

POST-FREUDIAN ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CULTURE

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Abstract: This paper locates a crucial point of convergence between psychoanalysis and culture in the concepts of the symbol and the sublime. Although they underpin all of Freud's writing in culture, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that theories of symbolization and sublimation began to be adequately theorized, in particular in the work of Lacan and Castoriadis. Using Lacan's paradoxical insight that the sublime is precisely that which eludes sublimation, this paper analyzes the play-within-a-play in *A midsummer night's dream* focusing on the way Shakespeare foregrounds the chink in the wall as not an obstacle to but a protection of the lovers— from the traumatic encounter with the Real of loss. Similarly, in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, it is the threatened loss of the symbol in the form of the mysterious footprint which poses the greatest threat to the human psyche. Finally, the paper examines the Kleinian features of Lacan's theory of the sublime, and argues that the drive towards symbolic repair, however differently formulated, underlies both their theories of sublimation.

Key words: Freud, Lacan, Sublimation, Symbolization.

THE SYMBOL AND THE SUBLIME

Many of the recent encounters between psychoanalysis and culture can be best understood in relation to two fundamental concepts: the symbol and the sublime (or what psychoanalysis more commonly calls symbolization and sublimation). If we look at what the poets have had to say about symbols over the centuries, we find that their terms are often remarkably psychoanalytic – as Freud, of course, was the first to acknowledge in his repeated references to writers such as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Schiller, Heine and Goethe. A primary form of artistic expression, the symbol as defined by writers and literary scholars differs from (though is close to) the metaphor in that it functions on both the literal and the

Note: Different versions of some of the points in this essay have appeared in my essay and (joint) Introduction to *Objects: Material, psychic, aesthetic* by Homer, Parkin-Gounelas, and Stavrakakis (2006).

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figurative levels simultaneously, standing in for but never replacing what it represents but does not name. The symbol puts together (συμ-βάλλειν) the figurative and the literal so that the two may function simultaneously. Poets and painters use symbols in order to keep in operation the emotional impulses they feel compelled to represent, to keep them alive. Symbolism, as Goethe put it, in terms very close to those Freud was to use nearly a century later, «transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative» (Goethe, 1827-1842/1998, p. 141).

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats had a view of symbolism in poetry which takes us equally close to psychoanalytic preoccupations. In an essay written in 1900 (see Jeffares 1964, p. 48), the year Freud's *The interpretation of dreams* was published, he analyzed the role of rhythm in poetry in terms reminiscent of the hypnotic state or that of free-floating reverie, out of which Freud's theory of dreams developed:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.

It is in this “trance” state between sleeping and waking, when dreams occur, that symbols emerge. But dream symbols, as Freud explained it (and Goethe had understood) condense emotion, idea and image not only to allow the emotion to be repeatedly re-activated. They also perform the vital function of censorship, disguising the often taboo psychic material as something else. Goethe, too, had understood this; the full sentence of his description quoted above was that symbolism «transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative and *unattainable* so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains *inexpressible*» (Goethe, 1827-1842/1998, p. 141, emphasis added). Without censorship, which makes the idea “unattainable” by conscious explanations, “inexpressible” in words, the emotion could not get past the defence systems the ego erects against painful exposure¹.

1. Goethe compared symbolism to allegory which, in his view, «transforms an object of perception into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept continues to remain circumscribed and *completely available and expressible* within the image» (Goethe, 1827-1842/1998, p. 141, emphasis added).

One of symbolism's essential modes is linguistic, a fact that lies at the heart of both the literary and the psychoanalytic enterprise. In focusing on symbolization as a process, more than on the symbol itself, psychoanalysis has from the start been concerned with speech as "cure" (the talking cure), with the way language's power to replace what is lost or (not) remembered is harnessed by the subject in its drive towards psychic well-being. Freud's life-long preoccupation with representation (*Vorstellung*) returned him repeatedly to the question of the special status of verbal or linguistic symbols and the psychic laws on which this status is grounded. If he began with language's power to cure, he moved increasingly towards awareness of the difficulty of the relation between the symbol and the symbolized. «Dreams make an unrestricted use of linguistic symbols», he wrote at the end of his life, «the meaning of which is for the most part unknown to the dreamer» (Freud, 1940/1993, p. 398)². The processes of condensation and displacement that occur in dream (and literary) symbols serve to remind us of the symbol's inadequacy ever fully to represent the battle of desires and prohibitions that constitutes our psychic structures. These desires and prohibitions are by their nature incompatible, so that the symbol has to play its role as "overdetermined". Cornelius Castoriadis (1995, p. 19) provides an eloquent statement of this mismatch between the "signifiers" of the dream (its manifest content) and its "signifieds" (the latent representations):

The result is a multivocal (and truly indeterminate) correspondence between "signifier" and "signified", one of whose sides Freud has brought out: the overdetermination of what represents "something", of what is there for something else; at the same time, he leaves us in the dark as to what must be called the symbol's *underdetermination* and even about the *oversymbolization* and *undersymbolization* that always exists in a dream. There is always a signifier for several signifieds (overdetermination), but this signifier as well is not the sole one possible for these sig-

2. Freud continued: «Our experience, however, enables us to confirm their sense» – through an analysis of the dream-work involved. He then gives his controversial late opinion about the phylogenetic nature of symbols:

They [linguistic symbols] probably originate from earlier phases in the development of speech...dreams bring to light material which cannot have originated either from the dreamer's adult life or from his forgotten childhood. We are obliged to regard it as part of the *archaic heritage* which a child brings with him into the world, before any experience of his own, influenced by the experiences of his ancestors. We find the counterpart of this phylogenetic material in the earliest human legends and in surviving customs.

(Freud, 1940/1993, p. 399)

nifieds (underdetermination); a signified can be indicated by several signifiers (oversymbolization) or can be indicated only "in part" (undersymbolization).

It is this insight, which I shall return to shortly, which has formed the basis of many recent cultural returns to Freud³.

Along with Breuer, Freud also recognized immediately the way «every discourse is destined for an other», the *dual* structure of subject and interlocutor (Kristeva, 1989, pp. 267-268). This understanding developed by Lacan and Kristeva brought Freud into the centre of late-twentieth-century debates over the structure of subjectivity. It also brought to the foreground the obvious but often forgotten point that "culture" (all art, religion, scientific insight, etc.) is the product of human thought and emotion made to be communicable and thus shared with the other and the group more generally. Culture, what makes human beings social animals, is a product of the drive towards symbolization, towards the replacement of primary psychic preoccupations (mainly erotic and aggressive) by codes such as language which Lacan (via the new sciences of anthropology and sociology) called the Symbolic order. Entrance into the Symbolic is a painful but necessary requirement which cultural endeavour (as well as psychoanalysis) helps us accomplish. The Symbolic order performs the vital function of structuring inter-human reality.

The concept of sublimation (which depends on symbolization) received little direct attention from Freud⁴, even though it underpins all his many writings on culture. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the concept began to be adequately theorized, through writers like Lacan and Castoriadis. In his work on psychoanalysis and culture Castoriadis (1995, p. 29) writes of «the massive conversion that characterizes the emergence of humanity», which he describes as «the substitution of representational pleasure for organ pleasure». Sublimation is

the process by means of which the psyche is forced to replace its own or private objects of cathexis, including its own image of itself, with objects that exist and have value in and through their social institution, and to make them for itself "causes", "means" or "supports" of pleasure.

3. The influential postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, for example, in his essay on *Nations and psychic states*, writes of «the loss that generates meaning» (Bhabha, 1991, p. 89) as a form of «communicatio interruptus» which he describes, citing Paul de Man, as a «relation of trope to meaning- 'the nonadequation of symbol to symbolized'...a process of displacement and fragmentation, 'a wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile'» (Bhabha, 1991, p. 90).

4. In *The ego and the id* Freud wrote that «the transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido...implies an abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualization- a kind of sublimation» (Freud, 1923/1991, p. 369).

One of Lacan's main elaborations of sublimation occurs in his seventh seminar on *The ethics of psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1992). Here, following Kant, he analyzes cultural texts (such as Sophocles' *Antigone*) in ways that illustrate the convergence of literary and psychoanalytic theories of the sublime and of sublimation. At one point he gives an uncharacteristically clear explanation of what sublimation involves when he focuses on the phenomenon of collecting as a way of channelling libidinal energies into socially-acceptable practices. The point of collecting, he argues, is to convert the mundane and trivial into something that society can approve of and relate to. As an example he takes the matchbox collection of his friend the writer Jacques Prévert, a long row of matchboxes joined together with string, which ran along the mantelpiece and up the walls of Prévert's living room. In attempting to anchor desire in ways that can be socially valued, such collections, Lacan argued, only draw attention to their status as "sublime" objects – that is, as objects which escape the symbolizing process through their superfluous proliferation, illustrating both the fundamental Freudian point about the impossibility of coincidence between aim and object and the linguistic thesis of Ferdinand de Saussure about the arbitrary relation of signifier and signified. Every item in the collection is an attempt to reach *the* thing or object, Freud's *das Ding*, which Lacan defines as «the beyond-of-the-signified» (Lacan, 1992, p. 54). In its «truly imposing multiplicity», this little collection revealed itself to be like the lady in medieval courtly romance: no longer the object of imaginary identifications but that which exposes the *impossibility* of these identifications. This exposure evokes a thrill of dread essential to every sublime experience (Lacan was here following not only Kant but also the Greek Longinus in his analysis of the sublime, *Περί ύψους*).

A further clue to understanding how the sublime is related to the sublimation of collecting is offered by the theorist of postmodern culture Jean Baudrillard (2002, p. 88). The collector's sublimity, he argues,

derives not from the nature of the objects he collects (which will vary according to his age, profession and social milieu) but from his fanaticism...gratification flows from the fact that possession depends, on the one hand, on the absolute singularity of each item, a singularity which puts that item on a par with an animate being –indeed, fundamentally on a par with the subject himself– and, on the other hand, on the possibility of a series, and hence of an infinite play of substitutions...In short, there is something of the harem about collecting, for the whole attraction may

be summed up as that of an intimate series (one term of which is at any given time the favourite) combined within a serial intimacy.

For a collector, Baudrillard (2002, p. 91) concludes, the unique object is always «the final term, the one which sums up all the others». The next item in the collection, like the next signifier in the chain of linguistic symbols at the centre of Lacan's theory, is that which stands for the *possibility* of being able to represent the "whole" or absolute, the complete set. Through the illusions of repetition one is lured into assuming that all possible objects are present (in the one). The (supposed) final term of each series, then (to return to Lacanian terminology), represents that which always eludes the aim of satisfaction. The collector's motive has to do with "apprehension" in the double sense used by Lacan in his *Ethics* seminar (Lacan, 1992, p. 114)– that is, both that which is laid out (like the matchboxes) to be "apprehended" (seen, captured) and that which at the same time invokes apprehension, dread. The sublime, in a post-Kantian context⁵, is on the side of the death drive, that which lures, captures and terrifies through excess. What exceeds in grandeur or sheer proliferating multiplicity runs counter to the symbolic order. The sublime, and here is Lacan's insightful paradox, is precisely that which eludes sublimation (Žižek, 1989).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SYMBOL(IC) IS REMOVED? TWO LITERARY EXAMPLES

Let me now turn to a literary example which I think illustrates Lacan's point precisely, a play set in Athens and often performed in Greece– Shakespeare's *A midsummer night's dream*. The play, you may remember, has two main plots, one at the level of "reality" and the other at the level of dream or fantasy. In the reality plot, starting in the palace of Theseus, Duke of Athens, two sets of lovers follow the usual course of love through a series of misunderstandings and failed encounters, chasing each other around without fulfilment, until the comic ending puts everything right. The second plot repeats all this at the level of fantasy, and concerns the Queen and King of the fairies, Titania and Oberon, who similarly cross each other's desire until the comic resolution. I want to focus on what could be

5. Postmodernity has followed Kant in stressing the resistance of the object world to its discursive equivalent. In his reading of Kant's third *Critique*, Jean-François Lyotard argues that the sublime, the most authentic form of the aesthetic, is «a thought that is felt on the occasion of an absence of the object's form» (Lyotard, 1994, p. 231).

called a third plot, embedded within all this, in a small play-within-a-play, a device Shakespeare often used in order to comment on the wider play, as well as the whole process of theatrical representation.

This little playlet is a very crude affair put on by the local workers/artisans (the carpenter, weaver, tinker, tailor, etc.) to entertain the Duke and the united lovers. It is crude both in terms of the quality of the acting and in terms of its content, being a primitive little piece of theatre confined to two short scenes. In the first, two lovers, separated by prohibitions, whisper through a hole or “chink” in a wall. The chink takes centre stage⁶ and is represented in comic mode by the tinker dressed up to play Wall and holding up his fingers to form a gap. In the second scene, the lovers attempt to meet face to face, but after a misunderstanding involving a lion end up committing separate suicide. In this little play, as I read it, Shakespeare is making a very primitive point, that love is *sustained* by a chink in a wall, the removal of which means death. The wall, you could say, represents the Symbolic order through whose gaps (where the symbol fails to meet the symbolized) the subject or signifier attempts to coincide with the object or signified. The fantasy of fulfilled love is possible only as long as the wall stands between the lovers. The play, in other words, seems perfectly designed for Lacanian purposes— or, as Slavoj Žižek might put it, proves beyond all doubt that Shakespeare had been reading Lacan. Love, for Lacan, is always a “missed encounter”. The object or signified, always already lost, can only be glimpsed in fragments (as if through a chink in a wall). As a phantasmatic “whole” it is impossible— though genres like comedy exist to give form to these impossibilities. The chink, as Lacan would say, has protected the lovers from the traumatic encounter with the “Real” of loss.

The sublime enters the picture here in the form of that moment of dread played out with melodramatic horror by the artisans. Through attempting to *exceed* the Symbolic, to aim at the “beyond-of-the-signified”, the lovers are brought face to face with the impossible. The sublime is the Medusa who kills all who confront her. And yet it is in the nature of human desire to seek that excess of pleasure which Lacan called *jouissance*, and which art, through its substitutive capacity, may rehearse. This is the point made by theorists of the objects and effects of the sublime from Longinus onwards, that through contemplation of the

6. Shakespeare’s source for this playlet is commonly accepted to be the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, translated by Arthur Golding in 1567 (Bullough, 1966, p. 374). Although Ovid’s version also refers to a «crany» in the wall through which the separated lovers whisper (Bullough, 1966, p. 406), the wall does not take centre stage in the way it does in Shakespeare’s version.

grandeur and power of the natural landscape, the human mind is stretched to its terrifying limits, stretched to the limits of the possibility of excess⁷.

The «shadow of the object [which falls] upon the ego» (Freud, 1917/1991, p. 58) often turns up in stories or novels as a sublime or ghostly apparition haunting the world of appearances. Gothic fiction is the classic example of this. But it comes also in more subtle forms, even in novels that are considered prototypically realistic. My next example, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, is similarly concerned with the way the threatened removal of the symbol exposes the subject to the terrors of the sublime Real. This example returns us to Lacan's point about the psychic function of collecting, as it depicts a man in isolation, without the reassurances of community, who resorts obsessively to collecting things around him, salvaging them from shipwrecks and storing them away. Much of the narrative consists of lists of things, numbered and described in a pragmatic, sometimes tedious way.

One particular object stands out for the way it lures Crusoe's memory and desire: the shoe. The «sign» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 66) first comes in the form of the two shoes washed up as the only remaining trace of his ship-wrecked companions. At this point, Crusoe simply mentions that these two shoes were «not fellows» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 66), drawing attention both to their failure to provide him with the fellowship their owners might have given him, and to the fact they're not a pair, and therefore of no use. Years later, another wreck brings more things which, however, only serve to remind him still further of the gap between what he wants and what he's got:

I got very little by this voyage [to the wreck] that was of any use to me; for as to the money, I had no manner of occasion for it: 'twas to me as the dirt under my feet; and I would have given it all for three or four pair of English shoes and stockings, which were things I greatly wanted, but had not had on my feet now for many years: I had indeed gotten two pair of shoes now, which I took off of the feet of the two drowned men who I saw in the wreck; and I found two pair more in one of the chests, which were very welcome to me; but they were not like our English shoes, either for ease or service; being rather what we call pumps than shoes.

(Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 197)

7. For an analysis of recent theories of the sublime in relation to the debate between contemporary neuroscience and postmodern culture over the nature of the emotions, see Parkin-Gounelas (in press).

This frantic collecting of shoes, however inadequate, has a point, for by this time, trauma has struck Crusoe in his long isolation in the form of a much more tenuously material sign than shoes. A footprint on the sand, which for a long time gives no indication of meaning, makes Crusoe flee like one pursued by the devil, «terrify'd to the last degree» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 162)– a terror, he confesses, which seemed quite «inconsistent with the thing it self» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 163). Worn shoes with no feet in them may be a potent symbol of death and violence, of which the heaps of shoes in Nazi concentration camps are an appalling reminder. The footprint, however, offers a double threat. First, the link between signifier and signified is undefined: whose footprint is this? Symptomatically, this uncertainty provokes a flurry of attempts to give another meaning to every random object he meets. Every bush, tree and stump becomes a sign of something: «nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes affrighted imagination represented things to me in» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 162). And it is at this point, under the shadow of the object, that this seemingly realist text becomes a gothic novel. Secondly, and worst of all, however, the symbol threatens to disappear altogether, as «the first surge of the sea upon a high wind would...defac[e] [it] entirely» (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 163). Surely, Crusoe pleads, «the devil might have found out abundance of other ways to have terrify'd me than this of the single print of a foot»? (Defoe, 1719/1985, p. 163) The devil, it seems, knew what he was doing, as the footprint represents the possibility of the loss of the symbol itself, and thus a direct and traumatic encounter with the Real. For Melanie Klein, the absence of symbolization meant full exposure to the sadistic impulses within, as she demonstrates in her famous case study of Little Dick in 1930 (see Mitchell, 1991, pp. 95-111). For both her and Lacan, following Freud, the human predicament is necessarily tragic, dominated by the death drive. And for both, despite their differences, psychoanalysis has to do with the imperative of the symbol in the psychic economy.

LACAN WITH KLEIN

Within clinical psychoanalytic practice the theories of Klein and Lacan are usually regarded as incompatible, even antagonistic. This is less the case within cultural and literary theory, although it is true to say that in this field, with a few notable exceptions, all the interest centres on Lacan, most recently on the work of post-Lacanian theorists such as Slavoj Žižek, who has given a radical re-reading of Lacan's work. I would like to suggest that a re-consideration of Lacan's position on symbolization and sublimation reveals a Kleinian foundation to his theory of the Symbolic, an agreement, in fact, between the two which adds something to

both and above all to our understanding of the creative process.

Immediately after his analysis of Prévert's matchbox collection in the seminar on *Ethics*, Chapter 9 ("On creation *ex nihilo*"; Lacan, 1992), Lacan turns to the work of Klein and quotes at length from her essay of 1929 entitled "Infantile anxiety situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse". In this essay, Klein describes the case of a patient complaining of an empty space inside her. One day, a painting is removed from a wall in her house, and in order to fill the empty space there, she paints a picture of her own on the wall itself. The difference between the Kleinian and the Lacanian theorization of this incident, I think, is less significant than Lacan would have us believe. Klein uses it to give an early version of what she was later to call the depressive position, during which the infant strives to make "reparation", to repair the damage done by phantasized attacks on the mother's body. Lacan, with a certain degree of defensive anxiety, insists at this point on his disagreement with the theory of reparation⁸. For him, the important point is that the Freudian drive is that which relates to *das Ding*, the aim in excess of the object (Lacan, 1992, p. 111). But like Klein, Lacan had long been interested in paranoia as a mode of mis-perception, with aggression dominating the relation to the other or mirror. It was this aggressivity, he acknowledges in an essay of 1955, which motivates the depressive reaction⁹. And in his fourth seminar on object relations (1956-57), he referred explicitly to Klein's theory of the depressive position (Lacan, 1994, p. 64 &

8. Lacan's references to Klein's views are hedged about with negative phrases such as «not that all of this is fully satisfying for us, of course» (Lacan, 1992, p. 116), or «the reduction of the notion of sublimation to a restitutive effort of the subject relative to the injured body of the mother is certainly not the best solution to the problem of sublimation» (Lacan, 1992, p. 116). Lacanian scholars tend to repeat this emphasis. Bruce Fink, for instance, writes curtly that according to Lacan, Klein's object relations theory was «barking up the wrong tree» (Fink 1995, p. 190). Feminist Lacanians, however, have been more inclined to give Klein's theories a hearing within the context of Lacan's work. In her recent study of Klein, Kristeva discusses Lacan's uneasy indebtedness to Klein's work and his insistence on "new directions" of his own. Kristeva (2001, p. 228) continues:

That did not keep him from occasionally referring to Klein's work, usually with a respectful tone, as if he had gotten over envy without quite reaching gratitude, suggesting that he sensed deep affinities with Klein's work, particularly with her conception of a primal paranoia and of an early fantasy that structures the ego.

9. See *Variations on the standard treatment* where Lacan (1996, p. 286) writes:

The notion of aggressivity corresponds...to the rending of the subject from himself, a rending whose primordial moment comes when the sight of the other's image, apprehended by him as a unified whole, anticipates his sense that he lacks motor coordination, this image retroactively structuring this lack of motor coordination in images of fragmentation. This experience explains...the depressive reaction, as reconstructed by Melanie Klein at the origins of the ego.

67). By the seventh seminar on *Ethics*, however, he was calling it his *own*. The enthusiasm for her art of the woman painter in Klein's essay, he says, «to me seems characteristic of the beginning of a phase tending toward depression» (Lacan, 1992, pp. 116-117). This is Klein's very point, that after aggression, depression sets in, anxiety about the phantasized attacks on the mother's body, and a desire to repair which results in something being created— the symbol.

Klein's theory of the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions had been articulated some twenty-five years before Lacan's seventh seminar. More interesting than the question of who had priority in theories of sublimation, however, is the question of what takes priority in the structure of the human subject— as well as the function of creativity. Is the aggressive disorganization, recognized by both theorists, to be given "priority" over the reparative reaction (the desire to repair and create something)? The drive towards symbolic repair, however differently stated, is fundamental for both Klein and Lacan in their theories of sublimation. Lacan may be right that Klein failed to theorize the gap or hole on the wall in the case study of the woman painter, the fact that the encounter with (re-creations of) the mother's body is always a missed encounter. But it was *her* powerful descriptions of this gap that stimulated Lacan to theorize it. It seems to me that in his theory of the Symbolic, which clearly incorporates Klein's theory of the depressive position, it was Lacan this time who was deficient in theorization. Through her work with very young infants, before their entry into language, Klein had followed Freud's direction in his description of the child throwing away a wooden reel in the drive towards symbolization (Freud, 1920/1991, pp. 283-287). For Lacan, this incident is about not the object (the wooden reel) but the words the child utters (*fort-da!*) to accompany the action. But the point, surely, is the way *both* words and things are used, anything on hand which the infant is able to make use of in the imperative need for symbolization.

THE (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF REPRESENTATION

Within a philosophical and cultural context after Jacques Derrida, much debate has revolved around the possibility and impossibility of representation and symbolization. My mention earlier of the piles of shoes in Nazi concentration camps may have reminded readers of Theodor Adorno's question about the possibility of representation after Auschwitz, his rejection of the compensatory stylizations of art in the face of full horror. Adorno's words offer a powerful warning against a simplified version of sublimation as a band-aid to cover the wounds of violence and loss. Against this truth, however, art and literature continue to furnish us with symbols, whether these be sensual phenomena (music for the ears, painting and sculpture for

the eyes and touch), or the words that rush to accompany or replace them. Symbols continue to “insist” in the way that Lacan suggested when he talked about the “insistence” of the signifier¹⁰.

In the final analysis, perhaps, all culture (games, art, religion, science) is a direct continuation of what Winnicott called transitional phenomena, through which we attempt to negotiate the space between subject and object— or, more precisely, «the subjective object and the object objectively perceived» (Winnicott, 1996, p. 100)¹¹. Insofar as what is being negotiated is the inevitability of the loss of the mother, sublimation must be viewed not so much in the early Freudian sense of the channelling or neutralizing of the drive, but rather as a struggle with impossibility, the impossibility but always phantasized possibility of full recovery (wholeness). It makes little difference whether this (im)possibility is understood in a Kleinian (or Winnicottian) sense as that which *would be* there, or in the slightly different Lacanian sense of that which *cannot* be there. All art is a struggle between the too little and the too much. Too little is what’s seen through the hole in the wall in *A midsummer night’s dream*. Too much is what’s seen (in the traumatic Real) when the wall is removed. The important thing is that through this struggle *something* presents itself. This is the point made by the Duke Theseus after the performance of the little play by the artisans. Though «palpable-gross», he says, the play has «well beguiled/ The heavy gait of night» (Shakespeare, 1600/1963, p. 122). To “beguile” means to cheat or charm away. The symbol, Theseus understands, has done its work, producing both a charm and a protection against the invading forces of darkness.

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10. In the essay on *The instance of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud*, Lacan (1996, p. 419) wrote that «it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but . . . none of the chain’s elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment».

11. Winnicott (1996) wrote that «when we witness an infant’s employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child’s first use of a symbol and the first experience of play» (p. 96).

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