

## THE SYMBOLIC BODY AND THE SYMBOLIC SYMPTOM

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The differential analysis of the symbolic expression and of the symbolic symptom enlightens the relation between body, language and symbol. The displacement and condensation, which explain the symptom, involve a bodily perception of a symbolic nature. Consequently, Freud tends to interpret the symbol according to the symptom formation, as opposed to J. Lacan, who equates displacement with metonymy, and condensation with metaphor. The author, in analyzing the similarities and differences, interprets the symptom as a desymbolization, which presupposes a presymbolic perception, which phenomenology has thematized. However, it is language which structures this perception as symbolic, and which introduces the symbolic finality, which the psychological dynamisms do not have by their own selves.

In addressing to this specific issue I would take on and adapt the principle of Pliny, the natural historian of the 1st century: 'Nature is to be found in her entirety nowhere more than in her smallest creatures.' Likewise, nowhere more than in the interpretation or explanation of a concrete fact, such as the symbolic symptom, is the entire theory of a psychologist to be found; of Freud, of Jung, of Lacan, of phenomenologists. Indeed, the symbolic symptom raises the fundamental question of the relationship between body, symbol and language. It has been the ingenious insight of Freud to interpret some symptoms as 'language through the body', because certain traumatic events had not been consciously expressed. Consequently, Freud dealt with the theoretical implications of the fact that the spoken word of the 'talking-cure' can heal symptoms which are, in some sense, a silent language.

The symbol is intimately related to language and to the body. But in what sense? Often the problem is obscured by the vagueness in the concept of symbol, and by the disregard of the enigmatic junction between body and language.

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We may start by letting ourselves be taught by cultural anthropology which has much to say for psychology that is worth hearing, among other things, the studies of symbols and rituals. They manifest the profound anchoring of the psychic life in the body. Nevertheless, a striking feature of these symbolic phenomena is that, although they are meaningful, yet people who live and express the meanings are largely unconscious of them. Therefore cultural anthropologists do not limit themselves to a mere questioning of the subjects of their study. They observe and interpret the meaning of the symbols by placing them within the complex system of references of which the people themselves are only slightly aware. In this respect the procedure of cultural anthropology seems similar to the interpretative procedure of psychoanalysis. In his landmark work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud also reveals the unconscious bodily meaning of many dream representations, and he consequently interprets them as symbols. And one of the most revolutionary contributions of Freud is his symbolic interpretation of hysterical bodily symptoms. Here the body evidently appears to have a symbolic meaning the subject ignores. Certainly, there is some doubt whether Freud provides evidential support for his symbolic interpretations. Often, readers who fail to recognize the complex psychoanalytical theories think that psychoanalysis presents a ready made catalogue of body symbols, and so many dismiss its interpretations as arbitrary. L. Wittgenstein (1967), on the contrary, judges them too evident to need an explanation: 'Freud mentions various symbols: top hats are regularly phallic symbols, wooden things like tables are women, etc. His historical explanation of these symbols is absurd. We might say it is not needed anyway: it is the most natural thing in the world that a table should be that sort of symbol.'

Be that as it may, some questions need to be raised, as to how they come about? Why do they seem to be a privileged mode of expression of the unconscious? How do they relate to the unconscious? Is the meaning and function of 'symbols' the same in symptoms as in symbolic language and behavior? Is the unconscious of dreams and of symptoms the same as the one which is the interest of cultural anthropology? The clarification of these questions should be illuminating for the psychology of symbolism and of body, and for their relation with language.

## The symbolic symptom

Let us first closely examine the structure of a symbolic symptom. The 'writer's cramp' is a well-known example in psychoanalytical literature. Freud interprets it as a symbolic self-mutilation for masturbation. His clinical experience must have taught him this interpretation. However, what is interesting, is that the meaning of the symptom can be of different kinds and highly individual, as was the case with a man belonging to an Arabic culture [1]. The psychoanalytic cure revealed that the patient, when a young boy, had been morally traumatized when his father was accused of robbery. Now the custom in his culture was to cut off the hand of a thief, which in this case was not carried out. But it gradually appeared that the patient had unconsciously applied this cruel law to himself by cutting off, in a 'symbolic' self-punishment, his own writing hand. In doing so, he had of course identified himself with his supposedly guilty father. Accordingly, there also must have been an obscure connection in his mind, between the two ways of acting; the writing and the robbery. I do not know the complete content of his associations and I cannot even hypothetically reconstruct the connection. From what I know from clinical experience, I would say that an image would have made the link, or an Arabic word, or a kinesthetic image, or a sequence of emotions and figures. As hidden as it remains, one thing is sure: since the talk concerning the traumatic childhood memory makes the symptom disappear, one is allowed to call the symptom 'symbolic'. But in what sense? The meaning of punishment is apparent, and one spontaneously thinks of the injunction of the Gospel: 'If your hand causes you scandal, cut it off, since it is better to enter into life with one hand than to be thrown into death (*Gehenna*) with two hands.' The advice of the Gospel is in metaphorical language, since it takes up a bodily figure in order to express a moral action. The symptom does it the other way around: it embodies or enacts in the body the real execution of the law. With respect to the Islamic custom of real punishment, the injunction of Jesus and the symptom can both be called symbolic, but they are obviously not symbolic in the same sense. One surmises that the pathological bodily symbolization requires conditions one cannot infer from a general theory of symbol.

[1] I refer to a case I heard Lacan expose in one of his seminars.

The following example will reveal somewhat the hidden processes which work in the *Organsprache*, as Freud calls it, that is, the symbolic symptom as language through the body. The case is of a man who chronically suffers from severe headaches for years. As always, such a symptom is only one of the manifestations of a neurosis, in this case, a torturing religious guilt anxiety. The meaning of this is, an obsessional neurosis which is accompanied by religious guilt anxiety. I shall limit myself here to the bodily symptom. During the analytical cure, two associations come out which explain not the whole symptom as such, but its specific form. He remembers having been impressed by the sight of an advertisement-poster for a drug relieving migraine. It illustrated the head of a man in which a wood-wedge is being driven by a hammer. Another time, he remembers that in his childhood, he was afraid of going into the garden at night, for he imagined that a dark man was waiting there with a heavy hammer to smash his head. Later on in the cure, he thought the dark man must have been God. Apparently, the symptom embodied these representations. Of course such imaginations alone could not provoke the symptom. One could test this by trying to produce the symptom by autosuggestive concentration on these representations; I doubt whether one would get a migraine from this. In order to be embodied in a symptom, the representation must be unconscious. Accordingly both of these remembered imaginations were only momentarily forgotten childhood ideas, which were heavily laden with emotion, and therefore, had been repressed. They must have had an analogy with more strictly repressed representations, and they must have been repressed for this reason. As such, they offer the symptom its imaginary and affective scheme. Hence we can call the symptom 'a symbol' for it represents effectively the pain caused by a blow on the head. The proof of this interpretation is the fact that the symptom disappeared and did not come back after the 'talking-cure'. However – and I insist on this – not only these two representations had to be spoken out, but also the whole problem of the repressed sexuality, as well as the repressed murderous phantasies and impulses. The two images, that of the poster, and that of the dark man in the garden, are obviously connected with sexual impulses, with the aggressivity of the patient, and with the idea of a severe divine judgment. It is this obscure connection, that the patient is not aware of, which determines the symbolic content of the symptom.

Before going more thoroughly into the symptom-formation, I would

first draw some theoretical consequences from this observation. In the peculiar situation of analysis, the speech turns into words unconscious memories which cause the bodily symptom and contain their meaning. It is logical to say that the symptom, as embodied signification, is symbolic. However, it is not symbolic in the usual sense of the term, for the embodiment takes place because the words for expressing the meaning of it are lost. Therefore Freud calls such a symptom a bodily conversion. To be sure, the person is not aphasic! He knows the words, but the connection between them and the symptom is lost. And when the connection is made, the symptom is dissolved. However, the cure does not consist of an explanation of the symptom, as people often erroneously conceive the therapeutic efficacy to be, but the efficacy is in the progressive working through of the unconscious memories, which are converted into the symptom. We encounter here a crucial difference between two types of symbols, for, normally, a symbol does not simply substitute itself for words.

Notwithstanding this difference, it remains true that speech conveys the meaning of the symptom, to the extent that afterwards, the observer legitimately calls this speech an interpretation of the symptom. In this respect, the symbolic interpretation of the symptom forces us, even more than the usual symbol, to state that the body is a psychic body, which means, that the lived body is formed by significations, which are of the order of language. For if the body did not possess language in some sense, how is it able to substitute the symbolic symptom for unspoken words?

### **The signifying and the signified body**

Let us consider now what it means to say that the body, in some sense, possesses language-significations. In the given case, the body must know what is signified by the blow on the head, since the person himself has no idea of the meaning of the migraine, and even during the cure, he does not reflectively interpret the symptom, as I do now.

The enactment of the meaning of the verbal expression, 'a blow on the head', evidently points to the symbolic meaning of the head. Now this meaning is plural, yet unified. The head is the locus of thoughts. A kinesthetic perception is surely at the basis of this localization, more than the objective knowledge of the physiology of the brain. The

connection between head and thought gets its full symbolic meaning by reason of other symbolizations we perceive, when listening to the many metaphorical expressions, such as: to bow one's head, to bend their heads, his head grows beneath his shoulders, he has his head on his knees, to lift up one's head, something stands on its head, etc.

As the phenomenologist Erwin Strauss (1960) has argued, the symbolic meaning of the head is inscribed in the very structure of the human body and of the world man perceives. The upright position is a knot of existential significations by which man is inserted into the verticality and horizontality of the texture of the world. Granted to man by nature, the upright position is offered to him as a possibility and he has to win it for himself. To stand up means to actively straighten up, and thus, to overcome partially the attraction of gravity. Consequently, height is the symbol of victory, self-affirmation, freedom and self-surpassing. On earth, man stands up and raises himself, yet is limited by the heavens, which became therefore, in mythological language, the symbol of divine power and authority. The polarity between the upright and the prone position introduces tension in the life of the body, and this tension is in accord with the symbolic structure of the vertical difference between earth and heaven. Thus, it is not surprising that ideological, political and national liberation movements take on the metaphorical language of the rising up of the oppressed, and that towers and pyramids give expression to man's power as he rises, lifts up his head and seeks to assert himself. Elation and depression are also original modes of existing which are expressed in the metaphors of corporal movement. Spontaneously, man also judges his actions by a scale of values, and ranges them at different 'levels'. Furthermore, although one rejects the Cartesian opposition of soul and body, one still continues to think of mankind in terms of the symbolic model of the highest and the lowest. Freud himself recalls the centauric image of man, even though he did not identify the lowest, i.e., the 'id', with the morally lowest.

This symbolic ensemble gives the head its full meaning. The idea of the blow on the head, in the case I have mentioned, is not just the representation of an aggression. This common-place image has undoubtedly been filled with a symbolic meaning, probably at the fringe of the consciousness, as is mostly the case with corporal symbolism. The blow is an aggression on the head for what it symbolically means. The lived body must have a sort of knowledge of the representation it enacts by conversion.

If what has been said has a validity, then it seems to be a false question to ask whether the body perception gives its content to metaphors and symbolic behavior, or inversely, whether it is language which fills up the body perception with its meaning. A description of the body symbolism opposes this formulation according to a one-way causality scheme, and demonstrates to the contrary the indissoluble interconnectedness of body perception and language. The body perception is pervaded with drives, and they give an existential content to the metaphors we considered. Now these drives have their specific psychological significance within the categories of language, which differentiate the below and the above, the helplessness and the power, the earth and the heaven. I recall the definition Freud gave of the *Trieb*, what I translate as drive, or with a word borrowed from the French which is 'pulsion'. The *Standard Edition* translates it as instinct, which is confusing, for Freud precisely distinguishes the instincts, which are preprogrammed, and the *Triebe*, or the drives, which are specifically human. The drive, he states, is a limit-concept marking the transition between the organic body and the psyche, and therefore, the drive is always present within the psyche through representation and affect. Certainly, representations are not all word representations, but they have a kinship with language, and they structure the lived body by the symbolic dimensions language develops. We touch here one of the most mysterious topics of psychology, and we are not surprised that the theoretical understanding of it determines the parting of the ways of Freud, Jung and Lacan.

The symbolic dimension of the body, at the cross-roads of body perception and language, makes understandable the psychoanalytic interpretation of dream symbols, as well as of symbolic behaviors, however odd this interpretation seems sometimes to the rational mind. An example of an event, which actually occurred, may illustrate my thesis and prepare a further interpretation of the symptom. A girl of two-and-a-half years, while sitting at the family table, takes her plastic cup and putting it on her head, and using a French childish word, says: 'I also I have a penis.' She then makes the cup fall and shouts, 'there it falls off!' What is the reason for this transposition of the sexual organ onto the head? One observes this often in dreams and in hysterical symptoms. Obviously, there must be a body perception which guides the equating of the head with the sexual organ. For the girl did not learn to make a symbolic substitute; she created it herself. One easily

can imagine that the body perception that erects the equivalence, has something to do with representations of power and of standing upright. But is the girl able to make the symbolic substitute before language offered her the possibility of affirming the equivalence? Surely not, for as far as I know, animals do not make such symbolic substitutes. Now, making the symbolic equivalence, language in its turn signifies the penis, that is, gives it a signification which it would not have by the mere fact of the body perception. Moreover, without language categories there only can be a non-perception of a body element but not the perception of an absence as such, and consequently not the creation of a substitutive symbol.

By reason of the reciprocal determination of language and body perception, symbols and symbolic behaviors are characterized by an excess of significance. Recalling what I have developed concerning the symbolic significance of the head, the symbols are embodiments of metaphors, and as the recent studies of metaphors convincingly have shown, metaphors are constituted by an interaction between at least two language chains. They produce a new meaning and cannot be replaced by a proper term. There is in the mentioned examples an interaction between the first language of the body perception and different other types of language, namely, moral, religious and political. These languages endow with their significations the elementary connection between the body experience and language. I call this connection the 'language-signified body'. As a consequence, a variety of significations are virtually present within the psychological body, and this makes the symbol exceed a rational explanation. To explain a symbol, would mean to establish a bi-univocal correspondence between the symbol and that what it symbolizes. As I have said, the explanation of a symbol which does justice to the symbol, consists in placing it back in the ensemble of its cultural universe, exactly as one does with metaphors. To understand them one reaccomplishes the metaphorization process by reactualizing the interaction between the language-chains. A true symbol cannot be rendered superfluous by something non symbolic, and for a true metaphor, one cannot substitute a so-called proper term. Yet, this precisely happens in the psychoanalytical cure of a symbolic symptom; it is dissolved by speech.

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### Lacan's conceptualization

Lacan has captured Freud's view of the coupling of the symptom and the symbolic language, and he made a powerful linguistical reading of Freud's work. Accordingly, Lacan's theoretical reformulations are a main contribution to the understanding of the function of language in analysis, as well as in the formations of symptoms. Nonetheless, the opposition I stressed between the symbolic body and the bodily so-called symbolic symptom contradicts Lacan's conceptualization.

Freud made clear that it is a lack of translation into words which constitutes the unconscious representations. Yet the very term of translation evokes a first language. Indeed, Freud uses many linguistic expressions to determine his interpretation of dreams: to translate a dialectical language; to decode hieroglyphs; to resolve a rebus and to decipher the underlying text of a palimpsest. Freud also makes a link between delusional or hallucinatory representations and myths. For example, Freud (1919) recorded the hallucination of the 'wolf-man' who, as a five-year-old boy, was carving the bark of a tree with his pocket-knife, and to his terror thought that he had almost cut off a little finger. Then Freud refers to the dreadful experience of Tancred, in Tasso's *Jerusalem liberated*, who slashes a tree with his sword and saw blood flowing from the cut, for the soul of his beloved Clorinda was imprisoned in the tree. And so, Freud proposes the interpretation, that unconsciously, the tree meant for the boy a woman. Having castrated the mother, as the father did, according to the infantile perception of the boy, the boy castrated himself, again in an unconscious symbolic behaviour, through displacement on to the finger. Are myths then the language of the unconscious? If so, the unconscious is composed, at least for a part, by mythemes, which means, by language elements. Should one then pursue Freud in the line of Jung? The problem of symbolism is a crucial one for psychoanalysis, and it is not by chance that this problem has been the first and most fundamental reason for the controversies and dissidences between Freud and some of his most interesting disciples, namely Silberer, Jung and Maeder. Again, it is this same problem that Lacan takes up and elaborates in his own way.

Lacan takes literally Freud's comparisons of the unconscious with language-phenomena. He calls the unconscious representations 'signifiers'. This is the term of de Saussure for the acoustic, and secondarily, for the written word-form which, according to him, is indissocia-

bly linked with the signification. Actually, Lacan's term 'signifier' applies more to what Freud designates as the 'word-representations' which, in Freud's mind, constitutes the Pre-Conscious. Even at first glance Lacan's linguistic conceptualization of the unconscious seems to lead to a radical change in the theory of the unconscious. I (1983) see three motives for Lacan's linguistic reformulation of the concept of the unconscious. Two motives stem from the contextual polemics with post-Freudian tendencies which, according to Lacan, alter the psychoanalytical technique. Lacan vehemently opposes the centering of the cure on the analysis of transference. The transference is the motor of the free associations, but to center the analysis on the transference transforms the cure into a dual struggle, and intensifies the mirror-stage alienation, with its consequential aggressivity, instead of liberating from the imprisonment in the mirror-image. This criticism of a prevailing psychoanalytical praxis, seems to me to be of Lacan's most worthwhile contributions. Secondly, Lacan opposes the phenomenological interpretation, which attaches itself to the analysis of the intentional significations, and as a result, remains within what I would call the preconscious intentions, or to say it in phenomenological terminology, the non-thetic intentional acts. By equating the unconscious representations with 'signifiers', Lacan intends to preserve the substantial reality of the unconscious, and correlatively, to restore the original ingenious technical procedure of free association, through which the present, although repressed and obliquely active representations, can be liberated in the 'verbalization'. The scope of Lacan is to restore the Freudian psychoanalysis its reliable scientific status, by basing it on the new science of linguistics. Besides this original intention, Lacan also endeavors – and this becomes gradually more essential – to retrieve the fundamental problem of symbolism. Language reigns over man and makes man. Man's conscious intentions, his investment of objects and events with subjective significances, is produced by the autonomous power of language that speaks through him, far beyond his conscious intentional significations. According to Lacan, this power of language pervades the unconscious. There is an analogy between his interpretation of the unconscious, as constituted by signifiers, and the psycholinguistic concepts of deep structure. In this way, Lacan renews the Jungian problem of the symbolic structure of the 'subconscious'. The fact that Lacan calls the 'signifiers' also the 'symbols', testifies to his intention to retrieve the

crucial question of symbolism which opposed Jung to Freud. I shall return later to this question.

The linguistic reformulation of the unconscious has far-reaching consequences. Freud's whole enterprise is to understand the sense of symptoms in a way similar to the translation or decipherment of dream figures. This enterprise links the psycho-dynamic study with psycho-linguistic concepts. But the problem is with the specificity of symptoms! Their meaning situates them within the realm of psycho-linguistics, but the necessity of their technical decipherment, within the specific situation of the cure and through the technique of free associations, displays the non-linguistic structure of the symptoms. If they were of the nature of language, they would not need the language of the talking-cure in order to be liberated from repression. Lacan stresses the other aspect; namely, if they were not of the nature of language, they could not have meaning and be brought into the 'verbalization'. Accordingly, after having identified the unconscious representations with 'signifiers' or 'symbols', Lacan pursues the formulation of psychodynamic processes in linguistic terms.

So for what Freud calls displacement and condensation, Lacan interprets them as metonymies and as metaphors. Thus, Lacan interprets displacements, such as the one on to the head, as metonymical processes. To illustrate his idea, he often gives the classical example of the catachresis: 'thirty sails' for thirty boats, which, he says, is a characteristic elision of a signifier, namely the boat. I would rather understand the linguistic metonymy as the focusing of the attention on the most significant element of the objects, that is, the sails. Obviously, by identifying the metonymy with the elision of the signifier, Lacan intends to apply the rhetorical figure of metonymy to the symptom, when there is actually a repression of a 'signifier'. Let us try to see whether we can understand some symptoms as metonymical figures. We could say, that in the previously given example of the young girl, the displacement from the sexual zone on to the head follows the track of a metonymy, for it happens according to the scheme of the contiguity between the areas of the body. However, the behavior of the girl is not a symptom. Obviously, by the way of a metonymical displacement she creates a symbol, and playing with the symbol, she expresses in a metaphorical language the recognition of castration. Metonymy, symbolism and metaphor are interwoven here to cope with a problematic body perception. However, even in this process, the body perception

and the language work together. One cannot merely explain the process in linguistic terms. It is true, as Lacan says, that the metonymy follows the connection by contiguity of signifier to signifier, or as he says, 'word to word', penis to head, as boat to sail. But the body perception is underlying the displacement. However, this body perception, in its turn, is articulated by the language which differentiates and connects, as I have emphasized.

Let us now consider the symptomatic displacement. I shall return to the case formerly mentioned, of the man suffering from a severe chronic headache. The whole case makes one think that a similar displacement takes place here from the sexual organ on to the head. The paths of the displacement are complex, and to some extent, carrying opposed intentions. The head is the symbol of power and liberation; it is also the centauric symbol of the domination of sexual drives, and the symbol of ethical 'higher values'. In this way, the head-symbol attracts the displacement, which offers a manner of repressing sexuality, instead of expressing it. Here, a displacement and a condensation take place, that is, the condensation of the representation of power and self-affirmation and of punishment for it. However, the transformation of libido into the suffering of migraine has been provoked by the intervention of concrete casual representations, namely, that of a blow on the head. In the context of repression, this image received the meaning of a punishment for the insistent, and in the mind of the person, forbidden sexual desire-phantasies. The image of the poster and the childish idea of the dark man have made the bridge that supported the condensation. Afterwards, during the cure, the patient becomes aware of this. When he says that this dark man must have been God, he does not express what happened in his childhood, but he makes a connection that never before had been consciously made.

As the analysis of this little example manifests, a symptom is far more complex than a symbol. If the symptom could be understood as a linguistic figure or as a symbol, it would be much more simple to interpret. However, I would insist on asking the question as to whether we can understand the displacement, in this case, as a metonymical process. To some extent it is, but it is also the contrary of a linguistic metonymy. In 'thirty sails', the displacement from word to word, from boat to sail, is an intentional focusing one can compare with the formation of a *Gestalt*, i.e., the whole boat remains the background of the sail, and the sail as the foreground of the *Gestalt* is intended to

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enhance the value of the boat, which remains co-represented and co-referred to. Conversely, in the symptom the displacement is the production of a substitute, the meaning of which is to remove as far as possible the original intention. Instead of enhancing the whole body, the symptom-displacement destroys the meaningful connection of its parts. The scope of the symptom-displacement is the repression of the libido by transforming it through its investment in a substitute symptom, whose link with the originally invested body-zone is cut off.

Of course, this cutting off of the connection presupposes that some connection had been made. It is this insight that lies at the base of Lacan's linguistic conceptualization. The question is the one I already have evoked, namely, the unconscious knowledge the body has of itself when it effectuates the displacement. That knowledge Lacan conceptualizes in linguistic terms, that is, the unconscious representations, according to him, are signifiers, and he interprets the displacement as a metonymy that language makes.

In contrary manner, Freud appeals to psychic dynamisms. The displacement, in his view, is the effect of repression. Repression is realized by psychic energy. It is one of the so-called psychological mechanisms. As is well known, the phenomenologists resisted Freud's energetic or economical concepts, for it seemed to them they were derived from biology, and they feared these concepts would bring into psychoanalytical theory a naturalistic model, whereas psychology should be an anthropomorphic science. Lacan also has reservations as regards the energetic concept of Freud, but he wants to maintain the notion of the unconscious. Therefore he appeals to structuralistic linguistics. In contrast to phenomenology, he claims that the language signifiers prevail over the conscious intentions. They exercise their power over man to the extent that they reign in the unconscious and express themselves even in delusions, where there is no intentionality at all.

To round out my account, I can strictly formulate the problem as follows: there is an analogy between myths and delusions; however, myths found cultural societies, whereas delusions are private and in contradiction with the symbolic system of the cultural community. The writer's cramp and the migraine effectuate a symbolic law of punishment, but they do it by an unconscious enactment in a symptom. Symptoms come in the place of a spoken word, as Lacan himself insists on, and the cure consists in what he calls verbalization, or what Freud calls, to give the word to the effects of unconscious representations. If

in the symptoms the words are lacking, then how can Lacan identify the unconscious with signifiers? On the other hand, when the symptoms have a meaning, should one not interpret them, as Lacan does, as linguistic figures?

### **The symptom is a desymbolized symbol**

If it is true that condensation presents a similarity with the metaphor, and the displacement with the metonymy, the difference is nonetheless impressive. A metaphor does not require an explanation. Moreover, as I have said, recent studies on the metaphor have stressed that a metaphor resists an explanation, for it is not a rhetorical comparison for which one could substitute the proper term, but the production of a new meaning. The true metaphor is immediately understandable precisely because it occurs within a proposition, which leads the listener or reader to reaccomplish actively the production of meaning, by remaking the language interaction. To the contrary, the symbolic meaning of the symptom can only be revealed through the painstaking work of free associations and interpretations. And when it is enlightened, it disappears as symbol. Supposing that the analyst guesses the true sense of the symptom and communicates his interpretation to the patient, the objective knowledge will not influence the symptomatic behavior. Only the personal working through of the contextually associated representations will dissolve the symptom, even without the patient himself making the interpretation of its symbolic significance. Clearly, the work of the cure cannot be paralleled with the meaning production the metaphorization accomplishes. The error non-analytically trained theorists often make, is to confound the theoretical account of the analytical cure with the process of the working through of symptoms, and consequently to identify psychoanalysis with hermeneutics of symbols. The formation of the symbolic symptom occurs against the grain of the metaphorization, and the cure deconstructs the symptom by giving the word to the different representations, which are crystallized in the unconscious complex representation underlying it.

Let us again return to the case of the headache. The underlying representation of the blow on the head can be compared with an ancient ritual that still is practiced in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, namely, after the confession, the priest gives the

penitent a slight tap on the head with a stick. Of course, the ritual symbolizes the punishment. What characterizes the symbolic gesture is that it is not a real punishment. The true symbol derives from reality, and takes over from it a minimal material reality. The symbol exists between the two thresholds of a minimum of reality and of the full reality. The reduced reality evokes and condenses the complex meaning of the ritual ensemble: as a first act of the decided conversion, the penitent bows his head before the authority of God to whom he confesses his sins, and to whom he promises to accomplish his penance. In this complex meaning-structure, the head has a metonymical and metaphorical signification, perhaps not clearly intended, but pre-consciously present in the mind of the practitioners of the ritual. The characteristic of a symbolic ritual is that it exceeds what phenomenology calls the thetic consciousness, but that it is a meaningful act the subject performs.

As for the mentioned symptom, the two ideas which lead to its formation are entirely non symbolic, i.e., the vision of the poster and the infantile phantasy of the dark man in the night. It is these meaningless representations which give the symptom its form. They could not do so, however, if they were not the receptacle for the displaced libido, and for the unconscious connection between sexual wish-representations and punishment. Perhaps this psychoanalytical explanation seems strange to those who lack clinical experience, but we should not disregard this most important fact, that is, if the person would have had some conscious idea of the blow on the head and the headache as a punishment, he could never have produced the symptom. Obviously, in this case, the head is no more symbolically signified.

Is it unconsciously symbolic? To be symbolic in the proper sense of the word, it should have, in the unconscious, the multiple significations it has in the ritual of Santa Maria Maggiore, or in the symbolic gesture of the little girl. But the displacement in the unconscious breaks the metonymical process. The head is not the significant focus of attention that organizes the whole body as a *Gestalt*, but an isolated part of the body. Therefore the displacement does not bring about a metaphorical or a symbolic process. The isolating displacement reduces the head, in the unconscious representation, to one meaning, namely, that of an unrecognizable substitute for the sexual organ. In this sense, the symptom is a desymbolized symbol. Hence, the famous monotony of psychoanalytical symbol-interpretations. This monotony contrasts with the

astonishing varieties of the highly individual associations which lead to symptom formations. Recall the case just analyzed. It would be a failure, however, to apply the monotonous psychoanalytical interpretations to symbols; the real symbols are like metaphors. Their meaning is polyvalent because of the interaction between differentiated co-signified elements of reality. Psychoanalysis is not a hermeneutics of symbols.

The very idea of desymbolization raises the question of a previous symbolization, and this is the real awkward problem of the symbolic symptom, or better, of the desymbolizing symptom. Granting the displacement I have put forth in my interpretation, should we not infer from it, that the psyche knows the symbolic significance of the head? Actually, the supposed knowledge in the symptom-formation is no more enigmatic than in the behavior of the little girl to whom I have referred. How can we conceive of this knowledge, and what is its relation to language? Can we consider it as symbolization? The enigma is that of the deep structure which underlies the symbolization, as well as the symptom formation and the dreamwork. This deep structure is never observed empirically and it is inaccessible to introspection. We can construct an idea of it, on the basis of our conviction that the psyche is rule-governed in the symptom-production, as well as in the creative symbolization.

I would just sketch some inchoative elements of an answer to the question. The knowledge the psychic body has, when it effectuates the displacement, is not yet really a symbolic perception, for the real symbol is the contrary of the symptomatic displacement. We could, therefore, characterize the deep structure of the symbol and of the symptom-formation as a pre-symbolic perception. 'Pre-symbolic' means that which is structurally previous, and which constitutes the necessary but insufficient condition for the formation of a symbol as well as of a symptom. We can further characterize this perception as unconscious, in the descriptive and structural sense of the word. That means that this perception has the characteristics which belong to the unconscious as a system. Language differentiates and identifies; for recalling de Saussure's definition of language signifiers, they are diacritical and consequently articulating. To call a head 'head' is to identify it as such, and to differentiate it from the other body constituents, and to connect it with them. As dreams and symptoms show, the unconscious representations freely produce displacements, transformations, inversions; they

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are not ruled by the language structure, says Freud, contrary to Lacan, and they obey the pleasure-principle instead of the reality-principle. I think that one could further enlighten them with Husserl's phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt* (the lived world) and of the passive syntheses. Indeed, the perception of the similarity between lived meaning and body-elements, seems to be of the sort of passive syntheses. What operates these transpositions and assimilations are, on the one side, the affect which invests the body and endows the lived constituent elements of it with specific immanent feelings, and on the other side, the perception of their shapes and functions.

It is this kind of representations, it seems to me, to which Lacan (1977) refers, when he uses the expressions: unconscious signifiers, primary language or primary symbols 'out of which all the others are composed'. Lacan considers them already as being of the nature of language components. According to him, feelings and body experiences are only meaningful and differentiated when articulated by language signifiers. However, as I previously have disclosed, Lacan's reconceptualization tends to confuse the symbol and the symptom, the dream-figure and the metaphor, the pathological displacement and the metonymy, and finally, the three data which should be distinguished, that is, the unconscious, in the sense of the primary inscriptions in the psyche, the unconscious, in the sense of the repressed and altered primary representations, and the preconscious language articulation.

To summarize this discussion, I would like to sketch briefly a confrontation between Freud, phenomenology and Lacan. Phenomenology has contributed to anthropology by its analysis of the pre-conceptual content of perceptions and body experiences, and this insight can help to elaborate some problems in Freud's theory, such as the question of the pre-symbolic body perception. The problem of phenomenology, however, is that of the connection between the pre-conceptual and the articulating function of language, and its failure has been to recognize the status of the repressed unconscious. Lacan's endeavor is to formulate a science of the unconscious, but in my judgment, his failure is not to recognize that which phenomenology has discovered, and consequently, his linguistic reformulation of the theory of the unconscious gives to the unconscious representations a linguistic status they do not have. Accordingly, Lacan considers as metaphors metonymies and symbol formations, that which is actually only symbolic in the sense that it is a meaningful symptom, in so far as it is a

desymbolized symbol. My conviction is that Lacan's theory applies to the language of schizophrenia and paranoia, precisely that pathology, which is characterized by the absence of repressed unconscious representations. In psychosis, the language itself functions as do unconscious representations.

### **Conclusion: the snares of psychodynamic concepts**

What seems to emerge from all this is that the idea of the symbolic symptom sets a trap against which I must warn. One can say, that what man cannot speak out, the symptoms cry out. But one should add: man can only symbolize that which he can bring into language. And when he works through the symptom in talk, it disappears and gives way to possible true symbolizations. By itself, the symptom is neither a message nor a symbol. It is only for those who interpret it, not as a symbol in the cultural sense, but as an inchoative symbol formation that has been used in order to prevent symbolization and message expression.

The fallacious use of the psychodynamic concepts is to think that an immanent finality of symbolization animates the psyche. This is the wide-spread error among anthropologists who adopt some Freudian concepts about the symbolic symptom. They believe that the symptom is a kind of direct bodily non-verbal communication, which needs the cultural symbol or the socialized language in order to acquire its meaningful human status. One translates the psychodynamic concept of psychoanalysis into the concepts of the intentionalities of the ego, and thus, one enlarges the ego, in order to integrate into it the supposedly dynamic structure of the lived body. The symptoms, then, seem to represent regressive stages of symbolization. When integrated into the cultural process of symbolization, they would be accomplished expressions.

What is behind this view, is the idea of a psyche which tends to elaborate itself, and which pursues its elaboration by integrating or internalizing the cultural references: language, rituals, modes of living, etc. The idea of a psychodynamic structure is fitted within an evolutionary scheme of successive layerings. This easy model fascinates many theoreticians of man, and they think they give the symbolic symptoms their locus on the trajectory of man's socialization.

Yet, any rigorous account of symptom-formations evidences that they are symbolic in the sense that they have a meaning, but that their

meaning is precisely the desymbolization of the symbolic virtualities of primary bodily experiences. The mistake of the finalistic interpretation is to identify the autonomous psychodynamic structure with a symbolic finality. The only finality which animates the psyche as locus of its own elaboration, is that of avoiding too painful experiences, whose traumatic character opposes an integration in symbolic expression. The autonomous psychodynamic structure maintains itself by repressing these experiences. To do so, it follows the tracks which the body prepares for displacements and condensations, cutting off the possible symbolization of the body.

The recognition of the nature of the 'symbolic' symptom enlightens, by the way of contrast, the symbolic structuring of the body. Then the body representations are immediately integrated within language and symbols of culture. They implant the symbolic finality into the psyche. Nothing in true symbolization is merely psychological, but all is, in so far as the body experiences fulfill language and symbols. They, for their part, give the psyche a symbolic articulation.

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L'analyse différentielle de l'expression symbolique et du symptôme symbolique éclaire la relation entre le corps, le langage et le symbole. Le déplacement et la condensation qui expliquent le symptôme impliquent une perception du corps qui est de nature symbolique. Freud a dès lors tendance à interpréter le symbole d'après la formation du symptôme. Lacan, au contraire, identifie le déplacement avec la métonymie, et la condensation avec la métaphore. L'auteur analyse les similarités et les différences. Il interprète le symptôme comme une désymbolisation qui présuppose une perception présymbolique telle que la phénoménologie l'a thématisée. Mais c'est le langage qui structure la perception en tant que symbolique et qui introduit la finalité symbolique que les dynamismes psychologiques n'ont pas de par eux-mêmes.