

The Unconscious Memory Network

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Sitting on the train back to St Petersburg, the day after the fateful ball, Anna Karenina thinks to herself, “Well, that’s all over, and thank God!” Yet when during a stop-over, Count Vronsky, the man from whom she is fleeing, suddenly comes into view, her reaction reveals something quite different. As Tolstoy describes it, the sight of him was ‘exactly what her soul had wished but her reason had feared’. So begins the long tortuous conflict between Anna’s conscious thoughts and the inexplicable unconscious processes that underlie them.

Such a gap between what we think and what we know is at the heart of the investigations of the Unconscious Memory Network. Founded in October 2014, this forum brings together the rich and varied representations of unconscious processes in literature with the new science of the unconscious. It explores what it is to remember without awareness and how unconscious memory delimits, defines and transforms the concept of conscious cognition. The aim is to integrate the vast amount of relevant information emerging from cognitive neuroscience on the pivotal role that unconscious memory plays with key concepts in humanities research.

Since 2014, we held nine neuro-literary seminars on various aspects of the unconscious, each of which hosted a neuroscientist and a literary scholar discussing a single theme. Some of the topics were: what is unconscious memory? How does unconscious memory bear on spatial navigation and scene construction? What is priming and what impact does it have on literary technique and processes? What is neuropsychology? What are the mechanisms of autobiographical memory and what light do they throw on Proust? Where does the unconscious fit into ideas of authenticity? Is the unconscious concept or metaphor? We have seen packed seminars, lively debate, and a fruitful exchange of ideas between the

scientists, literary critics and other disciplines in attendance. All the seminars are available on our website as podcasts.

We will be taking a break and reforming at UCSB to continue energetically into our third year. The aim of this network is to generate concrete research agendas for the production of systematic and transdisciplinary knowledge about the unconscious across the divide between the 'two cultures'. Collaboration and suggestions are warmly welcome.

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