In his paper on the Unconscious (1915; particularly Section III, “On Unconscious Emotions”), Freud made specific his sense that the atomic elements of System Ucs were Vorstellungen, visual scenarios, that were themselves constituted by subjects, objects, and drives, which have no independent existence except in the heuristic language of clinicians and theorists. Drives, for instance, were not to be seen outside of their context in these unconscious scenarios but were rather like transitive verbs: they all took on both a subject and an object. Perhaps it was Strachey’s clumsy translation (vorstellung rendered as idea) or perhaps it was our collective inability to accept the loss of the Great Father Freud that has generations of psychoanalysts reinventing these vorstellungen as object relations, schemata, fantasies, and RIGS.

Marilyn Charles’ Patterns is more than a recasting of the topographic model with a new terminology. It is revolutionary not so much in its new purview of these structures as it is in its style. Infused with the principle that “pattern inheres in nature,” (p. 26), the work, by the very structure of its writing, demonstrates the manner by which clinical productions, art, and poetry (hers and others’) are birthed from prelexical patterns in each individual. To accomplish this, Charles brings together a psychoanalytic chorus of clinical, developmental, and experimental voices (the likes of Beebe and Lachmann, Bion, Bowlby, S. Freud, M. Klein, Matte-Blanco, Milner, Stern, Tomkins, and Winnicott) and demonstrates how in lived-lives, in art (Vigee-Lebrun and Mendieta), and in poetry (Plath and Rich), patterns of love and loss, identification and disidentification, and conscious and unconscious are joined to construct the idiosyncratic forms that we each carry with us into our relational worlds and creative lives. If life has anything to do, as Charles suggests, with creatively synthesizing while being present with others, her work exemplifies this capacity, as it invites the reader to join her in exploration. It is “our willingness,” she says (p. 102), “to be touched by the experience of the other” that constructs “mutually created meanings that can be held by each other without annihilation.” In an era when many works seek to demonstrate an author’s position as lightning-chess champion of psychoanalysis, Charles has chosen, instead, to provide adequate and inviting space for the spectrum of reading audiences. I shall attempt to act in kind as I focus more on the patterns than the content of Charles’ rich volume, in suggesting that her work may provide a new writing paradigm for psychoanalytic findings.
Charles frequently cites Matte-Blanco's distinction between asymmetric conscious thought and the blurring of similarity-into-equality that dominates the primary process of unconscious processes. Along similar lines, it is, perhaps, possible to separate differing styles of clinical— theoretical writing. The most common style, the one taught in our academies, has the author bringing together a variety of other researchers with whom the author's interests intersect. Territories and boundaries are mapped with an emphasis on crisply defined differences, and in the end, the writer's view holds away. In a second model for theoretical presentation, the author forges a synthesis of the variety of extant works that she has assembled. Where difference was, similarity now reigns and her new synthesis dominates.

Charles opts for another style of writing, which is closer, perhaps, to the synthesizing one than to the one that emphasizes difference and yet stands apart from both. As if calling up her clinical and theoretical muses, she weaves a tapestry from these voices of the individual's inner world, both as an individual and as conjoined with others. No attempt is made to highlight differences between these voices and no forced synthesis is finessed. It is difficult, indeed, to find in this volume a singular example of a cited research with which Charles disagrees. Each author that she chooses to bring forth is accepted as an unimpeachable witness whose placement is within a matrix of other authors. Perhaps, this style is related to Charles' view that women (p. 136) "would seem to bear a unique relation to O [Bion's term for ultimate reality], in that the body so profoundly constrains and patterns her experience of the world" and, by its unity, transcends difference. Charles makes no statement on her choice of this particular style of presentation.

In any case, this is, indeed, a revolutionary style, though one not without precedent. In contemporary writing, Michael Eigen, whom Charles cites, embraces a similarly inclusive (rather than exclusive) style. And while not typically thought of as a theoretical statement, Anna Freud's model of developmental lines is one in which a multiplicity of models for development are conjoined rather than disjoined from each other.

If it was once popular to note the homology in psychoanalysis between theory and practice, Marilyn Charles offers the possibility of an additional homology, that between both theory and practice and the manner in which they are reported. Her examination of both women artists and poets centers on her assertion that (p. 19) "the unconscious can only be brought into consciousness by virtue of its elaboration in spatio-temporal forms." She continues: "Words are the asymmetrical tools of the translating/unfolding function ... giving form and structure to that which must be represented in some fashion in order to be communicated." This connection between discrete words and the whole was offered by the poet, H.D. (1940, in L. Martz, 1988, p. 104), who in a piece that we may presume commemorated her analysis with Freud, wrote:

Each word was separate
yet each word led to another word,
and the whole made a rhythm