

## The symbol as presence (\*)

FREDERICO PEREIRA (\*\*)

The basic issue that I am going to discuss here concerns the *reduction* of symbolic devices as generally conceived in Psychoanalysis: Reduction of the Symbol to only one of its sides; reduction to its mainly negative side, meaning, mainly a substitutional replacing one.

The symbol regarded as loss – and revolving around the symbol understood as such –, there is a tragic theory of symbolic activity.

To discuss these ideas, I will deal with two theories: that of Bion and that of Lacan.

Bion's theory is better known. A function – which Bion voluntarily does not specify more clearly – known as an  $\alpha$  function, transforms purely sensorial objects into dream thoughts and dream equivalents, as well as into waking up thinkable thoughts.

«The  $\alpha$  function – says Bion – operates over all sensorial impressions and all the emotions the patient is conscious of.» (Learning from Experience).

This function literally creates new objects, memorizable and linkable between themselves, which are the  $\alpha$  objects.

If the  $\alpha$  function does not perform well enough, the impressions and emotions which it should transform remain at the level of the  $\beta$  objects. Those elements which are not materials of dream or thought are, however, materials of expulsion, of evacuative projection and of projective identification.

In a certain way, one can say that the  $\beta$  elements are a certain type of *things*, *non-thought things*, things of the world which remain beneath thought.

Using a debatable Kantian reference, Bion says that the  $\alpha$  elements would be a kind of *phenomenon* and that the  $\beta$  elements would be a kind of *thing in itself*.

A specific group of  $\alpha$  elements forms a net, thus giving rise to the hypothesis of the breast which, not being *there*, is the desired breast. While desiring the good breast, the pre-subject is full of bad breast. Here, we can find a basic ordering by means of a splitting process.

However, the bad breast pre-object is submitted to a new transformation and links itself to the *idea* of the absent breast.

---

(\*) *Key not adress* to the International Conference on Literature and Psychoanalysis, Avila, Spain, July 1997.

(\*) Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, Rua Jardim do Tabaco, 34, 1149-041 Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: fpereira@meganet.pt

It is the *absence* of the absent breast that leads the apparatus that thinks thoughts to think the «breast» thought as an *idea* of absent breast.

As a consequence, absence is an essential side of transformation towards the *idea* of breast.

Absence as loss. Loss which is equally at the centre of the very transformation of  $\beta$  objects into  $\alpha$  objects, that is, at the centre of the matrix which gives rise to the possibility of thought itself.

Within the frame that occupies us now, Loss and Absence flow in Bion in two ways. Both the ascension to the idea of breast and the  $\alpha$ -work itself belong to the order of loss, of absence: *of the negative*. They belong to the order of radical loss, of definite fracture: the thing-in-itself, with its Kantian evocation, is what thought can never capture, as essence of the thing in itself and essence of the thought.

Thus, thought makes abysses, it is a factory of abysses: those which separate meaning beings from beings that they themselves mean.

Thinking is regarded as losing – thus, we can understand the relationship between thought and the so-called depressive elaboration, and maybe it is easier to understand the concept of mental pain.

If the mental apparatus is saturated, or if a functional impairment operates on it, then there might be a world of things but not a world of thoughts.

In the situation of non-saturation and of  $\alpha$  function activation, there will be *thought* but there will not be a *thing*, considering that things are relegated to the intangible world of things in themselves.

Since the situation is this, in fact, thinking is necessarily painful because it implies building abysses between the Subject and the World; it implies that to enter the field of symbols means to leave the world of things.

In Bion, there does not seem to exist a *Theory of Things*, nor for this reason, a *Theory of Connection between Thought and Things*.

Therefore, Bion's reference model is a resolutely idealistic model, in which his own assertions lead into a succession of references, such as, Kant, Plato, and the Mystics.

At the end, the encounter with the idea of God is the main landmark of these aspects of Bion's thought, which has an effectively relentless logic: from Nothing (Zero) to Everything, but to an Everything which is in itself Zero because, after all, there is no representation in God.

One could say: the Origin is not thinkable because it is a thing in itself; Fate is not thinkable because it does not contain a representation. God is the only idea which in this system is pure Presence and not re-presentation. In God (as a logical idea), as well as in things in themselves, there is no remittance, there is no double-face, there is no sense or meaning: there is only Being in its emptiness-of-thinkable-being and in its emptiness of Thing.

In short, to think is to lose; it is to sink into the abyss which separates thought from things in order to ascend to the sphere of the symbol. Every thought is, at its root, a thought of absence. The result is inevitable mental pain.

If we take a close look at Lacan, now, we can find the same *fracture*, the same *béance* between the Subject and the World of Objects.

In a certain way, it is possible to say that with Lacan all objects are *thought of* because, right from the beginning, they were inserted in the Symbolic Order, and, thus, they are not more than symbols of the Originary Object which, to be thought, had to be lost – and lost until the end of time. After all, all re-encounters are illusory.

And in the beginning – if one can speak of a beginning – there was the *Spaltung*, the void, «the division of Being revealed in Psychoanalysis, between the Self... and the discourse of the conscious subject...».

«This division, which Lacan considers as creating a hidden structure in the Subject, the unconscious, this division, I was saying, is due to the fact that all the discourse and all the Symbolic Order (...) *mediates* the Subject, thus, ensuring a quick lay-off from the Truth».

As Lacan says: «In essence, the symbolic order can only sustain itself in itself, which is to say that it cannot relate to the real».

The same happens with Moral Law: Lacan states that «the experience of moral law offers no intuition to the phenomonic object» (Kant and Sade).

On the contrary, it is access to the Symbolic Order – hence, to the Law that originates it – that sustains what the symbol represents, provided that *what the symbol represents* is radically apart.

The symbol is different from what it itself represents: it is the *condition* of what is represented.

The condition of what is represented is the condition of *that something* which is represented coming to the world in the position of «lacking».

*Lacking*, at present, and not purely and simply absent, because there is still «la suture», which connects the Subject to the Symbolic. As J. A. Miller says: «‘La Suture’ nominates the relation of the Subject with the chain of his speech... There, he appears as an element that lacks, under the category of a having-place. Given that lacking, he is not pure and simply absent».

*Therefore, what kind of non-presence is this?* The kind of the signifier. The subject stands as a signifier non-absent from his discourse in the sense that he says *I*. But is it possible that being non-absent, he is present in the Order of the Discourse? No, it is not. There, he is only represented, and that re-representation is in itself supra-ordained precisely by that which originates the Order of the Discourse, meaning, the Symbolic Order.

Enigmatically, Lacan used to say:

«The signifier is what the subject represents to some Other signifier.»

«Then, one can say that the human being is more an *effect* of the signifier than its cause. The insertion into the symbolic world makes us a representation being.»

Representation of each one into the *I* which is said in discourse, representation by Others in the multiplicity of dialogues that they establish upon the Subject, and representation in what makes him a Subject of the representative Order itself, that is, of the Symbol as a creator of the fault, of the void, of the «manque à Etre».

Therefore, even before being part of the Symbolic Chain, the Subject is already there, through symbolic exchanges that others build up concerning him.

And when the subject inserts himself there, it is only in so far as he is split through a constituent *Spaltung*, which at the same as it allows him to say *I*, it refers the subject of enunciation to another world.

As Lacan says: «The *Spaltung* operates on the whole intervention of the signifier between the Subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated».

Therefore, discourse itself is an enigma: *Who speaks? What is (truthfully) said there?*

«The register of the signifier means that a signifier represents a subject to another signifier (...). As the signifier produces himself in place of the Other (the symbol), the subject emerges, but at the price of being immobilised. What was there about to speak disappears, not being more than a signifier.»

A signifier of what? That is what one *tries to discover*, speech being an enigma par excellence.

However, «one tries to discover» within a movement that is radically condemned, considering that every discovery is only possible through the *presentification* of new signifiers which new enigmas will bring about.

Thus, access to the symbolic, while allowing the Subject to express itself, also blocks that access with the establishment of an Other Order.

The *Subjectivation of the Subject* is, after all, an *alienating elaboration*: in order to express himself, the Subject alienates himself in a Symbolic Order that establishes him as the signifier. More than that, to fulfil the originary *Spaltung*, the subject alienates himself in an *imaginary identity construction*, through which he has the *illusion* that what he says is exactly what he says.

As is known, it is this illusion that defines the place of the Ego.

«The Ego is the place of the Subject's imaginary identifications», says Leclaire. And according to Lacan: «the Subject's drama concerning the Logos is that it tests his own "manque-à-être". And it is because he protects himself in this moment of fault, that an *image* assumes the position of bearing the whole price of desire: projection, function of the Imaginary.» (Lacan: *Écrits*).

This *imaginary constitution* of the Ego is precisely what most opposes to the Subject's truth.

But then again, one might ask: which truth might this be that, while being spoken, alienates itself – is lost – in the Order that establishes what can possibly be said?

It might be the *truth of desire*. But then: which truth might this be that is the truth of desire?

And it is here that we find *loss* once more, «non-saturée» now, and alienation again – a double loss.

Loss of a real object – si j'ose dire – loss forever. A real object that language seeks to articulate without ever succeeding – precisely because it is a real object, representation over-determined by a Symbolic Order and, at the same time, established by it.

«This is the reason – says Lacan – that underlines the radical incapacity of Man to find whatever it is that can fulfil him.» Everything is a symbol or an image – signs of loss, signs of absence of the thing.

«Freud reveals – continues Lacan – that it is thanks to the Name-of-the-Father that Man does not remain tied to the sexual service of the Mother; that aggression against the Father is at the basis of Law and that Law is at the service of the desire by means of the interdiction of incest.

Therefore, it is the assumption of castration that creates the fault that is at the origin of desire... Desire reproduces the relationship of the Subject to the lost object.» (J. Lacan: *Du Trieb de Freud et du Désir du Psychanaliste*, 1964)

Evidently, this desire is not silent; it explodes in its symbolic articulation, which is the *demande*. It explodes there, it is true, but once again in the form of loss, considering that in relation to the *demande*, desire never explodes in the right place, so to speak so.

Desire is produced either beyond or beneath the *demande*.

«Desire is beyond the *demande*, that is, it surpasses the *demande*. It goes farther and is eternal because it is impossible to satisfy... But desire is also produced beneath the *demande*. (In this case) it is the unconditional and absolute *demande* itself, imitating the ecstasy of desire, which recalls the radical *manque-à-Être* that perceives desire.» (J. Lacan).

This dialectics of eternal bad timings, of impossible meetings, seems to be «*symbolicogenic*». Françoise Dolto clearly spoke of *symbolicogenic castration*, this fault that composes the *manque-à-être* and promotes a movement of replacement by symbol, by representation.

But this dialectic also has a symbolic name: *Phallus*, which designates «the privation, or the *manque-à-être*. The *Phallus* is in itself a symbol of the impossible fulfilment of the subject and, in a way, what promotes the infinite symbolic drift through which the object of desire would be the object that the Other desires. Any type of possession of that very object would be illusory. This Movement sets frustration and the chain of «*symbolicogenic castration*».

*As we see, in Lacan, it is also on the grounds of loss that subjectivity is rooted.*

One question may finally arise: *But what moves desire?* It seems to me that it is what Lacan calls the Status of the Letter. Status of the Letter in the Unconscious – as an olfactive, visual, aural element, which fulfils a primitive void, being immediately replaced by an alienating symbol.

It could be that in the symbol, the letter aims at expressing itself but the radical gap that builds up the subject leads the *letter* to be lost in the symbol right from the start. Or, as one could also say, the symbol, while being the only means by which the letter could express itself, is exactly the means through which the entrance of the letter into the Symbolic Order is declared impossible.

Every *letter* element that accesses the Symbolic Order ceases at that very moment to be a letter and starts being a signifier.

So: gap, fault, loss.

A part of this dialectic evokes Hegel and the originary power of the negative. But it also evokes Heidegger – to whom Lacan himself was sensitive, I think.

Leaving Hegel aside – a lot has already been said about the Hegel-Hyppolite-Lacan triangle –, let us consider Heidegger.

Let us put it this way: Heidegger firstly questions *things*.

What are things? «The Greeks – says Heidegger – «had a very precise term for «things»: *πραγματα*, that is, that which has to do with the trade that establishes the *πραξις* when it emerges as a concern».

Basically, the *πραξις* is the action while taking place, the action-in-its-own-taking-place.

In order for things, as *πραγματα*, to appear in the field of being as *πραγματα*, it is necessary to establish a transformation of the *πραξις*.

In fact, it is through the transformation of the *πραξις* into *νοειν* that the *πραγματα* appear in the form of a knowable thing-that-is, *that* about which one can think, and then *that* which may arise in the area of speaking.

In the discovery of the World's matters (*weltlichkeit*), there is a kind of succession of *πραξις-νοειν-λογος*.

Why then, in the horizon of the *πραξις* does the *νοειν* that establishes things as things appear?

A passage through the *ready-to-hand* is necessary.

The *ready-to-hand* (that which characterises the things that still have not been made *present*) is present in its *readiness-to-hand* - beneath which, however, it is undone as a thing-that-is.

This means that the *readiness-to-hand* of the *ready-to-hand* makes it *what* the *πραξις* has to co-exist with, which means it makes it a non-thing-as-a-non-*πραγματα*, or in other words, *what in the World still has not been marked*. In fact, as Heidegger says, «readiness-to-hand is the kind of Being characteristic of those entities which are proximally discovered within-the-world».

On the other hand, the *ready-to-hand* is «what can be *used for* something», what contains in itself *this* of referring to: the *ready-to-hand* which in its *readiness-to-hand* has not yet been object of attention.

As Heidegger also says: «That the World does not mark itself to attention, such is the condition of possibility so that the useful does not leave its state of not-surprising-us to be *placed ahead*. And it is in this that is established the phenomenal structure of Being-in-itself of this thing-that-is» (112).

But, alas, the useful becomes *surprising* – it leaves the state of not being marked to become something that is now an object of discernment.

It is necessary to ask: how does it become *surprising*, and thus change its phenomenal structure? Precisely through a *fracture in its readiness-to-hand*.

Quoting Heidegger:

«*But when an assignment has been disturbed* – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment becomes explicit. Even now, of course, it has not become explicit ontically for the circumspection which comes up against the damaging of the tool. When an assignment to some particular «towards-this» itself, and along with it everything connected with the work – the whole ‘workshop’ – as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection.»<sup>1</sup>

And Heidegger proceeds: «with this totality, however, the world announces itself.»

As one can see, it seems that here also the *emergence of the World* depends on the fault, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Heidegger. *Being and Time* (translation J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson). Oxford: Blackwell.

fracture, of the readiness-to-hand. In the place where there was a *πραξις* in its own taking place, appears a World which is presented to thought.

The echo between these ideas and those of Lacan seems obvious. But it becomes even more obvious if to the fracture we add the *emptiness* – which in its turn echoes with *absence*.

«Similarly, when something ready-to-hand is found missing, though its everyday presence [Zugegenheit] has been so obvious that we never take any notice of it, this makes a *break* of those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*. The environment announces itself afresh.»

The phenomenal structure of the useful being-in-itself is replaced by the phenomenal structure of the *being-for*.

*But Heidegger adds to this a movement of fault, of fracture, of void, these other considerations which, if we proceeded in the field of pure fault, would seem absolutely enigmatic, if not incomprehensible.*

«In such privative expressions as “inconspicuousness”, “unobtrusiveness”, and “non-obstinacy”, what we have in view is a positive phenomena character of the Being of that which is proximally ready-to-hand. With these negative prefixes we have in view the character of the ready-to-hand as “holding itself in”.»

In other words, if things become present – noticed – to the extent that they surprise, disturb, resist, by losing their ready-to-hand state, *it is because in themselves they already had a positive phenomenal status before the rupture of that state of usefulness, which made the πραξις possible.*

That is: it is the *positive phenomenal status* of the useful underneath its usefulness that makes discernment possible, related with the *πραγματα* as *πραγματα*, things that become noticeable, that ascend to *νοειν* and become capturable by *λογος*.

*It is presence as presence that allows the intuition of absence as presence of what became absent.*

Obviously, this analysis by Heidegger is different from the one that is to be found in Lacan, and *might* also be discerned in Bion.

This different analysis is not arbitrary. Heidegger’s theory of the sign reveals that this non-Lacanian analysis of Heidegger is effectively non-arbitrary.

Firstly, the sign is in itself a *reference to*, just like the useful being which still has not been made present because of its disturbance, its absence.

Concerning the sign, reference to what?

Firstly, not to the *fracture* which in loss, in absence, would be announced. On a first analysis, such a fracture would be only a Nothing.

Heidegger says:

«A sign is not a thing which stands to another thing in the relationship of indicating; it is rather an item of equipment which explicitly raises a totality of equipment into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the ready-to-hand announces itself.»

Then, *in the sign the useful thing is made present as useful and the usefulness ascends to discernment as a feature of the World, of things.*

This is the same as to say that in a *primary state* (Heidegger mentions the primitive Man) «the sign coincides with what is indicated. Not only can the sign represent this in the sense of serving as a substitute for what it indicates, but it can do so in such a way that the sign itself always *is* what it indicates. This remarkable coinciding does not mean, however, that the sign-thing has already undergone a certain ‘Objectification’ – that it has been experienced as a mere Thing and misplaced into the same realm of Being of the present-at-hand as what it indicates. This ‘coinciding’ is not an identification of things which have hitherto been isolated from each other: it consists rather of the fact that

the sign has not yet become free from that of which it is a sign. (...) This coinciding is based not on a prior Objectification but on the fact that such Objectification is completely lacking.»

This means that in the symbolic formation, its first state will not be a division between the symbol and the symbolised thing, but a *state of co-presence*, of *agglutination*, and this presence as agglutination will later make it possible to think about absence.

If this is the case, rather than rising above the loss of a World, the symbol would probably be the central way of constituting a world.

*Such an assertion, which seems to go against Bion and Lacan, is exactly the central issue of this reflection.*

The essence of desire is not limited to the «essence of absence» that only produces fantasised objects which condemn the subject to an incurable insufficiency of Being, both because while being said the object is lost – and the subject is also lost –, and because being thought transforms the real object into a thing-in-itself which is out of reach.

In multiple versions of the analytical thing, there is an excess of idealism produced by the objectal impossibility that another World establishes.

As Clément Rosset says, each time one insists upon a fault which might characterise the desire to define its object, the world finds itself unfolded into another world... around the following itinerary: the object lacks to desire; from here it is concluded that the world does not possess all the objects – it lacks at least one, the object of desire. Then, somewhere, there will be something that contains the key of desire, somewhere which is another world.

Desire would point out to Another world – which, at the same time, states itself as an impossible world.

In fact, this way of thinking seems to be based on a difficulty that is hard to overcome: things only exist to the extent that they are represented, and outside the representation either they are a part of the unattainable Real, or they are unattainable things-in-themselves.

The Unconscious is regarded as pure Ancient Drama.

And it is true that the Unconscious is Drama – representation.

But what if it was also *production*? What if – as G. Deleuze says – it was also a factory?

What if even language – and along with it symbolic activity – was more than the mourning of lost object(s), more than the result of symbolicogenetic mournings?

Heidegger points this out, as we have seen, and this is also what, for instance, J. B. Pontalis evokes, especially in his recent *Ce Temps qui ne Passe Pas*.

It is very possible that, in a certain way, language is mourning, a sign of loss, but it «*also carries us to what it is not, to what exceeds it. Love, poetry offer this possibility... Analysis offers it sometimes*».

Language and symbolic activity will, then, have a positive status before the negative one. They designate *what is really there* before leading into the mourning of what is made absent.

Before being a sign of fault, fracture, absence, the symbol is *a process of construction* and not simply representation in Ancient Dramas.

I think that this idea of the positiveness of symbolic activity is present in Freud in the same way or even more than the theories of the negative.

So, let us consider Freud. Firstly, let us look at the reflections about *Negation*, which he brought to us in 1925.

Besides analysing what one may regularly find in clinical work, and especially in the Clinic of obsessive neurosis, which reveals how thought admits what was once an object of repression as long as it is affected by the symbol of negation – besides this, what matters now is to find the first step through which Negation is established and what its consequences are.

Freud clarifies the relation between negation and judgement: «*That thing which is there, what do*

*I want to do with it»?* This is the fundamental question, says Freud: «Expressed in the language of the most ancient drives... judgement is: “I would like to eat that”, or “I would like to throw that out”. In a more general way, it would be: I would like to put this inside me and to keep that away. Or even: this is inside me, that is outside me».

This primary polarisation establishes two worlds right from the start: an internal world, which is a purified-Ego-pleasure, and an external or pre-external world, which is the rest of the world. Ejection, which establishes the purified-Ego-pleasure, is precisely the pioneer of negation.

But in a second moment, ejection can be replaced by repression which, in its obedience to pleasure, erases from the World the apprehension of what produces unpleasantness, remitting it to the field of the unconscious.

It is clear that the generalised repetition of such an operation would make any judgement impossible, making thought impossible.

The Ego of the subject has to find a means to free itself from the demands of the pleasure around repression, thus, having access to the internal and external real. This means is precisely what Freud pointed out in 1925 – Negation.

«The performance of the function of judgement – he says – had not been possible until the creation of the symbol of Negation had gifted thought with a first rule of freedom in the presence of the consequences of repression, and along with that, the compulsion of the pleasure principle.»

This means: firstly, introjection/projection are agents of the *construction of Worlds*, and namely, of the World of purified-Ego-pleasure. *Drama is not what is being discussed here, but factories, as Deleuze would say.*

Secondly, projective expulsion is symbolised by an operator, Negation, which makes judgement and thought possible.

This operator is efficient because he *symbolises an internal process of the Subject*, which does not directly have anything to do with the presence/absence of the primary object.

This *symbol of negation*, as Freud very strictly names it, is essentially *constructive*: it is not a substitutional process. The symbol of negation expresses an *operation of the subject* and it is one condition of his access to subjectivity.

It seems to me that we are far from a symbolic activity regarded as being elaborated over the desert of the Object's fracture.

On the contrary, what is considered here is a symbol that *expresses the constructive action of an internal operator, therefore, co-presence and not dialectics of the negative.*

A second incursion into Freud inevitably leads us to the *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and to the *Fort/Da* case.

As it has circulated widely, the story is well known: whenever his mother was absent, Freud's grand-child had the habit of holding a reel which had a thread around it; he would throw it far away saying a saddened *Fort*, to recover it soon after by pulling the thread and saying a happy *Da* when it was back right in *front of him*.

Freud provides multiple interpretations for this famous game, which is not going to be mentioned here in detail. Retaliation – to throw it far away; dominion – to pull it back towards him; pulsation of dominion assisted by the compulsion of repetition - to throw it far away and pull it back towards him, etc., etc..

In all these sets, as we have the habit of seeing them, *the reel symbolises the Mother*, and the truth is that Freud himself seems to make us tend towards this explanation.

Then, the *symbol «reel»* would be established in the Mother's absence because she was absent and to compensate for that absence symbolically.

The problem that arises is that, as I put it, the story of the reel game *is not well told*.

In truth, the child did not throw the reel «far away». The child threw the reel *into its own bed*.

As Freud reports: «he would throw the reel with a great expertise, having it held by the thread on top of his bed... in such a way that, once *there*, it would disappear; he would then say his very

meaningful o-o-o-o, and then, pulling the thread he would remove the reel *off* his bed, saluting its apparition with a happy “*da*”».

Thus, the reel was thrown *into the bed*, hidden *there*, and not in any other place.

It is not, then, a *symbol of the absent Mother* (the reel) which disappears just like the Mother when she is absent, but rather a symbol of the child himself, which being *here, present*, becomes absent, disappears by itself in the Mother’s absence.

So, the symbolic Fort/Da game seems to me a lot more complex than what is usually perceived: I would say that it is not in the area of *Drama*, but rather in the field of *Production*.

This interpretation of Freud’s text has the same meaning as a footnote to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, whose relation to the text seems a little enigmatic. In that footnote, describing Ernst’s symbolic productions in more detail, Freud says:

«... one day that his Mother was absent during several hours, she was greeted with a Bébi-ooo when she came back, an utterance which was not understandable at first. But soon it was revealed that during the time that the child was alone, he had found a means of *making himself disappear*. He had found his image in the mirror... curling up then, in a way that its image in the mirror would become *Fort*.» So, *Bébi-ooo* means: Baby is gone.

This other game clarifies the classic *Fort/Da*. At one level of its interpretation, Fort/ Da would not mean Mother is gone/ Mother is back, but it would mean *bébi-fort/ bébi-da*, which is baby is gone/ baby is back.

And this is why the reel was not thrown to some *far away place*, but to the baby’s own bed, behind the curtains and hidden amongst the bed-sheets.

The baby plays with its own appearing/disappearing/appearing, with its being here/being far away/being here.

Evidently, this game is possible to the extent that the baby is *present to the world* by starting to be *present to himself*.

Then, it is under a *background of presence* of himself to himself and from himself to the World that Fort/Da is set, and not only under a background of the Mother’s absence.

Maybe it is possible to say: it would not be I who is being carried by the symbol in its facet as signifier towards another signifier, but rather (or also) *I who carry the symbol* while being a thing that, whilst signifying, is the same thing as what the symbol means – which interestingly echoes the interpretation of Heidegger’s theory of the sign, that I presented previously.

I would still like to add another dimension I find in *Fort/Da*, by saying that what *can be found in Fort/Da* is the *thickness of a relationship* and *not the fracture of an absence*.

With the Mother’s *going and coming* movement, the baby co-ordinates its own *going and coming* movement.

The mirror game tells us:

Mother *Fort* – baby *Fort*

Mother *Da* – baby *Da*

and in this *Fort-Fort/Da-Da* quadrangle, it is the presence of the baby to the Mother and of the Mother to the baby that organises itself in the pulsation of an identification movement.

Under a background of presence, then the symbol is, and it is only because firstly it *is* that it can then *represent*.

\*

From all the symbols that may emerge from the density of the Being, there is still one that deserves a special reference. It is what Christopher Bollas calls the *Transformational Object* – or,

maybe better, my way of seeing a side of the Transformational Object discovered by Christopher Bollas.

This Object – which does not install itself in the space of the *manque-à-être*, nor in that of the thing-in-itself, nor in the various nuances of the  $\alpha$  processes – is *pure transformation*.

This Transformational Object is not a represented object, nor is it capable of being represented. It is beneath the dialectics of representation. It is a *pure operator of transformations*. It irritates, tranquillises, calms down, allows sleep, or it opens the eyes, allows contention or determines projective expulsion/deflection... *A non-thought-psychic operator*. Can one say that *it is out there in the World?* No, precisely because in the narcissistic universe in which it is created, there is not an *out there* nor an *in here*, but only a *worldliness* dissolved in the pre-subject or a pre-subject that embraces the Globality of the World.

What there is is a function of the pre-subject *and* of the pre-object, a [subject/object] function, a pure operator composed of a *primary synthesis*, a *subject-object pasting*, *agglutination*.

This means: first creation through a primary synthesis, not even fantasy, pure operator, function.

Maybe of *that* which is *effective, active, productive* – and not merely representative – one could probably say that it is the first symbol.

A symbol of what? Of the pre-Subject *and* of the pre-Object in its *mutual primary synthesis, in its mixture*. But a symbol which *is*. Not a symbol that *points to*. To evoke Heidegger, a symbol more in the field of *praxis*, action in its own taking place, than in the field of *voetv*.

There is nothing to say about it – and it is precisely in the silence of words that it can be felt, or obliquely, in poetry, music, movement...

There is nothing to say because such symbolisation *does not have a precise object*. On the contrary, it is in some way necessary to find out, to build on the object of such symbolisation: *the Object, which is an open field to all constructions*.

The symbol *operates*, the symbol *is*.

This is very obvious in the Symbolists and, generally speaking, in Romantic aesthetics.

As Todorov reminds us, the symbolising side and the symbolised side are under constant interpenetration, that is, the symbol *means* but it does not stop *being*. In this sense, it is above all, an *expression* and, precisely for that reason, a *production*.

As a consequence, maybe we should take into account that by saying what seems impossible to say, the symbol opens itself to its own revelation by the other, a revelation which is a *constructive process* and not a *tempo* of a programme of uncovering.

The consequences at the level of a Theory of Interpretation are obvious: Freud had already introduced a movement which is not the uncovering of signs, nor the establishment of arbitrary signs which «mean something». It is rather the rhythm of the «nachtraglichkeit», which lights up what is already known with new lights, thus, creating it and producing new mental elements.

And this surely forces us to think again about the problem of the subject's truth, in a double movement. To the symbols with which the subject speaking loses himself indefinitely in the symbolic drift established by an absence or radical loss, we have to add the symbols in which and with which the subject *expresses* himself, constructs himself, and, by doing so, builds worlds which, whilst being capable of signifying something, firstly *are* something.

Then, to the negative dimension of the symbolic, it is legitimate to add a positive dimension: THE SYMBOL AS PRESENCE.

This is a programme of reflection about the Tragic Theory of the Symbolic, which greatly dominates us, to which we should add the Romantic theories maybe abandoned too quickly. Names such as Moritz, Novalis, Friedrich and Wilhelm Schegel, Schelling, amongst others, might appear again in the frame of this agenda of re-thinking symbolic activity and, therefore, the dynamics of interpretation.

And then the symbol will appear in its *double sided nature* and not only in its *reduced state*:

absence but presence  
meaning but expression  
representation but production/construction and primary synthesis  
void of Being but yet Being  
Tragic version but Romantic version.