

Σύμβολου: An Attempt toward the early Origins, Part 1

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Abstract

This is the first of a two-part paper in which I would like to propose some possible hypotheses on the early origins of symbolic function, which is the most typical feature of human being, based on disavowal mechanism. Briefly recalling the main stages of the history of symbolism, it will be possible to lay out many of its theories within the framework that we wish to outline with this work, this first part of which is mainly concerned with the basic psychodynamic notion of disavowal and its possible applications, above all in regard to fetishism.

Introduction

One of the main aims of this paper is try to clarify the *vexata quaestio* on symbolism, its nature and origins. Our original motivation for this comes from mathematics and its role in the sciences: following Eugene P. Wigner (1960), how does one explain the effectiveness² of this formal and abstract language in natural sciences, like physics? The history of mathematics unfortunately comprises many cases of great mathematicians who have had alternating severe psychotic states with moments of normality and that, out of respect of them we do not quote here.³ Now, mathematics intimately relies on symbolic and segnic function, so that it may shed light on these typical human features. Due to this, we would like to put forward the hypothesis according to which the symbolic function might be the outcome of the dialectic interplay between two concomitant Ego's subagencies always present in every human being which, in turn, would be the outcome of an Ego's splitting mainly according to the Freudian (1938, 1949, 1999) thought based on disavowal mechanism⁴ and supported by the thoughts of other authors, above all H. Nunberg, D. Lagache and J. Lacan. Our hypotheses are historiographically supported by a considerable research literature which we have taken into account in drawing up this paper. The theoretical framework here outlined will turn out to be of some usefulness to explain, from a psychodynamics perspective, other already existent ideas on mathematical thought from a more properly cognitive viewpoint, like those based on *embodied mathematics*. Indeed, just this last perspective will be much more coherent with

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² On account of the reality.

³ See Rosen (1954).

⁴ This last psychic mechanism has been, wrongly in our view, quite underestimated according to Freudian work, as Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) pointed out, who, inter alia, would want to consider it a general psychic mechanism of the psychic formation and development of every human being.

what herein is established which, among other things, is based on the notion of *bodily image*, with related phenomena, as formed from the psychodynamics viewpoint. In this first part, we retrace the main theories on symbolism from a psychodynamics standpoint as well as outline the main psychodynamics elements underlying the notion of Ego's splitting upon which we will build our framework. In the second part, we will apply what herein is said to mathematical and physical contexts. From our discussion, it will turn out that a primary role is played by the formation of bodily image also as regards the general symbolism theory because, for instance, it may explain the possible origin of syntactic and semantic structures thanks to the possible relations established amongst its component elements together with the possible meanings assigned to them. In short, our main idea around which revolves this two-part paper is as follows. Putting the disavowal mechanism as a general psychic mechanism, its outcomes are some basic subagencies of Ego agency, to be precise the Ideal Ego subagency and the agency system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego, from whose dialectic interaction takes place most of psychic life, including symbolic function as well as degenerative behaviours. In particular, the disavowal is closely involved in the bodily image formation which takes place during the well-determined pregenital phases of human psychosexual development (mainly, from the anal phase to the Œdipus one) in the discovery of the primary sexual gender difference from which the child, when she/he gives pre-eminence to symbolic elaboration, is able to build up her or his personal bodily image, instituting relations (syntax) between its component elements together with the assignment of related meanings (semantics). In such a way, the child acquires her or his own syntactic and semantic tasks and abilities moulded according to her or his strong emotional experience in seeing and discovering the external realities given by the sexual apparatuses of both sexes put in reciprocal comparison. In doing so, it will therefore be possible to account for the inseparable⁵ relationships between syntax and semantics (at least, in normality) as well as to explain consequent and fascinating relationships between mathematics and physics. The paper is therefore devoted to debating on this main idea.

First historical outlines on symbolism

According to Eco (1981) and Petocz (2004), to date, it is not entirely clear what the unambiguous origins of the symbolic function of human thought are, although various explanatory theories have been proposed to this purpose. In this regard, Eco claims that the concept of symbol is epitomizable as a kind of “content's nebula”, mainly because of its polysemic nature. According to semiotic theory, a symbol falls into the wider class of signs (according to T. Todorov, 1982a, 1982b). From this perspective, then, U. Eco defines a sign as anything that can be taken as “significantly substituting” for something else, or rather, a sign is something (whether a natural or an artificial object) which stands in place of something that is absent. Historically, the semiotic perspective broadly goes from C. S. Peirce to F. de Saussure, K. Bühler and R. Jakobson (see Todorov, 1982a, 1982b). Peirce gave the first, famous tripartite division of the sign in *icon*, *index* and *symbol*, the last being the case in which the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary; thus, the major systematic manifestation of symbols is in language. In contrast, F. de Saussure held that it is the sign which is arbitrary, and the symbol which is not arbitrary or “motivated” and so does not properly belong to the field of semiotics. Therefore, according to de Saussure, the symbol is no longer a kind of sign, the affect starting to be a fundamental element in characterizing it, so making the set of symbols

⁵ According to Lolli (2000), the syntax is always in searching for the semantics.

different from the set of signs; both sets are overlapping one with another, the symbol being sometimes opposed to the sign, other times classified as a sign. This separation of domains, mainly due to the occurrence of the emotional-affective element, gives rise to two main entities, namely those of *conventional symbols* (the signs) and *non-conventional symbols* (those not classified as signs). The continuous slipping back and forth between them is the main feature of that *vexata quaestio* of the dualism between sign and symbol; in turn, the latter often refers to another crucial question, that of the conscious versus the unconscious nature of symbols. There is no doubting the fact that conventional symbols are entirely conscious, whereas strong disputes exist regarding the nature of non-conventional symbols. It is almost a matter of fact that the latter have a double unconscious and conscious nature, so that the critical point relies on the possible relationships between them. With Peirce and de Saussure, a prominent role is played by the relation between signifier and signified, the primary form of symbol being given by metaphor.⁶ Later, these last perspectives will be compared with the psychoanalytic ones, above all with Lacan's work. In this paper, we simply want to put forward the possible hypothesis according to which the fundamental Freudian disavowal mechanism, together with the consequent splitting of Ego's agency, might be considered to underlie the possible early origins of this fundamental function which essentially characterizes (according to E. Cassirer) all the normal and pathological human thought functions. A theory of symbol should be considered first from a psychoanalytic perspective, contrarily to a theory of sign which mainly pertains to the cognitive context, all this, in turn, referring to the primary distinction between conventional symbols and non-conventional ones. Only after having given a psychoanalytic basis will it be possible to consider a more cognitive viewpoint built up on the former; these two perspectives are often closely intertwined with each other. In this paper, we want to start just from the first psychoanalytical paradigm, the Freudian one, which epistemologically lies at the heart of every further psychoanthropological trend (according to C.G. Jung, M. Klein, J. Lacan, C. Lévi-Strauss, etc.).

Disavowal, fantasy and phantasy

The primary aim of this work is to put the *disavowal* process, considered as a fundamental universal psychic mechanism (*d'après* Anna Freud and others), at the basis of symbolic function. In pursuing this, as we will see later, the various already existent theories on symbolism could, in turn, get a more coherent and systematic classification if laid out within this framework based on the disavowal mechanism. According to the last Freudian thought, delineated in his last work⁷ in 1938 and which starts with the analysis of fetishism, disavowal might be contemplated as a possible universal psychic mechanism which nevertheless, in some cases, might give rise to degenerations in paraphilia. We here follow a suggestion by J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis (1973) according to which disavowal might be considered a general psychic mechanism involved in the formation and development of every human being, although this idea has already been considered by other authors, like Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. To be precise, disavowal has been considered a fundamental mechanism in the formation and structuration of the Ego agency, which is the one that presides in all the secondary psychic processes and relationships with reality. Following Rycroft (1968a), in

⁶ And this will be the central view of symbolism of C.G. Jung and H. Silberer (1971).

⁷ See Freud (1938, 1949, 1999), above all its final Part III. This is the main reference, together with Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), herein followed.

psychoanalysis the imagination is included in the realm of fantasy, where it forms a domain in itself, called *phantasy* according to English terminology. Therefore, phantasy is meant to be an imaginative activity which is at the basis of every human thought and sentiment. Each psychoanalytic trend agrees in considering the conscious mental activity as supported, accompanied, maintained, animated and influenced by unconscious fantasy which starts in childhood, has primarily and originally to do with biological relationships and processes, and gives rise to symbolic elaboration (see Rycroft, 1968b). Above all, the Kleinian school assumes unconscious fantasy to be an unavoidable means between instinct and thought (see Segal, 1981, 1991). Likewise, the orthodox Freudian theory locates fantasy into the Id. Furthermore, it is a general statement that (creative) imaginative activity entails the participation of a non-verbal unconscious fantasy (see Beres, 1950, 1957). According to Isaacs (1952), fantasies are the primary content of mental unconscious processes, while unconscious fantasies (understood as the primary content of unconscious mental processes) primarily concern the body and represent the instinctual aims toward the representation of objects. These fantasies are, in the first place, the psychic representatives of libidinal and aggressive instincts. The adaptation to reality and the secondary process require the support of concomitant unconscious fantasies. All that shall justify what will be said later.

On Ego's splitting: first outlines

Through a rapid analysis of the psychoanalytic literature on fetishism (see also Khan Masud, 1970, 1979), it will turn out that in the fetish formation process the first forms of condensation and displacement mechanisms take place, which are the two main psychodynamic processes underlying any symbolic formation. In the following, fetish formation will be compared too with that of the transitional object. Their paths meet frequently, until they become different to each other with psychic maturation, distinguishing between two possible choices, namely normality and pathology (perversions⁸). However, these two entities, fetish and transitional object, have many common points amongst them in the first stages of human psychosexual development. At the same time, according to the last 1938 Freudian thought, an Ego's splitting with the formation of two subagencies takes place, which will be called *Ego's Ideal* and *Ideal Ego* (see Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973; Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1975). Nevertheless, both these names are due to Hermann Nunberg (1932) and Daniel Lagache (1961) and not to Sigmund Freud who explicitly introduced and used only the name Ego's Ideal in his 1914 work *On Narcissism* to denote an autonomous intrapsychic formation to which the Ego refers itself to evaluate its effective realizations or representations (see Galimberti, 2006). Nevertheless, Freud himself, in the *On Narcissism* (of 1914) as well as *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (of 1922) and *The Ego and the Id* (of 1923) speaks too of an Ideal Ego (*Idealich*) but identifies it with the Ego's Ideal (*Ichideal*) and this, in turn, with the Super-Ego, even if in some points of his discussion a certain distinction between them seemed already to be possible. The Ego's Ideal has narcissistic origins going back to the primary identification and which precede all further object relations. Such a narcissistic state is lost thanks to parents criticisms toward the child. The interiorization of such criticisms gives rise to agencies of self-observation. Subsequently, other authors, such as H. Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975), J. Lacan (1961) and D. Lagache (1958), retook two such Ego's agencies as distinct from each other. On the other hand, as

⁸ In this regard, it is useful to remember the incisive Freudian expression according to which "perversions are, in a certain sense, the 'negative' of neuroses".

already said above, in the last period of his work, Freud himself implicitly started to distinguish between these two Ego's subagencies. Their interplay might be the interpretation key to all the following psychic behaviour. We will return later on to these last arguments.

Some epistemological considerations

The general epistemological problematic concerning the psychoanalytic disciplines and their foundations is well known to be complex and intricate, and is included in the wider problematic concerning the long-standing difficult relationships between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* (*d'après* W. Dilthey). According to Caramelli⁹ (1984, 1985) and Carotenuto (1982), every psychological theory is the result of the subjective and individual experience of its author, so that each of these will represent aspects of psychic reality that might elude others (*gnoseological relativism*). Therefore, only the whole composite framework made by all the possible theories of psyche will provide, at a given historical moment, a certain knowledge framework of human psyche. Thus, psychoanalysis also has a deep *historicist*¹⁰ and *pluralistic* dimension as a doctrine's field (which we might call a *historicist gnoseological relativism*), and, hence, we may use different theoretical frameworks to coherently explain a given psychic phenomenon without meeting contradictions. In this sense, we could use in a concomitant manner elements of different authors' theories, provided that the minimal requisites of non-contradiction and coherence are respected. On the other hand, in some respects, this last relativistic and opportunistic epistemological stance is much nearer to the last *epistemological anarchism* ideas of P. Feyerabend (see Abbagnano, 1998) that the author himself would want to consider as related to a general gnoseological method. In this paper, for instance, we will mainly follow the last Freudian thought as exposed in Freud (1938, 1949, 1999), but, at the same time, we will refer to many other thoughts systems which may have relationships (of coherence, analogy, confirmation, support, integration or completion) with the main ideas herein exposed and mainly based on the Freudian disavowal mechanism. However, a beautiful and emblematic example of the validity and application of this epistemological stance is provided by the same Jacques Lacan's theory which is an almost unique systematic and organic framework making harmonic and coherent use of different theories like anthropology, linguistic, literature, arts, etc., as well as the thought system of many other authors.

On symbolism: first considerations

On etymological meaning

According to Abbagnano (1998) and Galimberti (2006), the word *symbol* derives from the Greek noun $\sigma\upsilon\mu\beta\omicron\lambda\omicron\nu$ (with Latin transliteration *symbolum*), this from $\sigma\upsilon\mu\beta\alpha\lambda\lambda\omega$, in turn derived from the verb $\sigma\upsilon\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$ (with Latin transliteration *sým bállein*) which, in composition, means "throw together". It is

⁹ We have, above all, taken into account the works of this author because they are closest to the methodological aims that we would like to follow here.

¹⁰ Which, in turn, is nearer to the common area given by the non-void intersection between the *evolutionistic epistemology* ideas and the *genetic epistemology* ones.

characterized, like the sign, by an a priori *postponement* which, on the one hand, includes the symbol in the sign's order as a specific case of it (as a conventional symbol), whereas, on the other hand, it is opposed to the sign itself because the latter has a predetermined relationship with what it denotes or connotes (*aliquid stat pro aliquo*¹¹), whereas the symbol, instead, in evoking its corresponding part, refers to a given reality which is not decided by some form of convection but by the recomposition or assembling of a whole (in respect of its original etymological meaning, as a non-conventional symbol). Roughly speaking, there is no rigid link between a symbol and what it symbolizes. Nevertheless, the relationships between sign and symbol are never well delineated in a clear manner. The psychoanalytic perspective might yet provide useful clarifications, above all that of the Kleinian trend and that of the British *middle group* headed by Donald W. Winnicott, if one takes into account the early etymological meaning of the term "symbol" (see also Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973), i.e., the one that refers to the "assembling of a set of things". Following Petocz (2004), which quotes a Lévi-Strauss consideration, the concept of meaning is so difficult to define perhaps because of its intimate reciprocal connection with the notion of symbol. On the other hand, the noun $\sigma \acute{\upsilon} \mu \beta \omicron \lambda \omicron \upsilon$, i.e., a "tally", originally referred to each of the two corresponding pieces of some small object which contracting parties broke between them and kept as proof of identity when rejoined together.¹² That meaning subsequently expanded to include a diversity of meaning such as other kinds of tokens, seal, contract, sign, code, etc. In this regard, see also Laplanche and Pontalis (1973).

On interpretation and symbolism: a first sight

For our purposes, it is fundamental to sketchily consider the essence of the conception of symbol from the semiotic stance. Indeed, according to Eco, the symbol is considered as a "decision", since the symbolic world always and everywhere presupposes an invention's process applied to a recognition, i.e., one finds an element which might assume, or has already assumed, segnic function, and decides, then, to see it as the projection of a portion having a sufficiently imprecise content. On the other hand, following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), when one speaks of mathematical or linguistic symbols, any reference to a natural relationship or to an analogical correspondence is excluded, that is to say, the typical segnic denotation or connotation relation (for instance, in the Ferdinand de Saussure meaning) does not hold for them: to show a very elementary algebraic example, the following relation among integers, $(a + b)^p = a^p + b^p$, may have completely different symbolic¹³ meanings depending on whether it refers to the set of integers \mathbb{Z} or to the set of congruence classes modulo p , namely \mathbb{Z}_p ($p \geq 2$). Therefore, its meaning depends on the given contextual interpretation, as we will see later. Following Rycroft (1968a, 1968b), in psychoanalytic theory a sign points out the presence of something more or less directly identifiable, whereas a symbol refers to

¹¹ In other words, "something stands for something else".

¹² So that its meaning refers to something, like an object, and, through its fragmentation, to the idea of a link or bond. This will be coherent with what is pursued in this paper about bodily image formation in fetishism, Ego's splitting and their relations with symbolism.

¹³ Which must be considered as distinct from the segnic meaning of its components, such as a, b, p, \mathbb{Z} and \mathbb{Z}_p , which refer to the conventional symbol class. We will return later to such questions in the second part of this two-part paper.

something different from what it is. The importance of a symbol derives just from that something else in which it puts off, which is reachable only through a suitable interpretation. Signs directly reveal their meaning, whereas symbols require a kind of decoding through a correct interpretation. This is the main difference between sign and symbol, which is emphasized only within the classical psychoanalytic theory while in other contexts (cf. Peirce's theory of sign) such a distinction is more elusive. From our point of view, if one wants, for example, to try to explain why mathematics is a suitable interpretative language for natural sciences, it is not possible to prescind from the psychoanalytic perspective on symbolism. Indeed, whilst the connection between the sign and the thing to which it refers has a conscious nature, the symbol establishes an unconscious replacement, through displacement and condensation, of an image, an idea or an activity with another. This last viewpoint will be clearer later when we discuss C. Rycroft's work. Moreover, for further discussion on mathematical symbolism, see the second part of this paper.

Some linguistic aspects

However, we are not interested here in all the theories on symbolism¹⁴ but only in those which, in a certain sense, might be explained through (or correlated to) the line of thought that we wish to delineate in this paper, i.e., the one centred on the Freudian disavowal mechanism. Namely, we will consider those theories according to which the symbol is considered to be different from the sign, both in the lack of a conventional and rigid order which sets up the possible signifier-signified relationships (according to de Saussure) and in the fact that the symbol is conscious whereas the symbolized is unconscious. Nevertheless, in what will follow, the comparisons between segnic and symbolic functions will be frequent, since their domains are inseparable although distinct from one another, as already said in the previous sections. From our point of view, we consider the symbolic function as preceding the segnic one, and having deep unconscious roots; the latter, then, will start from the former.¹⁵ Our intention, therefore, is to focus on the first, ancestral nucleus of such a symbolic function, whose early origins we would want to bring back to certain crucial aspects of the last 1930s Freudian thought (see Freud, 1938, 1949, 1999) on human psychic evolution. Following Rycroft (1968a, 1968b), E. Jones was one of the first scholars of symbolism from the orthodox viewpoint. According to him, symbolism is always the result of an intrapsychic conflict between the repressing tendencies and the repressed material. Only those repressed objects that cannot be sublimated need to be symbolized, so there is a close relationship between the sublimation processes and the symbolization. Nevertheless, Freud himself wasn't so radical in considering symbolism as exclusively confined to the primary process as Jones was. Indeed, in his last work in 1938, Freud reached the conclusion that the linguistic symbols used in dreams have mainly an unconscious meaning and originate during the earliest language development stages. So, Freud presumed that the symbolic function was in some respects correlated with the formation of the verbal linguistic one.

¹⁴ However, brief outlines on some of them will be delineated in the following sections.

¹⁵ This is coherent with what is said above about the mainly unconscious nature of symbol and conscious nature of sign. In this regard, then, it will not be possible to prescind from the notable Lacan *œuvre* which, inter alia, is based on the previous work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson.

On psychoanalytic symbolism

According to Segal (1991), it is not possible even minimally to approach the subject of fantasy (hence, of creativity) and of dreaming without considering the unconscious symbolism; this is because both are closely intertwined and interconnected between them. Freud distinguished between a conscious symbolism (such as a metaphor) and an unconscious one. Again following Rycroft (1968a, 1968b)¹⁶ and Segal (1991), within the Ernest Jones framework on symbolism there is a close connection between the sublimation process and symbolic formation, which is the pivotal key to understanding any creative process, the latter being present where the former is missing. According to Jones, there are some main features of symbolism, namely: (i) the symbolic process is completely unconscious; (ii) each symbol represents ideas of Self and of the own family, as well as birth, love and death phenomena; (iii) each symbol has a constant meaning and is the result of an intrapsychic conflict between the repressing tendencies and the repressed material; (iv) only the repressed material needs to be symbolized; and, finally, (v) the emotional charge which invests the symbolized object has not been able enough to perform that qualitative modification given by sublimation. Therefore, according to Jones, symbols have nothing to do with sublimation. However, many points of Jones's theory of symbolism have been reworked out, amongst others by Melanie Klein, loosening their strong constraining character. As already said in the previous sections, even Freud wasn't as rigid about symbolism as Jones was, for instance allowing many possible meanings for the same symbol. Freud himself, then, was aware that at the basis of dream and artistic activity was unconscious fantasy, hence symbolic thought. Sublimation is a psychic process provided by Freud for trying to explain the higher human thought functions, thereafter counted as a general defence mechanism by his daughter Anna Freud (1937),¹⁷ and yet quite neglected by psychoanalysis which has not still given a coherent theory of it (see Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Given the close relationships of sublimation with secondary processes, perhaps it would be possible to bring back the segnic function to the sublimation process rather than the symbolic one whose process is quite different from the former, albeit both are intertwined with one another. For instance, according to Rycroft (1968a, 1968b), symbolization and sublimation are two psychic processes which have displacement as a common energetic exchange mechanism. Rycroft (1968a) states that sublimation is considered to be strictly related to scopophilia (roughly speaking, the pleasure of watching, one of the basic childish drives, from which derives the so-called *epistemophilia* (see Rycroft, 1968a), or else, general human intellectual activity is a sublimation of this, which follows from childhood inhibitions of sexual curiosities. Moreover, according to the author, all sublimations depend on symbolization, while all the Ego's development depends on sublimation. In turn, the splitting process (upon which is also based disavowal) has mainly to do with the Ego's development. In short, from what has been said so far, it is evident that there are links between the symbolism and sublimation processes and human psychosexual development. In this paper, on the basis of what has just been said, we would like to point out some possible relationships between the symbolic function and the disavowal mechanism, the latter supposed to be, *d'après* Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), a general psychic formation process (closely related to Ego's structuration) not only relegated to pathology, as already Freud himself had hypothesized in his last notable

¹⁶ See also Bott Spillius et al. (2011).

¹⁷ She considered sublimation, splitting and disavowal as comprising the set of defence mechanisms of the Ego (see Rycroft, 1968a). According to her, sublimation is concerned with normality.

1938 work, and subsequently accepted by his daughter (and other post-Freudians) as a normal defence psychic mechanism.

On the viewpoints of Charles Rycroft and Hanna Segal

Charles Rycroft (1968b) gave a useful and original interpretation of symbolism. This is neither a hereditary¹⁸ nor exclusive prerogative of the unconscious realm. The symbols are the outcomes of a cathexis displacement from the images of the objects of primary interest (like those involved in the primary identification) to the images of objects perceived in the external world. Once formed, a symbol may be used either by primary or secondary processes. When a symbol is used by a primary process, its meaning becomes independent from the object that it originally represented; hence, it will be involved in fantastic processes, like neuroses and dreams. When, instead, a symbol is used by a secondary process, it will continue to represent a suitable object of the external world and will become part of conscious and unconscious imaginative processes that promote the development of a certain sense of reality. Rycroft follows Melanie Klein and Isaacs (1952) in assuming that the sense of reality is supported and favoured by fantasy. Rycroft distinguishes between fantasy that intensifies reality and fantasy that maintains illusory (or neurotic) substitutes for reality. To the first, he gives the specific name of *imagination*, which is a fundamental component to evaluate reality. According to Rycroft (who, in turn, starts from the previous work on symbolism of L. S. Kubie and M. Milner – see Rycroft, 1968b), the words are classified as symbols closely related to consciousness that favour the secondary processes. The words are also closely related to object relations because verbalization is a form of communication between objects. On the other hand, within the Kleinian framework, Hanna Segal (1991) also made further and original contributions to symbolism (see also Bott et al., 2011). On the basis of her clinical material drawn from the analytic treatment of psychotic patients, she identified two main symbolic functions. The first function is called *symbolic equation* and relies on the basis of concrete schizophrenic thought: in it, the symbol is equated with the symbolized object, up to the point where it is lived as identical to the latter. In this regard, Segal refers to a clinical case in which a psychotic patient, at a certain moment in his life, broke off to play the violin; when he was asked why, he curtly replied: “Do you want maybe that I publicly masturbate?” Now, playing a violin has the psychoanalytic meaning of masturbation, so that, for him, a violin *is* a penis, so that playing a violin *is* masturbating and therefore it cannot be done in public. The intuition of the second function, however, came from a clinical case regarding a neurotic. It has been called *symbolic representation* and has to do with the true symbolism of normal thought. Through it, the symbol represents the object but must not be entirely equated to it. If one dreams of playing a violin, then the violin, yes, represents the penis, but distinguished from it, so that one may personify unconscious fantasies of masturbation and, at the same time, remain quite distinguished to use the violin to play in such a manner to separately represent a sexual act. The passage from the first function to the second one is well illustrated by a clinical case treated by Claudine Geissman (see Segal, 1991) and references therein) in regard to a psychotic eight-years-old girl who initially wasn’t able even to speak but rather was only interested in everything that had a spherical form, as well as showing aggressiveness and violence toward everybody and everything which resembled a human being (like dolls, etc.). By means of the transfer of the child to an analyst, Geissman stated that such objects were the concrete counterparts of maternal

¹⁸ Unless one accepts the hypothesis of a collective unconscious, like Jung.

body or analyst, so that all this framework built up by the girl was turned toward a maternal figure and her body. Gradually, through the analysis, the child started to speak in an ever more complex manner and to make drawings which had balls as subjects, the first indications of a slow formation of a symbolic representation of parts of the maternal body. Moreover, the child gradually started to join partial objects or fragments into a whole one, until she was able to put herself into a relationship with other children as well as to read, speak and write. So, after having considered other case studies, Segal was persuaded that the first symbolic function would correspond to the paranoid-schizoid position (*concrete symbolism*) while the second one would correspond to the depressive position (*depressive symbolism*). Segal states that, in the symbolic equation, the symbol substitute is felt *to be* the original object. The properties of the substitute are not recognized or admitted. The symbolic equation is used to deny the absence of an ideal object or to control a persecutory one (like a phallus), and belongs to the first stages of the Ego's development.¹⁹ The real symbol, available for the sublimation and favourable for the development of the Ego, is, instead, felt to be *representing* the object whose characteristics are recognized, respected and used. It develops when the depressive sentiments predominate over the paranoid-schizoid ones and when the separation from the object, the ambivalence, the guilt and the loss may be experienced and tolerated.²⁰ Once this is done, it will also be possible to come back to symbolic equations. The general symbolic formation will determine the ability to communicate because every internal and external communication is made by symbols, so that when schizoid disorders take place in the object relations, the communication capacity will also be damaged. For instance, in psychotic patients, symbols, being uniquely conceived in a concrete manner, do not have any emotional charge so they cannot be felt by others, making effective interpersonal communication impossible. In regard to the two symbolic functions above, Segal states too that there exists no symbolic function without the remaining one, that is to say, there will be a prevalence of one of these but without fully eliminating the other one. These two symbolic functions operate next to one another, with reciprocal influence and possible regressions to primitive stages. And this last fact might also be related to the indivisible binomial made by the symmetric and asymmetric thought of Matte Blanco's theory (see Iurato, 2013). One of the greatest achievements of a depressive position is having given to the human individual the ability to integrate and to encompass most of the primitive aspects of her or his experience, comprising primitive symbolic equations. This last point is of fundamental importance for a creativity theory according to the Kleinian standpoint (and others). Once the right passage has been made from concrete symbolism to a depressive one, then it will be possible to perform a further step towards abstraction, for instance with verbalization. However, from this, we cannot deduce that pure abstraction thought is necessarily an indication of mental health. Indeed, this capacity might also be the outcome of a splitting (of the Ego) in which abstract thought is fully devoid of emotive meaning or charge, as in psychotic states (see also Matte Blanco's thoughts in this regard). For instance, in schizophrenic patients, very often there is simultaneity between a coarsely concrete symbolization and complete abstractions devoid of emotive (and, in some cases, of intellectual) meaning.

¹⁹ And this point is of fundamental importance from our point of view based on the disavowal mechanism which is considered by Melanie Klein to be like a normal psychic mechanism.

²⁰ Within this position will take place the basic psychic function of the separation of opposites. This point has also been stressed by R. Money Kyrle (see Segal, 1991).

On the development of Freudian libido: a brief sketch

Herein, for completeness and for giving a semblance of organic unity to the whole treatment, we briefly outline the main points of Freudian psychosexual development, with slight additions and contributions due to other authors which must be understood according to the above-mentioned epistemological considerations.

On object relationships

The strong instinctual reduction due to homination (that is to say, the passage from primates to the genus *Homo*), gave rise to the human existential problem of managing the consequent instinctual energy content which has supervened as a result of such a drive *deconstrainment*. The human being is characterized, as well as by *needs*, by *desire* which is roughly meant as a sort of incoercible psychic tension which has to be necessarily, internally or externally invested. So, for the human being, it is indispensable to find *objects*²¹ upon which to direct, or to invest, such an energy content. The consequent relations established with these objects (animated or not) are generically called *object relationships*. These were explicitly introduced by post-Freudians, first of all by the Melanie Klein school, even if the notion of object relation was already present, *in nuce*, in the Freudian notion of *cathexis* of a drive (or instinct) which characterizes the inescapable human disposition to make interrelationships with something else (which belongs to the external or own internal world), said to be the *cathexis object*, which, in turn, will be represented by the individual in various manners. The Freudian cathexis has a *source*, an *object* and a *drive destination* (or *instinctual aim*) as fundamental constitutive elements. The first one is the (bodily) zone, or the somatic apparatus, in which the related libido excitation takes place and originates. The second one is the means by which or with which the drive may reach its (instinctual) aim. It is the necessary correlative of the drive destination, and is mainly determined by the personal history (above all, infantile) of the individual but constitutionally is quite undetermined since it may be either a person or a partial real or fantasmatic object. Finally, the third one is that particular and necessary activity, or that specific action, due to the push of the drive itself to obtain the given satisfaction, and that often is oriented and sustained by the fantasmatic or imaginative elaboration of the individual herself or himself. Hence, we sketchily have

source $\xrightarrow{\text{object}}$ *drive destination*.

These last notions are the generalization of the correlative ones of sexuality: for instance, the object corresponds to the sexual object, that is to say, the person who exerts the sexual attraction, while the aim corresponds to the sexual satisfaction, that is to say, it is the action due to, or raised by, drive pushes. The first (bodily) Ego formations mainly involve a correct balancing of the primary narcissism, a regulation of primary identifications (through introjection-projection mechanisms), and a beginning of a sense of reality and of a corporal image of Self.

²¹ We could consider the notion of *object* or *thing* in the wider philosophical sense. In psychoanalysis, then, a restricted sense is assumed mainly correlated to the post-Freudian notion of *object relation* (see Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973; Galimberti, 2006).

The psychosexual development

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (of 1905), besides outlining the above notion of object cathexis, Freud worked out the main lines of his celebrated theory on the stadial or phasic development of human sexuality which is meant to be mainly driven by the agency of *Id* (or *Es*), which is understood as the place of all the instincts ruled by the principle of pleasure. According to him, human sexuality²² starts at birth (if not before, in the prenatal phase) with two main stages, the *pre-Œdipus* stage, from birth to about four years old, and the *Œdipus* stage, from about five years old to about seven years old, to carry on with the *latency* phase, from about eight years old to about twelve years old, hence with *puberty* (or the *genital phase*), from about thirteen years old to about fifteen years old, ending with *adolescence*, from about sixteen years old to about eighteen years old. In turn, the pre-Œdipus stage includes: a first *oral* phase, from birth to about one year old, in which the somatic Ego²³ begins to form with the recognition of the first partial objects together the establishment of the incorporation's instinct; an *anal* phase, from about the first year to about two years old, in which a self-erotic narcissistic attitude prevails – it begins to express the first ambivalence phenomena and to structure the basic tasks of restraining and expelling faeces; a *phallic* phase, from about two years old to

²² In what follows, we refer to the basic work of Piscicelli (1994). In it, there is an exposition of Freudian human psychosexual development integrated with post-Freudian thought, above all the Kleinian one and that of its followers. For instance (see Piscicelli, 1994), it should be necessary to distinguish between a first *monadal* phase (mainly prenatal) and subsequent *symbiotic* phase (which includes the oral and anal ones; this term is due to M. S. Mahler) where the essential psychosomatic mother-child relationship prevails and through which begin to form and be structured the first cores of the *Self*, above all by means of a basic dyadic relation (moulding onto the previous mother-child relationship). In these phases, the first differentiations between the *Self* and the *Other* will begin to take place, the first ambivalence and opposition tendencies will appear through the formation of opposite pairs (that is to say, the first germs of philosophical pairs), like love-hate, cohesion-splitting, desire-refusal, approaching-estrangement, and so on. In short, the dialectic thought which plays a primary role for the consciousness begins to form. The transduction of the psychosomatic organization and contents into the elements and functions of thought requires a long procedure made by variously combined experiences mainly driven by a good mother. This is due to the fact that human thought mainly has its origin in the transferring of satisfaction of needs from an initially autarchic system toward relational exchange procedures (including object relations, anaclitic and diacritic phases of object dependence, etc). These last will reach their highest performance and definition with the advent of paranoid-schizoid and depressive Kleinian positions, which are indispensable for recognizing objects as thinkable entities. In the actuation and in the subsequent overcoming of these positions, the above-mentioned symbiotic mother-child relationship will be essential, which is mainly psychosomatic in its incipient phase and whose dynamics will be explicated through object relations. From what has just been said, the importance played by Kleinian thought with its subsequent evolutions is clear.

²³ Following Vegetti Finzi (1976), the maternal figure, with those deeply ambivalent feelings which she arouses, is the first core around which gradually the child's Ego starts to be organized along with, at the same time, her or his ability to recognize the other.

about three years old, in which, at first, sexual gender differences, in their structural and arrangement order, are noticed (although, since the oral phase, both baby boys and baby girls have already discovered their own genitals), to be then able to recognize the Other together with the coming of some attitudes toward sublimation phenomena; and, finally, a *urethral* phase, from about three years old to about four years old, in which a bladder sexuality prevails, and which is often parallel to the phallic phase. Self-eroticism, which initially characterizes the incipency of the pre-Œdipus stage, gradually evolves, within the familiar triangulation, toward hetero-directed sexual forms which will lead to the next Œdipus stage. In it, castration anxieties, penis envy phenomena and first formations of Super-Ego agency will prevail; it will finish with the crucial apical advent of the so-called *Œdipus complex*. In the next latency phase, after the relevant Œdipus complex, a general sexual quiescence phase takes over in which the major part of libidinal activities and fantasies are repressed or sublimated²⁴ but not fully eliminated. Thereafter, the fast increase of pubertal neurophysioendocrine activity leads to a libido re-emersion with a new and fast phase of sexual development, corresponding to puberty. During this, a kind of recapitulation of the previous phallic and anal phases takes place, along with a revival of sexual interest with related conflictual recrudescence at first toward the parents (as in the previous Œdipus complex), then oriented (unless there were previous pathological fixations) toward other cathexis objects (in general, extra-familiar) with the coming of adolescence. So, in a certain sense, a definitive disposition will be reached, at first sexual then characterial, of the human personality, through the overcoming of late adolescence. These are, very briefly, the main points of the Freudian framework of human psychosexual development, in which we will lay out most of the considerations of this paper. We want to highlight this as the first five to six years of life are very decisive in the formation of human personality, as is now almost unanimously recognized (see Mastrangelo, 1975).

On phallic phase

For our aims, it is important to further highlight other aspects of the phallic phase. As already said above, in the phallic phase the organization of genital pleasure prevails and there are predominant interests in the sensitivity of those organs whose functionality is particularly present from about three years old to about five years old. From this period hereafter, no matter what their possible origins, this excitation is focused and invested on the genitals, the sexuality being lived only in a self-erotic manner. In this phase, the drives revolve around the crucial question of having or not having the *phallus* (in its highest symbolic meaning) which is the main reference point and drive orientation line for both sexes. It is the central executive organ of the whole libido: for instance, it will be the high unit of the genital function which melts in itself all the partial drives coming from the various erogenous zones²⁵. This last phenomenon has been called *erotic anfmix* by S. Ferenczi (see Nunberg, 1932, 1955, 1975). But, in this period, the first notions of

²⁴ During this period of sexual development, there is little clarity about the possible relationships between repression and sublimation mechanisms. Moreover, as already said, little attention has been paid to the general sublimation mechanism, from the work of Freud until now (see Gay, 1992).

²⁵ This will play a fundamental role in the formation of bodily image as we will see later when discussing fetishism.

space and time also begin to form,²⁶ which also assist the formation of the corporal scheme, notwithstanding their categories are still not well defined from the logical viewpoint. Furthermore, in this phase, not all children are able to identify gender genital differences, although this phase is mainly focused on seeing and hearing in order to identify the possible cathexis objects of desire, remembering these through their symbolic meanings. In this phase, children develop the narcissistic conviction that there exists a unique genital organ,²⁷ the phallus, which they attribute, *erga omnes*, to every human being, no matter their sex, and even to inanimate objects (see Nunberg, 1932, 1955, 1975). Children are unable to imagine human beings as devoid of a phallus, which is understood as a mere narcissistic pleasure organ. Such a prevalence of the image of the phallus as a symbolic representation of the potential of pleasure is also interpretable as a *chiasma effect*²⁸ between psychosomatic-emotive experiences and psychomental ones ruled by logical thought. Therefore, the psychosomatic aspects, which manage the emotions, act too as a support for the subsequent logical thought functions and for the exchange of affects.²⁹ As already said, in this phase children are persuaded that only one genital organ exists, the phallus, noting too that there exist only the castrated and the not castrated, so coming on to configure the *castration fantasy* which has an archetypical

²⁶ According to K. Lorentz (see Oliverio, 1982), the abstraction's capacity for human thought has a phylogenetic origin during that particular homination period in which the advent of prehensility and the development of visual capacities – which have taken place thanks to the conquered bipedalism (or standing position) – allow the first manual exploratory activities (like the analysis of internal cavities, and so on). Nevertheless, to the formation and structuration of bodily Ego, a primary role is played by sensorial developments linked to the cephalic-caudal maturation which precedes the neural-muscular one. So, olfaction, vision and hearing are the first corporal physiological determinants contributing to the formation of bodily Ego (see also Greenacre, 1971).

²⁷ This explains why this phase is often mentioned as well as the *unique genital phase*.

²⁸ With this term, one refers to those particular situations in which certain different, and often opposed, aspects or dimensions of a given phenomenon undergo a kind of intimate union into an indissoluble interlacement where they will configure almost in a reciprocal interrelation of mutual exchange and biunivocal influence, until reaching symbiotic forms of mirror equivalence. This meaning is due to an extension of that related to the *chiasmus* of rhetoric figures. On the other hand, Freud himself claimed, in his 1927 paper on fetishism, that traumatic amnesia (which leads to screen memories, in turn closely related to these chiasma effects) could be considered to be a paradigm of fetish formation. To be precise, the fetish, as a screen memory, would be the outcome of the awareness of a traumatic real experience whose related cathexis' energetic charge gives the distance between such a screen and the real event. Its amount provides an estimate for the severity of the impact of the conflict related to the given perturbative situation. In this regard, see Greenacre, 1971), where, inter alia, the author paid much attention to screen memories, believing them to be the main path by which early preverbal experiences could be traced.

²⁹ And, often, inversions of these relationships (that is to say, psychosomatic reifications of thoughts) are at the interpretative basis of the perversions.

source and a universal character.³⁰ In this phase of the unique genital organ, sexuality is put into a crossroad of confusion because both parents are indistinguishable from each other and both are fantastically thought to have a penis. This confusion will flow on into the latency phase, to be then elaborated according to those different meanings that the male and female genitals will assume. The lack of a female penis induces a catastrophic fear due to the great importance assigned, in this phase, to the penis; the vagina could then be the result of a punishment. So, we are at the culmination of the Œdipus complex, with the prevalence of the castration one. The unity of the castration complex in both sexes is conceivable only on the basis of a common and primary assumption, precisely the one that states the equal and notable importance played by the castration's object (namely, the phallus) both for baby girls and baby boys. The posed problem is the same for both, that is to say, have or do not have the phallus. Following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), this castration complex is met in every (psychoanalytic) analysis, and every human being experiments with it. Greenacre carried out notable studies on this universal character of castration anxiety and human predisposition to anxiety (see Greenacre, 1971). Furthermore, following Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975), it is possible to distinguish between a *passive* and an *active* castration complex in relation respectively to the desire to lose or to the fear of losing the unique genital. The manner in which the child copes with her or his infantile sexuality and solves the castration complex will determine her or his character and psychic health. Such a complex is present, in more or less severe forms, in almost all psychic disorders. Finally, following Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975), in this phase takes place the first separation of opposite pairs which, in the previous phases, were characterized by a full ambivalence: for instance, in the oral phase, the ambivalence appears joined into a unique act, becomes particularly strong in the next anal phase in which each libidinal desire must be meant as its opposite, while in the phallic one the two opposite tendencies hold next to one another. This last dialectic dynamic tension between opposites will be of fundamental importance for symbolic formation.

The Freudian disavowal mechanism and fetishism: brief outlines

First historical outlines on disavowal

Following Roudinesco (1995), Freud, for the first time, used the term *negation* or *denegation*³¹ (*Verneinung*) in 1917 after a personal re-elaboration of the term *negative hallucination* due to H. Bernheim following his 1914 reclassification of psychoses, neuroses and perversions based on castration theory made in *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. The term was then explicitly used by Freud in 1925. By *Verneinung* Freud meant a verbal mechanism through which the repressed material is recognized in a negative manner by the subject, but without being accepted. Together with this mechanism, Freud also used the term *disavowal* (*Verleugnung*) to indicate the refusal, by the subject, to recognize the reality of a negative perception, like the lack of a female penis. The *Verneinung* is connected to a mechanism typical of neuroses, whereas the *Verleugnung* is connected to a mechanism typical of perversions. Finally, according to Freud, the *Verdrängung* is a term which indicates a mechanism related to *repression*. Thereafter, in the *Wolf Man* (of 1914), Freud also used the term *Verwerfung* to indicate

³⁰ R. C. Bak has also pointed out a possible universal character of female genital organs (see also Greenacre, 1971).

³¹ This denomination was due to J. Hyppolite in the 1950s.

the *rejection* of a reality presented as non-existent, and to be meant as distinct from the previous ones. In France, there were some heated debates about the relations of the term *scotomization*, first proposed by E. Pichon-Rivière in 1928 to indicate an unconscious mechanism through which a subject makes disappear from the consciousness those facts which are unpleasant, with the previous terms. For instance, R. Laforgue proposed consideration of scotomization as comprising either the *Verleugnung* and another repression mechanism typical of psychoses, whilst Freud considered it as distinct both from *Verleugnung* and *Verdrängung*. Laforgue wanted to indicate an annulment of a perception whilst Freud wished to keep the perception within a framework supported by negation, that is to say, not complete closure of a perception in front of a misunderstanding of reality, but rather activation of a perception put between a denegation and a repression. In a nutshell, the real problem consisted in the lack of a specific term to indicate the rejection mechanism typical of psychoses. In short, even Freud had a certain moment of uncertainty between all these terms, *Verleugnung* (disavowal), *Verdrängung* (repression) and *Verneinung* (negation), in relation to psychosis mechanisms. Finally, as we will see later, Freud opted for denegation or disavowal. *Disavowal* (or *denial*, of the reality), is a term that Sigmund Freud began to explicitly use, in a specific sense, after the paper entitled *The Negation* (of 1925), until it attained a more general sense in the last of his works, namely *Abriß der Psychoanalyse*³² (see Freud, 1938), even if such a primary notion did not have a definitive characterization, for which reason it will be retaken by his followers to be studied more deeply. According to Octave Mannoni,³³ Freud began to implicitly use the notion of disavowal after the 1890s in discussing the concept of splitting the Ego, both these notions being closely related to one another. As stated above, disavowal (*Verleugnung*) is different both from negation (*Verneinung*) and from repression (*Verdrängung*), as will become clear later. Following the last Freudian ideas exposed in Freud (1938, 1949, 1999), we may consider disavowal as a fundamental psychic mechanism which relies on the primary basis of any other possible relation with the external reality. Indeed, in this last work of his, Freud fully re-examined all his previous ideas about the Ego agency and its functions in the light of the fundamental psychic process of Ego's splitting. Freud (1938, 1949, 1999) also states that a certain degree of fetishism is part of normality, particularly during romantic love.³⁴ The above-mentioned Freudian work *The Negation* (of 1925) has played a primary role in subsequent studies on consciousness. Following De Mijolla (2005), negation dramatizes a situation of interpretative conflict and is related to a dialogical situation. Negation, unknown at the level of the unconscious, needs to be situated on a secondary level, and we can gain access to it only by way of the symbol. The study of the interrelation between oral instinctual motions and the establishment of negative and affirmative behaviour has been further investigated in the works of R. A. Spitz (1957). Then, following Akhtar and O'Neil (2011), any elementary content,

³² This last (partially unfinished) work may be considered as Freud's spiritual testament of his (orthodox) doctrine, in which he almost axiomatically tried to delineate the main lines of his theory as it historically evolved from its first ideas to the final form together with some of its unsolved questions to which the author was not able to give a relevant answer.

³³ See the Introduction to the Italian translation of Freud (1938), that is to say, Freud (1999).

³⁴ As we will see later, this psychic phenomenon is almost ubiquitous in childhood if laid out in the Winnicott's framework of transitional objects and their relations with fetish.

according to Freud, becomes conscious only in its inverted and negated forms. Subsequent epistemological analysis (see Chemama & Vandermerch, 1998) have shown that 1925 Freud's work *On Negation* dwells above all on the disavowal mechanism and not only on the negation one, so that his main theses were much more related to the former rather than to the latter. On the other hand, with his notion of splitting of the Ego, Freud showed his 1938 last thoughts especially concerning fetishism and psychosis. It also enlightens his ideas on the basically non-unified structure of the ego. He moreover focused on the question of the possible relationships between the Ego agency and the reality, introducing another model different from that of repression and of the re-emersion of the repressed content, by establishing the notion of disavowal as a specific psychic mechanism regarding Ego agency (see Bokanowski & Lewkowicz, 2009). The initial motivations for the introduction of the disavowal mechanism were mainly due to attempts to give a satisfactory explanation of the psychoses which remained until then out of the psychoanalytic theoretical framework which was mainly turned to explain the neuroses. Roughly speaking, disavowal is a defence mechanism through which the individual denies the recognition of painful experiences, impulses, reality data or aspects of herself or himself. Such a notion should be understood as a first generalization of a particular initial denial, precisely the one experienced by the individual in recognizing that traumatic perception which consists in the occurred awareness of the lack of a female penis, with consequent supervention of the related castration anxiety. According to the initial 1924 Freudian conception, at the first impressions of this lack of a penis, the baby boy disavows this absence and *imagines* to see, in an equal manner, a penis which formerly there was but that afterwards has been cut off (castration). According to Freud (1938, 1949, 1999), this process seems to be quite normal and widespread in children, but it might become dangerous in adult age giving rise either to a psychosis or a paraphilia, even if, in these last cases, it is quite unclear in what specific manner these take place. Girls, instead, reject the acceptance of the *facto datum* of their own castration, persisting in the conviction of having a penis, being therefore forced, later, to behave as if they were males (penis envy³⁵). Subsequently, this first disavowal conception was extended to all the painful perceptions which, contrasting with the pleasure principle, lead to not recognizing the reality and to transforming it, through hallucinatory modalities, to fulfill the desire. Fetishism, besides homosexuality, is the most frequent amongst the paraphilias (see Greenacre, 1971) even if it is the most difficult one to diagnose due to the fact that it is asymptomatic.

Towards the Ego's splitting

The 1927 Freudian paradigm of fetishism, which was initially laid down to explain the formation of fetishes by means of castration anxiety due to the observation of the lack of a female penis, has gone beyond the context of sexuality, due to the rigour with which it was formulated by Freud himself. Subsequently, such a paradigm underwent further improvements until a definitive 1938 model centred around the basic notion of Ego's splitting (see Freud, 1938, 1949, 1999). According to the latter, most people overcome such a castration complex through *symbolic elaboration*,³⁶ accepting the gender sexual differences, whereas those who do not overcome such a complex will have neurotic developments with possible paraphilic degeneration (see also Piscicelli, 1994). In

³⁵ On this, Lacan will speak of the child as a prolongation of the mother penis.

³⁶ The degree of this is directly correlated with (and proportional to) the emotive content associated with it.

fetishism, the perception that disproves the infant's belief in a female penis is not rejected but is, as some say, displaced upon an object, the *fetish*. It therefore does not imply a hallucination or an alteration of the representation of reality (like in psychoses), but simply it repudiates the reality. After having detected the lack of a female penis, the child has, in a certain sense, modified its initial belief about the female penis, retaining it and, at the same time, abandoning it (*Aufgeben*). He or she believes that, despite everything, the female has a penis, even if this is no longer that of before, because something has taken its place or replaced it, that is to say, it has been named a "symbolic substitute" for it upon which it will be possible to cathexis the desire to avoid the strong anxiety's pressures due to the castration principle. But, in doing so, the child inevitably goes into a conflict created by the load of the real undesired perception of a penis lack against the force of a counter-desire opposed to this, thereby reaching a basic ambivalence whose resolute compromise will be possible only thanks to the action of the unconscious thought which dialectically operates through its own primary processes.³⁷ In short, the fetish is, yes, a symbolic substitute for the phallus, but it is not always an iconic reproduction of it. Such a fetish reflects, at the same time, the denial and the affirmation of the female castration, this also corresponding to the coexistence of two opposite attitudes in respect of the fetish, which Freud tries to explain by means of a particular psychic mechanism, called *Ego's splitting* (*Ichspaltung*). This splitting takes place when the child undergoes a conflict between the initial instinct's claim (*Anspruch*) and the objection made by reality (*Einspruch*), but does not choose either one or the other, or else chooses both. In such a manner, the formation of the Ego's synthetic function is perturbed. Thus, to sum up, a fundamental characteristic of fetishism is that it allows reality to be recognized and, at the same time, disclaimed. It gives rise to the fundamental creation of opposites whose separation, thanks to this splitting mechanism (if correctly operating), is at the basis of first consciousness formation.³⁸ Such a mechanism, however, is different from the psychotic one because the latter is a mere and simple repudiation of the reality³⁹ which is never recognized. Nevertheless, the (paraphilic) fetishist cannot avoid a degenerative Ego splitting when this splitting does not give rise to that compensative symbolic elaboration recalled above.

From fetishism to Ego's splitting

On Ego's splitting, fetishism and transitional phenomena

By means of the disavowal mechanism, Freud glimpses the origins of an intrasystemic Ego's splitting⁴⁰ (*Ichspaltung*) through which, within the Ego agency, two distinct and conflictual psychic attitudes take place of which one takes into account the reality denied by the other, and substitutes it with the content of a desire. Or else, following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), through this intrapsychic division, an Ego's splitting takes place both

³⁷ See Smirnov (1970) and Khan Masud (1970, 1979).

³⁸ The constitution and separation of opposite pairs, as already said, is a fundamental and characterizing task for consciousness (see also Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Here, we have discussed such psychodynamic processes from the Freudian perspective, but they also play a fundamental role in the Jungian theory of consciousness (in this regard, see also Iurato, 2012).

³⁹ Which has mainly external sources.

⁴⁰ Which should be kept distinct from the analogous notion related to schizophrenia in which it is preferable to use the term *dissociation*.

into a part which observes and into a part which is observed. This last perspective is widely but implicitly used by Freud in his final works, above all to denote a certain dichotomic or separated nature of human psyche. Throughout this paper, when we refer to the notion of Ego's splitting, we mean this last perspective, coherently with the Freudian work in which such a notion starts to be used with the celebrated works *Fetishism* (of 1927), *Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence* (of 1938) and in *Abriß der Psychoanalyse* (see Freud, 1938). Above all, we will follow the Freudian thought of this last work. According to Freud, disavowal would allow us to explain the typical features of psychoses and fetishism. Following Galimberti (2006), as stated above, the original 1925 Freudian concept of disavowal was extended to all the painful perceptions that, being in contrast with the pleasure principle, lead to not recognizing the reality, transforming it in a hallucinatory manner to satisfy the desire. Hence, disavowal is a very fundamental psychic mechanism which has to do with the external reality, and whose main result is this Ego's splitting. It is the first psychic agency to form for detecting reality. The Ego's splitting is a basic psychic mechanism preliminary to others, like introjective and projective identification, etc. Following Greenacre (1971), in the formation of Ego's agency, a remarkable role is played by pre-Œdipus phases. In the 1930s, there was a considerable need for a deeper knowledge of Ego. In this regard, the author, thanks to her professional psychiatrist activity, had the opportunity to examine many clinical cases of psychosis which turned out to be of great usefulness just to study the Ego's function. After the studies of W. Hoffer, P. Schilder, M. Ribble, M. E. Fries, R. A. Spitz and M. S. Mahler, it had been possible to ascertain that the first formations of this agency are of a corporal or somatic nature (bodily Ego). Greenacre herself (and B. Lantos) pointed out a certain primitive predisposition to anxiety, mainly related to the elaboration of primal scenes, which will play a notable role in the Ego's formation, if properly cathexed, together its next splitting. According to Greenacre, the classical 1927 and 1938 Freudian works on fetishism were the best ones on fetishism and perversions. In these works, Freud foregrounds the Ego's splitting which takes place in consequence of the strong castration anxiety when a child has recognized the gender sexual differences. Above all, the kid refuses to recognize the reality of this painful situation. Nevertheless, he assigns a penis to his mother, symbolically represented by the fetish (material⁴¹ or merely symbolic) whose specific form is largely due to the displacement of that energetic amount which has been determined in concomitance with the appearance of castration anguish. The fetish formation must therefore provide these incongruities in the corporal image formation through suitable surrogates. These may be physical parts of the body (material fetish) or may be abstract formations like more or less complex fantasies (see Greenacre, 1971). The pathological cases mainly take place during the passage from the normal childish fetish of three- to four-year-olds to the latency phase, characterized by the deterioration of the capacity to establish object relations. In Greenacre (1971), the author contributed further interesting considerations on fetishism. According to her, the fetish has mainly a phallic meaning, but also a bisexual one. Fetishism is a disorder which is mainly due to an imperfect development of corporal image and of the bodily Ego, from which derive disorders of reality sense, of identity sense and of object relations. The adult's fetish has something in common with the Winnicott childhood's *transitional object* which, usually, has a certain role in the constitution and development of the reality and of the object relation, and concerns both sexes. The formation of a transitional object takes place within the so-called (Winnicott-Spitz) *transitional space*,

⁴¹ In this case, the (material) fetish may be considered as a materialized screen memory which is related to implicit memory (see Mancina, 2007) or cover memory.

which is the space around which the mother-child relationship and related *transitional* phenomenology take place (see Vegetti & Finzi, 1976). The persistence in adult age of the fetish reveals a chronic defect of psychosomatic structure, while the transitional object is usually abandoned with the dawning of genitality, at least in normal cases. In most cases, the fetish itself is something of a secret to the fetishist himself (or herself), which is strictly related to the primary meaning of the Oedipus complex, that is to say, the uncovering of the enigma sphinx, to confirm the basic relationships existing between fetish formation and pregenital phases. Following Greenacre (1971), in the phallic phase a consolidation of the recognition of genital organs takes place and, in the case of disorders and failures in the formation of corporal Ego, the fetish formation may cope with this, with a narcissistic reinforcement of Ego itself through it.

On Ego's Ideal and Ideal Ego

Following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), Freud, as mentioned above, put disavowal as the main psychic mechanism involved in the Ego's splitting. He started from the previous notion of *Spaltung* due to J. Breuer and P. Janet, but gradually reached his original generically oriented conception to indicate an intrapsychic division, above all in the last part of his life, in reference to a splitting of the Ego into an *observing part* and into an *observed part*. Later, from his above-mentioned 1927 works on fetishism, gradually Freud posed the disavowal mechanism at the basis of this splitting phenomenon that he wanted, in turn, to put at the basis of psychoses and perversions. Freud pointed out that in psychoses a full separation from reality never takes place; in every psychosis, even the deeper ones, two antithetic psychic attitudes always exist: the one that takes into account the reality in the normal attitude, and the other that, under the drive influence, detaches the Ego from reality, giving rise to delirious thoughts. The outcomes of this Ego's splitting are therefore two opposite psychic settings,⁴² of which each subsists, throughout life, alongside the other and never singly of each other, but with the prevalence, from time to time, of only one of these two, to the detriment of the other. Out of these, there is a normal self-observing component which takes into account the external reality (and is prodromic to the formation of the system *Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego*) mainly through opposition to the next subagency (the Ideal Ego), while the other, under the Es' instinct influence, tears out the Ego from the reality (and is prodromic to the unconscious formation of the *Ideal Ego*) assuming a prevalent narcissistic formation on the basis of primary identifications as a result of the mother-child relation. According to Nunberg and Lagache, the Ideal Ego, genetically prior to the Super-Ego, is the first Ego's component to be formed from the symbiotic mother-child state, upon which the subject will build up her or his further psychic development, and to which he or she comes back in psychotic states (and not only in these). According to Lagache, the Ideal Ego has sadomasochistic implications: in particular, hand in hand with Ideal Ego starting its formation, the negation of the Other, by the pair Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego, is correlative to the affirmation of Self, thus giving rise to opposite pair formation and to the next separation of their elements (consciousness process). Thus, following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), we have two basic Ego's psychic components, the one that observes (Ego's Ideal

⁴² Which might be considered as forming the first precursor of an opposite pair (or else the source of any other possible philosophical pair), which will play a fundamental role in the dialectic reasoning, as already stated above.

– Super-Ego) and the other that is observed (Ideal Ego⁴³). Human psychic behaviour will be the dialectic result of the concomitant action of these two opposite and inseparable, but independent from each other, Ego's (sub)agencies, hence by the prevalence of one of these two upon the remaining one. There is, however, always dialectic interaction⁴⁴ between them. Freud put this splitting mechanism at the psychodynamic basis of psychoses and other disorders (including neuroses), justifying the assumption of such a mechanism as one of the main dynamic processes of psychic formation, which basically allows us to relate ourselves to reality. In short, the basic opposition between the (narcissistic) Ideal Ego and the (social) Ego's Ideal is the early source of any further dialectic process. Furthermore, within the Lacanian work, disavowal has been the first psychic mechanism involved in a complex epistemological evolution that reached the composite notion of *forclusion* which lies at the basis of the celebrated binomial *O/o* (that is, *discourse of the Other* versus *discourse of the other*) that Lacan derives from the previous binomial Ideal Ego/Ego's Ideal. As mentioned above, these two Ego's components are not present in the Freudian thought, which introduced only the notion of Ego's Ideal and to which was brought back then the notion of Super-Ego. The history of the pair Ideal Ego-Ego's Ideal has undergone quite a hard-working evolutionary history. Following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), Freud introduced the notion of Ego's Ideal in *On Narcissism. An Introduction* (of 1914) to indicate an agency as resulting from the convergence of infantile narcissism and omnipotence (which will form the idealizations of the Ego) and the parental (hence social) agencies and identifications; later, first in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (of 1921), then in *The Id and the Ego* (of 1923), the Ego's Ideal was identified with the Super-Ego agency, whose function is put in the foreground in the formation of critical sense, of prohibition and self-observation agencies and of interpersonal relations. Nevertheless, the psychoanalytic literature identifies a certain difference between the Super-Ego agency and the Ego's Ideal one even if they overlap one another somewhat. The system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego is, however, related to social and prohibition agencies as well as to self-observation, moral and critical functions, even if there is no unanimous consensus in the respective attribution of these. As early as *On Narcissism. An Introduction* (of 1914) Freud used the term *Ideal Ego* but substantially as synonymous with Ego's Ideal. These subagencies would be retaken by H. Nunberg in 1932 (of which we will outline some related ideas in the next subsection) and, in 1958, by D. Lagache, who identifies a main opposition between the Ideal Ego and the system Ego's Ideal-Super-Ego. According to Lagache, the Ideal Ego has a narcissistic character of omnipotence which is mainly due to a primary

⁴³ These two Ego's agencies, as the results of an intrasystemic agency separation (the Ego's splitting), play a fundamental role in Lacan's theoretical framework. We would also want to suggest the hypothesis according to which the first bodily Ego formations (the first ones that have external reality's preconscious apprehension), and from which will form the Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego agency system, might have their neurobiological counterpart in the *mirror neuron* systems or however related with them. For instance, the latter are compromised in individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) (see Perkins, et al., 2010). Following Ritvo and Provence (1954), children with ASDs show disturbances in the area of human-object relations, relations with toys and playthings, mobility patterns and language, and all this will turn out to be coherent with what we will say later about the bodily image formation and its impairments. In any case, these systems will surely play a basic role in the formation of Ideal Ego agency as it has been defined above.

⁴⁴ Which is not present in psychoses.

identification with the mother; it is irreducible to the Ego's Ideal agency, and its formation has sadomasochistic implications, including the negation of the Other in correlation to the affirmation of Self, on the basis of the main opposition between the Ideal Ego and the Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego system. But, following Roudinesco (1995), it was Jacques Lacan that, in 1954, without quoting Nunberg, in his own way considered these two Ego subagencies as distinct from each other, putting them at the foundation of his theoretical framework, highlighting their relevant nature and function. The Ideal Ego is a narcissistic formation belonging to the imaginary register and formed during the *mirror stage* (theorized by Lacan in 1936), whereas the Ego's Ideal refers to a symbolic function that is able to organize the set of the relationships of the subject with others. The institution of the dualism *O/o* is therefore a consequence of the establishment of the dualism *Ego's Ideal/Ideal Ego*. In this system, Lacan laid out the celebrated Lévi-Straussian splitting from nature to culture operated by universal incest prohibition because this allowed Lacan to conceive a basic opposition between the *symbolic function* of the *Father* (corresponding to the Ego's Ideal or to the Other), representing the culture and incarnation of the law, and the *imaginary position* of the *Mother* (from whom derives the Ideal Ego or the other), depending on the order of Nature and destined to merge with the child meant as the phallic object of a missing penis. It is thanks to the mirror stage that the Œdipus phase starts, in such a manner that, through the paternal metaphor (*name-of-the-father*), the child is separated from the mother, giving rise to the Ego's Ideal formation. Therefore, it is just by *naming* the missing mother penis – that is to say, the child – by means of the paternal metaphor (the *phallus*) that the *symbolic register* takes place (Ego's Ideal or Other or signifier), which is related to a secondary process, through disengaging from the *imaginary register* (the Ideal Ego or other or signified), which is strictly related to the primary process. The consequent *lack of being*, due to this disengaging from the mother womb,⁴⁵ creates, amongst other things, the unsatisfiable *desire* of the *other* of the imaginary order which will try to be satisfied with other maternal substitutes that she or he will find in the symbolic order of the *Other*. The symbolic register will allow her or himself to be perceived and recognized from the Ideal Ego to the Ego's Ideal, that is to say, through the symbol, whose notion starts from C. Lévi-Strauss and F. de Saussure's structuralistic theories. However, for Lacan, what is fundamentally important is the signifier structure of the symbolic order and not the link of symbol with the symbolized (or signified), which concerns with the imaginary order, as in Freud.

An outline of Hermann Nunberg's Ego's psychology

The little-known work of Hermann Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975) contains a great number of new ideas and insights on psychoanalysis besides being one of the most important

⁴⁵ Just at this point occurs the *forclusion*, a specific Lacanian splitting mechanism based on reality's *rejection* (*Verwerfung*) and derived both from the Freudian *spaltung* and from Laforgue and Pichon-Rivière's *scotomization*. This mechanism roughly consists in the primordial rejection of a fundamental signifier (the name-of-the-father, hence the symbolic phallus) out of the symbolic register of the subject, so giving rise to a psychotic state. Therefore, the (symbolic) phallus is a cornerstone of Lacanian theory basically because it is the primordial symbol to enter into the symbolic order. Hence, also in the Lacan theory of the symbolic, the phallus, with related castration phenomena, plays a fundamental role (see Recalcati, 2003).

treatises⁴⁶ on orthodox psychoanalytic theory, as remembered by Freud himself in his preface to this work. For our purposes, we only recall here some points of his work which may have some usefulness for what is expounded here. For instance, in Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975), a clear and complete discussion of Ego psychology is presented, of which we here outline those main points that are useful for our studies. In it, the primary role of bodily Ego is highlighted, understood as the first central core around which will revolve and build up all the following representations. The perception is the first and basic element for establishing the *reality exam* which develops with great slowness but on which will depend all the following psychic formation. The Ego will accomplish both internal and external requests, with a suitable right energy distribution. According to Nunberg, the Ego initially is in an unorganized phase within the Id, whose delimitation identifies a subagency called *Ideal Ego*, which has a full narcissistic and omnipotent character turned only toward the satisfaction of the own needs.⁴⁷ During the psychic development, this subagency gradually leaves its role in place of the other rising subagency called the *Ego's Ideal*, even if, particularly in psychotic states, the individual intends to come back to the Ideal Ego when fantasies of “coming back to the maternal womb” predominate. Children and schizophrenics have great difficulty in disengaging from their strong narcissistic and omnipotent Ideal Ego which has an unconscious nature and is ruled by the principle of pleasure, trying to satisfy every need also in a hallucinatory manner in case of non-immediate satisfaction. Hence, the main defence mechanisms of Ideal Ego are negation, projection and hallucination to avoid any unpleasantness. Nevertheless, in normality, it is not always possible to disregard the reality, thus giving rise to the formation of the reality principle, which is often mediated by the thought. Between the perception of reality and the action adapted to the perceived reality gradually the thought is inserted, which prepares the action, eventually substituting it. The judgment function of *negation*, according to Freud, is the first transition step from ignorance to recognition. To be precise, recognition takes place thanks to a state of spiritual protection which seeks stimuli from the external world which, in turn, will be apperceived and accepted by the Ego. Therefore, recognition undergoes the influx of impulses which are aimed at establishing a link with the external world and its objects, drawing its energy from life instincts. Ignorance, instead, comes from a state which feels the stimuli of the external world as unpleasant, so perturbing the ever desiderated quite. Thus, the Ego definitively closes the perceptive system against them. Negation, instead, takes a further step, in the sense that it recognizes what is unpleasant, and, at the same time, eliminates, expels and annihilates (in the unconscious) all that. Ignorance and negation are energetically supported by death instincts. Therefore, the relationships between the external and internal world are ruled by the interplay between life and death instincts by means of the own bodily image and its borders. The gradual adaptation to reality takes place to inhibit the aggressiveness (Thanatos) through life instincts (Eros) which provide energy for libidinal investments of the first object relationships. In this regard, Nunberg considers the depersonalization states and schizophrenia as patterns to infer as a reality sense starts to form. In pursuing this, as we will see, the last 1938 Freudian thought seems to be re-evoked. In both cases, there is a retirement of libido from the lost-love object to which are also associated the world's destruction feelings with related aggressiveness tendencies that Nunberg attributes to the

⁴⁶ Together the well-known treatise of O. Fenichel (1945).

⁴⁷ Subsequently, D. Lagache will bring back this subagency to the maternal predominance or to the phallic mother. He brings back to it possible delinquent behaviours.

anxieties of castration. Furthermore, in these pathological cases, Nunberg detected a certain increase of narcissistic components that he would want to bring back to an identification of the Ego with the phallus due to the retirement of the libidinal cathexis from objects to the Ego, with consequent loss of the reality sense. Therefore, Nunberg deduces two main consequences: first, that the recognition of reality takes place thanks to a certain capacity of the Ego to turn the libido toward external objects; second, that there is a component of the Ego that does not want to recognize the perceived reality, notwithstanding this is just perceived. It seems that this part of the Ego does not want to know of the perceptions, notwithstanding these are rightly perceived. And the remaining perceiving part of the Ego seems as well to be suffering from this denial. Therefore, there are two subagencies of the Ego, one that perceives and acts, the other that judges the Ego's experiences which need to be approved in order that these may have a sense of reality. This might explain why it is immoral to deny the reality and not instead say the truth. Thus, Nunberg deepens this self-observing and critical agency of Ego which is located in the preconscious system. The first bodily Ego's percepts will be undergone to the critical and observational modalities of the Ego. They will be recognized or denied according to modalities which have no sensorial character and are absent in schizophrenic patients where a deep self-observation prevails, but not over percepts of the external world. In normality, the perceiving and self-observing Ego's subagencies harmonically and constructively co-operate with the critical one; often, these two Ego's subagencies are not easily distinguishable inasmuch as they overlap with one another, becoming quite differentiated or separated only when a conflict arises between them. These critical and self-observing agencies will form the substrate to the next merely psychic *Super-Ego* agency, which will reach its most complete formation with the end of the Œdipus complex. The Super-Ego will begin to intervene between the Id and the narcissistic Ideal Ego agencies, making itself bearer of the social and reality agencies; it will be the result of successive identifications but, in turn, it is also susceptible to influences from the first ones. Nevertheless, this mediation role is often failed by the Super-Ego because of its extreme difficulty in conciliating the Id and Ideal Ego agencies. Nevertheless, Nunberg highlights that both life and death instincts contribute to determining the structure of the Super-Ego. To be precise, its structure mainly stems from the inhibition of immediate instinctual satisfaction to account for reality needs, and this may take place both from death and life instincts. The death instincts concur to determine such an inhibition of the rigid, prohibitive and authoritarian structure of the Super-Ego, whereas the life instincts concur to determine another particular structure classified as *Ego's Ideal*, which is carried out as follows. When, for love,⁴⁸ one gives in to an instinctual satisfaction for fear of losing a loved object, the latter will be taken on into the Ego domain and cathected by the libido, so becoming a part of Ego which will be called *Ego's Ideal*. It is for love of her or his own ideal that the individual remains emotionally bound to it and undergoes to its requests. So, the Ego obeys both the Super-Ego for fear of a punishment and Ego's Ideal for love. This last love is not sexual because it is the outcome of a transformation of an object libido into an Ego's libido, so that a desexualization takes place, that is to say, a sublimation,⁴⁹ so that the narcissism of Ego's Ideal has a *secondary* nature (because it is linked to a secondary process), while that of the Ideal Ego is a narcissism having a primary nature. According to Nunberg, the system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego provides the

⁴⁸ Here, when one speaks of love, we refer to the wider general sense of this term, not only to the sensual one.

⁴⁹ Subsequently, J. Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) identified various possible outcomes for the Ego's Ideal, perverse as well as creative.

representation of the external world to the Ego. Therefore, instinctual renunciations may take place either for hate or for fear of a punishment and for love, so that the dual system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego is characterized by an ambiguous or ambivalent nature moulded on the fundamentally opposite love-hate pair. Nunberg puts in evidences the historical evolution of these notions since the Freudian work: indeed, as stated above, Freud mainly conceived the Ego's Ideal as being synonymous with Super-Ego, hence pointing out its prohibitive agencies and not the loving aspects. Instead, Nunberg retook the system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego and deepened the distinction between these two agencies, although it is very difficult to descry a net distinction between them. According to Nunberg, the Ego's Ideal has mainly a maternal libido, while the Super-Ego has mainly a paternal libido, even if there is a certain merger of both. The Ego's Ideal, due to its mainly maternal nature, starts to form from pregenital phases, while the Super-Ego, due to its mainly paternal nature, starts to form during the genital phase because of the castration fear which puts at risk the whole Ego due to its genital identification. The Super-Ego is responsible for the sense of guilt, while the Ego's Ideal is responsible for the sense of inferiority. Nunberg stresses the complexity of the system Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego, the first subagency being provided by life instincts and characterized by a prevalence of love while the second subagency is underpinned by death instincts and mainly ruled by severity, austerity and by a general asceticism just to stem these destructive instincts. The internal structure of this system is quite complex and variously subdivided into itself, with continuous oscillations from one component to another: for agency, in certain cases the more severe Super-Ego may prevail, in others the rather milder Ego's Ideal may prevail. The Ego will therefore accomplish control, mediation and synthetic functions in regard to the various requests coming from all these agencies, namely the Id, Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego and Ideal Ego, which are mostly in opposition with each other.

On fetishism: first outlines

From the epistemological viewpoint, Freud reached the conception of an Ego's splitting by studying a particular psychopathological model, that of fetishism. This is mainly meant to be a male perversion in which there is no recognition of the female penile lack since this is a fact that, if it were denied, would turn out to be potentially anxiogenic because of the castration complex which is experienced by most people (due to its universal character, as recalled above). He (or she⁵⁰) therefore recuses his (or her) own sensorial perception⁵¹ which has shown to him (or her) that the female genital apparatus lacks a penis, firmly keeping to the opposite conviction. Nevertheless, this denied perception does not remain without any psychic consequence since he (or she) does not have the courage, or the dishonesty, to affirm seeing a penis, unless he (or she) stays in a psychotic state. Thus, to compensate for this, he (or she) either turns towards a further general *symbolic elaboration*⁵² (as in most normal cases) or clings to something more material, like a part of the body or an object to which he (or she) ascribes the penis role or

⁵⁰ We have intentionally given precedence to males over females because these phenomena mainly concern the former, although not exclusively. Only for this reason have we put the female third person individual pronoun "she" within brackets.

⁵¹ Which still turns out to be not compromised.

⁵² Considering this in the general framework describing the crucial passage from nature to culture, that is to say, we regard the symbolic function as the main landmark of this. Sublimation therefore has to be meant as a consequence of it.

considers it to be acting as a material symbolic replacement for this. All that (*fetish creation*) is due to the fact that he (or she) does not admit this lack of a penis, notwithstanding the evidence thereof. However, Freud (1938, 1949, 1999) himself pointed out that this fetish creation does not provide the exact paradigm of the Ego's splitting mechanism, since the former belongs to the proper psychopathological context whereas the castration complex, with its possible effects (including this Ego splitting), basically concerns normality – that is to say, it concerns every human being, as we shall see later – but without excluding possible pathological degenerations (just like in fetishism). Subsequently, Freud was led to consider disavowal (as already seen, essentially based on castration anxiety) as concerning, in pathological cases, the full recusation of external reality by the psychotic, as opposed to the repression carried out by the neurotic. Indeed, the former completely recuses the external reality (due to a structural deficit of the pair Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego), whereas the latter removes the (internal) Es' needs. In the first case, as already said, we have an Ego splitting (with a complete prevalence of the narcissistic Ideal Ego) that is different from other splitting phenomena due to the neurotic repression, because the latter concerns an internal conflict between two distinct agencies, the Ego against the Es, in regard to an internal (and not external) reality. Hence, only the former has some relationship with the external world, and Freud put it at the source of every other form of disavowal of reality that yet may be symbolically reconceived or rebuilt up. Thus, disavowal mainly has to do with primary relationships between these two Ego's subagencies, the Ideal Ego and the Ego's Ideal – Super-Ego, due to the above-mentioned Ego splitting.⁵³

On negation, fetishism and linguistics

First linguistic implications

Following Galimberti (2006), negation (*Verneinung*) has to do with the conscious emersion of repressed material in a negative form in respect of that presented at the moment in which such a content was repressed. Hence, through negation, which is a mechanism laying out into the class of repression phenomena, it will be possible to make conscious a repressed content. Freud introduced such a notion in 1925, distinguishing it from that of disavowal but with which it has close relations. Indeed, according to Thass-Thienemann (1967), a strict correlation exists between grammatical negations and the Freudian concept of disavowal discussed above. After a detailed historic-epistemological comparative analysis of various grammatical negation terms, according to Thass-Thienemann, their negativistic character subtends an anal aggressive element, in which it is possible to descry the verbal expression of one of the greatest events of the child emotive-affective development, namely that concerning the discovery of sexual differences,⁵⁴ with all the correlated intense anxious emotive charges which will be at the energetic basis for the incipiency of other basic psychodynamic mechanisms, like that of repression and disavowal.⁵⁵ The author, in this regard, quotes the almost universally

⁵³ Which is a mechanism in some respects quite similar to the above-mentioned *scotomization* of E. Pichon-Rivière and R. Laforgue (see Rycroft, 1968a).

⁵⁴ It's not by chance that the common language of children (and not only them) is full of references to genital organs.

⁵⁵ Which will become operative in the subsequent phallic phase. In this regard, therefore, it is noteworthy to highlight this strict and fundamental link between the

known stories and tales whose *leitmotiv* are goblins, or little spirits, which often disappear in such a way that it is impossible to establish whether they are present or not. Since a little goblin is clearly a phallic symbol, all that means that sometimes the little penis is missing and at other times it is present, reflecting the primeval infantile observation experienced by a child in noting gender anatomical differences. We are at the border between the anal phase and the phallic one. Therefore, this *being-there* and *not-being-there* (and that, in part, recalls M. Heidegger's thought) correspond to the first child fantasies in observing this, which thereafter will unconsciously mould the fantasies of verbal negation. This duality between 'being-there' and 'not-being-there' has also been one of the main themes of Soren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger's philosophies, whose ontological theories of *nothing* are at the basis of *existential anguish* as a human response to *nothing*. Again according to Thass-Thienemann, there is not much difference between the metaphysical interpretation of anguish and the metapsychological one. But the latter is but the castration anxiety due, as already said, to the ascertainment of the female penile lack, so that, in conclusion, the *philosophical nothing* is but the abstract elaboration of the "nothing" perceived during the childhood in the moment of seeing the related gender anatomical differences, that is to say, the bewilderment, the astonishment and the disbelief of a child before the "nothing" of a woman (in seeing her genital setting); however, this appreciable, even if little known, work of Thass-Thienemann on negation will receive further confirmation later. On the other hand, following Nunberg (1975), the language originates from sexual instincts (as stated by H. Sperber) as well as being a substitute for actions having a desexualized meaning, so that it is the result of a sublimation process which has taken place in the first phases of psychosexual development. Nunberg recalls a fact drawn from the autobiography of the Russian writer and dramatist Maksim Gor'kij (1868-1936) who wrote that, after having taught a farmer to read, the latter exclaimed that he was astonished by the possibility that a thing, while not being there, it is as if was there.

Other linguistic implications

Taking into account what has been said above, the Freudian psychosexual development may play a central role in the foundation and behaviour of a certain primary *psychic grammar* on the basis of the above oppositions which seem to develop during the passage from the anal phase to the phallic one, thanks to the action of the disavowal mechanism. The linguistic function is one of the main symbolic systems of communication amongst human beings. It takes place during and parallel to the specific phases of Freudian psychosexual development herein considered. In this framework, two main basic rules can be identified, namely:

a) Separation of opposites. As we know, in the unconscious domain prevails a *symmetric principle* (see the work of I. Matte Blanco, briefly recalled in Iurato (2013) through which a statement with its negation may be valid. Within it, it is not possible to have a distinction between the elements of an opposite pair, so that, for example, there is no distinction between "I" and "not-I" (or Me and not-Me). Following Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), Freud, for the first time, spoke of opposites in regard to perversions in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (of 1905), stating that some of these take place through pairs of opposites, and this fact has a great importance from the theoretical

anal phase and the subsequent one, the phallic phase, in which a unification of the previous partial instincts will take place under the control of genital organs.

viewpoint. From here on, the notion will be present almost everywhere in all of Freud's work. The opposite elements of such a pair are irreducible each to the other, thus giving rise to a psychic conflict which will be overcome only through a dialectic process. With the separation of the primary opposite elements (I, not-I), through the Ego's splitting (from the disavowal mechanism), it will then be possible to attain the first rudiments of otherness, with the formation of "you", "he" and "she". These are the first steps towards the formation of the own identity in respect to the otherness. In doing so, the *identity* and *symmetric principles* take place, which are two elementary principles of Aristotelian logic. To be precise, the main elementary Boolean logic operators, upon which relies elementary logic, are conjugation, negation, disjunction, material implication and biconditional implication. Nevertheless, C.S. Peirce proved that all five of these operators can be derived from only two primitives, namely conjugation and negation (see Akhtar and O'Neil, 2011; and references therein).

b) Symbolic formation. After the separation of opposites, in the unconscious realm, a dialectic synthesis of their dynamic opposition can be attained through symbolic elaboration. For instance, from the previous opposition process, it is possible to have identifications⁵⁶ of the type "not-penis = vagina" and "vagina = castration" (the vagina's emptiness being the result of a castration and therefore inducing a consequent castration anxiety), from which it follows the very crucial painful identification "not-penis = castration", which is what is effectively observed during the passage from the anal to the phallic phase, until the Œdipus complex. Hence, if this last concatenation process takes place, then the achievement of the *transitivity principle* is possible. On the other hand, that the penis and the vagina might form a primordial opposite pair is simply due to the opposed anatomic-geometrical constitution. Then, within Lacan's framework, the phallus, as the main signifier which will distribute the various signified, institutes a first difference between have or not have, which will constitute the first primordial step from the imaginary order to the symbolic one.

In particular, from the conclusion given by the last pivotal identification "not-penis = castration", a certain more or less strong anxiety follows (of castration, stronger in males for obvious reasons) whose consequent affective-emotive energetic charge must be cathexed to avoid such an anguish. From here, the disavowal mechanism starts to operate in its stronger action. Therefore, the possible solutions are mainly twofold: a fetishistic (material) degeneration or a symbolic elaboration, both of which are oriented to desperately find such a penis lacking in females. In normal cases, the symbolic elaboration is the first step towards the institution of every other following human symbolic process. *En passant*, we observe that the above *a)* and *b)* processes are at the early origins of the elementary logical thought (in its Aristotelian form): indeed, from them follow the *identity*, *symmetry* and *transitivity principles* by which, in turn, follows dialectic reasoning,⁵⁷ through the building up of the *naïve set theory* in its Boolean form, thus obtaining the elementary *propositional algebra* of Aristotelian logic (see Iurato, 2013). On the other hand, following Greenacre (1971), the fetish represents the substitute for the maternal phallus in which the child had first believed and which he (or she) does not want to renounce, keeping, therefore, his (or her) initial idea thanks to the fetish, at

⁵⁶ Such identifications are now possible through the action of the previous separation process thanks to which an identity principle is available. From it, the identification and discrimination processes are functional to their aims.

⁵⁷ See Lombardo Radice (1965).

the cost of a violent denial of reality. The fetish is the symbol of triumph at the threat of castration and a protection from it. According to Freud, fetishists have a sort of double image of female castration, that is to say, the fetish, at the same time, denies and affirms the existence of castration, thus giving rise to opposite attitudes. Therefore, the symbol (that is to say, the fetish) is usually what may reunite in itself (or put together) the opposites, in line with the original etymological meaning of symbol and with what has been said at points *a*) and *b*). This is what Freud himself claims, to confirm what we have said above. Subsequently Freud focused his attention on fetishism in relation to the reality sense and to the Ego's splitting, as we have outlined above. Indeed, the castration anxiety gives rise to a conflict between the instinctual demand (due to the pleasure principle) and the reality domain, in which the child does not want to renounce the gratification but at the same time he (or she) does not deny the reality, inducing two opposite reactions which will be at the centre of the next Ego's splitting. This is the early origin of dialectic reasoning. According to R. C. Bak, the symbolic meaning of fetish is due to condensation processes put in place during pregenital phases (namely, the phallic and Œdipus ones). Again according to Greenacre (1971), the fetish is the key to a hesitant genitality. It should satisfy stability, visibility and tangibility requirements, as well as be able to symbolize the penis and its opposite (whence *a*). Then in Greenacre (1971), the reverential fear reactions in childhood mainly start at the end of the Œdipus phase as a result of the previous strong penis reverential awe during the phallic phase which implies, at the same time, fear and admiration of the penis itself. These contrasting phallic images often remain in adult life, and might be put into relation with what is said in the above point *a*). These last discussions are also linkable with creative attitudes, as we will see later. Hermann⁵⁸ (1989) gives a psychoanalytic explanation of the above-mentioned basic logic principles on the basis of the Œdipus complex. But, on the basis of his clinical case, Hermann also introduced another psychic mechanism, called *dual procedure*, that he wanted to bring back to the castration anxiety and that will provide every dualistic feature of thought. Hermann puts it at the basis of his framework, even trying to explain the Œdipus complex through it. On the other hand, Hermann himself states that the logical thought comes from a pre-existent primitive thought that he calls *totemic mentality*, that is to say, he wants to consider a totemic origin of logical thought, so that the latter has a substantial fetishistic nature.

On embodied linguistics

On the basis of the previous work of I. Matte Blanco on the inextricable relationships between symmetric and asymmetric thought (which comprise those related to emotion and rational thought), the analysis of the relationships between primordial thought language (like those experienced in altered states of consciousness) and cognitive linguistic features (like syntactic structures and creativity), as discussed in Cariola (2012), show what primary role the body boundary awareness elements have in primary conscious acts, like the right perception and usage of space-time categories and those regarding the right separation between Me and not-Me, the latter playing a fundamental role in consciousness development, as Freud himself stated. As regards, then, what is said at point *a*), a further confirmation that separation of opposites takes place during the passage from the phallic phase to the Œdipus one comes from Cuccio (2011, 2012) and references therein, where, essentially, it is said that the first forms of linguistic negation are acquired between two and a half years old and three years old, and that these play a

⁵⁸ The original paper dates back to 1924.

very basic role in human cognitive development. We textually report what is said in Cuccio (2011, p. 48), namely:

By looking at first-language learning in infancy, we can see [...] three steps in the acquisition of linguistic negation: 1) rejection/refusal; 2) disappearance/non-existence/unfulfilled expectation; 3) denial. According to many studies, [...] rejection is the first category of negation to be acquired. Children use “no” to express refusal of something existing in their present context. However, we can find examples of rejection in human pre-linguistic gestures and even in animal behaviour. In fact, before the time children start to produce the single word “no” to express rejection, they have already expressed rejection non-linguistically. Rejection [...] does not require abstract mental representations, while non-existence and denial do require them. The second category of linguistic negation to arise is non-existence/unfulfilled expectation. At this point, children are able to signal the absence or disappearance of an expected referent in the context of speech or indicate something that violates their expectations, based on previous experience (for instance, malfunctioning toys). Lastly, the third category to be acquired is denial. Denial implies negation of a predication. The referent is usually symbolically expressed. [...] To deny, children must have the ability to discern between their own knowledge of the world and the knowledge of their listener. In order to deny a sentence, children have to manage with two propositions, one affirming and one negating the same predication; and they have to ascribe one of them to the person they are speaking to. “To deny the truth of another person’s statement entails the understanding that the other person may hold different beliefs, or that language is itself a representation of reality, not reality itself” [...]. Denial is usually acquired by the age of two and a half years. [...] Categories of negation are acquired according to the complexity of the inferences that they entail. At the beginning,

children are only able to make inferences about the present perceptual situation. Thus, at first, children can only negate (rejecting, prohibiting or expressing non-existence) something currently present in the perceptual context of speech or something that just before was present in the speech context. Later on, as children start to express denial, they become able to read their listener presuppositions. At this time, children rely both on perceptual and pragmatic context.

It is clearly possible to establish parallels between the non-existence and denial processes of the above and the disavowal mechanism which we have considered. According to Cuccio (2011), negation is a typical universal feature of human language and there is no known animal communication system that has negation. The acquisition of linguistic negation is a fundamental step in human cognitive development. Following Cuccio (2011, p. 47):

Many studies carried out during these last decades have been looking at the acquisition of negation in first-language learning [...]. All of them seem to agree on the opinion that the acquisition of linguistic negation is a fundamental step in cognitive development. According to Spitz (1957), the ability “to say no” is the most important achievement of first infancy. In fact, by saying “no” children, for the first time, are symbolically expressing an abstract concept (see D’Aniello, 1989; Spitz, 1957). The use of negation requires complex cognitive abilities. As psycholinguistic research has shown, in order to use negation children need to know the difference between their own mental representations and the external world; they need to know the difference between their own mental representations and the mental representations of the person they are speaking to; moreover, in complex forms of negation, children cannot entirely rely on a present perceptual scene but instead they need to manage their listeners’ beliefs and other epistemic states. Thus, although the expression of negation is acquired very early in infancy (before children learn to talk, in fact prelinguistic infants can reject something by using gestures or by shaking their

head), negation is all but cognitively simple. Of course, linguistic negation is far more complex than its non-linguistic expression; still “no” is acquired very early on, being one of the first words in language acquisition. Psycholinguists have been identifying the different semantic categories of negation that emerge during cognitive and linguistic development. The number of these categories increases or decreases depending on the criteria of classification adopted in each study. However, although there is not a general agreement, we will see that the functions and the order of appearance in these studies are roughly the same.

On the other hand, linguistic negation is a metalinguistic operator because it cannot be referentially used, and this is a remarkable fact for the development of consciousness because, amongst other things, this operator entails a second-order mental representation. Finally, following Cuccio (2011), it has been observed that ASD subjects are unable to use a correct linguistic negation, coherently with what will be said in the following Part 2. Thereafter, in Cuccio (2012), interesting relations between embodiment and linguistic functions are highlighted on the basis of the prominent discovery of the mirror neuron system which has given scientific proof that language and cognition are embodied. We now follow Cuccio (2012, p. 2) (who, in part, revisits what is said in her previous 2011 work):

According to many studies [...] rejection is the first category of negation to be acquired. Children use “no” to express refusal of something existing in their present context. Before the time children start to produce the single word “no” to express rejection, they have already expressed rejection non-linguistically. Rejection [...] does not require abstract mental representations, while non-existence and denial do require them. The second category of linguistic negation to arise is non-existence/unfulfilled expectation. At this point, children are able to signal the absence or disappearance of an expected referent in the context of speech or to indicate something that violates their expectations, based on previous experience (for instance, malfunctioning toys). Lastly, the third category to be acquired is denial. Denial implies negation of a predication. The referent is usually symbolically expressed. [...] To deny children

must have the ability to discern between their own knowledge of the world and the knowledge of their listener. In order to deny a sentence, children have to deal with two propositions, one affirming and one negating the same predication; and they have to ascribe one of these to the person they are speaking to. To deny the truth of another person's statement entails the understanding that the other person may hold different beliefs, or that language is itself a representation of reality, not reality itself [...].

Denial is usually acquired by the age of two and a half years.

Clearly, there are many interesting points which lend themselves to being explained by means of what is proposed in this paper and that might be the aim of a further in-depth study. The importance of negation in logic and in all scientific inquiry is also reconfirmed by B.E. Litowitz in Akhtar and O'Neil (2011), where a complete and in-depth review of the already made psycholinguistic researches on rejection, refusal and denial⁵⁹ is presented in the light of psychoanalytic perspectives. To these last linguistic arguments, namely of the possible explanatory potential which might have the theoretical pattern here considered and based on the disavowal mechanism (considered to be a general psychodynamic mechanism), it will therefore be necessary to return later.

Other post-Freudian perspectives on fetishism

A general historical account

According to Resnik (1979), at the basis of symbolization lies the aware depressive⁶⁰ elaboration of *absence* as a model of the expression of a lack, or loss, due to a traumatic separation (like the mother-child one), where the symbol phenomenologically arises as a new and indirect presence to fill up the *not-being* of the absence, taking the original object's place. According to Fenichel (1945), fetishism necessarily implies some form of Ego's splitting because of the attempt to unconsciously disavow (by Ego's Ideal) a (painful) truth at the same time recognized by the conscious part of the individual's personality (by the Ideal Ego). Furthermore, we agree with the statement of Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) according to whom, due to its basic characteristics of having fundamental relationships with the external reality, it is assumed that disavowal is a primary founding dynamic process of the human psychic reality rather than a simple defence mechanism related to a specific perceptive fact (A. Freud). Moreover, this last claim is based on the the Jacques Lacan *symbolic* register (whose valuable work will deserve further consideration), as already said. In particular, the theoretical framework of this author takes into consideration the general linguistic structure in the form given by R. Jakobson, in which, roughly speaking, the language is articulated on the two axes of the *presence* (syntagmatic level) and of the *absence* (paradigmatic level), that is to say, according to the rhetorical figures respectively of the *metaphor* (by condensation) and

⁵⁹ Which are the three main negation operators of linguistics.

⁶⁰ In the Melanie Klein sense.

metonymy (by displacement). And the fetish⁶¹ formation, in its symbolic and material nature, just accomplishes to these. As we shall see, the above evaluations of Resnik will be in full agreement with the notions which will be later exposed. According to Alexander (1948), the origins of the notion of fetishism are particularly intricate. The first interpretations of fetishism date back to Alfred Binet and Richard von Krafft-Ebing in the 1870s, which were retaken later by Freud himself who pointed out, above all, the symbolic meaning of the fetish object, and according to whom this symbolically represents a sort of female penis that the child fantastically imagines to be owned by the woman too, to avoid the Oedipus castration anxiety. Then, according to Giberti and Rossi (1996), Ellenberger (1970) and Greenacre (1971), the fetish is but the symbolic representation of the phallus. Furthermore, Giberti and Rossi (1996) and Greenacre (1971) briefly recall the related ideas of some authors, including E. Glover, O. Fenichel, P. Bergman, J. Harnik, E. Kronold, E. Vencovsky, S. Bonnett, S. Payne, M. Balint, W. H. Gillespie, R. C. Bak, P. Weissmann, M. Sperling, M. Wulff, E. Sterba, J. K. Friedjung, A. Z. Idelsohn, S. Lorand, P. Greenacre and others, according to whom the fetish (in its degenerate meaning) is a symbol of parts of the maternal body, used for the purpose of avoiding separation anxiety or to restore the integrity of the maternal body considered to be impaired or fragmented. Afterwards, J. Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) made a deeper historic-epistemological recognition of the most important contributions to this argument, reaching the conclusion that the fetish, as a depository for all the partial object loss during human development, allows both the separation from the mother and the castration complex with its anxious implications to be avoided. The fetish shows displacement and condensation properties. The former are related to attempts to shift the strong energetic charge associated with castration anxieties and fears (as well as frustrations) in such a manner as to minimize them. The latter, on the other hand, are mainly correlated to attempts to reorganize that lost unity of a fragmented corporal image that characterizes fetishism (see later). In this regard, for instance, Wulff⁶² reports some 1946 clinical cases of infantile fetishism in which the created fetish joined together in itself the various partial objects, again in accordance with the original meaning of the term “symbol”. However, on general perversions and their history, see above all Khan Masud (1979) and Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985).

Some clinical data

As already mentioned above, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) stressed the fact that the disavowal mechanism could be a fundamental and common psychic mechanism. This might find further clinical confirmation in what follows. First, Freud himself pointed out the polymorphously perverse nature of the child, a feature which potentially persists until the advent of the Oedipus complex (see Rycroft, 1968a) and roughly consisting in the interchange of various erotogenic zones amongst them. It is not clear at what point of childhood psychosexual development takes place such as a set of disorganized and polymorphic perverse states (from which will depart neuroses and perversions). But then, according to Giberti and Rossi (1996, p. 332), higher or lower degrees of fetishism are present at every age and in every person, as well as in certain life circumstances like in

⁶¹ It would be better to speak of a transitional object-infantile fetish entity (see later) instead of simple fetish.

⁶² See also Greenacre (1971).

mourning and its elaboration (Kleinian depressive position⁶³). Nunberg (1932, 1955, 1975), in discussing perversions, states that within certain limits, the deviation of the object from the final sexual aim is quite normal. Raphling (1989), in discussing a case of female fetishism, states that the clinical example analysed by him confirms the existence of fetishism in women and suggests that subtle forms of perversion may go unnoticed and be more prevalent than previously realized. Greenacre (1971) states that forms of sexual perversions are far from being rare. Furthermore, in Greenacre (1971), the author states that there exists a ubiquitous and not worrying childish fetishism, mainly based on the need for contact with the maternal body (D. W. Winnicott), which will be spontaneously rejected around three or four years old, but that might degenerate in pathological cases. Therefore, according to studies made by O. Stevenson, D. W. Winnicott and M. Wulff (see Greenacre, 1971) fetishistic phenomena are almost always normally present through the phenomenology of *transitional objects* which play a fundamental role in the constitution of reality and of object relations. In Greenacre (1971), the author discusses on some researches about the normal presence of a fetish phenomenology in childhood which will be spontaneously abandoned after the phallic-Edipus period. In this regard, see Spiegel (1967), in which the author states that this fact is very frequent in baby boys and baby girls. Freud gives a great deal to the ascertainment of the lack of a penis in the mother which is almost ubiquitous in childhood (see Greenacre (1971) because it is related to the almost equally ubiquitous anatomic sexual difference awareness. According to Garzotto (1985), fetishism represents the psychopathological degeneration (paraphilia) of a normal psychic modality in a child, during whose development he (or she) replaces the above-mentioned primitive (body) fragments with their symbolic substitutes like, for example, games, dolls, teddies, Lego, and so on (according to Winnicott). This tendency, known by Solomon and Patch (1971) as *partialism*, to privilege portions of object, or fragments (*partial objects*), in place of the global or entire one (*total object*), is just the essence of fetishism. In regard to the set of these fragments, the adult fetishist develops a drive which has the modalities of adult sexuality even if he (or she) is not able to cathexis his (or her) drives on the sexual object considered in its totality since this would re-evoke an anxious situation related to his (or her) incapacity to experience an adult love. Hence, he (or she) is unable to develop a global or unified sense. Following Greenacre (1971), the bodily Ego starts to develop from the first four months of life hereafter, where fundamental integration processes of the various sensorial (above all visual and tactile) explorations take place to give rise to a corporal Self as separate from the external world. In this period, the presymbolic formation of a *transitional object* and related phenomena according to the 1953 D. W. Winnicott seminal work take place, thanks to which the transition from the oral phase relation with the mother to the first real object relations with the external world is possible, and that will form the so-called *transitional space*. Winnicott proves that the *childish fetish*, which is almost ubiquitous, is usually formed by a preferred transitional object like a toy or any other object which has to do with the external world. This is both a Me-object and a not-Me-object until the not-being-Me is fully accepted, thus allowing the separation of opposites (see above point *a*). According to R. Löwenstein, the transitional object may start from the genitals as well as the breasts. It will be put, by the child, into relationships with the body to give rise to his (or her) corporal image which, in fetishists, is the arena where those fantasies and memories are represented as corporal images instead of thought images. These corporal representations are often cathected by strong aggressive and libidinal charges. As a result of this,

⁶³ In this regard, see Zetzel and Meissner (1977). Furthermore, bear this in mind when we later talk about the known Freudian work on the so-called *fort-da* game.

fetishistic behaviour is often followed by strong guilt (see Kaplan & Sadock, 1997), mostly due to threats of castration. Finally, Thomä and Kächele (1989, 1992) claim that in fetishism is manifested the higher human imagination, whose subsequent (fetishistic) symptom formation may depend on pre-Œdipus or Œdipus conflicts in which the fetish object is chosen. In its pathological form, it frequently starts in adolescence and mainly concerns the male sex, but also with cases related to the female sex in which it speaks of a *fetishist female* according to Solomon and Patch (1971) and Lalli (1999). In the end, according to Sarteschi and Maggini (1982), the fetish sometimes represents the phallus, at other times not, albeit, in these latter cases, the illusion of its presence is maintained. The fetishist's Ego, in accordance with the reality, admits that the female has no penis, but, notwithstanding this, he (or she) is deceived that she has at least one penis, the illusion being furnished by the fetish, which is the material substitute or surrogate of it. The fetish maintains the illusion of the phallus's presence, so that it can be both a mere symbol (as in normal cases) and a material surrogate (in degenerations). On the basis of clinical observations made on subjects who underwent psychoanalytic treatment, the fear of castration is brought back either to violent experiences (which took place between two and four years of age) that the child has been a witness to or victim of, or to severe organic disorders, which, in any case, will determine a disharmonic structuration of the image of the own body. From this, strong anxiety follows due to the view of that "unexplainable otherwise" of the female. Finally, following Piscicelli (1994), a certain degree of "fetishistic overvaluation" is usually also present in every normal love relation. The pathological case takes place when the desire for the fetish replaces the drive destination and becomes the unique interesting sexual object for the individual.

Other perspectives on fetishism

According to Glover (1933, 1949), at the foundations of fetishism, it relies on the basic unconscious mechanism of displacement⁶⁴ through which genital interests and incestuous desires are degenerately displaced toward the upper or lower body parts. Above all he stressed the symbolic meaning of the fetish which may be various but with a prevalence for the phallic one, the latter being related to the presence of a female penis which, in a certain sense, is considered mysteriously hidden within the mother's body. This last fantasy has a universal character in infancy,⁶⁵ above all in male children, sometimes degenerating into paraphilia in adults, and with a regressive degeneration of genital Œdipus desires. According to Rosolato (1967, 1969) and Etchegoyen (1991), the fetish is the "counterpart of the subject's splitting", in the sense that the fetishist recognizes the castration but, because of his (or her) presentification of the *imago*⁶⁶ of the female penis, he (or she) imagines the one that does not exist. *D'après* Lacan, *presentification* is the other face of what is disowned. The fetish, according to Lacan, presentifies (or embodies) and, at the same time, veils the female penis. According to Rosolato, the fetish manifests itself as separated from its corporeal support but, at the same time, is also in metonymic continuity with the body⁶⁷ (*object fetish* in degenerate cases, or *symbol* in normal cases), and this is a fundamental consideration for our purposes because it is

⁶⁴ According to Glover (1953), the displacement mechanism is an unconscious process with great applicative potentialities, above all for the symbolic function.

⁶⁵ See Glover (1953).

⁶⁶ According to Freud, the *imago* is an unconscious object representation (see Rycroft, 1968).

⁶⁷ Through clothes, shoes, etc. in degenerate cases.

directly connected with the symbolic function when the degeneration into paraphilia does not take place. Due to this continuity, if the fetish is a metonymy, then it is also a metaphor for the mother's lack of a penis because the former represents (*presentificates*) the latter. Thus, the fetish's creation accomplishes both a metonymic function and a metaphoric one, with a prevalence of the former in degenerate cases and of the latter in normal cases. With this, we are at the beginnings of the *Lacanian symbolic* register which is based upon these last notions, as already said. In the Lacanian symbolic register, the two tropes⁶⁸ *metonymy* and *metaphor* are put, following Roman Jakobson, in correspondence respectively with *displacement* and *condensation*, which are the two main unconscious dynamic mechanisms of the primary process.⁶⁹ According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), human desire is primarily structured by an unconscious dynamic, being mainly expressed through metonymic processes. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the metonymic process is based, according to Jakobson, on displacement which can also be interpreted as a shift of unpleasant or painful sentiments from the distressing object (e.g. the female penis) to another (e.g. the fetish), thereby establishing a typical symbolic link. Furthermore, as we have repeatedly said above, the fetish (symbolic or material) is the result of a displacement of the strong castration anxiety, which D. W. Winnicott puts in close relationship with the transitional object to establish the first forms of object relations. Finally, we outline R. M. Khan Masud's (1979) ideas on perversions. According to him, perversions are the result of an *idolization* of an external real object which is characterized by an overcathexis. This idolization occurs in place of any form of symbolization or imagination which are the normal alternatives to degeneration when the transitional object-infantile fetish phase (see later) is declining. Khan Masud noted an absence of transitional objects and toys in the childhood of perverts, which is also typified by the absence of any form of initiative. In every pervert, Khan Masud also detected a deficiency of elaboration of corporal experiences in psychic fantasies. Their fantastic elaborations are trivial and repetitive, so that their creative abilities are very poor. In perversions, there is a bad and incomplete separation of the opposite elements of Me and not-Me, so that there is not a complete separation between the external and internal reality sense. Khan Masud then identifies an intrinsic deficiency of the pervert to focalize and tune their emotions during the institution of any object relationship both intrapsychic and external. It is a typical feature of the pervert's object relation which Anna Freud (1937) brings back to a pervert's incapacity to love and to a great fear of emotions. On this Ego's disability to support a suitable cathexis of an external object or of its internal representatives (internal objects as outcomes of symbolization or imagination) relies the main feature of the pervert's object relations. Khan Masud brings back these inabilities to an early defect of the ability of the (bodily) Ego to perform integration processes, in turn due to a bad mother-child relation. And this will be confirmed many times by other authors (above all, by P. Greenacre), as we will see later.

⁶⁸ *En passant*, we recall that metonymy and metaphor belong to the subcategory of tropes, this being included in the category of grammatical figures, in turn falling into the wider one of discourse (or rhetoric) figures. According to Roman Jakobson, such tropes are the two fundamental poles around which all languages revolve.

⁶⁹ See Part 2 of this paper.

Fetishism in the culture

Other paradigms on fetishism besides the Freudian one have been formulated, like those of Charles de Brosses, August Comte, Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx: in this regard, for a brief account of these, see, for instance, Valeri (1979), Mådera (1977) and Galimberti (2006). Taking these into account, together with the Freudian one, it is possible to identify a common point amongst them. To be precise, the one according to which the fetish⁷⁰ is conceived as an object⁷¹ formed by a contradictory relationship with the reality, or rather that gives, yes, a fictitious representation of reality but that makes a true representation of it also possible. The fetish thus realizes a sort of synthesis (*fetishistic synthesis*) between these two opposite tendencies which, although it is false in itself, nevertheless anticipates a true relation between the human being and nature, thereby constituting a first conceptual framework which makes the collection and classification of positive observations possible. Fetishism is based on a kind of confusion between “natural” and “supernatural”, between something having human nature and something having superhuman nature, or something having animated nature and something having inanimate nature. In Freud, then, such a position becomes more complex because it implies an initial *object splitting* (*Was-spaltung*) which will be correlative to a subsequent *subject splitting* (*Ich-spaltung*) that, in turn, turns out to be correlated with the former in normal cases, but not in pathological ones. Finally, both in Freud and Marx, the fetish’s genesis lies in the fictitious separation of the “part” from the “whole” (even if this is meant to be related to different total objects, namely the person in Freud and the work in Marx). And the latter is just a first form of the principle of inductive reasoning. On the other hand, bearing in mind that mysterious meaning of the fetish (and its relationship with the origins of religion and mythology), according to Greenacre (1971) and Freud himself, attempts to give explanations to the consequent basic secrets provided by the fetish itself lead to intellectual activity, first through sorcery, religion and mythology, then through science. An emblematic example of this is provided by Freud himself in the essay *The Theme of the Three Caskets* (of 1913), where, inter alia, he states that the fundamental secrets are those on the origins of life and of destiny which are, in turn, implicit in the impenetrable enigma of the riddle of the sphinx that Œdipus solved, thereby obtaining the opportunity to live. From this, A. Gross stated that the secret of the symbolism of mythology is, at the primitive level, in close relation with the processes and organs of the body and whose meaning is connected both with the fear of death and life relations. On the other hand, the secret is strictly related to the anal phase and its features, first of all the faeces,⁷² and the anus, this last place of secrecy and fortress of defence.

The Phyllis Greenacre viewpoint

According to Greenacre⁷³ (1971), fetishism should be treated from the point of view of corporal image. During the changeover from the phallic to the Œdipus stage, a great

⁷⁰ Which clearly has, as already said, a phallic meaning from the Freudian symbolic viewpoint.

⁷¹ This last term might be understood in the wider general philosophical meaning.

⁷² With its ambiguous meaning which is also closely linked to the ambiguity of the fetish itself, to its dual nature (like bisexuality), in coherence with its symbolic function.

⁷³ The work (Greenacre 1971) is a collectanea of some of the main works of Phyllis Greenacre (1894-1989), amongst which those on fetishism and creativity.

castration problem subsists. This lies at the basis of every next Ego's splitting acting on an already instable, insecure and little structured bodily image formed during pregenital phases. In this moment of psychosexual development, the first forms of displacement and condensation processes take place in relation to the formation of a corporal image from its component parts, and in delineating its borders which, in turn, induce variations in the subjective perception of dimensions. The choice of fetish is quite undetermined, even if its nature will be determined by the outcomes of previous destabilizing prephallic castration anxieties. In Greenacre (1971), the author presents further considerations on fetishism, highlighting the mainly psychosomatic nature of it. To be precise, it is the result of a defect of the corporal image which the subject will remedy through a fetish creation in the absence of symbolic elaboration. In pregenital phases, there is a particular corporal sensibility which reaches its highest value during the phallic stage. In the same period, the formation of the corporal sense of Self takes place, crossed by strong aggressive and libidinal energies which, if not suitably managed, may lead to dissolution sentiments, hence to degenerative phenomena. In Greenacre (1971), the author confirms the primary role played by the formation of the bodily image of Self which presents both an internal and external aspect. Thanks to this, the child starts to be aware of his (or her) own genitals and of the visage. The core of this sense of identity is strongly structured and influenced, from the anal stage until the phallic-Œdipus period, by many factors concerning the external world. In this phase, the child is aware of herself or himself as existing in a world of external objects. He or she hears have memories and thoughts, learns to evaluate her or his own dimensions, has knowledge of sexual differences and of many parts of her or his own body. In creative subjects, this image of Self is quite unstable and susceptible to possible diversifications. In Greenacre (1971), the author expresses the idea that bodily Ego's disorders (at the root of fetishism) are mainly due to the inadequacy of relationships with parents during the first two years of existence which will be at the basis of a primary emphasis given to castration anxieties and to complementary narcissistic defences. In Greenacre (1971), the author summarizes perversions and their dynamic aspects. In particular, for our purposes, it is important to outline some points of her study, particularly those examining material fetish and its comparison with imagination. The fetish, as stated, develops from an imperfect formation of the own corporal image during the related libidinal phases, above all connected to genital organization, with more or less severe repercussions on reality sense. The main feature of fetishism is first an excellent degree of primary identification, which is a normal characteristic of every human being, but which, in pathological degeneration, is distinguished by a prolongation of the introjective-projective phase (typical preconscious mechanism of primary identification), in which there is an incomplete separation between the own Ego and the Other, that is to say, a poor separation of the elements of the opposite pair (I, not-I) or (Me, not-Me), as outlined above. This is mainly due to the fact that a fetishist is unable to make a clear distinction between opposite images that he (or she) has of female genital organs, as Freud himself claimed in 1938, notwithstanding he (or she) is able to distinguish between males and females as mental categories, but not to compare their genital apparatuses. All this, according to Freud (and as confirmed later by other psychoanalysts like K. Abraham and S. Payne), will be at the basis of a weakness of the Ego. In 1965, R. A. Spitz pointed out that visual abilities are focalized quite early, so that the recognition of anatomic gender differences (above all in genitals) is available quite early for the child. This is a notable fact for organizing and structuring own corporal image which starts from the previous recognition of the bodily image of genital settings. All this takes place from before four years old, in fact from about two years old, when the child is also able to roughly recognize her or his mirror image. Nevertheless, the

recognition of genital settings, in both our and other organization, starts before the corporal one. The child takes this as a system of comparison to be used for the formation of a sense of reality. In Glover (1933), the author states that perversions help in taking together the various partialities and objects (like the many external perceptions) which come from the development of a sense of reality, also through symbolic formation processes. According to Glover, the formation of a sense of reality depends on the emancipation of a system of bodily and environmental perception from excessive interference through introjection and projection mechanisms. According to M.S. Mahler and P. Greenacre, the second and fourth years of existence are crucial for human psychic development in which there is a high corporal sensitivity and confusion about the bodily organization, especially the genital one. The question of the lack of a female penis strongly requires a solution. The emotional shock involved in it may compromise the reality sense formation. The aggressiveness, usually present in these periods, together with other defence mechanisms, may hinder a degeneration of this trauma toward paraphilic disorders. In any case, the strong castration anxiety anguish requires a displacement to be cathexed. According to Greenacre (1971), the genetic bases for fetishism are mainly twofold, and take place between two and four years old. The first concerns the frequent and careful view of the genitals of the opposite sex. The second may concern the occasional sight of a severe bleeding wound on one's own body or of another person. The vision, in this period, plays a very fundamental role, even before the development of other senses. In the first and more common case, the child focalizes other genitals, comparing them with their own. In such a manner, when one sees other genitals, the not-Me (or not-I) is much clearer than the Me (or I), and if the emotional involvement of this comparison is not sufficiently controlled, a confusion about own genital setting will be possible, giving rise to paraphilic degenerations. Analogously, in the second case, the damage undergone by the not-Me might give rise to veiled fantasies which, in turn, may contribute to increased confusional images of one's own body. If not adequately controlled and assisted by (good) motherly cares (see Winnicott's *holding*⁷⁴ notion), these traumatic experiences may induce great anxiety and guilt feelings, also thanks to the fact that, in this period (from about two to four years old), there is a major sensorial susceptibility in concomitance with the beginnings of the formation of own corporal image. Around two years old, the first steps and words start to appear, while the genital (phallic and vaginal) physiological pressures will appear around four years old. During this period, all the above-mentioned influences may flow out in intense fears of castration which may also assume a certain aspect of reality that will lead to paraphilic disorders, including (material) fetish formation. The material fetish must be so real to avoid such strong and unbearable fears of castration. Nevertheless, as already stated several times, this fetish creation may be accomplished too by means of symbolic elaboration, most of the time originally due to the simple search for a missing mother penis.

⁷⁴ Also known as *holding environment*.

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