



PSYCHOSYNTHESIS & TRANSPERSONAL IMAGINATION

AAP Webinar Series 2024

Presented by: Allan Frater

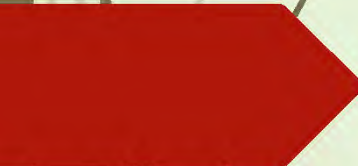
Hosted by: Peter Stewart

*AAP provides resources for people
to cultivate peace and purpose.*



ASSOCIATION_{FOR THE}
ADVANCEMENT_{OF}
PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

AAP provides resources for people to cultivate peace and purpose.



Our mission is to advance the theory and practice of psychosynthesis to benefit individuals and society.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSYNTHESIS?

Psychosynthesis is a **natural experience** of '**synthesis**' within psychological life.

Synthesis having a two-fold meaning:

'**the process** of combining objects or ideas into a complex whole'

+

'the combination or **whole produced** by such a process'

i.e. 'synthesis' = method + goal

Psychosynthesis theory and techniques are ways of thinking-about and working-with this innate tendency towards **synthesis**. Originally connived by [Roberto Assagioli](#)

This workshop sketches an approach to psychosynthesis as an **act of imagination...**

- *"In its most basic sense, psychosynthesis is a name for the conscious attempt to cooperate with the **natural process** of growth - the tendency in each of us and in our world to harmonize and **synthesize** various aspects **at ever higher levels of organization.**" (Synthesis 3-4, Vargiu, J., ed.)*
- *"Psychosynthesis is essentially an attitude...that is **bringing together in an organic whole** diverse and sometimes conflicting elements...in which each element preserves its own individuality and function, in operation with all the others..." (Assagioli, YouTube interview)*

OVERVIEW

The explicit & implicit basis within psychosynthesis for a **transpersonal imagination**.

The 4 limitations of 'inner imagination': dualistic, rationalistic, narcissistic and mechanistic.

The 4 advantages of 'transpersonal imagination': non-dual, trans-rational, participatory and emergent

Practice based considerations to better notice, validate and enhance work with images.



PART1: IMAGINAL IDENTIFICATION



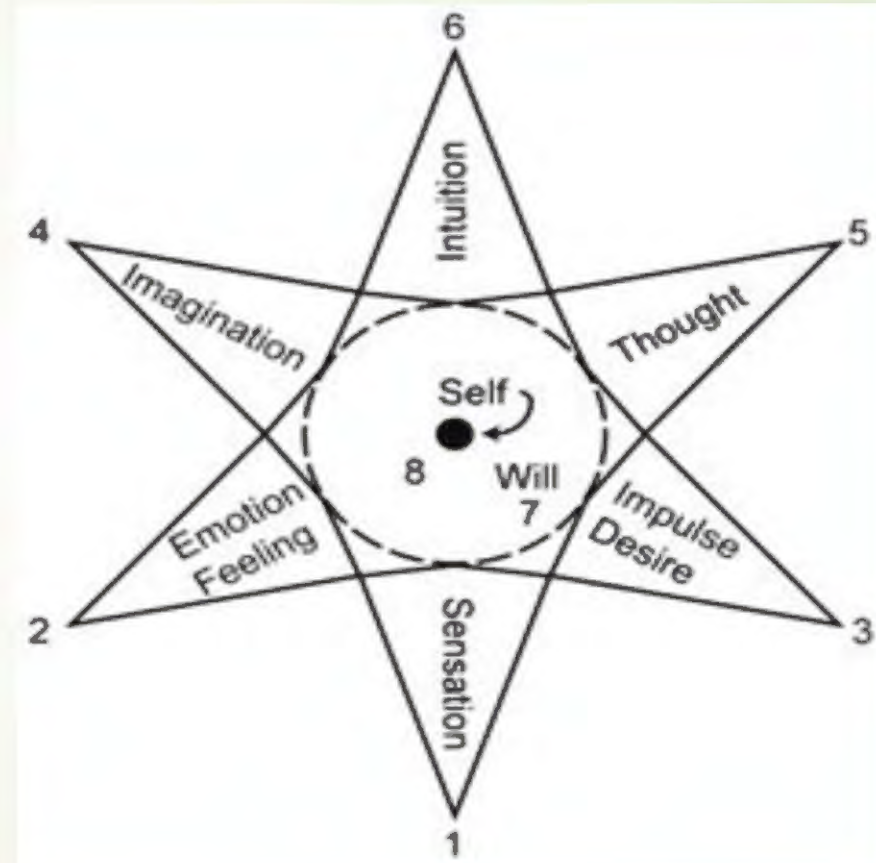
IMAGINATION IN PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

THEORY:

A psychological function - of equal importance to feeling, thinking, sensation etc.

TECHNIQUES:

Guided imagery, visualizations, dialogue with subpersonalities etc.



UNDERSTANDING OF IMAGINATION IN PSYCHOSYNTHESIS?

“It is ironic that those psychologies which seem to give the greatest respect to the imaginal have not inquired into the subject of what they have imagined of imagining”

(Mary Watkins)

➤ *“Imagination is **a function which in itself is to some extent synthetic**, since imagination can operate at several levels concurrently: those of sensation, feeling, thinking, and intuition.” (Assagioli, Psychosynthesis, p143)*

➤ Assagioli's Psychological Laws
PRINCIPLE: images are always related to feelings/thoughts/sensations/actions etc.

***Law I** – Images or mental pictures and ideas tend to produce the physical conditions and the external acts that correspond to them.*

***Law II** – Attitudes, movements and actions tend to evoke corresponding images and ideas; these in turn (according to the next law) evoke or intensify corresponding emotions and feelings.*

***Law III** – Ideas and images tend to awaken emotions and feelings that correspond to them. etc. etc.*

(see The Act of Will)

INNER UNDERSTANDING OF IMAGINATION

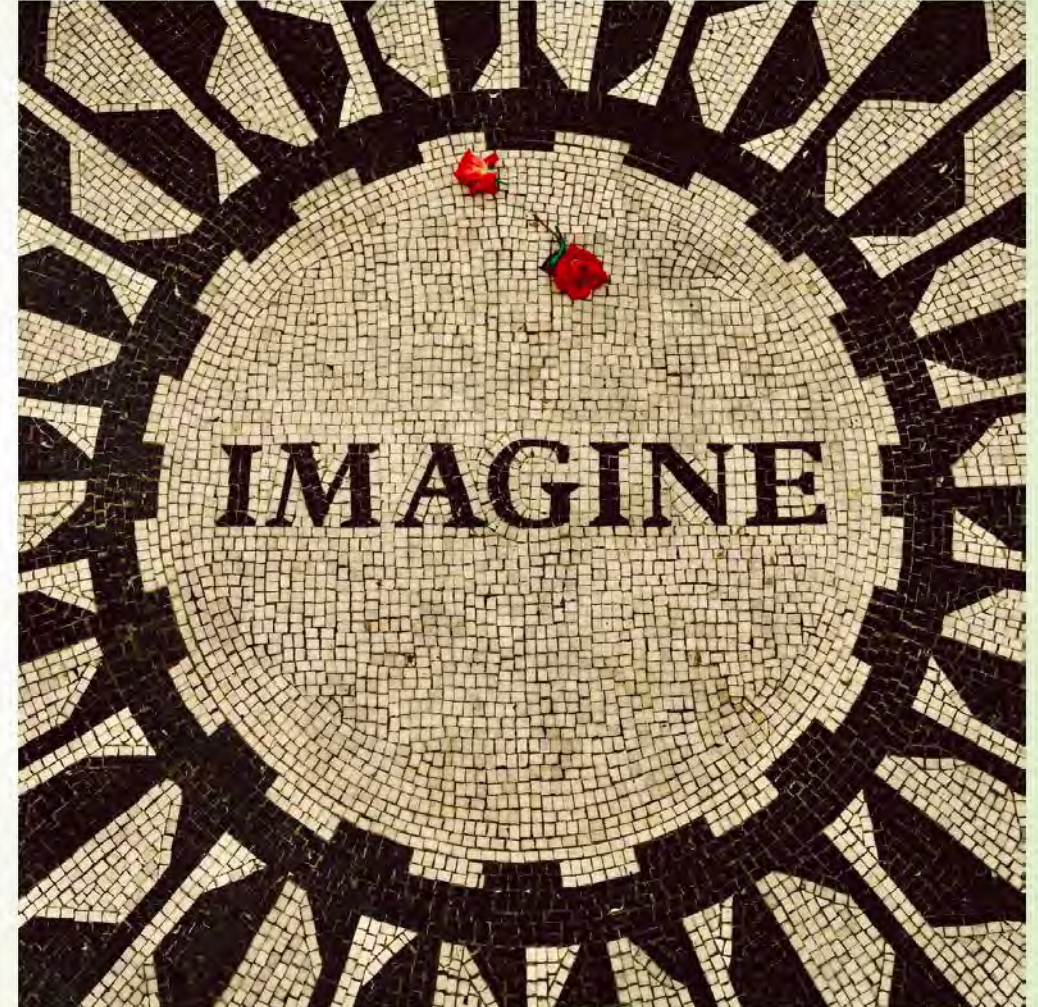
Common sense understanding, as also used in psychosynthesis, is an **'inner imagination'**:

*"the act or power of forming **a mental image** of something **not present to the senses**"*

&

*"**pictures in your mind** of people, places and things you have **not experienced**"*

inner	in contrast to	outer
mental	in contrast to	physical
imagined	in contrast to	perceived
represented	in contrast to	experienced



4 limitations of Inner Imagination

dualistic

Images have a proper location within and an improper projection onto the world, but attempts to fit imaginative experience into neat inner/outer categories is rarely satisfactory or clear-cut.

rationalistic

Being on the 'outside' peering in tends towards 'thinking about' what the images mean. Images are not worked with as images, but rather as symbols which point to meaning elsewhere. Images are turned into ideas, imagining into thinking.

narcissistic

Images assumed to be personal and subjective, perhaps even something we have made up and have a certain control over. A narcissistic self-absorption happens when the ego becomes identified as "the-person-doing-the-imagining", a distortion that serves to further bolster and suit the needs of this identity, moving away from the more relational imaginative engagement that might challenge egoic identification.

mechanistic

Inner images are theorized "as if" mechanical "objects" or "parts", and change is the moving around of these image objects. Imagination is a zero-sum-game, a collection of imaginal components that can be moved around but never increased or destroyed. Offers little to support therapists in understanding how imagination seems to create new ideas, identities, and ways of being, a process that rarely proceeds in a linear, predictable, and controllable mechanical fashion.



IMAGINATIVE EXPERIENCE is not just 'inner'

Feelings, thoughts, sensations...connect us to the world...no more inner than outer

Images are experienced in the world...in chair-work...the transference...

We are surrounded by images...immersion in memories/
the arts...

....a felt presence...a voice...not just optical pictures

...not physical, but not purely subjective either

autonomous images.....not just personal imaginings

Images are a synthesis of all the senses and psychological functions.

Imagination is therefore not a discrete function in itself:

“we never seem to catch imagination operating on its own and we never can circumscribe its place because it works through, behind, within, upon, below our faculties....” (James Hillman)



BROAD UNDERSTANDING OF IMAGINATION

“imagination is the way the senses...
throw themselves beyond what is
immediately given”

(David Abram)

*“You won’t understand anything
about imagination until you realize
that it’s not about making things
up; it’s about perception”*

(Phillip Pullman)

"My contention is that perceiving is
imagining...because the world that is
perceived is continually brought forth, or
called into being, in the very act of
imagination."

(Tim Ingold)

“the perception of images arising in
between self and world”

(Allan Frater)

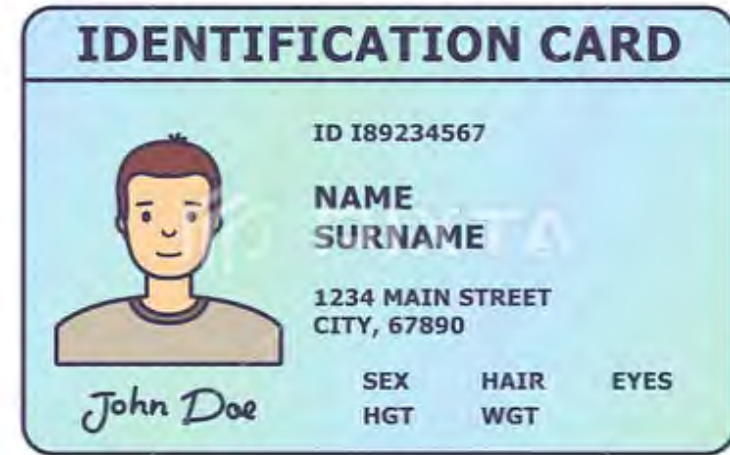
Imaginal Identification

"We are dominated and controlled by everything with which our self becomes identified." (Assagioli, Psychosynthesis, p22)

Typically an 'identification' is taken as a restricted range of feeling/thinking/sensation

Image-based psychosynthesis goes a bit further and understands an '**imaginal identification**' as a **restricted story about self and world**:

body/feeling/mind + perception/action



pixtastock.com - 46802793

Images are not just 'in the mind' any more than just 'in the world'

Images combine a synthesis of inner and outer

Images change the imaginer and the world



IMAGINAL IDENTIFICATION = FANTASY (LIMITED) IMAGINING

*“Though patients seem to be living in a world of imagination, it is in fact their **imagination which has been injured**. They have lost the capacity to be in the world in a creative way.”*

*“We **fantasize** because we cannot imagine. Through fear of rejection or abandonment, we **detach ourselves from our bodies, from others, from the world as a whole.**”*

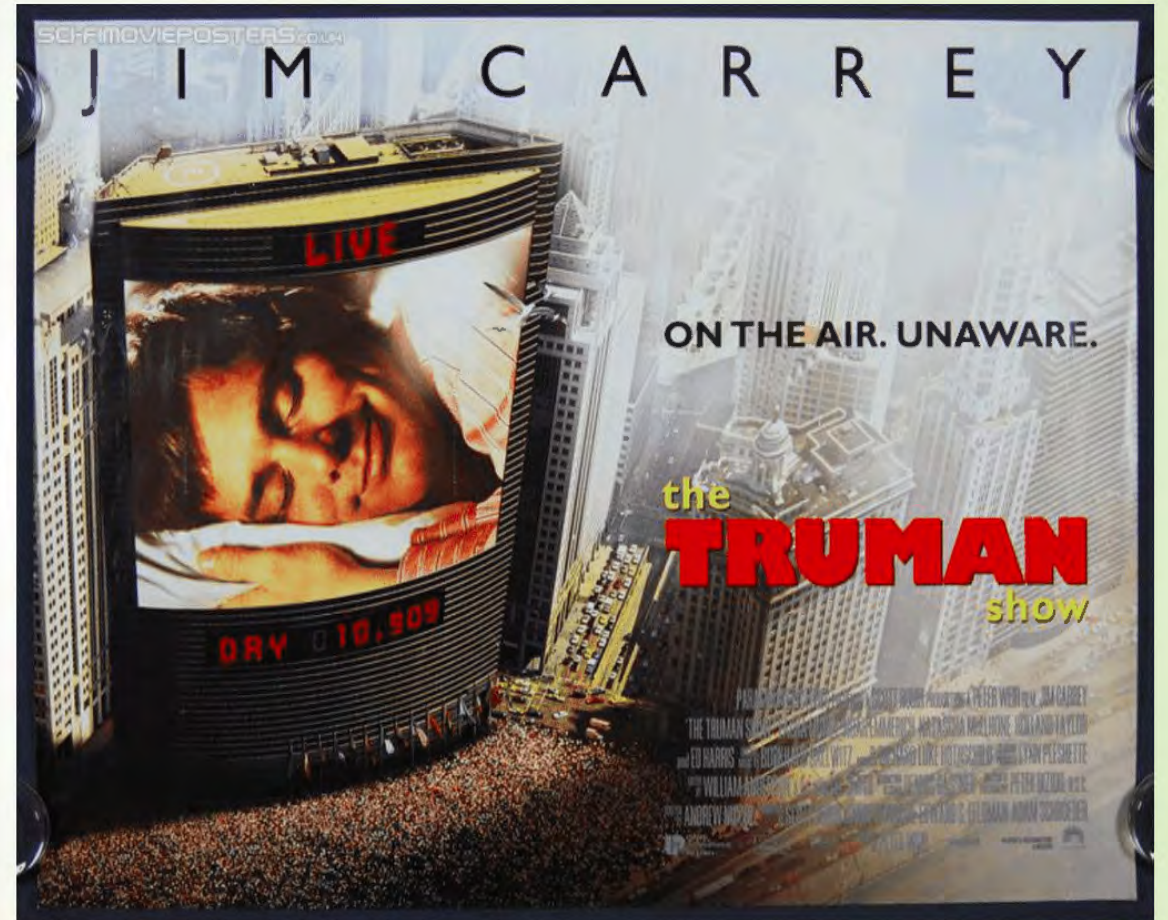
(Stephen K. Levine, POEISIS)

Imaginal Disidentification

Disidentification is the psychological movement that allows for the emergence of a wider range of meaning, experience and behaviour.

Typically this is taken as the ability to notice and express feelings and thoughts precluded by the former identified state.

Image-based psychosynthesis goes a bit further and understands an '**imaginal disidentification**' as a movement into living within **an expanded story of self and world.**



IMAGINAL IDENTIFICATION STORY

ASPECT 1 = HOLISTIC

Story contextualises a clients whole life

Brings together a **synthesis** of feelings /thinking/ sensations with perceptions and actions...

...within a scene / place / world.

Allows for a holistic understanding/empathy

Avoids: a **rationalistic** & **dualistic** analysis of isolated parts (feelings / beliefs / inner figures etc.) + simplistic linear cause and effect paradigm



IMAGINAL IDENTIFICATION STORY

ASPECT 2 = TEMPORAL

Stories unfold over time.

Story Moments are situated between a past and a future, remembrances and anticipations.

Working with story therefore includes client history alongside future possibilities.

A 'bi-focal' vision.

Allows: dynamic emergent description

Avoids: static historical analysis
(rationalistic / dualistic) & mechanistic
theory of change



IMAGINAL IDENTIFICATION STORY

ASPECT 3 = PATTERNS EXPERIENCE

Stories = imaginative patterns within which we live

Stories = templates guiding everyday choices & actions

Stories = create 'this' experience while filtering out 'that' possibility

a patterning across multiple contexts:

"how you do sex is how you do the rest of your life" (Waking Dreams)

Allows a contextualising of presenting issue / working with stories as stories

Avoids: a **dualistic** thinking-about / analytical-separation & **narcissistic** 'inner' focus



Imaginal Identification Ex# 1

STORY:

"I'm hearing a story about a woman who has been carrying a heavy suitcase around for a long time, doing a good job to take the load of other people, but is finding it harder to continue and would like to put it down, but this makes her worry what might happen."

Story components:

- Parts in relationship: protagonist / suitcase / other people /
- Space: the setting is not mentioned, but will be imagined by both client and therapist, i.e. the gap in the story is 'filled-in' spontaneously
- Consequential / Time: carrying a suitcase relieves burden on others....but leads to fatigue...fears of what might happen if suitcase put down

IDEA / INTERPRETATION:

"I don't think that's your responsibility any more"

- **rationalistic** sharing on abstract/ideas level
- while a client might agree rationally with this statement, it won't resonate or touch them in a holistic /experiential story way
- also notice how this intervention suggests a **mechanistic** change/control, rather than an empathic description of how it is to be the client, as the story offers

Imaginal Identification Ex#2

STORY:

"it's as if you are out in a dry desert, and you've been there a long time, and you are getting ever more thirsty, trying to find some water but not seeing any."

Story components:

- Parts in relationship: protagonist / feeling-thinking-actions of thirst and search for water
- Time and Space:...been there a long time, searching....desertscape...
- Consequential: being in desert leads to thirst leads to search for water....

IDEA / INTERPRETATION:

"Listening to you, I'm imagining a desert scene, does that mean anything to you?"

- sharing the desert image in a transparent and undigested fashion effectively turns it into a symbol of meaning elsewhere, taking the session into an abstract thinking-about what it means etc. **(dualistic)**
- this might be interesting on a **rationalistic** level, but again won't necessarily touch the client in a holistic / experiential story way

BREAKOUT ROOMS

DISCUSSION #1

Discuss

understandings of imagination

+

imaginal identification /
disidentification.

How might these ideas fit in to your
understanding of psychosynthesis? (or
not?)

Examples?

What further questions / opportunities /
problems are provoked?



PART2: IMAGINAL SELF



Q: What is psyche?

1, a personal 'essence' or 'centre'

i.e. 'my psyche' ; 'my soul' ; 'my 'I'' ; my 'Higher Self', my 'authentic self'

2, a non-personal (aka transpersonal*) conception as:

"The medium of experience" (Evans, 2007)

"An in-between zone of porous exchange" (Frater, 2021)

"A middle-ground between us and events" (Hillman, 1992)

A 'transitional space' / 'potential space' / 'third area' (Winnicott, 1971)

*a broad understanding of 'transpersonal' as beyond and within, through and across, the human person – encompassing both 'higher' non-ordinary and 'lower' or everyday states of consciousness.



Psychological Life = Transpersonal Imagination

Freud & Jung considered psychological life to be primarily imaginal not rational-conceptual

Psyche is Image

And if psyche is also transpersonal, i.e. in-between / beyond the personal

Then we can consider **a transpersonal imagination**

Q: how does psychosynthesis appear if based upon a transpersonal understanding of psychological life as an imaginative process arising between self-and-world.



Imaginal Self (not 'personal self')

'imaginal self' provides a theory aligned to the
in-between imaginal experience of
psychological life

a decentred and porous imaginal self
no radical subjective self- objective world
separation

rather a continuity between all experience

"In psychosynthesis, we might see the self and
the will as the "boss" of the system, but I
believe this is a distortion arising from our
cultural bias towards hierarchy. The self is the
system and the system is the self; it is not
some distinct part of us that rules the rest."

(Molly Young-Brown)



*"Imagination can be said to be the 'bridge' between
self and world; but we are always 'on' this bridge."
(Stephen K. Levine)*

NON-DUAL BENEFITS OF 'IMAGINAL SELF' #1

'imaginal self' removes various dualisms between:

'personal self' and feelings/thoughts/sensations (content)

'personal self' and 'transpersonal Self'

'true self' and 'false self'

'immanence' and 'transcendence'

conscious and unconscious

Allows:

Imagination is Reality

'imaginal self' as an image among images

'imaginal self' as a 'meta' or second-order synthesis arising from networking beyond, through, across, between all relationships

Avoids:

-dissociation of 'observer' position separation from '**content**'

-spiritual bypassing or identification with heightened states of consciousness



TRANS-RATIONAL BENEFITS OF 'IMAGINAL SELF' #2

'imaginal self' as experience rather than a fixed 'essence'

a process rather than a thing

a verb rather than a noun

Allows:

emerging in-the-moment process experiences

embodiment / focus / holism

which includes thoughts 'within' the process alongside
feelings, sensations etc.

Avoids:

static abstracted rational emphasis

disembodiment / fragmentation / analysis

cognitive distance / thinking-about 'outside' the process



PARTICIPATORY BENEFITS OF 'IMAGINAL SELF' #3

'imaginal self' is fluid and interconnected not a fixed, unchanging, 'authentic' or 'true' self

Allows:

- a relational and participatory emphasis
- contextualization of person within the wider world
- human and more-than-human psychology
- social, cultural, political and environmental 'wounding'

Avoids:

- narcissistic self-preoccupation and neurosis
- anthropocentric or human-centric focus
- assumption of 'stable' / 'benign' social-political background



EMERGENT BENEFITS OF 'IMAGINAL SELF' #4

'imaginal self' is decentered not a 'unifying center'
[a 'unifying center' is a political concepts from the colonial
world, borne from a Eurocentric dominance]

Allows:

emergent process theory of change
spontaneity & unpredictability, mystery & awe
acceptance

Avoids:

expectation of mechanistic 'control' and 'manipulation'
theory of changed
pressure of pre-determined goals and outcomes
conscious center and unconscious distortion splits



BREAKOUT ROOMS

DISCUSSION #2

Discuss

imaginal self

+

4 benefits of imaginal self (non-dual, trans-rational, participatory, emergent)

How might these ideas fit in to your understanding of psychosynthesis? (or not?)

Examples?

What further questions / opportunities / problems are provoked?



Additional Resources

Read 'Waking Dreams':

Sample introduction and first chapter [here](#)

Waking Dreams On-Line Course:

over 10 evenings with The
Psychosynthesis Trust

-next cohort starts [FEB 2024](#)

Keep in Touch:

[Mailing List](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Facebook](#) /

allan@wildimagination.uk



Interested in knowing more about Psychosynthesis???



- Please explore the AAP website! Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis: <http://aap-psychoanalysis.org/>