its bold upright position and detailed anatomical depiction from the navel to the alert

pricked ears are clear evidence of the human capacity, not only to observe nature keenly, but to make intelligent use of the observations.

For the present purposes the crucial point about the Lion Man is the use of imagination by the artist to create an abstract object not existing in the real world. The object represents neither man nor cave lion, nor does it represent any other known creature such as a bison or a mammoth. Realism was not the goal. The product was nothing but a figment of the sculptor's imagination. This required symbolic thought and abstract thinking in addition to the craftsmanship of carving.

We cannot know the purpose the Lion Man served for the ice age hunters amongst whom it was produced. Whether its purpose was as deity or shaman's object, we can only speculate (Cook 2013, MacGregor 2018). Whatever its purpose, this sculpture is evidence of the fundamental power of imagination to create something of meaning. Whatever the meaning, it must have been of great importance to those who supported its maker. It is estimated that the making of this sculpture required around four hundred hours of work. Over these hours the artist must have been supported by others (Cook, 2013).

The choice of the cave lion for the head transposed to a human body also tells us a story. The cave lion, now extinct, had no mane and lived in caves just like our artist. At that time this animal was the most powerful predator and was bigger than the lion of today. It was at the top of the food chain and hence a formidable threat to ice age hunters. Perhaps this upright lion-human was imagined as having the physical power of the cave lion with the mental and emotional power of humans, the best of both worlds so to speak. Although but a figment of imagination, this hybrid figure presumably offered something of great importance.

It had a facet of reality because it could be looked at, perhaps touched, talked to or worshipped. This may have led on to the greater issue of collective belief. Collective belief, perhaps even in a form we might today classify as a religion, opens up the possibility of identification and incorporation, offering a reassuringly strong internal object to assist in dealing with the terrors of physical weakness in an unforgiving world.

As an aside from the theme of meaning and knowing, it is astonishing how the Lion Man anticipates things to come, from the sphinx and satyrs to angels and devils and ultimately to great pieces of art like Michelangelo's "David" or Leonardo da Vinci's "Vitruvius Man."

What began in the distant past as lines, marks, or blots of colour developed over time into images with representational status (Smith 1992). These first visible traces of making a mark occurred long before one could speak of images but our ancestors eventually began to see their marks as images. They used their imagination to expand reality by making art and artistic objects, the Lion Man sculpture being one such.

## **IMAGINATION AND A MODERN CREATION**

At the other extreme from the Lion Man in every way, conceptually, date of creation and even in its physical location at the exit of the exhibition is a creation of the American conceptual artist, Robert Barry. This consists solely of the following words on vinyl film on a white wall:-

It is wholly indeterminate.

It has no specific traits.

It is entirely ineffable.

It is never seen.

This could well be taken as a description of the imaginative processes leading to the creation of the Lion Man. Barry seems to be addressing the limitations of artistic objects in expressing artists' imaginative intent unequivocally, i.e. there is always to some extent a degree of the artists' intent left unknown, unperceived or unrecognized - possibly even by the artist.

Barry's words are evocative of the enigmatic nature of our imagination. Despite every attempt made, both through centuries of philosophical consideration and in more recent times through

neuroscience, it remains a tantalizing fact that imagination cannot be known – it can only be sensed through intuition or, indeed, through imagination itself as a kind of meta-process.

## **IMAGINATION AND BION'S "TRANSFORMATION"**

At the outset of this exploration the intention stated was to explore the way our capacity to imagine can transform the emotionally sensed unknown to the known by use of the arts. So far the considerations have focused on imagination itself and the outcome as art object of some kind. Little consideration has been given to the actual process of transformation. Despite their positions as polar opposites in the spectrum from solid sculpture to words in print, both the Lion Man and Barry's word concept have in common the requirement for a transformation from the imagined to an expressed real. What is imagined clearly cannot be shared without transforming it into something intelligible to others in some sense.

Bion addresses this process of transformation ([1965] 1991). He first designates the inexpressible and unknowable as "O" - in his words he gives it the sign "O." He acknowledges borrowing here from Kant, for whom the unknown is the "thing-in-itself", the thing which can never be known. In acting as the medium through which the inchoate is made manifest the artist is able to transform that which springs from his otherwise inexpressible "O" into the expressed form of a piece of art. Hence, when looking at a piece of art, we are looking at a transformation of what the artist has done with his "O". The object thus created might strike our sensory and perceptual system and thereby move us and enable us to share common feelings. Or it might stimulate our curiosity and, with the use of our own imagination, might generate or influence our own "O", one not necessarily corresponding to that of the artist. While we may sense what the artist attempted to communicate with his transformation, we can never really know. In fact, we might be moved individually in different ways resulting in differing senses of what may have come from the artist's "O".



It is intriguing to consider that Bion's "O" itself must have arisen from an act of imagining, imagining a name for something which by its very nature cannot really be defined. By naming the unknown as "O" he created a symbol which could then become useful for understanding the process of transformation of "O", thereby creating meaning and understanding of what would otherwise remain obscure and hidden.

It also intriguing that in "Transformations" Bion (1965 ) says nothing about imagination per se. Specifically he does not mention it as the driver of the artistic effort, the process of transformation of an "O" to an object of art.

Notwithstanding the views of Bion, imagination as a mental function and process remains an on-going interest in psychoanalytic theory.

## **PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDING OF IMAGINATION**

There have been many and varied attempts to understand and/or define imagination in the literature of psychoanalysis. As noted earlier, the word itself is understood in differing ways, depending on context and differing psychoanalytic understandings. It is often conflated with phantasy.

The psychoanalytic concept of phantasy itself has been the subject of numerous publications. Phantasy is commonly considered to be inextricably intertwined with the unconscious and has long been a core concept of psychoanalytic thinking and practice. For Klein and Isaacs phantasy, conscious or unconscious, is inherent in all mental activity, psychic function and of course, mental growth (Isaacs 1952, Klein 1930).

Spillius, however, is more specific.

I think that Freud and Klein emphasised contrasting aspects of the everyday usage of the word phantasy. The word conveys contrasting implications both in English and I believe also in German. It has a connotation of the imagination and creativity that underlie all

thought and feeling, but it also has a connotation of make-believe, a daydream, something that is untrue by the standards of material reality.” (2001, p. 362).

In support of Spillius, in German the word "Phantasie" is commonly used interchangeably with "Vorstellungskraft" and "Einbildungskraft", the literal translation into English of both these German words being "power of imagination."

Britton seems to have something similar to Spillius in mind when he states that we locate some phantasies in our imagination. He writes,

I had already equated the imagination, conceived of as a place in the mind, with something I had begun to call the 'other room' on the basis of my clinical work". He continues, "When we place our phantasies about events in this psychic 'other room' we know we are imagining something. It is the space for fiction (1998, pp. 120-121).

This space for fiction is known to be fiction and is no longer regarded as unconscious phantasy. For Britton this fictional other space is

a space that could be imagined or imaginatively created by a work of art but never physically entered as it is only imagined. (p.121).

Whilst Britton regards imagination as phantasy "in another room", Goldman separates phantasy from imagination (Goldman, D. 2017). For him,

Imagination is not another term for “fantasy” or name for the unconscious”. (Goldman, 2017, p. 25.) He continues, “...imagination sculpts distinctive unconscious objects and narratives.” (p.25).

To make his point he précises what Theseus has to say in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Theseus says,

As imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.

A similar view to that of Goldman is held by Beres (1960). In his view our capacity to imagine enables us to form mental representations of diverse things - an object, an affect, a body function, or an instinctual drive - even if not actually immediately present to the senses. Beres concludes that

imagination is a complex psychic function, itself the resultant of a group of ego functions, that enters into all aspects of human psychic activity – normal mentation, pathological processes, and artistic creativity (p.327).

Whilst seeing imagination as a psychic function he also sees it as a process bringing about images, symbols, phantasies, dreams, ideas, thoughts and concepts – as we might consider to be epitomized by the Lion Man. Hence, not only is imagination a process of giving form to mental images, but it is also a necessary tool to give shape to the world, to acquire knowledge and with it self agency. Beres puts it as,

Without imagination, reality is only sensed and experienced; with imagination, reality becomes an object of awareness. With his imagination man participates in reality, alters it, and even to some extent controls it (1960, p.334).

Thus for Beres imagination has a function and is an ongoing process which allows us to adapt to reality, a view that Rosen (1960) shares when he emphasizes that imagination is designed to fill the void of ambiguity with a new conceptual structure that can become the basis for further exploration of the inner, as well as the outer world.

Others regard imagination as rooted in neurobiology where the focus is solely on the function of the brain which is seen as having the primary task of the acquisition of knowledge. In this view, imagination is understood to be a process which serves to transform perceptual data into knowledge (Kandel 2012; Oppenheim 2013; Solms 2013, Zeki 2009). According to Solms, it is our upper brainstem which registers affect and arousal. This has to happen first before the frontal cortex transforms “*a portion of affect into conscious perception.*” (Solms 2013, p.15).

Consequently it is our frontal cortex which has the capacity for representational forms of memory by stabilizing the objects of perception and thereby generating object-presentations.

However, a solely neuroscientific view cannot explain the mystery of our imagination. For example, the workings of the imagination of the ice-age artist in settling on the lion-human object, the Lion Man, cannot simply be explained by or found just in a physical model of the brain such as neuronal pathways. It is a vexing and puzzling issue in that, whilst it is brain activity which produced the Lion Man, we have no means of defining the nature of the corresponding imaginative activity.

Likewise, whilst our psychoanalytic theories and insights may act like the stone tools our ancestor's hand used to make the Lion Man, in the end it is our capacity to imagine which brings about the ongoing and never ending process of interpretation and attribution of meaning and

knowledge. This is despite the fact that the process itself is invisible to us - in the words of Barry's conceptual creation above, *"It is never seen. It is not accessible."*

In summary, whilst there is not yet a commonly-accepted psychoanalytic concept of imagination, we can note that the major difference between understandings of it lies between viewing imagination on the one hand solely as phantasy, unconscious or conscious, and on the other viewing it as a separate mental activity in its own right. The latter is understood to be an ongoing complex psychic function which is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge and adaptation to reality. In other words imagination is an active and conscious mental process which uses the process of transformation to express what arises from conscious or unconscious phantasies into a form or an object which can then be received and understood. This process is particularly essential when words alone cannot sufficiently express and communicate what it is that needs to be communicated.

To understand imagination solely or primarily as phantasy, i.e. as synonymous with phantasy, leaves out the active component of this vital mental functions, the act of transformation itself.

Although these different viewpoints cannot really be reconciled, it seems safe to conclude that, while imagination emanates from the wellspring of our unconscious phantasy, when driven by emotional awareness and fuelled by the epistemophilic instinct it becomes a conscious and active process in its own right. It is a process which is well addressed by Abel-Hirsch who puts it this way:

Imaginative thought is more sustained work than phantasy. Whilst it has its roots in phantasy, imaginative thought is where the capacity to manufacture or represent our world meets up with reality. Imaginative work is an intercourse between one's internal and external worlds (2001, p. 55).

## IMAGINATION: CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

The capacity to “manufacture or represent our world” is indeed a vital function of imagination because we cannot really know external reality. Neuroscientists and philosophers agree that our neuro-physiological and psychological faculties cannot provide the much sought certainty of the real. Our vision is limited to the perception of what is external to us as perceivers. We therefore cannot differentiate between perception and reality because we do not know what lies behind the perception (Bion [1965] 1991; Solms 1997). For Bion,

The belief that reality is or could be known is mistaken because reality is not something which lends itself to being known. It is impossible to know reality for the same reason that makes it impossible to sing potatoes;.... ([1965] 1991, p.148).

Hence, the act of seeing and knowing what we see is fundamentally a matter for interpretation. This inability to differentiate between perception and reality also applies to our psychic reality which is created by belief, conscious or unconscious (Britton 1998, pp.11-12). We believe in who we imagine we are and, further, we believe in who we imagine our fellow humans to be. However, how we see ourselves and how we see others is subject to change because the process of imagination is fundamentally an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of what constitutes our sense of reality, beliefs and meaning. As a result, psychic reality is also subject to change.

Oppenheim came to the following conclusion about reality:

...the most we can say, and say with legitimacy, about external reality is that it is that from which the imagination, for all its unreality, forms its very real images. Images are not formed ex nihilo, but are generated from other images and, in this sense reality is not fixed

but expansive in measure relative to one's capacity for openness, receptivity and responsivity (2013, p.40).

This conclusion supports Beres in his view that not only can reality can be expanded but it can also be altered and to some degree controlled.

Given the above-mentioned lack of a commonly-accepted psychoanalytic concept of imagination it is worth turning to the work of neuroscientists whose research specifically focuses on the function and effectiveness of the arts. Their findings significantly enhance psychoanalytic understanding by exploring how it is achieved.

### **NEUROSCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF IMAGINATION**

Both Zeki, the pioneer of neuroaesthetics, and the neuroscientist, Ramachandran (Ramachandran 1999; Zeki 2001) include the arts as a vital source for obtaining knowledge, stating that art encourages an active and imaginative exploration of the world. Zeki describes this process as the primordial function of the visual brain, which is also the primordial function of art. Because our eyes do not work like a camera but are enmeshed with physical and emotional responses, we do not just see the world, or see a piece of art, we have a visceral experience in response to what we see. Consequently art, whether or not creating an illusion, has an emotional impact on us when the artist succeeds in tapping into our emotional conscious and unconscious. Once emotions are aroused, both cognitive and physiological responses in the observer are elicited and are even capable of producing a whole-body response. This is true not only for the visual arts but for music, dance and poetry.

Ramachandran argues that many forms of art are successful in capturing our imagination because they involve deliberate overstatement, exaggeration and distortion designed to pique our curiosity and produce a satisfying emotional response (Ramachandran 1999). Our ancestors

instinctively knew this and the ice-age artist who created the Lion Man was no exception. The sculptor abstracted the essential features of the image and discarded redundant or insignificant bits or information not needed to achieve the emotional response intended.

For the Lion Man, the artist chose essential and useful human physical features, namely an upright position with hands free to use, together with the cave lion's essential features, namely animal power evoking terror. We can hardly doubt that this figure was a compelling object, both fascinating its beholders and feeding their curiosity and imagination.

The neuroscientist and Nobel Prize winner Eric Kandel (2012) brings forward the emerging intersections amongst neuroscience, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and art. For him, imagination is placed at the crossroads of visual neuroscience and the psychodynamic functioning of the mind-brain with imagination functioning as a mediating faculty between the two.

The process of using imagination as the mediating faculty is, however, mentally challenging. Winnicott regards the individual as being in a constant struggle to distinguish phantasy from fact, external from psychic reality, the world from the dream. He claims

...that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.) (1953, p. 96).

It is this "intermediate area" of Winnicott which helps us to go outside the demands and strains of perceived reality and to use our imagination freely, in other words to play with ideas. This leads us on to considering inter-relationships between imagination and play, a topic which would deserve a paper on its own.



## IMAGINATION AND PLAYING

Playing has been a much explored topic in philosophy and psychoanalysis. Although Freud 's references to play were scattered throughout his writing he nevertheless stated,

“Should we not look for the first traces of imaginative activity as early as in childhood? The child’s best-loved and most intense occupation is with his play or games [das Spiel]. Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?”(Freud, 1908 [1907], pp. 143–4).

Freud makes a link here between the imaginative activity and playing, linking child’s play to creativity and the arts. This activity which Freud describes however, does not end with childhood but continues throughout our lives, beginning from birth..

Regarding the Lion Man we can speculate about the extent to which playing, at the very least playing with ideas, was crucial to the creation of the sculpture. Creating the Lion Man could hardly have been a linear process given how far outside reality it is. Its creators surely drew on Winnicott's intermediate area to be able to play with their ideas and could come up with this hybrid figure. Without the capacity to play the Lion Man could have never been created.

Our Ice Age forbearers were the same curious creatures as we are, curious in order to feed our imaginative desire. Playing is a central element of this, in particular playing with ideas. Like the thought waiting for a thinker for the thought to be known (Bion 1962b), the idea is waiting for the imagination to be called into being and this occurs through playing.

Freud, Klein (1930) and Bion (1962b) all emphasized the importance of the epistemophilic instinct in children, the innate desire of children to reach out and learn about the world. Meltzer (1978) says this is first expressed in the infant's curiosity about the mother's body including the

imagined space inside it, this space being occupied by a variety of objects and contents. This is the child's prototype of the world and the wellspring of its imagination and phantasies. If all goes well, over time the narrowness of a twosome world will become an exuberant universe of infinite possibilities driven by the capacity for and the use of imagination.

The centrality of playing as an important and universal part of the imaginative process leads us on to consideration of some activities of infancy, early childhood and finally our work in the consulting room. Consideration of these activities relates to what we can draw from the Lion Man about art and imagination in that they underpin the Lion Man's creation.

Infancy is a time when we are without language and must rely on means other than words for communication. Engaging and communicating with an infant becomes playing. We use the music of the voice and non-verbal physical behaviours, all of which intuitively draw on deliberate overstatement, exaggeration and distortion (Ramachandran 1999).

The parent's verbal and non-verbal behaviour in dealing with the infant becomes a multimedia show by a skilled performance artist. The face of the mother in playful engagement with her infant changes when responding to or trying to reach out to her infant. Her eyes open very wide, her mouth broadens into a big smile and her eyebrows are raised. At the same time her voice changes and becomes soft and high pitched, quite musical, clear and often rhythmic and repetitive. In short, the features of the face and voice are much exaggerated, inviting, welcoming, visibly and audibly pleasing and enticing. She artistically and imaginatively turns her face and her voice into a compelling object of interest. She is also having a conversation with her infant, a sort of a to and fro between her and the sounds and noises of the infant.

Trevarthen calls this not a conversation but a "proto conversation", which he denotes as playing (Trevarthen 2009). The mother knows that her baby does not understand the words she is saying but nevertheless believes that she is received and understood emotionally by her child. A mutuality is established, far exceeding physical need-satisfying functions (Stern 1985, 1990).

Post infancy we see in early childhood imagination used in the young child's play, particularly in the creation of make-believe worlds. This imaginary world is an intermediate space where the child uses a "pretend" mode of playing. The pivotal role of this is extensively explored in Target and Fonagy's three articles on "Playing with Reality". (Fonagy, P. and Target, M. 1996, 2000; Target, M. and. Fonagy, P. 1996). Extending Winnicott's notion of "Playing and Reality" (Winnicott, 1986) by a change of wording to "Playing with Reality" they show how it is through play - in particular pretend in play and playful interactions - that the child is able to reflect on thoughts and feelings. However, whilst playing the child knows intuitively that his ideas are representational and belong to his imaginary world, not to reality. It is vital for the playing child that the meaning of the pretend in his play and its correspondence with reality remains unexamined. Was this also vital to the creator(s) of the Lion Man?

According to Goldman,

When pretending, we are our own authors, directors and actors, accessing with pleasure the multiplicity of our imaginary worlds (1993 p.66).

Given the estimated 400 hours of work in the manufacturing activity alone, Goldman presumably describes the creation of the Lion Man, a make-believe object from the imaginary world of our forbears.

As the last of the activities to be considered our work in the consulting room is equally dependent on the use of our imagination and our capacity to play. Winnicott considered playing to be at the core of the psychoanalytic treatment ([1971] 1986) and to take place in a transitional area shared between the patient and the analyst. This means that the tools of theoretical psychoanalysis alone are not sufficient. We must use these in combination with imagination and play. Heaney (1980, p.47), in relation to the poet's way with words, writes,

It involves the discovery of ways to go out of .... normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate...

In the consulting room there is a shift in focus from perceived actual reality to psychic reality, where patient and therapist can safely and imaginatively explore shared internal worlds. During the clinical hour the therapist attempts to transform and gather into a form, i.e. an interpretation, the raw material evoked within the emotional dynamics of the therapeutic relationship. In Bion's terms the therapist aims to effect a transformation from the "O" of the raw material to the known of the interpretation.

### **IMAGINATION, ART AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Bion draws an analogy between the techniques of psychoanalysis and those of a painter. ([1965] 1991). Notwithstanding his repeated references to "O" being "unknowable" as in the description of transformation above, he writes:

I shall understand what he (the patient) says or does as if it were an artist's painting. In the session the facts of his behaviour are like the facts of a painting and from them I must find the nature of his representation...I hope to discover from the invariants in this material what "O" is, what he does to transform "O"... (Bion [1965] 1991, p.15).

In similar vein Loewald expresses this as

The progression in...an hour is quite similar to the progression of a work of art, a poem, a musical composition, a painting, at a propitious moment or period during the artist's work.

There, too, it is the momentum of an active imaginative process .....”(Loewald 1975, p. 284).

## CONCLUSION

The consideration of these activities demonstrates that imaginative work takes place as a constant and never ending intercourse between our internal life and the world around us, inherently making use of the arts, including in the practice of psychoanalysis. The search for meaning in and understanding of the hidden and unknown involves both what Loewald calls an “*active imaginative process*” and, in relation to psychotherapy, what Bion calls a search for understanding of that which “...*the patient says or does as if it were an artist’s painting*”.

Imagination is fundamental to all of this. Nevertheless, and despite all the further considerations above of the various ideas, concepts and attempts to say what imagination is, the question of why there seems so little sign of a definitive statement, or much in the way of a consensus, is left unanswered. Imagination remains an enigma. It remains “*entirely ineffable*” and “*never seen*”.

The only sign of much consensus is in the view that we each have our own personal picture of the world around us created by our own unique imaginative processing. If we put this together with the idea that we imagine what imagination is, i.e. we each have our own unique concept of imagination, then it is little wonder that there is no universally accepted definition.

The Lion Man tells us that humans have for millennia been able to use imagination to create art, in this case enabling us to transcend nature by figuratively erasing the boundary between human and animal. This piece of art may have responded to

...our compelling need which we all have, for stories that order our memories and hopes, and give shape and meaning to our individual and collective lives.” (MacGregor 2018, p. XII).

Out of “airy nothing” something was created which may have bound people together and therefore assisted in the struggle for survival.

From the distant time of the creation of the Lion Man right up to the present we have used our imagination to transform by use of the arts the raw material of the emotionally sensed unknown to something known - creating, manufacturing dreams and manufacturing reality as physical and mental survival mechanisms. But imagination is of a much higher order - are we human without it? Oppenheim claims that “The death of imagination, synonymous with life, is unimaginable”. (2013, p.22 ) Perhaps we can say that, for the human, imagination is life.

## REFERENCES

### Figure 1:

*The Lion Man.*

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:L%C3%B6wenmensch#/media/File:Loewenmensch1.jpg>

Abel Hirsch, N. (2001) *Ideas in Psychoanalysis, Eros*. Cambridge: Icon Books.

Beres, D. (1960) Perception, Imagination, and Reality. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 41:327-334.

Bion, W. [1962a] (1987) *A theory of thinking*. Second Thoughts, London: Maresfield Reprints, London: Karnac Books.

Bion, W. [1962b] (1984) *Learning from Experience*. Maresfield Reprints, London: Karnac Books.

Bion, W. [1965] (1991) *Transformations*. London: Karnac Books.

Britton, R. (1998) *Belief and Imagination*. Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge,

Cook, J. (2013) *Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind*. London: The British Museum Press.

Dissanayake, E. (1995). *Homo Aestheticus. Where Art comes from and why*. Seattle, USA: University of Washington Press.

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (1996) Playing with Reality: I. Theory of Mind and the Normal Development of Psychic Reality. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 77:217-233.

Fonagy, P. & Target, M. (2000) "Playing with reality: III. The persistence of dual psychic reality in borderline patients." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 81:853-73.

Freud, S. (1900) The Interpretation of Dreams. SE 4 et 5 [GW II et III].

Freud, S. (1905a) Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905) SE 7, 130–243. [GW V, 29–145].

Freud, S. 1908 [1907]. Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming. SE 9, 141–154 [GW VII, 213–223].

Goldman, D. (2017) *A Beholder's Share. Essays on Winnicott and the Psychoanalytic Imagination*. Oxon: Routledge.

Heaney, S.. (1980) Feeling into Words. In *Preoccupations, Selected Prose, 1968 – 1978*. London: Faber and Faber.

Isaacs, S. (1952) The nature and function of phantasy. In: *The Freud/Klein Controversies, 1941-1945*. London: Routledge, ed. P. King and R. Steiner, 1991, pp. 264-321 (first version).  
Revised version: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*: **29**:73-97 (1948). Also in *Developments in Psycho-Analysis*, ed. M. Klein et al. London: Hogarth, pp. 67-121.

Kandel, E.R. (2012) *The Age of Insight. The Quest to understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain*. New York: Random House.

Klein, M. (1930) The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **11**:24-39.

Loewald, H.W. (1975) Psychoanalysis as an Art and the Fantasy Character of the Psychoanalytic Situation. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, **23**: 277-299

Mac Gregor, N. (2018) *Living with the Gods. On Beliefs and Peoples*. Penguin Random House UK.

Meltzer, D. (1978) *The Kleinian Development*. London: Karnac Books.

Oppenheim, L. (2013) *Imagination, from Fantasy to Delusion*. Hove: Routledge.



Ramachandran V.S. (1999) The Science of Art: A neurological theory of aesthetic experience. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* **6**:15-51.

Rosen, H.D. (1960) Some Aspects of the Role of Imagination in the Analytic Process. *Journal American Psychoanalytical Association* **8**:229-251.

Smith, N.W. (1992) *An Analysis of Ice Age Art. Its Psychology and Belief System*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Solms.M. (1997) What is Consciousness? *Journal American Psychoanalytical Association* **45**:681-703.

Solms, M. (2013) The Conscious Id. *Neuropsychoanalysis*, **15**:5-19.

Spillius, E.B. (2001) "Freud and Klein on the Concept of Phantasy." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **82**:361-373.

Stern, D. N. (1985) *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books.

Stern, D. N. (1995) *The Motherhood Constellation*. New York: Basic Books.

Target, M. & Fonagy, P. (1996) Playing with reality: II. The development of psychic reality from a theoretical perspective. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **77**:459-79.

Trevarthen, C. (2009) The intersubjective psychobiology of human meaning: Learning of culture depends on interest for co-operative practical work – and affection for the joyful art of good company. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* **19**:507-518.

Winnicott, D. W. (1953) Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena: A Study of the First Not-me Possession. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* **34**:89–97.

Winnicott, D.W. [1971] (1986) *Playing and Reality*. Aylesbury: Pelican Books.

Zeki, S. (1999). *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*. New York: Oxford University Press.