

What is the raw material of the psychic apparatus

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Abstract: To investigate the specificity of the psychological distress nowadays, beginning this discussion in the psychoanalysis' raw material. Thus, we are aiming at different kinds of therapeutic intervention which escapes from a model that has, in the representative universe, its biggest reference. Moreover, we will work out the distinction between material reality and psychic reality and analyze the terms *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* as indicators of different forms of psychic elaboration

Keywords: psychoanalysis, psychic elaboration, *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung*.

The decision on which the epistemological perspective of psychoanalysis is inserted, both in the conceptual and clinical context, engenders a heated discussion, transcending, many times, the psychoanalytic field itself. This discussion refers and, in a certain way reedits, the argument established at the end of the nineteenth-century regarding the privilege of the body over the soul or vice-versa, expressed in the famous division between Nature Sciences and Human Sciences. Depending on the option, different models of understanding the human being are established. As a result of this conception, we are currently witnessing attempts to classify psychoanalysis within the most diverse frameworks, or even, to situate moments of its conceptual plot according to certain orientations, running the risk of considering the Psychoanalysis as a world view. In this sense, for example, we passed by a Freud seen as adept of vitalism to a Freud supporting an idealistic reading of unconscious motivations or, a Freud who would have conceived the unconscious within an eminently biological perspective. Certainly, each point of view imply not only in a way to think of psychic disturbances but also a model of clinical intervention.

The main objective of this article is, from the discussion on the raw material of psychoanalysis, to approach a series of questions referring to the specificity of the psychic distress that we face in the contemporaneity. Thus, we seek to achieve different kinds of therapeutic intervention for the mental health professional. This is a urgent necessity nowadays in consequence of the patients' care inserted in what is designated as contemporary psychopathology, namely: compulsions, phobias, panic disorder, among others (Herzog & Pacheco-Ferreira, 2014), and keeping in mind that a point of view will be privileged.

In a previous article (Herzog, 2011b), we examined the question based on an epistemological perspective, analyzing how the various “isms” — materialism, idealism, vitalism and others — firstly operate as keys of reading with which psychoanalysis is practiced and thought of. Taking into account the subversion promoted by Freud when questioning some dichotomies present in the thoughts of his time — such as normal/pathological, word/thing, *logos/pathos*, representable/unrepresentable — we defend the idea that his thought would be more finely in tune with the materialistic perspective. Several paths provide themselves to support this position and we chose to approach it from the Freudian conception of reality. Since the beginning of psychoanalysis, Freud has been involved with this question, seeking to legitimize the unconscious and confer a form of existence to it. For this purpose, he made the distinction between psychic reality and material reality, using the terms *Realität* and *Wircklichkeit*.

Because of this provision, and as a consequence of the discussion undertaken at the time, we saw ourselves facing the challenge of dealing with the following question: What is the specificity of the distinction between psychic reality and material reality? Is this a simple relationship of opposition? Or would this distinction have the greater purpose of ratifying its topical dualism? Perhaps ontological? What is the purpose of such differentiation? And regardless of the answer, what code does the matter on which these two realities act/operate? These questions emerged from the materialistic perspective that we defend in relation to the conceptual plot of Freud and that we tried to answer in the text.

However, here is a caveat: in Freud's work cannot be found the systematic use of these two words to mark the distinction between two species of reality, although several terms have been adopted. Therefore, despite preferentially employing the term *Wircklichkeit* to designate material reality, Freud does not use it with

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much rigor along his texts. And, another question: how does this apparent lack of rigor conciliate with the attention of the author to give up on the words? After all, his posture in this respect is well known: “pleases me to avoid making concessions to weakness. One can never say how far this path will lead us; it first cedes in words and then, little by little, in substance too” (Freud, 1921/1976, p. 117). Therefore, we tend to consider that this use of terms without so much rigor is expressive of its refusal to maintain a sealed division, or even a relationship of conceptual opposition, between these two realities. It is always worthy to remember that, in the seek to legitimize the unconscious, Freud’s greater target (1915/1974) was not the outer reality; in other words, it was not about opposing psychic to physical or biological, but to distinguish unconscious thoughts from conscious psychic processes. In order to implement this legitimacy, Freud makes several references to the material reality, approaching it from the psychic reality, by saying that the unconscious is as unknown to us as the outside world (Freud, 1900/1972); or by the 1915 statement, making an allusion to Kant, that the psychic as well as the physicist is not as it appears to us (Freud, 1915/1974).

Done this digression, we shall retake our arguments. Even if it is not about simply contrasting material reality and psychic reality, we think that some sign/singularity can and should be conferred on each of them. To discern this singularity, it is necessary to deepen the materiality contained in the terms *Realität* and *Wircklichkeit*. To do so, one must bear in mind that the latter, according to the scholars Chauí (1994) and Jaeger (1936/1952), approaches the Greek notion of *physis*, hold the ideas of source, strength, and movement; whereas the word *Realität* refers to reality as a thing.

It is worth starting by following Freud’s path on the content (the matter) of psychic reality. Perhaps we can even inquire: what is the substance of psychic reality? It is important to remember that this question should not refer to a materialistic ideology, but it is worth noting that if we are talking about materialism, we are necessarily referred to the idea that “the real is constituted by matter” (Birman, 2011, p. 17). After all, for Einstein (1916/1999), we know that matter is one of the ways in which energy manifests itself.

Let us see how Freud will forward his argument. Right at the beginning, he emphasizes that the unconscious is fulfilled by mnemonic traits. Which are the code of these traits? The guiding line to this response, aligned some texts of its conceptual elaboration beginning in a pre-psychoanalytic phase, when it builds in the Aphasia text (Freud, 1891/1987), a language apparatus; Then offers us, in the “project for a Scientific psychology” (Freud, 1895 [1950]/1977) a neural apparatus and, in the famous “Letter 52” (Freud, 1896/1977) a memory apparatus. These are the antecedents of the psychic apparatus of the first topography (Freud, 1900/1972); About 20 years

later we are presented with a new configuration of this apparatus (Freud, 1923/1976).

Is it apparent from this route that the matter of psychic reality is the mnemonic trait? Or, otherwise, it is the representations, encompassing thing-presentation and word-presentation? To affirm that the psychic reality is composed of mnemonic traits does not mean a great novelty. The great innovation of the Freudian elaboration was rightly to say that the psychic reality is the reality of the unconscious and it is composed only by unconscious thoughts, more precisely, according to the first topography, by thing-presentations. Moreover, in this bias, the Freudian conception of psychic apparatus is distinguished from any other for it holds two characteristics, promoting a fundamental inflection related to all the previous thoughts. Firstly, due to the highlight given to the memory record — the memory is unconscious — and secondly, because it has conceived the psychic apparatus forming in front of another apparatus. In the 1900 this apparatus is constituted, by conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious systems.

Another important observation concerns its functioning. For this apparatus to work, it takes something more: articulating the three apparatuses (neural, language and memory) Freud forged the psychic apparatus as a delayed excitation apparatus (drives) that affect it (from inside and outside); These captured excitation, would be inscribed and transcribed as mnemonic traits, in order to prevent the discharge from being carried out in a direct manner. From this perspective, the drive is taken as a requirement of work imposed on the psychic by the somatic (Freud, 1915/1974). In the condition of a boundary concept between the *sum* and the *Psyche*, it is represented in the psychism, by two delegates: representative-representation (*Vorstellung*) and representation of affect (*Affekt*) (Freud, 1915/1974). It is then a drive energy that will give rise to — with the purpose of discharge — a apparatus. In short, a apparatus that carries a psychic reality — the reality of the unconscious — and which operates in the relationship with another apparatus, having as its function the pursuit of satisfaction.

Another aspect to be added to this plot: we know that Freud passed by the consideration of a factual seduction (of the order of an invasion) to the question of fantasy as the means which reality inscribes itself in the unconscious. In this way, it is a very singular manner to inscribe reality; sexuality gave the necessary tone to “explain” the nervous disturbance. This assembly clarifies, up to 1915 at least, the dynamics involved in the psychic conflict. Due to the need to balance the internal tension of the apparatus, its discharge will be carried out according to the principle of pleasure/displeasure.

The topical and dynamic description of the psychic apparatus serves as the basis to circumscribe the matter (or the substance) that sustains it: it is the unconscious thoughts — i.e., immigrated mnemonic traits of sexual desire. Description regulated by an economic dimension of the

greatest relevance in this dynamic. Making the question more complex, besides saying that the unconscious is fulfilled by mnemonic traits, Freud declares that we do not have access to the unconscious core. What does that mean? Would there be a kind of original substance, a raw material that would not be representable? In other words, that would not be configured as thing-presentation? That would not be enrolled? In this core we would have “traits” for which there is no possible presentation? How do these traits differ from each other? Or would he be referring to something different from presentation and yet another way of registering? No more in terms of inscription or trait feature.

To clarify these questions, we sought support in two excerpts of Freud’s conceptual elaboration. The first appears in the text “The Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1900/1972) and refers to the mechanisms of dreams production: displacement, condensation, and representability as well as secondary elaboration. The second excerpt, is in the “Letter 52” (Freud, 1896/1977), concerning the perception sign of designation in the frame of the memory apparatus. Regarding the mechanisms of the dream, we see that condensation and displacement allude to the great possibility of transcriptions and retranscriptions of the enrolled mnemonic traits (which would correspond, in the “Letter 52”, to the unconsciousness in which it proceeds “according to other relations (perhaps causal)” (Freud, 1896/1977, p. 318). In relation to the secondary elaboration, everything indicates that it refers to the record of consciousness, as it rearranges the sensory images of the dream, aiming at a certain coherence. In Freud’s words (1900/1972): “The following consideration makes it seem very probable that this psychic function, which undertakes the so-called secondary elaboration of the dream-content, is identical with the work of our waking thought” (p. 533).

As Hanns (1996) points out, “It is a psychic work on the material still in the raw state, to provide it a way of understanding” (p. 196), and this “according to the rules of the secondary process: intelligibility, consideration by the rules of appropriate thought to the principle of reality, etc.” (p. 196).

Based on the comments of Hanns (1996), it is comprehensible that Freud presents at least three words referring to the idea of elaboration: *Bearbeitung*, *Durcharbeitung*, and *Verarbeitung*. All possess the *Arbeits* radical of the verb *arbeiten* (work), but they keep some differences among themselves. The first term is used related to the formation of dreams. The second word has the connotation of an effort in a work, seeking to overcome the resistances; The latter is used “in connection with the processes of resolving stimuli excess generated by potentially threatening events” (Hanns, 1996, p. 203). This author helps us to understand that for Freud, the work (*Arbeits*) gains in this plot a much broader dimension than the one restricted to the

processes of conscious thought. The *work* is seen as a *construction* that requires an *effort* aimed at giving a *destination* to an excess.

It remains to situate the representability (*Darstellung*). Which record does this mechanism refer to? If we follow the “Letter 52” and if we articulate it to the question of the development of the dream, we see that the representability in Freud, points to the first record in the psychic apparatus. In his words: “WZ [*Wahrnehmungszeichen*] (indication of perception) is the first record of the perceptions; it is quite incapable of being conscious and is arranged according to associations of simultaneity” (Freud, 1896/1977, p. 318). In these terms, it is by the representation that one forms the sensory images. With this perspective, we consider that the representability would not be referred to the mnemonic trait, but rather to a sensitive impression, which composes, associated with the mnemonic traits, the psychic apparatus. Here, we will use the *Dicionário comentado do alemão de Freud* (Freud’s Commented Dictionary of German) (Hanns, 1996) to explain this term.

Several meanings are attributed to the term *Darstellung*; in Portuguese it translates to represent as well as to figure. The author lists some of the meanings: “to explain, to describe, to present, to expound, to represent, to show, to exhibit, to constitute, to signify, to characterize” (Hanns, 1996, p. 376); and stresses be at stake “a double movement of ‘to provide a capable form’ and ‘to show’” (Hanns, 1996, p. 376). In our concern, it is worth to analyze this term with the word representation (*Vorstellung*), which is also used to translate it. However, unlike the latter, *Darstellung* does not hold the idea of “being in the place of”, nor the meaning of “being a symbol of”; and also does not imply: (1) A mental representation of images; (2) The idea of a play-acting; (3) The function of high social position representation; or (4) a meaning, a value. The most important aspect in the notion of *Darstellung* is its character of presentification, in the sense of “bringing the unrepresented to the world of representation and constituting it” (Hanns, 1996, p. 381). However, bringing the unrepresented to the world of representation does not necessarily mean transforming the unrepresented into representation.

A necessary observation regarding the distinction between the two terms (*Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*): Firstly, Freud does not reduce the idea of representability or presentification to the mechanisms of dream development. Moreover, *Darstellung* refers to the idea of shaping, constituting, and expressing something that is in an unrepresented or shapeless state. And the shape is expressed by images (sensory-motor image). However, as Hanns (1996) points out, the reference to the visual-plastic and the “contiguity with imagination and fantasy” (p. 384) is not the prerogative of *Darstellung*; it is also implicated in the idea of *Vorstellung*. So, what is the difference? In the author’s words, the first term is different from the second for:

It points to the activity of “invoking”, “imagining” and “combining” something that already inhabits the dimension of the apprehensible and representable things and that can be described as recalling images obtained from previous experiences and putting them on the scene. While *darstellen* refers to “constituting” or “producing” an image, *vorstellen* refers to “re-producing” an image. (Hanns, 1996, p. 386)

Thus, the first is a constituent of the image, whereas the second “presupposes the evocation of the idea based on images already constituted and available” (Hanns, 1996, p. 385); Thus, the presentification does not refer to “visualizing internally images” (Hanns, 1996, p. 376), but, according to the prefix *da(r)*, to “make present-existing in a shared there” (Hanns, 1996, p. 386).

It could be said, and certainly this is a reading that makes sense in the Freudian conceptual plot, that prevails in this distinction a relation of precedence between *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. An image that is presentified and then is connected, forming mnemonic traits enabling the discharge of energy that affects the apparatus — thus the first model of the psychism functioning is presented in 1900. Before this date in the “Letter 52” (Freud, 1896/1977), Freud’s description of a memory apparatus also refers to this idea, but with this, we risk to reinforce a developmentalist/evolutionary reading that provides relevance to the representational dimension, which is absolutely not our purpose here.

Therefore, based on this perspective, in the context of the clinic when identifying “elaborate psychically” to “represent”, the relationship of precedence between these terms is undoubtedly consistent, and authorizes the assertion (not saying denunciation) that psychoanalysis would have privileged, in its clinical-conceptual model, the psychoneuroses, basically relying on a representation theory. Consequently, it ends up leaving aside a dimension that has a greater force in the trauma. We believe that approaching the question of what we designate as “the raw material” of psychoanalysis makes it possible to reformulate this question. For us, reformulating this question implies not only to provide subsidies to approach the specificity of psychic sufferings nowadays, but also aiming at different kinds of therapeutic intervention. In other words, our interest is to challenge the Freudian metapsychology, trying to highlight the question of the traumatic in modalities of psychic distress that characterize contemporary psychopathology and which has been the subject of discussion nowadays. And that leads to a reconfiguration of how to think neurotic functioning in its strict sense.

Nowadays, the frequent designation that we are confronted by “a new psychic economy” points to the rupture with this clinical-conceptual model that is sustained in the conception of a conflict

between prohibition and desire; rupture that questions a reading anchored in the idea of the phallic order sovereignty as emblematic of the whole Freudian thought. According to our point of view, it would be more accurate to say that the complexity of the conceptual plot of psychoanalysis indicates other reading possibilities than the distinction between *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* enables to refer.

To this end, what led us to deepen the question about “substance” of psychic reality was not to defend the idea that this reality is not reduced to a fictional or fictitious reality, but the need to deal in the clinic context, with situations that “question” the proposition that in analysis we should be able to put into words what is of the uneasiness order, or, in metapsychological terms, it would only be about connecting thing-presentation to word-presentation.

In the classical psychoanalytic apparatus, two fundamental rules are present: the free association on the part of the analysand and the floating listening, by the analyst. What the free association brings to the scene is the verification that the subject “is able to observe his inner world to make it object of his narrative” (Andrade, Mello, & Herzog, 2012, p. 233). Thus, it is verified that this method presupposes the production of associations between representations, enabling the liquidation of a symptom by symbolic elaboration. That is, linking the word-presentation to the thing-presentation by association, the subject would reach the resolution of the psychic conflict. This ability places the subject in a search of a “memory” located in a past time. It would be as if the search was toward a “material truth” of the pathogenic memory. In short, it is a process that takes place in the representational universe according to the pleasure principle.

Sometimes we see in the so-called “difficult patients” that configure the clinical frameworks typical of “contemporary subjectivities” is precisely, in the psychoanalyst’s jargon, a difficulty to “associate” these molds. Which would entail the impossibility of uttering a self-narrative. In other words, “a difficulty to represent, questioning the possibility of symbolic elaboration” (Andrade, Mello, & Herzog, 2012, p. 229). In this sense, the impasse posed by these patients indicates that, instead of an experience that finds in the narrative a communication channel with the other, we are facing a fragmented experience. Otherwise, we are facing a disconnected experience of the subject himself/herself, which is expressed in several ways: either by a literal narrative, either by radical shyness or in compulsive acts; or, for an experience of relentless anxiety. What is his/her code, given the impossibility of a change in the associative-chain?

In an article dealing with themes of writing and representability, Antonello and Gondar (2013) argue that “writing already denotes a representation process (*Darstellung*), since it draws an image of the

thing, establishing a representative relationship with the object” (p. 175). They also show that in Freudian thoughts “the term *Darstellung* refers to the possibility of providing a capable format (in the form of a sensory language, pictorial, kinesthetic, auditory — of the sensible order) to something that still incomprehensible in the field of representation” (p. 175).

If, as they argue, accompanying Botella and Botella (2002), represent is a kind of psychic work, we can infer that represent is a way of elaborate supported in a sensitive language, not in a formal language. In another occasion (Herzog, 2011a, p. 243), we also defended the idea of an affective dimension of language stating that:

to dare to say that the order of the lived is not a linguistic fact, it is only in the sense that the lived is not articulated to a dimension of language that refers to linguistic arbitrariness. And it is from this configuration that one intends to make this lived (from the order of the literal) in experienced, the order of the representative.

This work, according to the Antonello and Gondar (2013), is comparable to the regression that occurs in the dream: “The result is the production of a sensory image or an internal perception close to the hallucination of the dreamer, implying the repression of the traumatic elements” (p. 175). It is not without reason that it is said that the psychic apparatus is a apparatus of hallucinating. In this sense, we could accompany Pontalis (1994) when talking about this experience, in the transference relationship, as an “apparition” that has “affinity not with the hallucination, but rather with the hallucinatory of the dream?” (p. 96). In the same manner that in the

dream the thoughts are decomposed in sensory images (Freud, 1900/1972), by representability the access to the so-called unrepresentable elements, impressions of the signs of perception, and raw material of psychic apparatus is allowed.

Within the clinic, a great difference is noted. We said earlier that both, mnemonic traits and sensory-motor images inhabit the psychic apparatus, better saying, the unconscious. Regarding to mnemonic, the plasticity of this traits will make possible a change of meaning that has in the free association its expression. However, concerning the sensory-motor images, their “apparition” holds a literality that implies another approach, also allowing a change of meaning, but of another scope. In these terms, therapeutic intervention does not prioritize a manner of elaboration that would hold an interpretation, derived from the connection between thing-presentation and words-presentation. Therapeutic intervention should also enable sensory-motor images to point and emerge, appear and disappear, such as glow-worms, configuring, by glimpses of desire, another manner of feeling the life (Didi-Huberman, 2011), forming a net in which one can grab to avoid falling.

Given the difficulty that some patients have to “undertake a verbal dialogue” (Herzog & Pacheco-Ferreira, 2014, p. 115), the analyst is responsible for seeking “other communication plans”. Therefore, beyond the discursive pathway, we can establish “a communication by gestures and signs presented in the body” (Herzog & Pacheco-Ferreira, 2014, p. 115). In these cases, as we pointed out at the time, “the Psychic content is ‘presented’ more than said” (Herzog & Pacheco-Ferreira, 2014, p. 116). This idea provides (clinical and conceptually) a positivity to sensations, feelings and anguish by broadening the mode of expression of each singular being.

Qual a matéria prima do aparato psíquico

Resumo: Investigar a especificidade dos padecimentos psíquicos na atualidade a partir da discussão sobre a matéria-prima da psicanálise, visando pensar formas de intervenção terapêutica para além do modelo que tem no universo representativo sua referência maior. Para tanto, vamos trabalhar a distinção entre realidade material e realidade psíquica e analisar os termos *Vorstellung* e *Darstellung* como indicadores das diferentes formas de elaboração psíquica.

Palavras-chave: psicanálise, elaboração psíquica, *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung*.

Quelle est la matière première de l'appareil psychique

Résumé: Investiguer la spécificité des souffrances psychiques dans la contemporanéité à partir du débat sur la matière première de la psychanalyse, afin de penser aux formes d'intervention thérapeutique au delà du modèle qui tient dans l'univers représentatif sa référence majeure. Pour ce but on va travailler la distinction entre réalité matérielle et réalité psychique et analyser les termes *Vorstellung* et *Darstellung* comme repères des différentes formes d'élaboration psychique.

Mots-clés: psychanalyse, élaboration psychique, *Vorstellung*, *Darstellung*.

¿Cuál es la materia prima del aparato psíquico?

Resumen: Investigar la especificidad de los padecimientos psíquicos en la actualidad a partir de la discusión sobre la materia prima del psicoanálisis, con el objetivo de pensar formas de intervención terapéutica más allá del modelo que tiene en el universo representativo su mayor referencia. Para esto, vamos a trabajar la distinción entre la realidad material y la realidad psíquica y analizar los términos *Vorstellung* y *Darstellung* como indicadores de las diferentes formas de elaboración psíquica.

Palabras clave: psicoanálisis, elaboración psíquica, *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung*.

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