

The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real : Inaugural meeting of SFP, Paris : 8<sup>th</sup> July 1953 : Jacques Lacan

P1-52 of On the Names-of-the-Father : Jacques Lacan : translated by Bruce Fink

Jacques Lacan spoke on “The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real” immediately before writing the so-called Rome Report on “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (published in the *Écrits*) during the summer of 1953, a paper that marked the public debut of “Lacan’s teaching,” as it was later called. The earlier talk included the first thematic presentation of the famous triad that undergirded all of Lacan’s work for the next three decades and that went on to become its essential object – not merely a conceptual object, but a mathematical and material one as well in the form of the Borromean knot and its derivatives.

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References to Sigmund Freud

Wolf Man : The History of an Infantile Neurosis : 1918 (SE XVII)

Rat Man : Notes upon a case of Obsessional neurosis : 1909 (SE X)

Beyond the pleasure principle : 1920 (SE XVIII)

My friends, you can see that, for the first so-called scientific presentation of our new Society, I have selected a title that is quite ambitious.

I will thus begin first by apologizing for it, asking you to consider this presentation both as a summary of viewpoints that those here who are my students know well, with which they have become familiar over the past two years through my teaching, and also as a sort of preface or introduction to a certain orientation for studying psychoanalysis.

Indeed, I believe that the return to Freud's texts which my teaching has focused on for the past two years has convinced me – or rather us, all of us who have worked together – that there is no firmer grasp on human reality than that provided by Freudian psychoanalysis and that one must return to the source and apprehend, in every sense of the word, these texts.

One cannot escape the conclusion that psychoanalytic theory, and at the same time its technique, which form but one and the same thing, have undergone a sort of shrinkage and, to be quite frank, decay. For, in effect, it is not easy to remain at the level of such fullness.

Take, for example, a text like that of the Wolf

Man [*The History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918), SE XVII]. I thought of taking it this evening as a basis for and as an example of what I wish to present to you. But although I gave a Seminar on it last year, I spent the entire day yesterday rereading the case and quite simply had the feeling that it was impossible to give you even an approximate idea of it here and that there was but one thing to be done – to give last year's Seminar again next year.

Indeed, what I perceived in this incredible text, after the work and progress we made this year on the case of the Rat Man [*Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* (1909), SE X], leads me to think that what I stressed last year as the crux, example, or typically characteristic thought furnished by this extraordinary text was but a simple "approach," as the Anglo-Saxons say – in other words, a first step. The upshot being that this evening I will merely try to compare and contrast briefly the three quite distinct registers that are essential registers of human reality: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

## I

One thing cannot escape us at the outset – namely, that there is in analysis a whole portion of our subjects' reality [*réel*] that escapes us. It did not escape Freud when he was dealing with each of his patients, but, of course, it was just as thoroughly beyond his grasp and scope.

We should be struck by the way in which he speaks of the Rat Man, setting him apart from his other patients. He concludes that he can see in him the personality of a "fine, intelligent, and cultured man," and he contrasts him with other patients he has worked with. This is not so much the case when he speaks of the Wolf Man, but he mentions it nevertheless. Still, we are not required to endorse all of his appraisals. The Wolf Man does not seem to have had quite as much class as the Rat Man. Yet it is striking that Freud singled him out as a special case. Not to mention Dora, about whom we can virtually say that he loved her.

This direct element, whereby Freud weighs and appraises personalities, cannot fail to strike us. It is something that we deal with all the time in the register of morbidity, on the one hand, and

even in the register of psychoanalytic practice, with subjects who do not fall completely into the morbid category. It is an element that we must always reserve judgment about and that is especially prominent to those of us who bear the heavy burden of choosing among those who wish to go into analysis in order to undergo training as analysts.

What can we say in the end, after our selection has been made? Consider the criteria that are mentioned – must someone be neurotic in order to be a good analyst? A little bit neurotic? Highly neurotic? Certainly not, but what about not at all neurotic? In the final reckoning, is this what guides us in a judgment that no text can define and which leads us to appraise personal qualities? In other words, do we rely on the reality expressed by the following – that a subject either has the right stuff or he doesn't, that he is, as the Chinese say, *xian da*, a worthy man, or, *xiao ren*, an unworthy man? This is certainly something that constitutes the limits of our experience.

What is brought into play in analysis? Is it a real relation to the subject, namely, to recognize his reality in a certain way and according to our own measures? Is that what we deal with in

analysis? Certainly not – it is indisputably something else. This is a question we ask ourselves all the time, and that is raised by all those who try to formulate a theory of psychoanalytic practice [*expérience*]. What is this practice, which is so different from all others and brings about such profound transformations in people? What are those transformations? What is their mainspring?

For years the development of psychoanalytic theory has been designed to answer this question. The average person or man in the street does not seem terribly astonished by the effectiveness of this practice that occurs entirely through speech. And he is, in the end, quite right, for indeed it works, and it would seem that, in order to explain it, we need first but demonstrate its movement by working. To speak is already to go to the heart of psychoanalytic experience. Here it makes sense to first raise a question: What is speech? In other words, what are symbols?

In truth, we witness an avoidance of this question. And we note that in minimizing this question – in seeing in the strictly technical elements and mainsprings of analysis nothing more than instruments designed to modify, through a series of successive approximations, the subject's

behaviors and habits – we are led very quickly to a number of difficulties and dead ends. Going in this direction, we certainly don't go to the point of situating them in a global consideration of psychoanalytic practice, but we go ever further toward a certain number of opacities that arise and that then tend to turn analysis into a practice that seems far more irrational than it really is.

It is striking to see how many subjects who have recently engaged in analysis have talked, in their first way of expressing themselves regarding their experience, about its possibly irrational character, whereas it seems, on the contrary, that there is perhaps no more transparent technique around.

Of course, in an analysis everything goes in this direction: we fall in with a certain number of the patient's more or less partial psychological views, we speak about magical thinking, we speak about all kinds of registers that indisputably have their value and are encountered in a very dynamic fashion in psychoanalysis. There is but one step from that to thinking that psychoanalysis itself operates in the register of magical thinking, and this step is quickly taken when one does not decide first to raise the primordial question: What does

the experience of speaking involve? What is the essence and exchange of speech? And to raise at the same time the question of psychoanalytic practice [*expérience*].

Let us begin with this practice as it is initially presented to us in the first theories of analysis. What is this *neurotic* whom we deal with in psychoanalysis? What is going to happen during the analysis? What about the shift [in focus] from the conscious to the unconscious? What are the forces that give a certain existence to the equilibrium we call the pleasure principle?

To proceed quickly, I will say with Raymond de Saussure that the subject hallucinates his world. The subject's illusory satisfactions are obviously of a different order than the satisfactions that find their object purely and simply in reality [*réel*]. A symptom has never sated hunger or slaked thirst in a lasting manner, unless accompanied by the absorption of food or drink. No doubt a general decline in the subject's level of vitality can result in extreme cases, as we see for example in natural or artificial hibernation, but this is conceivable only as a phase that cannot last without leading to irreversible damage. The very reversibility of a neurotic problem implies that the economy of

satisfactions that were involved in it were of a different order, and infinitely less tied to fixed organic rhythms, even if they command some of them. This defines the conceptual category that includes the sort of objects I am in the process of qualifying as imaginary, if you are willing to grant this term its full range of implications.

On this basis, it is easy to see that the order of imaginary satisfaction can be found only in the sexual realm.

All of this is but a precondition for analytic practice. And it is not astonishing, even if things had to be confirmed, verified, and inaugurated, I would say, by psychoanalytic practice itself. Once having gone through the experience of analysis, things seem to be perfectly rigorous. The term "libido" merely expresses the notion of reversibility that implies that there is a certain equivalence or metabolism of images. In order to be able to conceptualize this transformation, a term related to energy is necessary. This is the purpose served by the word "libido." What is involved is, naturally, something quite complex.

Imaginary satisfaction is obviously not the simple fact that Demetrius was satisfied by having dreamed that he possessed the courtesan

priestess [Chrysis], even if this case is but a particular case in a larger whole. It involves an element that goes much further and that intersects all the phenomena that biologists mention concerning instinctual cycles, especially in the register of sexuality and reproduction.

Apart from the still uncertain and improbable studies concerning neurological relays in sexual cycles, which are hardly what is most solid in their studies, it has been demonstrated that these cycles in animals themselves depend upon a certain number of triggering mechanisms that are essentially imaginary in nature. What is most interesting in studies of instinctual cycles, their limits, and their definition is that, in testing a certain number of releasers to determine the lowest degree capable of producing an effect – in order to figure out exactly what these release mechanisms are – researchers have been able to provoke artificially in animals the activation of parts of the sexual behavioral cycle in question.

The fact is that, within a specific behavioral cycle, a certain number of displacements can always occur under certain conditions. Indeed, biologists have not found any better term than the very one that serves to designate the primal

sexual troubles and mainsprings of symptoms in our patients: "displacement." For example, in the middle of a combat cycle, one can observe the swift supervening of a segment of display behavior. In birds, one of the combatants suddenly begins preening itself.

A thousand other examples could be given. I am not going to enumerate them here today. I am just trying to indicate that the element of displacement is an essential mainspring of the set of behaviors related to sexuality. No doubt, these phenomena do not occur in this realm alone. But the studies by Konrad Lorenz on the functions of images in the feeding cycle show that the imaginary plays just as eminent a role there as in the realm of sexual behavior. In man, it is principally at the latter level that we find ourselves faced with this phenomenon.

Let me punctuate this discussion by saying that the elements of displaced instinctual behavior displayed by animals can give us a rough idea of a symbolic behavior. What is called symbolic behavior in animals is the fact that a displaced segment of such behavior takes on a socialized value and serves the animal group as a marker for a certain collective behavior.

We thus posit that a behavior can become imaginary when its directedness toward images and its own value as an image for another subject make it capable of being displaced outside of the cycle that assures the satisfaction of a natural need. On this basis, neurotic behavior can be said to be elucidated at the level of instinctual economy.

As for knowing why it is always sexual behavior [that undergoes displacement], I need not return to this except to provide a brief indication. The fact that a man may ejaculate upon seeing a slipper does not surprise us, nor are we surprised when he uses it to bring his partner to feel better disposed toward him. But surely no one imagines that a slipper can serve to abate an individual's hunger pangs, even extreme ones. Similarly, what we deal with constantly is fantasies. During treatment, it is not uncommon that the patient or subject recounts a fantasy like that of performing fellatio on the analyst. Is that an element that we would characterize as an archaic cycle of his biography? Or relegate to a prior period of undernourishment? It is quite obvious that we wouldn't dream of such a thing, regardless of the incorporative character we attribute to such fantasies.

What does this mean? It can mean many things. In fact, we must realize that the imaginary can hardly be confused with the domain of what is analyzable. There may be another function than that of the imaginary. It is not because what is analyzable encounters the imaginary that the imaginary can be confused with the analyzable. The imaginary is neither the entirety of what can be analyzed nor of what is analyzed.

Let us return to the example of our fetishist, even if it is rather rare. If we accept that what is involved here is a sort of primitive perversion, it is not impossible to envision similar cases. Let us suppose it involves an imaginary displacement like the kind we find in the animal kingdom. Suppose, in other words, that the slipper here is a strict displacement of the female sexual organ, since fetishism is far more common among males. Were there nothing representing an elaboration on this primitive given, it would be as unanalyzable as is this or that perverse fixation.

Conversely, let us return to the case of the patient or subject in the grip of a fellatio fantasy. This is something that has a completely different meaning. We can no doubt consider that this fantasy represents the imaginary, a certain fixation

on a primitive oral stage of sexuality, but we will not say that this fellatio performer is constitutionally a fellatio performer. By which I mean that the fantasy or imaginary element in question has merely a symbolic value that we must assess only as a function of the moment in the analysis at which it occurs. In effect, the fantasy does arise – even if the subject does not always tell us about it – and it does so frequently enough to show that it arises within the psychoanalytic dialogue. It is designed to be expressed, to be spoken, and to symbolize something – something that has a very different meaning depending on the moment in the dialogue at which it arises.

So what does this mean? First, it is not merely because a phenomenon represents a displacement – in other words, is inscribed in imaginary phenomena – that it is an analyzable phenomenon. Second, a phenomenon is analyzable only if it represents something other than itself.

2

To broach the topic I wish to speak about, namely, symbolism, I will say that a broad range



of imaginary functions in analysis bear no other relation to the fantasmatic reality they manifest than the syllable "po" bears to the simply shaped vase it designates [in French, the *t* in *pot* (meaning pot or vase) is silent]. In "police" or "poltroon," the syllable "po" obviously has an entirely different value. One could use a vase to symbolize the syllable "po." In the term "police" or "poltroon," it would be necessary to add other equally imaginary terms that would not be taken for anything other than syllables designed to complete the word.

This is how we must understand the symbolic that is involved in psychoanalytic exchange. Whether it is a matter of real symptoms, bungled actions, or whatever we constantly find and re-find, which Freud referred to as its essential reality, it is always a matter of symbols – symbols organized in language and which thus function on the basis of the link between the signifier and the signified, which is equivalent to the very structure of language.

The notion that a dream is a rebus comes from Freud, not from me. The fact that a symptom expresses something structured and organized like a language is sufficiently manifested by

hysterical symptoms, to begin with the simplest of symptoms, which always provide something equivalent to a sexual activity, but never a univocal equivalent. On the contrary, they are always polyvalent, superimposed, overdetermined, and, indeed, constructed in the exact same way as images are constructed in dreams. We find here a coming together or superimposing of symbols that is as complex as a poetic phrase whose tone, structure, puns, rhythms, and sound are all crucial. Everything occurs on several levels and partakes of the order and register of language.

The importance of this will perhaps not sink in if we do not try to see what language is originally.

Of course, the question of the origin of language is a topic that can easily lend itself to organized, collective, or individual delusions. We must not engage in that sort of thing. Language exists. It is something that has emerged. Now that it has emerged, we shall never know either when or how it began, or how things were before it came into being.

But still, how can we express what is perhaps one of the most primitive forms of language? Consider passwords. I am choosing this example deliberately because the illusion, when we speak

of language, is always to believe that its signification is what it designates. But this is not at all the case. Of course, it designates something, it serves a certain function at this level. But a password has the property of being chosen in a way that is thoroughly independent from its signification.

But what if the latter is idiotic? The Scholastics reply – one should no doubt never reply – that the signification of such a word is to designate the person who pronounces it as having such and such a property corresponding to the question that makes him pronounce the word. Others would say that it is a poor example because it is selected from within a convention. But this makes it even better. On the other hand, you cannot deny that a password has the most precious qualities, since it can help you avoid getting killed.

This is how we can consider language to have a function. Born among the ferocious animals that primitive men must have been – it's not unlikely, judging on the basis of modern men – a password is something thanks to which a group is constituted, not something thanks to which the men in a group are recognized.

There is another realm in which one can meditate upon the function of language: the stupid

language of love. The latter consists – in the final spasm of ecstasy or, on the contrary, as part of the daily grind, depending on the individuals – in suddenly calling one's sexual partner by the name of a thoroughly ordinary vegetable or repugnant animal. This certainly borders on the question of the horror of anonymity. It is no accident that certain of these animal names or more or less totemic props are found anew in phobia. The two have something in common. The human subject is, as we shall see later, especially prone to vertigo, and to get rid of it he feels the need to create something transcendent. This is not insignificant in the origin of phobia.

In these two examples, language is particularly devoid of signification. We can clearly see here what distinguishes symbols from signs – namely, the interhuman function of symbols. This is something which is born with language and which is such that, after the word has truly become pronounced speech, the two partners are no longer what they were before. This is what words are for, as I've shown you now using the simplest examples.

You would, moreover, be wrong to believe that these are not fully fledged examples. Whether in

the case of passwords or words of endearment, we are talking about something that is full-blown in scope. [Not so in the case of] a conversation that at an average moment of your career as a student you have at a dinner with equally average professors, where the signification of things exchanged has a character tantamount to that of conversations with people you meet on the street or the bus – nothing but a certain way of getting yourself recognized is involved here and this justifies Mallarmé's claim that language is "comparable to worn coins that are passed from hand to hand in silence."

Let us consider on this basis what happens when the neurotic comes in for an analysis.

He too begins to say things. We must not be surprised if, at the outset, the things he says have no more weight than the ones I just alluded to. Nevertheless, something is fundamentally different, which is that he comes to the analyst to exchange something other than idle chatter and banalities. Something not insignificant is already implied in this situation, since, in short, it is his own meaning that he has basically come to seek. Something is mystically placed here on the person who listens to him.

Of course, the neurotic advances toward this experience, this original pathway, with – by God – what he has at his disposal. What he believes first is that he must play the part of the doctor himself, he must inform the analyst. Naturally, in your everyday practice, you set him straight, saying that that's not what it's about, but to speak and preferably without seeking to put his thoughts in order or organize them – in other words, without putting himself, in accordance with a well-known narcissistic maneuver, in the place of his interlocutor.

In the end, the notion we have of the neurotic is that gagged speech lives in his very symptoms, speech in which a certain number, let us say, of transgressions with respect to a certain order are expressed, which, by themselves, loudly fustigate the cruel world in which they have been inscribed. Failing to realize the order of symbols in a living fashion, the subject realizes disorganized images for which these transgressions are substitutes.

This is what will initially get in the way of any true symbolic relationship.

What the subject expresses first when he speaks is the register of what we call resistances, which can only be interpreted as the fact of realizing an

image or images of early experience *hic et nunc*, here and now, in the analytic situation with the analyst. The entire theory of resistance was built upon this, but only after the major recognition of the symbolic value of symptoms and of everything that can be analyzed.

Now, what psychoanalysis encounters is precisely something other than realizing symbols. It is the subject's temptation to constitute this imaginary reference point here and now in psychoanalytic experience.

We call this an attempt by the subject to draw the analyst into his game. This is what we see, for example, in the case of the Rat Man, when we perceive – quickly, but not immediately, and Freud doesn't either – that, by recounting the grand obsessional story of the rat torture, the subject attempts to realize here and now with Freud the very imaginary anal-sadistic relationship that makes the story piquant. Freud perceives quite astutely that something is involved that is translated and betrayed physiognomically on the subject's very face and that he qualifies as “*horror at a jouissance of his own of which he himself was unaware.*”

The moment at which people were able to gauge and posit as resistance elements that manifest

themselves in psychoanalytic practice was certainly a significant moment in analytic history. This was first spoken about in a coherent fashion in Reich's article, one of the first articles on the topic published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, at the same time at which Freud constructed the second stage in the development of psychoanalytic theory, which is no other than the theory of the ego.

Around this time, in 1920, *das Es* [the id] appears. At that moment, we began to perceive, within the register of the symbolic relationship – and it must always be maintained there – that the subject resists and that this resistance is not a simple inertia opposed to the therapeutic movement, as in physics one could say that a mass resists acceleration. It establishes a certain bond that is opposed as such, like a human action, to the therapist's action, except that the therapist must not be misled by it. The patient is not opposing him as a real person [*réalité*], but rather as a certain image that the subject projects onto him, to the extent to which it is realized in his place.

These terms are, in fact, merely approximate.

The notion of an aggressive instinct is also born

at this moment, the term *destrudo* being added to libido, not without reason, for from the moment at which its goal [words missing here . . .] the essential functions of these imaginary relationships such as they appear in the form of resistance, another register appears that is linked to nothing less than the specific role played by the ego.

I will not go into the theory of the ego today except to say that, in any coherent and organized analytic notion of the ego, we must absolutely define the ego's imaginary function as the unity of the subject who is alienated from himself. The ego is something in which the subject cannot recognize himself at first except by alienating himself. He can thus only re-find himself by abolishing the ego's *alter ego*. Here we see the development of the dimension that is already referred to as "aggressiveness," which is quite distinct from aggression.

We must now take up anew the question in the following two registers: speech and the imaginary.

Speech, as I showed you in an abbreviated form, plays the essential role of mediation. From the moment it is realized, mediation changes the two partners who find themselves in each other's

presence. There is nothing to this that has not already been given to us in the semantic register of certain human groups. Read, in this regard, the book by Leenhardt entitled *Do Kamo*.

I wouldn't give it my highest recommendation, but it is expressive enough and quite approachable. It is an excellent introduction for those who need to be introduced to the topic. You will see therein that, among the Kanak people of New Caledonia, something rather peculiar occurs at the semantic level – namely, that the word "speech" signifies something that goes much further than what goes by that name for us. For them, speech is also an action. Note that it is for us too, for to give one's word is a kind of act. But, among the Kanaks, it is also sometimes an object – in other words, something that one carries, a sheaf [*gerbe*], for example. It can be anything. But, on this basis, something exists that did not exist before.

Another remark should also be made. This mediating speech is not purely and simply mediating at an elementary level. It allows two men to transcend the fundamental aggressive relation to the mirage of their semblable. It must be something else as well for, if one thinks about it, one

sees that not only does it constitute this mediation but it also constitutes reality itself.

This is quite obvious if you consider what is called an elementary structure – in other words, an archaic structure – of kinship. The structures of kinship are not always elementary. Ours, for example, are especially complex, but, in truth, they would not exist without the system of words that express them. And the fact is that the prohibitions that regulate among us the human exchange involved in marriage [*alliances*], in the strict sense of the word, are reduced to an excessively small number. This is why we tend to confuse terms such as father, mother, son, and so on, with real relationships. It is because the system of kinship relations is extremely reduced, in its boundaries and in its field. But it concerns symbols.

Jules H. Masserman published a very nice article in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1944 entitled “Language, Behaviour and Dynamic Psychiatry.” One of the examples he gives there shows clearly the weakness of the behaviorist standpoint. Masserman believes he can resolve the question of language’s symbolism by providing an example of conditioning. Researchers coordinated people’s automatic reaction to light

– the contraction of the pupils – with the ringing of a bell. When they eliminated the light stimulus, the subjects’ pupils would contract when the bell was rung. In a further step, the researchers managed to trigger the same reaction simply by having the subjects hear the word “contract.” Do you believe this resolves the question of language and symbolization? If, instead of the word “contract,” the researchers had enunciated some other word, they could have obtained exactly the same results. What is involved is not the conditioning of a phenomenon but what is involved in symptoms: the relationship between symptoms and the entire system of language, the significative system of interhuman relations as such.

Psychoanalysis precisely intersects these remarks and shows us their scope and presence in detail. The crux of what I just told you is in fact the following: any analyzable relationship – that is, any relationship that is symbolically interpretable – is always inscribed in a three-term relationship.

As we have already seen in the very structure of speech, what is libidinally realizable between two subjects requires mediation. This is what gives its true value to the fact, asserted by psychoanalytic

theory and demonstrated by experience, that nothing can be interpreted in the end – for that is what is at stake – except via Oedipus. This means that every two-term relationship is already more or less marked as imaginary in style. In order for a relationship to take on its symbolic value, the mediation of a third personage is necessary who, in relation to the subject, realizes the transcendent element thanks to which his relation to the object can be sustained at a certain distance.

Between the imaginary relation and the symbolic relation lies the entire distance attributable to guilt. This is why, as psychoanalytic practice shows us, people always prefer guilt to anxiety.

Thanks to the progress made by Freud's doctrine and theory, we know that anxiety is always linked to a loss – in other words, to a transformation of the ego, to a two-term relationship that is on the verge of vanishing, and which must give way to something that the subject cannot approach without a certain vertigo. This is the register and nature of anxiety. As soon as a third party is introduced, as soon as it enters into the narcissistic relationship, the possibility of a real mediation opens up essentially by means of the

personage who, in relation to the subject, represents a transcendent personage – in other words, an image of mastery by means of which the subject's desire and fulfillment can be symbolically realized. At this moment another register manifests itself which is either that of the law or that of guilt, depending on the register in which it is experienced.

3

You can tell that I am abbreviating things here a little bit. I hope it is not too disconcerting, however, since these are things that I have repeated many times in our meetings.

I would like to underscore once again an important point concerning the symbolic register.

As soon as the symbolic – that which is involved when the subject is engaged in a truly human relationship – is involved, as soon as a commitment is made by the subject that is expressed in the register of *I*, by an "I want" or "I love you," there is always something problematic. The temporal element must be considered, which raises a whole range of problems that must be dealt with parallel

to the question of the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary. The question of the temporal constitution of human action is inseparable from that of the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary. Although I cannot discuss this topic fully this evening, I must at least indicate that we encounter it constantly in psychoanalysis and in the most concrete manner. Here too, in order to understand it, we must begin from a structural and, so to speak, existential notion of the signification of symbols.

One of what appears to be the most well-established points in psychoanalytic theory is that of automatism, so-called repetition automatism [or "repetition compulsion"], the first example of which Freud explained so clearly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [(1920), SE XVIII, pp. 14-17]. We see there the first form of mastery in the making: the child abolishes his toy by making it disappear. This primitive repetition [i.e., making the toy disappear and reappear again and again] or temporal scansion is such that the identity of the object is maintained in both presence and absence.

This gives us the precise scope or signification of the symbol inasmuch as it is related to the object – in other words, to what is known as the

concept. Now, something that seems so obscure when one reads about it in Hegel – namely, that the concept is time – is illustrated here. It would require a one-hour lecture to demonstrate that the concept is time. Curiously enough, Jean Hyppolite, in his [1941 French] translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, confined himself to adding a footnote saying that this is one of the most obscure points in Hegel's theory. But, thanks to Freud's example, we can put our finger on the simple point which consists in saying that the symbol of the object is precisely the object that is here [*l'objet là*]. When it is no longer here, we have the object incarnated in its duration, separated from itself, and which, owing to this very fact, can be in some sense always present for you, always here, always at your disposal. This points to the relationship that exists between symbols and the fact that everything that is human is preserved as such. The more it is human, the more it is preserved from the shifting and decomposing aspect of natural processes. Man gives everything human that has lasted – himself first and foremost – a certain permanence.

Let me give another example. If I had wanted to broach the question of symbols from a



different angle, instead of beginning from the word, speech, or small sheaf, I would have started from the tumulus over the chief's tomb, or over the tomb of anyone at all. What characterizes our species is precisely the fact of surrounding cadavers with something that constitutes a grave, marking the fact that this person lived. A tumulus or any other sign of burial warrants being called a "symbol." It is something humanizing. I term "symbol" everything whose phenomenology I have tried to demonstrate.

I obviously have my reasons for pointing this out to you. Indeed, Freud's theory had to go so far as to highlight the notion of a death instinct. The analysts who, afterward, stressed only the element of resistance – in other words, the elements of imaginary action in analysis, more or less canceling out the symbolic function of language – are the same ones for whom the death instinct is a notion that has no *raison d'être*.

To realize – in the strict sense of the word – to bring the image back to a certain reality [*réel*], after having included in it, of course, a particular sign of this reality [*réel*] as an essential function, to bring psychoanalytic expression back to reality [*réel*], is always correlated – among

those who developed it in this register because they have nothing else – with bracketing or even excluding what Freud placed under the heading of the death instinct, which he essentially called repetition automatism.

Reich provides us with a typical example of this. For him, everything the patient recounts is *flatus vocis*, it's the way instinct manifests its armor. The point is significant and very important, but it is merely a stage in psychoanalytic practice. When the entire symbolic component of psychoanalytic practice is bracketed, the death instinct is itself excluded.

Of course, death as an element does not manifest itself only at the level of symbols. It also manifests itself in the narcissistic register. But there it concerns something else. Death in the narcissistic register is much closer to the element of final nullification that is linked to every type of displacement and about which one can conceive, as I already indicated, that it is the origin or source of the possibility of symbolically transacting reality [*réel*]. But it is also something that has much less to do with the element of duration, temporal projection, or the future as the essential term in symbolic behavior as such.

As you can tell, I must go a bit quickly over these things. There is much to say about all of them. The analysis of notions as different as those that correspond to the terms of resistance, transference resistance, transference as such, the distinction between what one should strictly call transference and what should be left to resistance, all of that can quite easily be theorized in terms of the fundamental notions of the symbolic and the imaginary.

In concluding today I would simply like to illustrate my remarks. One should always provide a little illustration for what one discusses. This is merely an approximation in relation to elements of formalization that I have developed much more extensively with my students in the Seminar – as regards, for example, the case of the Rat Man. It can be completely formalized with the help of elements like those that I will indicate to you. This will show you what I mean.

Here is how an analysis could, very schematically, be written from its beginning to its end.

*rS-rI-iI-iR-iS-sS-SI-SR-rR-rS,*

in other words, realizing symbols.

*rS*: This is the initial position. The analyst is a symbolic person as such, and he is sought out insofar as he is both a symbol of omnipotence and is already an authority or master. Seeking him out, the patient adopts a certain stance which is approximately as follows: "You're the one who possesses my truth." This stance is completely illusory, but it is the typical stance.

*rI*: Next, we have the realizing of images – that is, the more or less narcissistic instating in which the subject enters into a certain behavior that is analyzed as resistance. Why? Because of a certain relation [*rapport*], *iI*,

IMAGINATION

IMAGE

*iI*: This stands for captivation by images, which is essentially constitutive of all imaginary realization insofar as we consider it to be instinctual. The realizing of images is such that the female stickleback is captivated by the same colors as the male stickleback, and that they enter progressively into a certain dance which leads them you know where. What constitutes it in analytic practice? I am situating it for the

time being in a circle. See further on [schema missing].

After that, we have  $iR$ , where  $I$  is transformed into  $R$ . This is the phase of resistance, negative transference, or even, in extreme cases, delusion that there is in the analysis. Some analysts tend to go ever further in this direction. "Analysis is a well-organized delusion," as I once heard one of my teachers say. This formulation is partially but not totally inaccurate.

What happens next? If the outcome is good, if the subject is not thoroughly disposed to becoming psychotic, in which case he remains at the stage  $iR$ , he moves on to  $iS$ , the imagining of symbols. He imagines symbols. We have a thousand examples of the imagining of symbols in analysis, for example, dreams. A dream is a symbolized image.

Here  $sS$  comes in, allowing for a reversal. It is the symbolizing of images – in other words, what is known as interpretation. One reaches it only after going beyond the imaginary phase which basically encompasses  $rI-iI-iR-iS$ . The elucidation of symptoms through interpretation now begins:  $sS-SI$ .

Next we have  $SR$ , which is, in short, the goal

of all health. The goal is not, as people believe, to adapt to a more or less well-defined or well-organized reality [*réel*], but to get one's own reality – that is, one's own desire – recognized. As I have emphasized many times, the goal is to get it recognized by one's semblables – in other words, to symbolize it.

At this point, we come to  $rR$ , which allows us to reach  $rS$  in the end – which is precisely where we began.

It cannot be otherwise, for, if analysis is humanly viable, it can only be circular. And an analysis can go through this same cycle several times.

$iS$  is the analysis proper. It involves what is wrongly referred to as the communication of unconscious. The analyst must be able to understand the game his subject plays. He must understand that he himself is the male or female stickleback, depending on the kind of dance initiated by his subject.

$sS$  stands for symbolizing symbols. The analyst is the one who must do that. It's not a problem for him as he himself is already a symbol. It is preferable that he do it thoroughly, with culture and intelligence. This is why it is preferable and

even necessary that he have as complete a background as possible in cultural matters. The more he knows about them the better. *sS* must not come in until a certain stage has been reached.

The subject almost always forms a certain more or less successive unity whose essential element is constituted in the transference. And the analyst comes to symbolize the superego, which is the symbol of symbols. The superego is simply speech [*une parole*] that says nothing. The analyst has no problem symbolizing that speech, which is precisely what he does.

*rR* is the work the analyst does. It is improperly designated with the famous term "benevolent neutrality," about which people speak any old which way, and which simply means that, to an analyst, all realities are basically equivalent, all of them are realities. This stems from the idea that all that is real is rational and vice versa. This is what must give him the quality of "benevolence," upon which negative transference falls apart, and which allows him to bring the analysis safely to harbor.

All of this has been said a bit rapidly. I could have spoken to you of many other things. But it was merely an introduction, a preface to what

I will try to discuss more completely and more concretely in the report that I hope to deliver to you soon in Rome on the subject of language in psychoanalysis.

### Discussion

Prof. Daniel Lagache thanks the lecturer and opens up the floor for discussion. Mrs. Marcus-Blajan indicates that she did not understand certain words, for example, "transcendent." What the speaker said about anxiety and guilt made her think of agoraphobia.

*J. L.* – Anxiety is tied to the narcissistic relationship. Mrs. Blajan has provided a very nice illustration of it with agoraphobia, for there is no more narcissistic phenomenon around. Every time I have commented on a case in my Seminar, I have always shown the different stages [*temps*] of the subject's reactions. In each case in which we find a two-stage phenomenon – in obsession, for example – the first stage is anxiety and the second is guilt, which provides relief from the anxiety in the form of guilt.

The word "transcendent" seemed obscure to you. It is nevertheless not a very metaphysical or even metapsychological term. I will try to illustrate it. What does it mean in the precise context in which I used it?

In the subject's relationship to his semblable – the two-term or narcissistic relationship – there is always something that has faded away. The subject feels that he is the other and that the other is him. This reciprocally defined subject is an essential stage in the constitution of the human subject. It is a stage in which he cannot subsist even though his structure is always on the verge of appearing, especially in certain neurotic structures. Where the specular image applies maximally, the subject is merely the reflection of himself. Hence his need to construct a point that constitutes something transcendent, which is precisely the other *qua* other.

A thousand examples could be offered. Let us consider that of phobia – that is, the fact that a similar anxiety corresponds to the subsistence in the human partner of animal images, which are quite foreign and separate from human images. In fact, whatever we may think of the real historical origin of totemism, and it is not transparent

despite the studies that have been devoted to the topic, there is one thing that is quite certain, which is that totemism is linked to the prohibition of cannibalism – that is, the injunction not to eat the other. The most primitive form of human relationship is certainly the absorption of the substance of one's semblable. Here you can clearly see the function of totemism, which is to create a subject that transcends the semblable. I don't believe Dr. Gessain will contradict me here.

This intersects one of the points that interests you the most, the relationship between children and adults. To children, adults are transcendent insofar as they are initiated. What is rather curious is that children are no less transcendent to adults. By a system of reflection that is characteristic of all relations, a child becomes for an adult the subject of all mysteries. This is the source of the confusion of tongues between children and adults that we must take into account when treating children.

We could take other examples, in particular examples related to what constitutes the sexual type of Oedipal relations, which involves the subject in some way and yet simultaneously goes

beyond him. We see there the constitution of a form at a certain distance.

*Serge Leclair* – You spoke to us about the symbolic and the imaginary. But you didn't talk to us about the real.

*J. L.* – I did talk about it a little bit, nonetheless. The real is either totality or the vanished instant. In analytic practice, it always appears for the subject when he runs up against something, for example, the analyst's silence.

Through analytic dialogue, something quite striking occurs that I was not able to emphasize this evening. It is a facet of analytic experience that, in and of itself, would require far more than just one talk. Let me take an altogether concrete example, that of dreams, about which I no longer recall whether I said earlier that they are composed like a language. In analysis, they serve as a language. A dream that occurs in the middle or at the end of the analysis is part of the dialogue with the analyst. So how is it that these dreams – and many other things as well, [such as] the way in which the subject constitutes his symbols – bear the absolutely gripping mark of the reality of the

analyst, namely, the analyst as a person, as he is constituted in his being? How is it possible that, through this imaginary and symbolic experience, the subject winds up in the final phase with a limited but striking knowledge of the analyst's structure? This in and of itself raises a problem that I was not able to broach this evening.

*Georges Mauco* – Perhaps we need to recall to mind the different types of symbols.

*J. L.* – A symbol is, in the first place, an emblem.

*Georges Mauco* – Symbols are lived experience. For example, a house is known first of all by a symbol, and is later elaborated and disciplined collectively. It always evokes the word "house."

*J. L.* – Let me say that I do not entirely agree. Ernest Jones has drawn up a little catalogue of the symbols that one finds at the roots of analytic experience – which constitute symptoms, the Oedipal relationship, etc. – and he demonstrates that what is at stake are always essentially themes related to kinship relations, the master's authority, and life and death. All of which obviously

involve symbols. The latter are elements that have nothing whatsoever to do with reality. A being that is completely engaged in reality, like an animal, hasn't the slightest notion of them.

At stake here are precisely the points at which the symbol constitutes human reality, where it creates the human dimension Freud constantly emphasizes when he says that the obsessive neurotic always lives in the register of what involves the elements of greatest uncertainty: how long one's life will last, who one's biological father is, and so on. There is no direct perceptual proof of any of that in human reality. Such things are constructed and constructed primitively by certain symbolic relations that can then find confirmation in reality. A [child's] father is effectively its progenitor. But, before we can know who he is with certainty, the name of the father creates the function of the father.

I believe thus that symbols are not elaborations of sensations or of reality. What is properly symbolic – and the most primitive of symbols – introduces something else, something different into human reality, something that constitutes all the primitive objects of truth.

What is remarkable is that symbols, symbolizing

symbols, all fall under that heading. The creation of symbols accomplishes the introduction of a new reality into animal reality.

*Georges Mauco* – . . . but sublimated and elaborated. This provides the foundation for later language.

*J. L.* – I completely agree with you there. For example, in order to designate relationships, logicians themselves quite naturally appeal to the term "kinship." It's the first model of a transitive relationship.

*Octave Mannoni* – The shift from anxiety to guilt seems related to the analytic situation itself. Anxiety can lead to shame and not to guilt. When anxiety evokes the idea not of a punisher but of being ostracized, it is shame that appears. Anxiety can also be translated into doubt instead of guilt. It seems to me that it is because the analyst is present that anxiety transforms into guilt.

*J. L.* – I quite agree with you. The analytic situation is unusual – the analyst [is felt by the patient

to be the one who] possesses speech and judges – because the analysis is quite thoroughly oriented in a symbolic direction and because the analyst has substituted speech for what was missing there, because the father was merely a superego – in other words, a law without speech, inasmuch as this is constitutive of neurosis, inasmuch as neurosis is defined by transference. All of these definitions are equivalent. There are, in effect, infinite routings to the reaction of anxiety, and it is not out of the question that certain of them appear in psychoanalysis. Each one deserves to be analyzed in its own right.

The question of doubt is much closer to the symbolic constitution of reality. It is in some sense preliminary to it. If there is a position that one can essentially qualify as subjective, in the sense in which I mean it – in other words, that this is the position that constitutes the whole situation – it is clearly this one. When and how is it realized? That would require a whole separate discussion.

Wladimir Granoff raises a question regarding fetishism.

*J. L.* – Indeed, I did not come back to fetishism. The fetish is a transposition of the imaginary. It becomes a symbol.

A question is raised by Dr. Pidoux.

*J. L.* – Symbols are involved in even the slightest acting out.

*Didier Anzieu* – When Freud developed his clinical theory, he borrowed models from theories current at his time. I would like to know if those models come from the register of symbols or from the imaginary, and what origin should be given to them. As for the preliminary schema that you proposed today, are we talking about a change of models which would allow us to conceptualize clinical data adapted to cultural evolution or about something else?

*J. L.* – It is more adapted to the nature of things, if we consider that everything involved in analysis is of the nature of language – that is, in the final analysis, of the nature of a logic. This is what justifies the formalization I provided as a hypothesis.

As for what you said about Freud, I do not



agree that, regarding the subject of transference, he borrowed the atomistic, associationistic, or even mechanistic models of his era. What strikes me is the audacity with which he accepted love, purely and simply, as something not to be repudiated within the register of transference. He in no wise considered love to be an impossibility or a dead-end, something that goes beyond the bounds. He clearly saw that transference is the very realization of human relationships in their most elevated form, the realizing of symbols, which is there at the outset and which is also there at the end of all that.

The beginning and the end always involve transference. In the beginning, potentially: owing to the fact that the subject comes [to see us], the transference is there ready to be constituted. It is there right from the outset.

The fact that Freud included love in it is something that must clearly show us to what degree he gave symbolic relations their full range at the human level. Indeed, if we were to bestow a meaning on love – a borderline experience we can barely talk about – it would be the total conjunction of reality and symbols, which constitute one and the same thing.

*Françoise Dolto* – You say reality and symbols. What do you mean by reality?

*J. L.* – Let me provide an example. Giving someone a child as a gift is the very incarnation of love. For humans, a child is what is most real.

*Françoise Dolto* – When a child is born it symbolizes a gift. But there can also be a gift without a child. There can thus be speech without language.

*J. L.* – I am always willing to say it: symbols go beyond speech.

*Françoise Dolto* – We always arrive at the same question, “What is the real?” And we always manage to move away from it. There is another way in which to apprehend psychoanalytic reality than this one, which to my psychological sensibility seems quite extreme. But you are such an extraordinary teacher [*maitre*] that we can follow you even if we only understand later.

Sensory apprehension is a register of reality, and it has a foundation that seems more sure to me, since it is prior to language. If there is no

image of one's own body, everything occurs for the adult with the verbal expression of the imaginary. As soon as the other has ears, the subject cannot speak.

*J. L.* – Do you think a lot about the fact that others have ears?

*Françoise Dolto* – I don't, but children do. If I speak, it is because I know that there are ears to hear. Prior to the Oedipal stage, children speak even when there are no ears to hear. But after the Oedipal age one cannot speak if there are no ears around.

*J. L.* – What do you mean?

*Françoise Dolto* – In order to speak, there must be a mouth and ears. So a mouth remains.

*J. L.* – That is the imaginary.

*Françoise Dolto* – I met with a mute child yesterday who drew [a picture of a child with] eyes but no ears. As he is mute I said to him, "It's not surprising that the kid can't speak – he has no

mouth." The child tried to draw a mouth with a crayon. But he placed it on the kid in a place that cut the kid's throat. He would lose his head, his intelligence, and his notion of a vertical body if he spoke. In order to speak, one must be sure that there is a mouth and that there are ears.

*J. L.* – That is all fine and good, but the very interesting facts you highlight are connected to something that was completely left aside, the constitution of the body image *qua* the ego's *Urbild*, and with this ambiguous knife-edge, the fragmented body. I'm not sure where you are going with this.

*Françoise Dolto* – Language is but one of the images. It is but one of the manifestations of the act of love, but one of the manifestations in which being, in the act of love, is fragmented. We are not complete since we need to be completed when we need speech. One does not know what one is saying – it is the other [who knows what one is saying], assuming the other hears one. What occurs through language can occur through many other means.

THE SYMBOLIC, THE IMAGINARY, AND THE REAL

*Octave Mannoni* – Just one remark. Drawings are not images; they are objects. The question is whether an image is a symbol or a reality. This is extremely difficult.

*J. L.* – One of the most accessible ways by which one can approach the imaginary, at least in the phenomenology of intention, is by saying that the imaginary is everything that is artificially reproduced.