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From interpretation to rumination: An essay on integrating the self

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Summary

In response to Gruica's paper, the essay reflects on the depressive rumination through established theories of negative thought repetition and my own interdisciplinary philosophical concept in the development, named Implosion oh Hyper- Significance which discusses how the possibility of creating meaning and significance can become burdensome because human natural cognitive drive tendency to interpret experiences and the world around them. Within this frame, depressive rumination can be considered as a manifestation of a broader interpretative process. This concept is not empirical, it is an example of the power of the metaphor in integrating self, precisely how reducing accumulated significance and finding one's own interpretative concept can help the individual to understand their authentic identity better.

Keywords: *rumination, interpretation, metaphor, integrating self*

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INTRODUCTION

Depressive rumination is a pattern of repetitive negative thinking. In this essay, several approaches to rumination are considered, including cognitive, metacognitive, and evolutionary perspectives on repetitive negative thinking. These perspectives can be used to reconsider the origins of the human tendency to repeatedly interpret what is happening within us and around us. Rumination includes standard cognitive processes such as attention, interpretation, evaluation, comparison, and the creation of meaning (Watkins, 2008). If interpretation is functional, while rumination includes persistent forms of interpretation, the boundary between functional and dysfunctional interpretative processing is not completely clear. Watkins's research has shown that repetitive thinking can be constructive or unconstructive, depending on its content, context, and mode of processing (Watkins, 2008).

The adaptive component underlying repetitive interpretation could be located at an earlier and broader level of cognition, in the human tendency to interpret experience for the purpose of orientation within the physical and social environment. Rumination could then represent one of the possible outcomes when this interpretative tendency becomes excessively persistent and difficult to stop.

This essay explores this possibility through the interdisciplinary philosophical theoretical framework of Implosion of Hyper-Significance, which I am developing in a separate manuscript. This manuscript can serve as a source of ideas for practical therapeutic work. During my current education, which is moving in the direction of counselling and therapeutic work, as well as through practical work with people, this has shown itself to me as an alternative way of understanding how the power of metaphor can have a healing and inspirational effect and help in finding ways for a person to independently help themselves during difficult phases of life (Pantić, 2026). The framework considers how persistent interpretation can continue after the creation of meaning sufficient for functional orientation and contribute to the accumulation of individually generated significance. Depressive rumination can be viewed as one of the possible manifestations of this broader process. Rather than replacing existing theories of rumination, the framework seeks to complement them by considering a potentially more fundamental interpretative process from which repetitive negative thinking may arise. At the same time, it should not be understood as a psychotherapeutic practice or empirical psychological and psychiatric research, but rather as an example and testimony of work on one's own development.

EXISTING MODELS OF DEPRESSIVE RUMINATION

One of the most influential theories is the Response Styles Theory, developed by Nolen-Hoeksema. Within this model, a ruminative response includes repeatedly

directing attention toward depressive symptoms, their possible causes, and consequences. Such responses can prolong depressive states because persistent negative cognition can interfere with effective problem-solving and behaviour (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). From a cognitive perspective, Beck's theory of depression provides a broader framework for understanding the way in which patterns of interpretation contribute to depressive experience. Depression is associated with negatively organised cognitive structures that influence the way in which an individual understands themselves, the world, and future experiences. Although Beck's model is not specifically a theory of rumination, it provides a basis for understanding the way in which underlying beliefs and cognitive schemas shape patterns of interpretation (Beck et al., 1979).

The metacognitive approach is less focused on the content of negative thoughts and more on the beliefs individuals have about their own thinking. For example, an individual may believe that repetitive analysis will help them understand or solve a problem, while at the same time holding negative beliefs about the uncontrollability or harmfulness of rumination. Papageorgiou and Wells demonstrated the presence of positive and negative metacognitive beliefs about rumination among individuals with recurrent major depression (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2001). Positive beliefs included the potential usefulness of rumination as a coping strategy, while negative beliefs concerned themes such as uncontrollability and harmfulness. Watkins further distinguishes constructive and unconstructive repetitive cognition, showing that repetitive thinking is not necessarily maladaptive (Watkins, 2008). It can contribute to planning, preparation, emotional processing, and adaptation to demanding experiences. Its outcomes depend on factors that include the content of thinking, situational context, and mode of processing. Repetition itself is therefore not sufficient to determine whether a particular cognitive process is maladaptive.

An evolutionary perspective is provided by Andrews and Thomson through the Analytical Rumination Hypothesis (ARH) (Andrews and Thomson, 2009). They propose that certain features associated with depression may have evolved because they enable sustained analysis of complex problems. Within ARH, analytical rumination directs cognitive processing toward understanding a problem and developing possible solutions. The adaptive logic of ARH can therefore be understood as a sequence that includes a complex problem, a depressive response, sustained analytical processing, and the possibility of problem resolution (Andrews and Thomson, 2009). The importance of ARH for the argument of this paper lies in its recognition of the possibility that processes associated with depression may be connected with ordinarily functional cognition.

IMPLOSION OF HYPER-SIGNIFICANCE AND THE ADAPTIVE COGNITIVE DRIVE TOWARD INTERPRETATION

The Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework proposes that the human tendency toward interpretation and the creation of meaning can be understood as an adaptive tool for orientation. Interpretation enables individuals to structure experience, understand themselves and others, and respond to changes in their own environment (Pantić, 2026). Within this framework, I use the term cognitive drive to describe a persistent tendency toward interpretation. This term is used to explain a evolved orientational tendency toward interpretation and the creation of meaning (Pantić, 2026).

A philosophical basis for considering persistent human tendencies in terms like drives can be found in William James's broader discussion of human instincts, including socially oriented tendencies. James argued that human behaviour includes numerous instinctive tendencies and that human instinct should not be considered absent simply because behaviour is also shaped by learning and experience (James, 1890, pp. 389–403). The Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework theoretically extends this general possibility to interpretation, proposing as a hypothesis that the human tendency to interpret may function as an evolved drive toward orientation and the creation of meaning.

The social dimension of interpretation can also be considered in relation to Tomasello's account of human cultural cognition. Tomasello and colleagues emphasise shared intentionality and the human capacity to participate in collaborative activities involving shared goals and intentions as important features of specifically human cognition (Tomasello et al., 2005). Human cognition develops within complex systems of social interaction, cooperation, communication, cultural learning, and shared representations. Functioning within such environments requires the interpretation of intentions, social signals, relationships, expectations, behavioural changes, and one's own position in relation to others. Tomasello's approach therefore provides a theoretical basis for understanding the social need for interpretation, but it does not represent empirical confirmation of the cognitive drive proposed in

this paper. The Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework extends his account by proposing that continuous demands for interpretation may contribute to a strong orientational tendency toward the creation of meaning (Pantić, 2026).

The distinction between meaning, significance, and Hyper-Significance is central to this framework. The creation of meaning ordinarily provides a sufficiently stable understanding of experience necessary for orientation and action. Significance refers to the additional personal, affective, and identity-related importance that can be attributed to what has been interpreted. An individual can therefore experience a particular event, interpret it, create sufficient meaning to understand how to respond, and then redirect cognitive activity elsewhere (Pantić, 2026). Hyper-Significance describes a separate conceptual process in which interpretation continues after meaning sufficient for practical orientation has already been achieved. Further interpretation can generate additional questions and increasingly elaborate forms of subjective significance. When this significance becomes self-expanding and no longer serves an orientational function, an excessive structure of individually generated significance may develop (Pantić, 2026).

Individuals may differ in the extent to which they repeatedly analyse experiences, attribute subjective significance to events, reconsider previous interpretations, search for connections between experiences, and continue searching for additional meaning after the initial interpretation has already enabled sufficient orientation. Within the Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework, these differences can be understood as an expression of the human capacity for interpretation. This capacity can be used in such a way that the process moves in the direction of condensing experiences in everyday interactions with other people and the environment, which can help an individual notice more precisely the relationship between their own wishes, needs, and expectations. This opens the possibility for a person to build an authentic image of themselves, and then a clearer relationship with other important areas of their own life (Gruica, 2026; Gruica, 2025).

Importantly, such interpretative intensity does not initially have to involve negative affect. An individual can experience an event positively or neutrally and still engage in extensive interpretation of its importance for identity, relationships, future possibilities, or personal development. Persistent interpretation can therefore remain compatible with ordinarily functional processes such as self-understanding, social orientation, creativity, planning, and the construction of personal coherence. This possibility is consistent with the distinction between constructive and unconstructive repetitive thinking, according to which repetitive cognition is not in itself maladaptive, but its consequences depend on content, context, and mode of processing (Watkins, 2008).

Within the proposed framework, a potential vulnerability may arise when interpretative activity becomes increasingly difficult to stop or when it continues after meaning sufficient for functional orientation has already been achieved. If an emotionally significant unresolved experience subsequently becomes the centre of such a persistent interpretative process, interpretation may become increasingly organised around this emotional content. As the subjective significance attributed to the experience grows, the interpretative process may become increasingly difficult to stop and gradually take the form of repetitive negative cognition. Depressive rumination may then arise as one of the possible manifestations of this broader interpretative process.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The difference between the Analytical Rumination Hypothesis and the Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework lies in the way in which the starting and ending points of repetitive cognitive processing are considered.

The primary difference between the two frameworks concerns where the proposed adaptive component is located. ARH considers depression and analytical rumination in relation to an evolved response to complex problems, with sustained analysis potentially contributing to their resolution (Andrews & Thomson, 2009). The Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework, in contrast, proposes that the adaptive component may be located at a more fundamental level, in the human tendency toward interpretation and the creation of meaning and significance (Pantić, 2026). The central question shifts from asking why rumination itself might be adaptive to asking why the human mind continues to interpret experience and what may happen when an ordinarily functional interpretative tendency becomes burdensome. These two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both recognise a possible connection between apparently maladaptive cognitive phenomena and ordinarily functional cognitive processes. However, they locate the proposed adaptive component at different levels.

A second important difference concerns the way in which repetitive cognitive processing may end. Within ARH, sustained analytical processing is directed toward understanding and potentially resolving complex

problems (Andrews & Thomson, 2009). The Implosion of Hyper-Significance framework, in contrast, considers the possibility that continued interpretation increases the complexity of an existing structure of individually generated significance instead of improving orientation (Pantić, 2026). Such a disruption may potentially create conditions for the reorganisation of meaning and significance. The proposed endpoint therefore differs from simple problem resolution: the process does not have to end because a final answer has been found, but because the existing organisation of significance may become unsustainable in its current form and lead the person toward an induced reorganisation following an experienced breakdown (Pantić, 2026).

The concept of excessive accumulation of significance additionally raises the question of cognitive load. Persistent interpretation requires continuous cognitive processing, and an increasingly complex structure of subjective significance could therefore place increasingly greater demands on cognitive resources. Within the proposed framework, greater cognitive demands could reduce the individual's ability to flexibly disengage from interpretative processing. Contemporary environments may also increase the demands placed on interpretative processing. Individuals are often exposed to large quantities of information, rapidly changing informational contexts, and numerous alternatives that require evaluation and selection. Research on information overload has documented difficulties associated with the quantity and diversity of information available in contemporary environments (Bawden & Robinson, 2009). Experimental research has also shown that an excessive number of available options can, under certain conditions, reduce motivation and satisfaction instead of improving decision-making (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Within my theory, such conditions are not proposed as direct causes of depressive rumination. Instead, they may represent contextual factors that increase the number of opportunities and demands for continued interpretation. Research on information overload and choice overload supports the broader possibility that contemporary informational conditions can increase cognitive demands (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000).

The possibility that interpretative processing becomes increasingly persistent before it takes the form of repetitive negative cognition also opens questions relevant to future research and psychotherapy. Future research could examine whether individuals differ in the frequency with which they reanalyse experiences, the amount of subjective significance they attribute to events, and their ability to recognise the moment when interpretation has become sufficient for functional orientation. One possible practical implication of this framework would not be to reduce interpretation itself, since it may have adaptive orientational functions. Instead, future research could examine whether recognising the moment at which meaning sufficient for functional orientation has been reached can support a more flexible interruption of further interpretative processing. This could, for example, include recognising the moment when further interpretation no longer contributes to orientation, tolerating a certain level of uncertainty, and flexibly redirecting attention after sufficient understanding has been achieved.

From this perspective, a potentially important distinction is not simply between more and less interpretation, but between interpretation that remains flexible and functionally orienting and interpretation that becomes increasingly self-generating and difficult to stop. Intensive interpretation can contribute to creativity, self-understanding, social sensitivity, intellectual exploration, the construction of personal meaning, and the building of an authentic identity. This essay has considered depressive rumination as one of the possible manifestations of the broader theoretical framework of Implosion of Hyper-Significance. Rather than locating the adaptive component primarily within rumination itself, the framework proposes that it may be located at an earlier level of cognition, in the human tendency toward interpretation and the creation of meaning and significance (Pantić, 2026). A person who, through their own insights, finds solutions for their ruminative processes, relying on their own example can inspire others to find their own metaphorical framework for understanding their own functioning. In this way, they can come closer to getting to know their authentic self.

Ethical considerations: Does this study include human subjects? NO
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