

THE SUBJECT GENESIS, THE
IMAGINARY AND THE POETICAL
LANGUAGE

“In order to understand poetry,
one must be able to put on the
soul of a child like a magic shirt
and to prefer the wisdom of child-
hood to that of adulthood.”

J. Huizinga

I. INTRODUCTION

“I am, but I do not own myself”¹—this famous formula of Plessner conceives man as an excentric subject, i.e. a being who can never dominate and dispose of himself as a whole. If we add to Plessner’s dictum Bloch’s answer to it: “I am. But I do

Translated by Johanna Pick Margulies

¹ H. Plessner, “Die Anthropologische Dimension der Geschichtlichkeit” in *Sozialer Wandel—Zivilisation und Fortschritt, als Kategorien der soziologischen Theorie*, H.P. Dreitzel, ed. Neuwied, 1972, p. 160.

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not own myself. Therefore we are still becoming” then we are already suggesting the anthropological space of the imaginary; because the ability to imagine something that is not, plays an essential role in this subject’s becoming.

Seen from this point of view the imaginary participates even at the very genesis of the subject and remains fundamental for the permanent constitution of the subject’s limits. We must assume that the imaginary penetrates all the domains of our lives; however very early there develops a special space, reserved for the imaginary: the space of play and later of cultural experiences. It is the space of those creative activities which play such a part in the continuous individual and collective formation of subjectivity. Even works of art and other cultural objects acquire their meaning—by way of the particular esthetic experience—by these delimitations in the field of subjectivity.

These are very simplified premises of a definition of the imaginary which derives from a concept of decentralized subjectivity. We shall continue with a complete differentiation based on the theory which has developed this concept most thoroughly: the subjectivity theory of psychoanalysis.

I shall rely on two particular concepts which consider the imaginary a basic element in the development of the subject: J. Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage³ and D.W. Winnicott’s play theory.⁴ Both theories render possible the contemplation of the imaginary in connection with the differentiation between the *Myself* and the *Others* or between the *I* and the *Not-I*. J. Lacan underlines the imaginary’s role in the construction of the *Self* and D.W. Winnicott the function of the imaginary in the autonomization of the subject.

Starting from these theories, I shall then formulate some fundamental theses leading to a theory of poetic speech; theses which originate in finding the proper place for the imaginary in the constitution of the subject.

² Ernst Bloch, *Spuren*, Gesamtausgabe, Bd. I, Frankfurt, 1969.

³ Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je” in *Écrits*, I.

⁴ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London, 1971. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, *Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, New York 1965.

II. PSYCHOGENESIS OF THE DECENTRALIZED SUBJECT

At the earliest phase of its development, the subject is in a stage of undifferentiation. In experiencing this, the subject does not know any separation between himself and the object; he experiences neither himself as a definite unit nor his environment as something separate from himself.

This primary process-like experience is dominated by the pleasure principle. The psychic energy flows free and easy with a tendency towards a possible immediate elimination of tensions. Freely moving occupations as well as a constant readiness for hallucinatory satisfactions favour this tendency. As the subject develops, this primary existence is then pushed more and more into the background; the so-called secondary processes are dominated by the reality principle, which presumes an ability to postpone immediate pleasure and requires the fixing of attentions onto constant objects as well as the canalization of energies.

We can speak of an “I” only after the formation and development of secondary process differentiations since the fundamental achievement of this developmental stage is just the discernment of the *I* from the *Not-I*. It is in this connection that we speak of establishment of the I-limits.

However, the primary process-like experiences are not altogether abandoned but only pushed underground—in our daily life—by the predominance of the secondary processes.

It develops freely only in certain reserves of experience, e.g. in dreams, daydreams, fantasies, as well as in states of so-called “alternative consciousness” which we consider to be the activity of the “It.”

To the secondary process-like competences belong, among other things, the logical, thinking, and articulated, mainly in speech, with its incompatibility with contraries; the capacity for renunciation and restriction; the command of syntax and semantics with their correlation of systematization, hierarchization, and polarization; the postponement of sensual satisfactions and the investigation of reality with its correlation of differentiation between exigence and satisfaction.⁵

⁵ By this we intend the distinction and separation between a desire and its realization, and between an opinion and its reality content.

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With the development of the latter abilities, all that had been dominant in the primary process experience is but incompatible with the new order; the non-separation and confusion of objects, over-determinations, the plastic imagery of all experience, alogical non-hierarchies (ordered, graded), non-polarized connections, coexistence of contraries, arbitrary investment of things and ideas with imaginary meanings and affective content, the exchangeability of parts of the whole, and the lack of categorization.

This gradual passage from one way of being to another is already a result of a confrontation between the subject and his environmental conditions, since it means his integration into a social structure of intersubject behaviour forms and into the symbolic order of his cultural community; and it forces him to submit his pleasure principle to the reality principle and to develop differentiating functions of the "I."

The secondary process competences are expanded as functions of this symbolic order.

The elevated and inevitable conflictuality of this process conditions its course not as a linear development but as a fight with a variable and most ambivalent result, the primary way of being regulated by the pleasure, which had been pushed into the underground, acts subversively, from down there, on the symbolic order, the reality principle incarnate.

Therefore, the primary process remains dominant only in the subconscious, but it pervades and subverts the whole domain of the "secondary." In the subject's dreams and fantasies it gains the status of a lost paradise.

As we can see, the price paid by the subject for the development of the ability to differentiate between the *I* and the *Not-I* consists in an inner split: the polarization of *I* and *It*. When psychoanalysis speaks of "the decentralization of the subject," it intends this duplication.

In the following essay, we hope to evidenciate those factors in the subject's development which may be considered the roots of the imaginary.

A really fundamental role is played by *looks*. Even in the undifferentiating stage in which the recognition of self is still indivisible from the experience of the other, the mother's touch and look cause the first affective realization of one's own body,

or a kind of corporal self.⁶ At this stage, the child experiences himself as the mother reflects him in her touch or look.⁷ There lie the psychogenetic bases of the “*esse = percipi*.” This particular type of reflection by the mother decides the affective equipment of the child’s first sensual experiences of his own bodily self.

The way of the “mirror” remains decisive, even later when particular type of reflection by the mother decides the affective possession of his own body into a complete image of his own body and self.

In order to experience his own body as an organized and perceptible form, he must be seen also from “the outside,” from a distance.

The child lives this experience in the so-called mirror phase.⁸ The discovery of his own mirror reflection—here his *own* look becomes the medium of the experience—proves to be just as fundamental to the cognitive equipment of the real self as the mother’s look was for its affective investment.

Both experiences together lead to an internalization of the first body image which can be considered the basis of the self image. The body image is therefore composed of the investments acquired by the look of another as well as those acquired by the child’s own look.

If we try to reduce the acquisition of the self image to only its cognitive dimension or its perceptibility, it proves insufficient and falsifies the perspective. The discovery that the mirror reflection is an image of self can become of such a decisive importance and influence because it renders possible the first

⁶ As Freud has already stressed, the self in this phase is again totally a corporal self. Cf. Freud, *Das Ich und das Es*. See also M.S. Mahler, F. Pine and A. Bergmann, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, New York 1975, part II, chap. IV, and part IV, chap. 15.

⁷ See D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, *op. cit.*, chap. 9.

⁸ I refer particularly to Lacan’s research on the mirror stage. I have, however, developed a different notion of the imaginary to that of Lacan. My concept refers to all products of the imagination and, rather closer to Winnicott’s concept, it embraces the productive creative force of the imaginary. It is not so strongly linked to the unconscious as that of Lacan and is less influenced by the rather negative connotations which Lacan attributes to it, where the imaginary shows itself above all in the non-recognition, the remoteness, of the truth of the subject.

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identification of one's own body as a definite and well organized structured unit of one's own self. A very important factor is that all this happens in a period in which the subject, lacking as yet control of his movements, experiences his body as uncoordinated and himself as helpless, dependent, and confused with his environment and other subjects.

Therefore, the definite and organized unit is still an illusion as far as this experience is concerned; but even so, it engenders the wish and the ability to overcome lack of movement coordination and dependence by recognition of limits.

The mirror image of self, in its discrepancy to the experience of self, has the double function of *conquest* and *anticipation*. (And, we would like to add, instrumentality. The body image represents an essential means of coordination of our movements and thus the basis of our behaviour).

In this way the subject also acquired his first capacity of representation, though only a pictorial and not yet a conceptual one, but it enables him to establish a relationship with reality by "doubling it, whether it consists of his own body or of other persons or even of objects around him."⁹

This structure of the mirror experience becomes internalized as a matrix for further self-experiences; the difference between the self-image and the inner reality remains constitutive of the consciousness of self. In order to uphold the agreement between self and image of self, any discrepant experience must be excluded.

The influence of the imaginary becomes evident for the first time with the following essential event: from now on the excluded and off-limits will express its yearning for recognition in image representation.

It comes back in fantasies of a body broken into pieces, in images of detached independent parts of that body, of organs endowed with individual life, of fusion and confusion of single parts of the body with certain objects in the natural environment, and so on. In these fantasies the desire for freedom from the borders of the *I*, the wish to return to the experience of an unlimited fusion with the environment, as well as fears of a

⁹ Lacan, *Ecrits*, I, Seuil/Points, p. 90.

disintegration of self appear.

As far as experience and representation of self are concerned, the fantasy about a body broken in pieces, just as the mirror image, is very ambivalent indeed.

III. SELF EXPERIENCE AND SELF REPRESENTATION

The relation to self acquired in the mirror stage gives only one structure, or as J. Lacan calls it, one “matrix” which constitutes the entire and the only connection with self.

Besides, this structure formed by delimitations and exclusions remains to serve in the subject’s social relationships since they are based on the very same ability, favoured by the consciousness of one’s own body as a limited entity, the differentiation between *I* and *Not-I*, and therefore the emergence from the original symbiosis.

During this process of individuation the symbiotic dependence changes slowly into the need of recognition in which the original dependence internalized itself.

This recognition is the condition necessary for the survival of self in both meanings of the word: constitution and preservation. It is an intrinsic part of a complex relation of interactions based on the matrix of the mirror experience.

The Other is already experienced in a complex duplication, as a real interaction partner and as an internalized Other since what is also internalized is a kind of “image” of the Other which defines the recognition just as much as the Other’s actual actions and exigences.

This desire of recognition or approval activates in the subject the social norms for I-identity and world differentiation.

The Other—and since the internalization of his image, the subject himself also—will approve of, recognize, or even perceive above all these portions of himself that can comply with these norms.

Therefore, at the earliest stage the recognition or approval by the Other refers to the subject as he is and only later changes into expecting him to be as he should be.

In this phase, just as in the foregoing mirror phase, the

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anticipation is the base for the building of self.

The result is double: in order to be approved, the subject must set himself up as something he is not, or not yet, and on this foundation construct his identity.

It means that he must eliminate everything that does not correspond to rules of the symbolic social order transmitted to him by the Other.

Only by eliminations can the subject become what he should be, but they separate him from some essential parts of himself.

On the other hand, since it is the only way to acquire an Identity within this symbolic order, the moment of estrangement from self is also the moment of constitution of this identity.

However both anticipation and elimination are also decided by the internalized image of the Other, and thus we always come back to the imaginary.

It follows that the very constitution of a subject with the capacity for perceiving himself as a definite *I* or even saying “*I*” would be impossible without the participation of the imaginary. This capacity to say “*I*” grows proportionately to the subject’s success in giving up the symbiosis with his environment. The development of an *I*-identity is connected with the renunciation of the symbiosis imposed by society.

Now we can add a point to the polarization of the two ways of being and obtain three poles: non-differentiation—differentiation; pleasure principle—reality principle; symbiosis—individuation.

The renunciation of symbiosis, absolutely necessary for individuation, is hardly voluntary and therefore must be coped with and mastered.

In the following paragraphs I shall endeavor to explain how this accomplishment of coping and mastering is taken over by the imaginary.

IV. THE INTERMEDIATE FIELD¹⁰

The absence of the mother represents the original menace to the symbiotic unity. Because of his total dependence the child ex-

¹⁰ What follows refers to the theory of the intermediate field developed by Winnicott.

periences it as a menace to his very existence and reacts with fear. The endurance of a necessary and limited absence has to be learned slowly and at a great expense of energy. The process of learning this is the only way leading to the experience of oneself as something separate from the environment.

Thus, a play area forms gradually between the child and his mother, a space which Winnicott calls "the intermediate field." The borders of this play area remain very plastic at first since the child redesigns them again and again according to his striving for dependence or autonomy as well as according to external exigences.

Winnicott thinks the imaginary is rooted in this intermediate field and he develops a differentiated play theory based on his experience in this area.

From the viewpoint of psychogenesis, the intermediate field might be considered as an area of imaginary testing and conquest of exigences and tasks presented by intersubjectivity.

This space, at first developed within the symbiotic relationship, prepares the way for a gradual detachment from symbiosis and the establishment of borders of the *I*; therefore, its primary function is the subject's autonomy.

Winnicott's studies show that in order to achieve the gradual abandonment of symbiosis and to separate the *I* from the *Not-I*, the baby uses certain objects which he endows with imaginary contents.

The primary function of these so-called "transit objects" consists precisely in filling with the imaginary *just* the space which begins to extend between the *I* and the *Not-I* during the detachment from symbiosis; cuddly animals or rags are excellent as transit objects.

A classic example is given by Freud's reel of thread.¹¹ The choosing and forming of such objects represents the beginning of symbol forming; therefore, one of the most important achievements of the intermediate area is the development of the ability to symbolize.

The child experiences the transit objects or first objects he perceives already as *Not-I*, but not yet really separate from

¹¹ In *Freud: Jenseits des Lustprinzips*.

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himself. Winnicott considers this *paradox*—the term is his—to be constitutive for the intermediate area; whatever happens in it is regarded by the subject as at once inside and outside, as taking place at its borders and so he plays with them, crossing constantly from side to side.

In this sense we are dealing here with illusory experiences which can render the subject free from pressures of reality by placing him in a “protection zone”—in a no-man’s land between *I* and *Not-I*. Seen from the outside, from the perspective of differentiations already quite formed, the subject lives in this area in a state of permanent creation of illusions.

The requirement to discern between being and seeming to be has no value here; on the contrary, we have a creative activity which liberates the subject from the task of seeing the inner and the outer reality as separate but interdependent.¹²

However, in the intermediate area the subject’s behaviour is not the same as in the state of non-differentiation.

This behaviour includes elements of both the primary and the secondary phase of the subject and the most characteristic thing is that they do not inevitably contrast each other.

The border between them is, for the moment, indefinite. According to Winnicott, this area remains valid even in later life; it is the soil which contains the roots of creativity.

Even later in life the borders of *I*, as dividers between the inner and the outer reality, are set aside in the intermediate area without simply re-introducing primary forms of behaviour. This is the reason why the essential interactions and mediation processes between the subject’s two ways of being take place in that area. Strictly speaking, it is not only a simple mediation between the two domains, but also something more and something different.

It is a question of what will be included into and what excluded from one’s own self, i.e. the *creative constitution* of one’s own limits.

Whatever happens in the intermediate area has the character of a blue print for the future, with designing itself being a product of an interaction between both domains as well as the motive

¹² See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, *op. cit.*

for change in their relationship.

The function of the intermediate field might be compared here with the creative function of the mirror image outlined above. The theory of the "intermediate area" demonstrates (on another level) the linkage of the function of the imaginary with the problems of the borders of *I* already pointed out in the theses concerning the mirror phase. The function of this field regarding the *I*-borders is very complex and ambiguous; it has a part in their establishment but also in the solution of the problems intrinsic in this delimitation and, last but not least, with the re-insertion of the excluded in the relaxing of the borders or in establishing new ones on a much wider scale.

V. THE IMAGINARY AND ITS FUNCTIONS

In the considerations above we may already perceive the basic outline of psychogenesis of the imaginary.

Both in the mirror phase and in the intermediate area essential achievements in the subject's development had been made possible by the influence of the imaginary.

In both cases the subject pretends to be something he is not, or anyway, not yet, and so starts on the road to change.

Imaginary designs of self become a creative basis of the *I*-identity. Characteristically, the imaginary serves always to correct a shortcoming.

The image of the body helps to overcome the motorial uncoordination; in the intermediate area transit objects help to conquer the fear resulting from the absence of the mother in the symbiotic state and finally to renounce symbiosis.

These achievement efforts are accompanied by a really impressive cross-work of cognitive and affective functions. The intervention of the imaginary may be considered in at least one case as the first step in the development of the cognitive functions of consciousness. The ability to experience oneself as a definite entity, acquired through the internalization of the body image, and the ability acquired by way of the transit objects to differentiate between *I* and *Not-I*; these two create the premises of our logical thinking and therefore of our entrance into the

symbolic order. However another essential point for the subject's development is the capacity to react with the imaginary to the causes of imperfection, e.g. to displeasure and fear, insufficiency and threats, during the state of dependence in symbiosis. In the course of this development brought about by the imaginary, the cognitive and affective functions have been merged with each other irreversibly.

In the mirror stage the representation ability is developed as the first premise for leaving the symbiosis. The internalized body image must be considered an affective as well as a cognitive achievement. It helps, in the literal and also in the figurative sense, to "move away" from the mother. When the child then begins (in the intermediate area) to people the space now extending between her or himself with imaginary objects—not quite *I* any more, but not quite *Not-I* either—then he is working on the affective problems brought about by the renunciation of symbiosis and acquiring meanwhile the differentiation competence which he needs outside of symbiosis. While directing imaginary stagings with objects created by himself, he achieves in the intermediate area a sovereignty he will never have outside this area, but which will still have a constructive influence on his everyday behaviour.

The close connection of affective and cognitive components in the psychogenesis of the imaginary has an undeniable consequence for the status ascribed to the imaginary: this linkage opposes the theory of the imaginary as antithesis to the consciousness of reality; on the contrary, it demonstrates emphatically the contribution of the imaginary in the formation of the said consciousness.

From the point of view of psychogenesis the main function of the imaginary consists in its contribution to the acquisition of fundamental functions of the *I* and to the establishment of its borders. In this way the imaginary helps the self-forming subject in his striving for autonomy, since it promotes not only the passage out of the indifferentiation stage but also the various functions of consciousness, as for example the capacity for representation and for creating symbols.

In this sense the subject's imaginary activities in the intermediate field are steps leading to transcendence of reality with

the help of the imaginary. During this process the imaginary acquires a most ambivalent status which has to be defined with greater precision, since until now we have emphasized above all the functions useful for the construction of the limits of *I* and for the insertion in the symbolic order.

The study of the mirror phase has already shown that the imaginary is being used not only in the definition of the *I* but also, through the nightmare of the body hacked to pieces, in the representation of what has been excluded. It seems to serve just as well as a stabilizer as a subversive of borders.

This ambivalent status of the imaginary becomes more and more pronounced as the subject develops. While at first the border-forming functions stand out, as the formation and strength of the *I* increase, so do the functions whose scope is the loosening of the borders. During the subject's development, as its imposition of differentiations grows stricter and its requirements of the exclusion of any primitive experience stronger, the imaginary has to bring the subject in touch with the excluded parts of himself and to gain them possibly even an entrance to consciousness. When the borders between *I* and *Not-I* already exist, their further stabilization becomes less important than the restoring to the subject of some of the domains excluded from the *I*. Even when we consider this as a process of re-designing the borders, the emphasis rests on the reinclusion of the excluded.

Now the dialectics of stabilization and subversion makes the impression less of contrasting functions than the far superior one of a constitution of a decentered subjectivity as such. Evidently this formation of the subject requires the establishment of permanent borders and this will not succeed if we do not concede certain activity and intelligence to the excluded as the great renewal reserve. However, only constant crossing of the borders or even a delimitation of the subject can render this possible. The imaginary, with its double function of being off-limits itself and abolishing the limits, allows for this necessity. Its ambivalent status is rooted in the polarization of two ways of being, in the decentralization of the subject.

These basic functions of the imaginary manifest themselves the strongest in the space reserved, so to speak, for its free development: the intermediate field. Although there also it serves

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mostly to test and stabilize the borders of *I*, its lasting function consists in their temporary loosening or even suspension to give way to new and creative formation. Thus the intermediate field becomes the area in which the subject tries to transform his excentric position and put it to creative use.

In the intermediate field the imaginary becomes a medium and a means through which the two poles of the subject's way of life can meet and communicate with each other. Seen like this it proves to be a half-way bridge over the abyss created in the subject by his decentralization with its own dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. And so the imaginary seems to be a domain which the subject had to create for himself in order to conquer its decentralization and to transform a lack and deprivation into an incentive to creative activity.

VI. LANGUAGE AND SYMBOL

So far we have purposely excluded another conquest of the subject's development, a conquest that may be considered the motor and carrier of the second and secondary way of being: the language. We can start with the statement that our whole subjectivity is marked by language. J. Lacan maintains even—as we all know—that the subconscious is structured like a language.¹³

On the basis of the capacity to invent and use symbols, acquired through the transition objects, language develops into a primary medium of the symbolic order and therefore of the secondary processes. But the double function of the imaginary in the intermediate field penetrates the whole symbol area and, therefore, the language as well. Under special conditions, language can become a medium through which what is excluded from the symbolic order might express itself or even communicate.

Thus the fundamental ambiguity of the subject expressed in the polarization of the two ways of being infiltrates into the language, too: it is constituted as a *double meaning structure*.

¹³ Lacan, *Ecrits*, in particular "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage" and "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient."

In speech we can always use the possibility to double the evident, generally secondary, meaning of words by a hidden meaning which expresses something that must stay excluded from the evident one—mostly something primary. In everyday speech these two meaning levels are in precise hierarchical order. One uses consciously only the evident meaning, while the hidden one acts in the back of one's mind. This corresponds to the normal relationship between the included and the excluded. The suppressed and the excluded appear only exceptionally, as a blunder of the evident meaning, a slip of the tongue—but even then not as a conscious meaning.

The dynamic relationship between the primary and the secondary processes or between *it* and the *I* forces might also manifest itself in a less “peaceful” order of evident and hidden meanings. It happens when the meaning's primary parts participate visibly in the conscious *formation* of our speaking and so push into the domain of communication. The double-meaning structure is then used in a significant way, in contrast with everyday language. To these formations belong dreams and—above all—cultural phenomena; the latter differ from the former in that they bring the intra-subjective dialogue (rooted in a double meaning), which is between the subject's divided areas, into the domain of intersubjectivity.

Within the language the significant use of the double meaning is entrusted to the symbol;¹⁴ the way it operates guards the genetic and structural contact with the formation of the imaginary in the intermediate field. The transition objects then influenced the subjectivity just like the symbols do now: through being neither only representatives nor simply represented.

The fact that the ability to create symbols developed out of the formation of the imaginary in the intermediate field, makes the symbols into real conveyors of that field even later on. Since in that field there is always promotion or creation going on of a relationship between the domains of the primary and the secondary, the symbols must take on a double function: they must be apt to receive *it*, like contents, and at the same time to

¹⁴ We will use here Paul Ricoeur's concept of symbol. See: *De l'Interprétation; Essai sur Freud*, Paris 1965, book I, chapt. 1 and book III, chapt. 4.

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transform it to fit the requirements of the secondary. It means that the symbols in the intermediate field may never be simple products of a primary process, but they must express them. Therefore their *modus operandi* can be bracketed neither as primary nor as secondary, not even when they are figures of speech.

These functions condition the symbol's structures and form and thus the pregnant construction of the imaginary. In this sense the symbols render possible a specific experience of meaningful coordination of the inner and the exterior reality as well as of the primary and secondary process. This mediatorship is included in their structure and renders it communicable. Their specific virtue lies above all not in the destructive rapport between the manifest meaning and the hidden one, but in the capacity to signify the one and the other at the same time.

If we follow Winnicott in placing the cultural objects in the intermediate field, then its bylaws are valid for them and for their symbols as well. Although they must take on the inter-subjective communicability—which does not concern the other, mostly strictly private symbols of the intermediate field—they constitute, like the latter, a *third degree* level. Even the poetic language itself opens on the “intermediate field” of speech, i.e. it becomes a medium of a third degree speaking.

VII. POETIC LANGUAGE AS INTERMEDIATE FIELD OF SPEECH

1. *The Validity of the Theory*

Every attempt to place poetic language in an intermediate field of speech must accept the consequent exclusion from the domain of the secondary. At first it must astonish us greatly, since according to such premise poetic language slips below the quality of everyday speech. There exist already well known theories which try to define poetic language according to its difference from everyday speech, but there the difference is made to appear as a result of a phenomenological description, while we have proved it to be functional.

Such a functional theory must of course be proved to be general. Can we follow Winnicott's conclusion that, since the psychogenesis of the imaginary takes place in the intermediate field, the cultural objects may also be rooted there? The fact that poetic language presupposes every differentiation of the secondary domain renders the above assertion very doubtful; or does it? In other words: what is the basic difference between a child forming his first symbols in the intermediate field before he can speak at all and an adult manipulating the highly differentiated symbol system of poetic language? Why should this also take place in the intermediate field? And if we accept the fundamental thesis of the intermediate shouldn't it stay limited to certain forms of poetic work? Or shouldn't we at least divide them into chronological or specific categories according to the degree of deviation of their poetic language from everyday speech? In the course of ages and in certain categories poetic speech does seem to belong definitely to the domain of the secondary.

In this essay I propose to forego such differentiations, possible and fruitful though they be, and to defend the thesis of the intermediary origins as strongly and as comprehensively as Winnicott asserts it. Therefore I consider historical and specific differences as internal divisions by function and method within the intermediate field and not as limitations of the theory's validity.

The advantages of this procedure are particularly evident when we consider the aspect of communication, since in the intermediate field there are separate rules not only for the production, but also for communication and reception. This protects the parallelism of the individual and the collective orders: just as in the ontogenesis the intermediate field assumed diversified functions which are reflected in the various products of imagination, so also will the cultural development demonstrate the quantity and variability in the forms of the imaginary.

Thus we can say, concerning the novel, that its language, serving the constitution of integrated subjectivity, at first stayed relatively close to the everyday world and everyday speech, while when this form of subjectivity is broken up and connected again with its hidden roots, the language turns closer and closer to the primary. The poetic language can come nearer to the

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primary psychogenetic function of the imaginary or go further away from it, at will. Just so can it put more emphasis on constitution and formation than on dissolution of the subject borders—according to historical needs and understanding of self. But its tendency is to do both together. The nearer it comes to the excluded, the more will it detach itself from everyday speech and the more primary qualities it will assume.

In this way the once concrete language of a famous historical text is not only in a dialogue relationship with everyday language of this context, but also with the traditions of the poetical speech to which it forms a relation. The intermediate field develops psychogenetically and assigns to the imaginary always different functions; and so does the cultural intermediate field change and develop. An analysis of poetic language from the perspective of its position in the intermediate field will show, above all, qualities and possibilities deriving from the psychogenetic function of the intermediate field: the integrative formation of the not-yet-formed or of the excluded, and the influence of this formation on the borders of subjectivity.

2. Poetic Language and the Borders of Subjectivity

We have shown that in the intermediate field the capacity to give the imaginary a symbolic form and pregnancy plays a decisive role from the very beginning. Literature accepts this psychogenetic function of symbolization, channels it and inserts it into a collective framework. The collective formation of the imaginary in the medium of poetic language creates the subjectivity of an epoch like the first language symbols create the development of the subject.

In the collective as well as in the individual intermediate field the imaginary as the Other of the real insists on change in the subjectivity. In the formation of the imaginary poetic language influences the borders of the epoch's subjectivity as well as the borders of the subjects linked with it in production or reception. And so it gives reality to the actions of the imaginary. Through the anticipatory and integratory formation of the undifferentiated and excluded, this language participates in the process of per-

manent constitution of subjectivity. With this it puts in parenthesis not only the borders of the real world but the borders of the language as well.

The influence on the borders of subjectivity is exercised through differentiation of experience, since the presence of the excluded in the language or, even more, its acceptance into the manifest meaning appeals to the subconscious rendering it perceptible and therefore changeable. In proportion to the degree in which the conscious mind transforms this experience or steers a primary experience into a manifest meaning, it changes also, through its differentiation, the borders of subjectivity. In this aspect of differentiating formation of the excluded we find again the double function characteristic of the intermediate field: by accepting the excluded the conscious loosens the borders of subjectivity, and by its formation it reconstructs them. Thus the poetic language acts in a way characteristic of the intermediate field as stabilizer and subversive at the same time; not only in regard to the borders of subjectivity but also to those of the language: poetic language is subversive, since it undermines the language's typical secondary order by bringing the primary excluded into the intersubjective language domain; it is also stabilizing, since this subversion and the pregnant formation of the excluded leads to the differentiation of the language and of the consciousness.

This is all rendered possible by—among other factors—the fact that the poetic language puts at our disposal the public protection area of the speech which temporarily sets aside the borders between *I* and *It*, i.e. between the primary and the secondary even in the language itself and so can promote integrative change even outside this protective zone. This public refuge is guaranteed by freedom from the pressures of the daily world and from the temptations of reality characteristic of the whole intermediate field. This concerns the production as well as the reception. Indeed, the poetic language often gets its aesthetic qualities just from this free space it has created by suspending the order of everyday language. This freedom from rules of common speech and the constitution of its own internal rules release a high creativity potential.

Amazingly, the most important utilization of this free zone, i.e. the farthest deviation from the common language, goes in two

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directions: either towards extreme stabilization and formation, i.e. a strict *limitation and structurization* of the language materials, or towards the total breakdown of syntax and semantics as fragmentarization and subversion of customary interpretations, i.e. *destructurization*. Thus the play area which in the intermediate field stands open for the speech, is particularly utilized just by the so-called highly structured texts. It happens also with the purposeful stylization of language, e.g. in poems or classic tragedies as well as in the dissolution of language in the highly structured texts of the present century.¹⁵

In this manner the coexistence of construction limitation and infraction of limits characteristic of the intermediate field is reflected in the language.

Giving the excluded a linguistic form is the main function of the poetic language; but the fulfilment of it requires particular qualities. I intend to gather them in the formula of the "significant use of the double meaning structure."

As explained above, the excluded has always had a place in our speech as a secret hidden meaning. But it penetrates into the domain of significant factors only under particular conditions (e.g. in blunders or slips of the tongue in the manifest text).

Poetic language has developed its own procedure in satisfying these conditions. It musters its symbolic functions strategically so that the symbols present within their manifest meaning also a hidden one, without degrading the manifest into a simple carrier of the secret.

The symbol's affective qualities play a decisive role in this process. Positive and negative appeals are directed to the receiver's subconscious, touch his excluded area or even change it. The affective influence on the excluded is far stronger and more dominant than the cognitive one. It might extend over a wide area as a subconscious activity.

The entrance into consciousness, on the contrary, asks for a more complex strategy. It requires, among others, that the ex-

¹⁵ These last-mentioned texts take into account the "primary" usage of the language: that which corresponds to the historic change in the function of the imaginary. In these texts the question is that of reintegrating the excluded. To examine them a psychogenetic theory of the imaginary would be particularly pertinent—but we will not enter into this argument.

cluded be not aggregated as a hidden meaning, but inserted into the manifest one in such a manner that it might be experienced consciously and even provoke a decoding. At this point we should insert the whole phenomenology of the mechanism of the imaginary in the intermediate field.¹⁶ For our immediate purpose we have to keep in mind only the fact that the use of the double-meaning structure is one of the aesthetic qualities of the poetic language. What counts in the intermediate field is not the enhancement of the subconscious, but a playful, imaginative and active manipulation of whatever in this area demands expression. The intermediary speech does not use the linguistic double meaning to the advantage of the two polar means of expression, but promotes the relaxation of the borders of both of them and the free interchange between them; the symbolic order of language so becomes infiltrated and differentiated by primary processes. As we see even in the intermediate area stabilization and subversion are not opposites.

The poetic language stretches in all directions the borders of our speech, since what happens inside the intermediate field affects all that's outside of it. Even when the evident meaning has a purely secondary form, poetry expresses the imaginary and gains thereby a hidden dimension pointing above and beyond the secondary order. Of course it applies even more to poetic structures showing the qualities characteristic of the primary, and so demonstrates their closeness to the subconscious.

The essential quality of poetic speech is its inclusion of the excluded in a domain of intersubjective value. This is the fundamental difference between poetry and dreams or other forms of double meaning, which also refer significantly to the *latent*. In contrast to "private fantasies" produced strictly for private use and enjoyment, the "institutionalized fantasies" introduce the excluded to society. Poetic language is a medium which bestows speech on the "speechless" and helps them to be publicly recognized.

¹⁶ An initial attempt at the concrete analysis of texts founded on these premises can be found in my book *Samuel Becketts Endspiel mit der Subjektivität—Entwurf einer Psychoästhetik des modernen Theaters*, Stuttgart, 1981 and in "Das augenlause Schweigen—Zur Subjektivität in Virginia Woolfs *The Waves*," J. Cremerius, W. Mauser, C. Pietzcker, F. Wyatt, eds. *Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche*, Frankfurt, 1981.

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Therefore according to a language theory based on the concept of the “intermediate field” these border crossings become a particular quality of poetics.

In the intermediate field beside the transgression of the language borders regarding the excluded or the primary, the altogether essential border crossing is the one between *I* and *Not-I*, which may be immediately conceived to be a result of the original differentiations between *I* and *Not-I*. I am thinking above all of one phenomenon: the producer of this language who leaves it in order to let speak imaginary figures or voices, negates his *I* in a speech which however does not become a *Not-I*.

If we add to it the extreme use of this detachment of language from the speaker’s *I* in contemporary texts (in which even the unity and identifiability of the speaking figures is dissolved) then we see clearly that it is precisely the language that creates many possibilities for transgression of subject borders.

This possibility of dissolving the ties of the language to a speaking subject and of making it produce contents transcending the subject’s borders corresponds to a central function of the intermediate field: by using this possibility the language installs itself in a borderland between *I* and *Not-I* typical for this area. Or, from the opposite point of view: the intermediate field supplies the psychogenetic foundation for the sketchy products of the typical language dynamics and for their intrinsic potential to speak as *I* on behalf of the *Not-I*.

3. The Process of Reception

We said that the subject of poetic language negates itself in order to let imaginary figures speak who are not altogether *I* and not entirely *Not-I*; similarly, the reader will have to dissolve the borders of his *I* for the duration of the process of reception, in order to identify the mentality and the world of imaginary figures. His own self retreats into the background before them and enters into complex blending processes with them. In this sense the relation between reader and text is never that between subject and object, because the act of reading

abolishes temporarily the separation of subject and object. This corresponds exactly to a central function of the intermediate field, and during the reception procedure the reader places himself in that area. What's more, the aesthetic attitude makes him dispense with a great number of the troubles and temptations of reality. In a "willing suspension of belief" he renders easier the conditions for the reception of latent contents, just as he would for the temporary loosening or shifting of his own borders. This disposition facilitates the formation of the imaginary and the differentiation of the excluded (both functions of the poetic language), since it increases the predisposition for the reception of the excluded by placing the reader in the intermediate field and so lowering the barriers of the unconscious. However the important thing is—we repeat—not to make the subconscious conscious, but to make the borders of the subject's own *I* more flexible by opening them to the contents presented by poetic language and by immersion in a world of imaginary figures.

For that, poetic language uses a complex strategy. If it wants to manipulate the borders of subjectivity, as required by its own psychogenetic foundation, it must take into particular consideration the subject's two modalities of being. It faces the recipient with speech which not only appeals to the *I* and *It* parts of his subjectivity, but also links them both into dialogue relationship to each other.

This is done through a significant use of the communicative potential embodied in the double meaning. For the communication to succeed, the poet must take into account the decentralization of the receiving subject; i.e. hidden contents with a strong appeal to the receiver's subconscious must be presented through a manifest meaning which will make them experienceable, without exposing them to the danger of rejection; because the consequence of the subject's ambivalent attitude regarding everything excluded consists in his feeling both attraction and revulsion at the confrontation with a language in which even the excluded becomes experienceable. These defensive attitudes of the subject must be also either breached or dodged.

For example, all processes of distortion of primary contents take into account this fundamental ambivalence of the aesthetic experience. The principal condition of poetic language is that it

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must be put, at least partially, in a meaningful order, even in its manifest contents; this condition implies that the latent contents and their correspondent experience will be not only distorted but also revised in a way relevant to intersubjectivity.

This cultural revision of the excluded in poetics corresponds to the individual handling and working out of problems resulting from the renunciation of primary experiences. It is a continuation of the editing begun in the intermediate field, now institutionalized and public-directed.

The recipient is exposed not only to the influence of the excluded or the primary; but each of his own individual forms of editing or even each conflict are confronted with the corresponding historical forms of cultural editing. This process creates, out of institutionalized fantasies, an area of cultural reactions to the eccentric position of the subject, that is an area of continuous change of subjectivity. In this area the influence of the subject's linguistic borders acquire particular importance. In the process of reception the recipient's language is confronted with the poetic one. This confrontation becomes especially significant when the poetic language differs from his own. However this thesis must be immediately defined: in the recipient's aesthetic attitude, in his own position in the intermediate field is already implicit the expectation of a dialogue situation with particular rules and the use of poetical language differing from everyday speech. This means that the recipient's everyday language is not the first to be brought into the dialogue with the poetic language, since in the intermediate fields its validity, together with that of the everyday world, are set aside. In its stead the recipient's intermediary competence, and specifically his competence in poetic language, participates in the dialogue. I mean first of all his own internalized cultural experiences and here particularly the experiences with the poetic language. Only indirectly, and by means of these experiences, can he achieve a secondary dialogue with everyday speech.

In this connection we stumble again over a paradox typical of the intermediate field: during the subject's development the language becomes more and more dialogue-like and *one* of the functions of the intermediate field consists in promoting this ability to dialogue; but the dialogue with the poetic language

often takes place in a *modus* of incommunication. Aesthetic experiences take place mainly where the intermediary competence or the poetic linguistic competence jostle against their walls. Generally the first symptom of this is the irritation provoked by poetic language when it does not satisfy the expectations regarding poetic speech.

One of the functions of poetic language consists in differentiation of the subject's general dialogue capacity. Its apparent paradox consists precisely in its ability to increase the general capacity for dialogue even when the immediate or well known and liked dialogue structure breaks down. The productive potential of this paradox is based on the language's capacity for polyvalence; since the manifest text allows excessive determinations or in extreme cases may deny even the simple meaning, it allows free way for production and communication of manifold potential meanings. Such manipulation of language in the intermediate field leads to a differentiation of the potential handling of language in general and results in this way in an extension of the subject's language borders—even outside the intermediate field. This is virtually the material basis of that subtle playing with the borders of subjectivity.

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