

SYMBOLS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

# Symbols and the Growth of Society



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# **SYMBOLS AND THE GROWTH OF SOCIETY**

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# SYMBOLS AND THE GROWTH OF SOCIETY

## INTRODUCTION

Symbols did not burst upon the world in a trice, moving toward man's awareness as a comet does, ever increasing in brilliance till its starlike referents were drowned in one great swell of light. Symbols evolved slowly. Each slow step advanced survival skills, while enhancing the growth of culture. Each new symbolic form tinkered with conscious awareness, till there were preserved in the memories of mankind, symbol filled fact packets to be used both for active adaptation and for the recognition and interpretation of "reality". These packets preserved impressions of "truth" that would otherwise have dwindled and been lost to time's attrition.

Changes in evolving symbolizing functions reflected at first the biological growth of the brain that permitted disjuncture, and later the influence of the maturation of culture. There were stepwise rises and regressions along pathways that were paved with the symbolic forms that made possible man's transition from the ways of the beast to the styles of modernity. The latter required disjuncture based delays in response to stimuli. Disjuncture refers to the ending of the syncretic relationship between drive and object, which permits the introduction of alternate aims, goals and objects for drives.

At first, protosymbols and simple symbols were enhanced as the brain grew. Disjuncture and the repression of the conscious rational links of symbols to meanings appeared. This broke the chain that had grappled man to the reality of nature, setting symbols free of fixed limits to their meanings and opening doors to the effect of cryptic symbols on imagination with its dreamed up worlds, where fantasied rewards and comforts abound, allaying fears. Through such portals men tumbled into myths, whose symbols led the way in predicting havens in heaven that justified bearing the pain and sacrifice implied by life lived in a shared social context. Common mythic symbols with unique and arbitrary specific meanings strengthened the boundaries of groups, and added communicative strength to the shared social skills of those who gathered food, fought wars and created art together.

The gain derived from freeing symbols from nature was not without cost. Fantasy was added to

memory—both kind fantasies and angry ones—and created room for error in evaluating the world. The origin within one's self of cruel wish fantasies could be hidden by projection of fantasy to pain heavy affect porous symbols, such as demon shadows, which while standing ready to drown men in irrational fear, provided an enemy to be recruited as focus and target for the idiosyncratic fantasy driven reactions of faiths and armies.

## THE EVOLUTIONARY MARCH OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

### Physiological (non-verbal) Distortions Form Early Brain Based Symbols

Symbolic forms are the products of both biological and cultural evolution. The earliest symbolic forms (called protosymbols) were determined by brain maturation. They were produced from representations in memory of traces of perceptions. Biological limitations of immature brain function introduced distortions in memory and in consciousness that created altered representations of perceptions and concepts. These are the protosymbols. As a result of the limitations of immature brain activity, representations in memory could not be commensurate with the source sensations from which the memory had been derived. Inexact representation of perceptions produced protosymbolic forms. Examples of brain function based symbolic forms would be: the affect shorn memories that are channeled through the hippocampus (*Hippocampal Protosymbols*), innate *physiognomic responses* to stimulus characteristics, non-verbal gesture symbols, memory elements whose accuracy is dulled by faulty perception due to *the presence of synaesthesia* (see Critchley 1994 Ch 8.) and transitions in perception associated with changes induced by *ongoing disjuncture*. Edelman (1992) in placing the seat of consciousness in brain structure, described such an interactive relationship between brain and symbolic form in the parallel evolution of consciousness and the evolution of symbols. He noted that “symbolic memory” (P 125), and “higher-order consciousness” (P 149) “... flower with the accession of language and symbolic reference” (P 149).

### Hippocampal Protosymbols

The hippocampal protosymbol is an example of a brain altered (organically influenced) symbolic form. This memory element results when there is representation in conscious awareness of information

that has been shorn of affect. The total experience comes to be represented only partially. This occurs when information enters awareness and memory through the hippocampus. It is affect free since by transiting the hippocampus it follows a path that bypasses the access to affect provided by the amygdala. LeDoux (1994), who studied the physiology of such affect free symbolic forms, noted that emotion linked data is stored in declarative memory in the hippocampus as a cold declarative fact.

When this memory returns to consciousness, it is without affect. As such it is a partial expression (a symbol) of a referent, which when initially experienced had had associated affect. Here is a distinct channel for recall from memory, which bypasses the amygdala to deliver content—free of affect—to consciousness. Partial representations of interpreted perceptions are derived from this activity. What is produced is an inexact modified form of the entire interpreted perception, which comes to serve as a referent in memory. This process explains devitalized recall of referents, which results clinically in conscious recovery of important reality content without distorting affect. Through this channel, distortions associated with neurotic interpretation are removed. As a result, the role of reality determinants in decision-making is enhanced.

Because there is loss of a link to affect, this partial representation, which is a primitive symbolic form, should properly be called a psychoanalytic protosymbol. Its cold declarative content may be relinked through amygdalic function to its original affect (re-affectization). This can be produced by psychotherapeutic interpretation and free association, which as Ledoux (1994) puts it, “may” cause “the individual (to) become tense, anxious and depressed, as emotional memory is reactivated through the amygdalic system.” (P 57)

### **Physiognomic Thinking**

Modern man has descended from animals, who hunted in packs, hordes, and eventually tribes. At first, instincts and the environment existed as articulated units, which served the immediate gratification of drives. Hands, claws, fangs, images, sounds and odors were the first means of aware contact with the world. At first there could only be reflex responses to these contacts, such as an inborn response to the ferocious face of a predator, a process called physiognomic thinking.

**Physiognomic perception** (See Werner 1948 p 67 etseq.) **is an innate cognitive process that attributes meaning and motivation to the appearance of objects.** An example would be innate fear of the face of a lion. Physiognomic thinking motivates safety-seeking responses to physiognomic perceptions. It colors the syncretism that dominates childhood cognition early in the first year of life. It is a primitive form of animism, which is a group response that uses projection in support of the assumption that plants have motivating self-aware thinking. Physiognomic thinking represents a protosymbolic (primitive) stage in symbol ontogenesis. Through induced group regressions to the ways of physiognomic thinking, identity, meaning, and motivation can be attributed by leaders and teachers to the images, shapes, and movements of intrinsically inanimate objects, such as those used as sanctified idols for worship.

### **The Presence of Synaesthesia**

**Synaesthesia** (See Critchley 1994 Ch 8 and this book Unit 1, Section B, Chapter 5.) **is defined as the jumping of the anatomical boundaries of brain sensory receptor areas by incoming sensations.** In synaesthesia, stimuli generate responses in neurons unrelated to the sensory modality through which the stimulus entered the brain's perceptual system. It results in a person seeing colors when reading numbers. Luria (1968) described a clinical experience of synaesthesia in a child in which every sound produced a "... sense of taste and touch as well." The perception of natural reality and the imagery that represents it in memory is reshaped.

### **Ongoing Disjuncture**

**Disjuncture** (See Werner 1940 p150 and this book Unit 1, Section B, Chapter 5.) **refers to the severing of the syncretic relationship between drive and object.** It is hard to conceive of breathing without including air. No disjuncture of respiratory need (an obligate drive) from its object of desire is possible. Disjuncture can only occur with expressions of sexual, aggressive, and hunger drives (the facultative drives) and the denial that deals with unavoidable drive equivalents such as fear of death.

## **Passive Symbolization and Disjuncture**

The development of drive gratification in thought, without expenditure of effort in the world, accompanies disjuncture. The introduction of access to new outlets enhances psychological influences on symbol formation. Passive symbolization (Sarnoff 1976 p 93) refers to the use of views and events external to the self as clue like symbolic forms, which activate non-motor thought reactions.

Passive uses of stimuli for signals to initiate reflex responses are earlier in evolutionary origin than actively chosen responses. External influence, intensified by brain growth and social interaction, opens the way to choice of symbols. As a result the evolving form of symbols used in interpretation comes to reflect more the influence of the maturation of culture than the biology of the increasingly stable brain.

There were stepwise rises and regressions along pathways, paved with symbolic forms that made possible man's transition from the ways of the jungle to the styles of the city. Choices in common by early men assured predictable basic conformance to the shared beliefs that defined the emergence of cultural groups. Tribes evolved with the development of choice in creating shared passive responses. The development of groups enabled the growth of excess food. Food, which could be reserved for the common benefit, freed work energies, leaving room for fantasy, thought, leisure, and the active selection of representational symbols and myths.

## **The Origins of the Active Symbols of Play and Creativity During the Psychological Growth that Parallels Disjuncture**

Creativity and culture begin when the level of disjuncture permits variant trial play responses to stressful inputs. Many animals can play. The larger the brain, the more play is possible. In playing, the animal exhibits the capacity to separate needs and drives from their specific satisfying objects. In play one practices symbolic behaviors, which are independent of direct gratification. The introduction of drive gratification through fantasy, without the immediate expenditure of work, enhanced the psychological development that accompanied the appearance of disjuncture.

Drive-object disjuncture establishes an arena for flexibility in fantasy and behavior. This results from the loss of obligatory drive responses to stimuli and objects. Room for delay offers a blank check in the form of a zone in which the creative ego can play. Within this playing zone, delay coupled with

displacement and condensation can produce substitute representations in the form of symbolic objects, which draw a person's attention from reality and which diminish anxiety. Play elements, which are direct substitutes for the gratifying elements that are sought by object seeking drives, are a primitive form of preverbal symbol. With the appearance of disjuncture, distorting protosymbolic entities fade in influence. True symbols, defined as partial representations, appear. These entities find acceptance as valid substitutes for a mind experienced in seeing distorted images as accurate depictions. They can therefore be seen as real objects for active use in drive discharge.

### **Psychological Preverbal Symbols**

With the maturation of the capacity for delay of gratification through disjuncture, alternative hunting patterns using hand alone or hand and tool evolved. As a result, syntaxes, which organized work movements, were added to early man's resources. Vocal sounds at this point could have become part of such motor sequence patterns, especially in situations in which teamwork was involved. Starting from this beginning, vocal signifiers (grunts and work song rhythms) could more and more have entered the patterned work contexts (syntaxes) of already established motor techniques. Increasing brain size provided early man with storage capacity for verbal representations of these image syntaxes. As brain size increased the number of memory elements associated with elements of vocal expression, available to conscious awareness increased. At this early level of phylogenetic development, consciousness consisted of the presence of memory elements, which could have been used to interpret familiar incoming sensory stimuli and the identification of motor acts.

As vocal counterparts of motor sequences were developing, they could be used as simple symbols to communicate to others new combinations of motor techniques and for giving brief commands. Reflecting inner sensations, vocal signals could become indicators of affect, proprioception, and patterned movement. This could be stored for retrieval through the creation of sustained definitions. These were early simple symbols. At this stage, a kind of reflective verbal consciousness, precursor to the consciousness that is experienced by modern man became a potential. (See Sarnoff 1976.)

## **Primitive Symbolic Forms, and Play**

Long before he had a name for them, man used symbols. By the time simple symbols had evolved, awareness could be communicated to others or recalled to the self through the effective use of subverbal part representations (i.e. gestures) associated with appropriate affect. Simple symbols took the form of signs, signals, and later, words. When part representation fell so far short of reproduction that the substitute representations lost the capacity to stir affect, there was crossed the dividing line between pristine reality based memories and memory tainted by displacements and deferrals. Then cryptic symbols appeared. They diverted attention cathexes so that displacements could not have been undone. Conscious education by kin groups in the retained original meanings that lay behind manifest symbolic forms provided shibboleths around which social groups were organized. In secret silence, cryptic symbols ushered primitive mankind into modern man's domain.

## **Cultural Evolution of Symbols Leads to the Emergence of Mankind**

The development of disjuncture underlies the cognitive transitions that support the evolutionary shift from beast into man. After disjuncture the facultative drives need no longer find immediate fulfillment with their objects. With disjuncture, preprogrammed automatic responses to stimuli give way to an informed choice of responses utilizing displacement. Through cryptic (psychoanalytic and dream) symbols, disjuncture opens the way to irrational responses.

The presence of disjuncture is a marker for the crossing of a divide in the development of the symbolizing function. Before disjuncture there are no true symbols. Disjuncture and the displacement it enables introduce the possibility of simple phylogenetic protosymbols. Protosymbols are altered representations of perceptions, which are products of brain-based distortions that occur prior to complete disjuncture and the establishment of self-object differentiation. Then the addition of graphic and verbal representational modalities makes possible the introduction of simple symbols. Repression of the conscious link between the representations and the referents of simple symbols, in the service of muffling affect, introduces the cryptic element to symbolization. Cryptic symbols as parts of memory panels alter the potential for accuracy of interpretations of new sensory and haptic sensations.

## Conscious Reflection and Interpretation of Perception Based on Symbolized Memories

It is in archeological findings from about 35,000 B.C., that there is evidence that in man interpretative responses came to be influenced by conscious reflection. Then perceptions began to be interpreted through comparisons with memory contents that were brought into verbal awareness. New perceptions were compared to symbolized knowledge that had been encoded into memory trace panels, (See this book Unit 1, Section C, Chapter 11). Such memory panels contained experience of the symbolically altered past, as well as abstract contexts derived from projections into the future. Verbalizations associated with shared past experiences became the basis for interpreting complex perceptions and memory contents, as well as serving communication. The vocabulary produced made possible self reflective evaluations as well as interpretation of new stimuli, reflections on fate, attempts at control of tomorrow, and ability to transmit information to others. Response to affect in the form of the displacement and repression that produce symbols can introduce distortions of reality and fact into memory trace panels. This introduces the possibility that error, based on symbolization, can influence perception and the handling of life.

The emergence of modern man is marked by a conscious reflective awareness that is made prone to error by the presence of cryptic symbols in memory panels. Incomplete or symbolically altered contents in the memory panels that influence reflective awareness interfere with accuracy in interpretation and planning. The presence of cryptic symbols in memory panels indicates that there exists suppression of uncomfortable affects, inappropriate delay and inhibition of action. This provides a venue for the use of symbolized fantasy for resolution of stress using thought instead of action. Irrationality arises when there is a shunting of the expression of need satisfaction from real objects to symbols, which in secret represent past loves or enemies. Fantasy content impelled by drives and motivations involving undoing of past injustices or resolving lost hopes, can replace actions cued to the present. Reactions—to persistence in memory of unrequited injustices and their accompanying bagful of painful affects—are impelled by these symbolic substitutes.

Neurotic turnings in the ways of symbol development are the downside of the role of the cryptic symbol. The upside is the role of cryptic symbols in softening and delaying responses that involve rivalry reactions between men, in a way that makes benign social interactions possible. This takes place in

contexts involving power, food, sex and love. In maintaining civility and achieving survival with energies focused on new tasks set by reality, symbols are developed for use in reducing manifest affect while discharging tension. As a result evolving man acquires skills in reserving energy for daily tasks and providing playgrounds in the mind for the discharge of overflows of affect. Through this mechanism old wrongs can be undone in abstract word worlds in which there is created a parallel consciousness well beyond reality's redress. Civilization and pathological distortions of reality, hand in hand, took their first steps when such symbolic images became active tools in dealing with frustrating reality.

### **The Sublime: An Innate Precursor Of The Psychoanalytic Symbol**

There are perceptions, which have stimulus characteristics, which are so overwhelming to the interpretive receptive apparatus of the brain that there is generated an affect of awe. This response does not appear to be related to prior experience or training. Such affect responses are dealt with through displacement of cathexes from the stimuli to representations that carry the affect of the sublime. This reactive mechanism has been most closely studied in relation to the creation of works of art. In art works it has been noted by Starobinski (1982) that paintings, and the landscapes that they celebrate, contain "sublime" images, removed by distance and displaced by transformation through painting away from the awesome reality that they represent. Removal from the immediacy of dangerous reality offers safe distance and a sense of power to the viewer in the face of potential awesome dangers in that reality. There is here an echo of Kant's (1790) comment that confronting "... clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals ..." (P 100) either at a distance or in the form of a painter's image "... gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature." (P 101) Stress becomes tolerable "... in our own mind ..." (P 114) through displacement of its reality to comfortable situations and representations.

Burke (1757/1968) also observed this. He noted, "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful ..." (P 40). Great cataracts engender fear and erotic contexts rouse lust. These responses are innate. When such stimuli are activated as dream symbols they fail to preserve sleep, for their selection needs little displacement and the associated affect generated is severe. The mechanism is similar to the inadequate displacements, which create the affect porous

symbols found in phobias. The symbolic forms that are generated activate affect rather than mute it. (See this book, Volume 3, Chapter 6.)

References in the literature of philosophy to innate awe responses to stimuli, which use displacement, predate Freud's uncovering of the dynamic underpinnings of phobia by two millennia. The first commentary on the existence of this early form of psychoanalytic symbol is contained in the insight of Longinus (Ant) that displacement in art alters affect, such as occurs when a sense of awe is transmuted into the sense of the sublime. The latter is an affect associated with imparting grandeur to awesome content in speech and art, both creative and expository. This is a reference to the insulating distance offered by hyperbolic metaphors, which when substituted for reality in oral presentations can alter affect intensity (P 177). This is a paradigmatic phylogenetically early step on the way to achieving the protection afforded by displacement through the unconscious linkages inherent in the psychoanalytic symbol.

The capacity to create representations that alter the affect impact of a memory or perception defines man. In the case of psychoanalytic symbols, this process makes possible a distancing of conscious awareness away from potentially disorganizing contents of memory. Such substitution occurs automatically in psychoanalytic symbol formation. It is apparent clinically when its failure results in an intensification of affect such as is seen in affect porous symbols.

### **The Mechanism for Transmutation of Awe into the Sublime**

The mind responds to awe with creation of the sublime. This is a phylogenetically early form of psychoanalytic symbol formation. Transmutation of a stimulus associated with awe into a substitute representation that can be managed, such as images that stir sublime feelings, parallels the core mechanism of cryptic symbol formation. Long before psychoanalytic symbols were recognized and described as such by Freud and Jones, the processing of innate responses to dangerous realities through the generation of substitute representations associated with non-disorganizing affects had been observed. Through mechanisms of the mind, the experiences of awe could be transmuted into entities that were sublime and thus reassuring. Transformation of fierce reality and memory into safe substitutes was observed to be a means for processing discomfiting perceptions and mastering them. It was an

impression noted by Kant (1790) that one can wrestle fear and win “. . . in our mind (finding) a superiority to nature (and remembered pain) even in its immensity”. (P 101)

### **DISPLACEMENT and the PSYCHOANALYTIC SYMBOL**

Distance through displacement and venting gives comfort. Distance through symbols shared with others gives mastery. The former occurs with the evocations of repetition compulsion. The latter lies in the domain of communicative symbols and reparative mastery. Man, the symbol bearer and playing dreamer, can master affect and danger through creating distance between manifest symbolic forms and their referents. This can take the form of displacement to symbolic content that is removed from affect, or through a change of media from three-dimensional reality to fantasy on canvass using two dimensions.

Antique insights take us far on the road to an understanding of how it is that symbols make the intolerable tolerable and free the ego to advance in areas of conflict free pursuit. Psychoanalytic theory tends to emphasize the role of repression and cathartic discharge in this result. The emphasis is justified where there is psychopathology, evocative emphasis, excess narcissism and repetition compulsion. For understanding healthy mental processing and reparative mastery, it would be best if one were to recognize that repression only serves to support displacement. Displacement is the prime mechanism in symbol formation. It uses content change to defuse affect and interposes changes of media. In this way it dulls expression of latent content meaning and alters the impact of recalls.

Displacement changes one's “set” and gives one a sense of power and a prideful self image in the face of the immutable strengths of nature and of unalterable past experience. It is displacement that, through providing less frightening forms of representation, defuses the power of memory and transforms affect from horror to a sense of the sublime. Enhancement of healthy displacements and the undoing of repressions can lead to clinical gains.

### **SELF CONSCIOUS REFLECTIVE VERBAL AWARENESS**

#### **Repression and the Psychoanalytic Symbol**

The symbolic forms first experienced by man were protean; their evolution was etched over eons.

The earliest dreams of evolving man perpetuated the characteristics of the dreams of animals. Like the dreams of very small children, they were need satisfying “coherent imagery sequences” evoking simple and undistorted memory elements.

Such concrete symbolic forms were all that minds were capable of achieving at the point in primate evolution that bipedal locomotion developed, and hands took from the mouth the tasks of gathering and holding food. The primitive vocal apparatus thus freed evolved into a form that could transform grunts into naming speech. Memory for names (called explicit “declarative memory” and localized in the medial temporal lobes) developed. These were the first simple symbols as differentiated from protosymbolic sensory memory traces, which served to encode memory. Manipulation of these name words in memory introduced the image potentials that underscored the development of the ability to wish.

Preservation in memory of danger quelling wishes that could be cathected in the face of stress, made possible delay in responses to autonomic sensations. The development of a capacity to delay reactions to the autonomic sensations that demand flight or fight was syncretic with disjuncture. Capacity to delay made it possible to replace action with wishing as a response to danger.

Wishes for action were never fully extinguished by the introduction of initial symbolized substitutes in fantasy. They contributed to the sustained affect states that accompanied verbal memory contents. To control the effect of these affects, further displacement within declarative memory to representations for expression in awareness, which had fewer valences for attracting attention to affect, were strengthened and emphasized. These were the first psychoanalytic symbols, which introduced a split between conscious and unconscious content. As a result of this split self-preservative stances could be sustained in awareness, while self-destructive responses to danger waited their turn to influence reality.

## **SYMBOLS AND SOCIETY**

Spengler (1918) described an “. . . almost entire lack of physiognomy in primitive man’s world-around.” (P 174) In his view, primitive man had many steps to take before achieving a world of physiognomies that could generate a sufficient number of response possibilities to introduce cultural

differentiated choice during individual adaptation.

At the time that tool making began, recognition memory for work pattern syntaxes were added to mankind's world of physiognomies. They became guides to the use of each tool. Identifiable culturally shared variations in work patterns evolved. These developed into the simple symbols that served as the basis for the differentiation of social groups. Since they could be used to establish the characteristics of the group, simple symbols shared with myths the function of providing a touchstone through which group identity and cohesion could be established and be transmitted over generations. These were the earliest forms of culturally transmitted educational patterns.

Verbal signifiers at brain volume less than 750 cubic centimeters were concretely and invariably linked to their parallels in movement or sensation. Washburn and Avis (1958) noted that "oral traditions essential for complicated human society probably were not possible with less than 700 or 800 cubic centimeters of brain, and there is no likelihood that elaborate traditions of tool making are possible at less capacities . . ." (P 432). Memory storage of multiple syntaxes of behavior made primitive conscious selection between alternatives a fact of proto-human life. It set the stage for the use of displacement as an adaptive function of the ego. As such it established the ground for the development of the symbolic linkages that underlie the selection of substitutes during the formation of symbols.

As alternative physiognomies increased in number, certain patterns of response provided greater survival value than others. Among these patterns individual wishes and needs had to be suppressed in favor of patterned functioning acceptable to the social group, if survival were to be assured. Such survival preserving patterns included inhibition and regulation of aggressive and sexual drive expression between members of the immediate group. Sexual inhibition, especially incest taboos, insured survival of young individuals, through attenuation of the wrath of older larger males.

Inhibited drives came to be expressed covertly through symbol supported fantasy pathways, which in being disarticulated from actualization in reality provided safe needed discharge for forbidden drive derivatives. Such needs were fulfilled for instance through symbolization during sleep (i.e., distortion dreams). In order for men to advance to this level, a capacity for abstraction was necessary.

## Development of Abstract Concepts

Early Paleolithic people experienced an increase of brain capacity to 1200-1300 cubic centimeters. Though communication during technical activities became possible, this increase in the quantity of available memory was not accompanied by a change in the quality of their thinking. In the artifacts left by these people, there is only evidence of concrete symbolizations similar to the initial symbolizations of the modern child during the age range of zero to eighteen months.

At the point in psychological evolution that the idea of the word and the idea of the thing become separable entities, hyperattention to the idea of the word could have resulted in losing sight of the idea of the thing it represented. The inability of words to represent the whole of the concept of a remembered thing interferes with the potential for complete recall in future memory. As memory and communication evolve to become increasingly mediated through words, the memory elements that are represented lose detail. Intensified cathexis of signifiers that have little in common with that, which is signified, results in a loss to awareness of many of the elements of the original referent. This produces a primitive form of partial representation (a simple symbol), a prerequisite for the later development of the abstractions required for psychoanalytic symbol formation.

The use of language and external objects as abstract signifiers for referents awaited the evolutionary tenure of Neanderthal man. Material evidence of abstract forms of symbolization reflecting the abstract conceptual memory required for psychoanalytic symbol formation may be found first according to Leroi-Gourhan (1965) at late (before 40,000 B.C.) Neanderthal sites. Religious symbols that reflect awareness of an abstract numinous entity are found in burials, ritual placement of cave bear skulls, ochre coatings found at graves, and odd stones placed near Neolithic graves. According to Leroi-Gourhan, these findings “constitute the slender halo of immateriality which floats above Neanderthal man” (P 159). “With the Neanderthal the exteriorization of non-concrete symbols was produced” (Leroi-Gourhan, p. 165).

Concurrent with the waning of the Neanderthals, there appeared on earth another race, Cro-Magnon man. An evaluation of bony remnants related to vocalization and a study of the size and shape of the brain case indicate that this group could have had the language skills of modern man. Metaphorical

(cryptic) symbol formation has been inferred in their thinking from a study of their works of art. Leroi-Gourhan (1967) described this most succinctly when he stated, "it is quite possible that Paleolithic men (Cro-Magnon) were [capable of] expressing something like 'spear is to penis as wound is to vulva.'" (P 173) This is the sort of symbolic linkage upon which abstract metaphorical symbolism is based, and may explain the direct and concrete sexual symbolism found in primitive religions. The symbols used by Paleolithic man appear to be part of a rich and far-flung culture passed down through generations. Leroi-Gourhan (1967), noted that "In Western Europe . . . stable traditions over many thousands of years led to a maturing of a symbolism absolutely continuous in development from the earliest artistic manifestations [35,000 B.C.] to the end of the Magdalenian period [10,000 B.C.]." (P 34)

### **Symbols in Mythologically Informed Cultures**

In preliterate primitive societies, cultural conformance for boys is demanded at puberty. Cooperativeness, calm, and the channeling of energies into the activities that support social survival are acquired at this time. These skills are achieved through learning myths and rituals, whose content supports the transmission of survival patterns. Sharing of their contents and admonitions welds individuals to the group.

Symbols, used in maintaining the centripetal forces of the group in the face of individual self-satisfying centrifugal pressures, had from the beginning provided primitive man with support for the fulfillment of his positive evolutionary potentials. When both biology and society proscribed direct drive expression from ages six to twelve, the dreamlike symbolic mechanisms of the ego structure of latency served for drive discharge that could preserve calm. Epigenetically the mythic products of the ego structure of latency offered a conduit for the transmission of the traditions of culture.

Many drive derivatives are potentially antithetical to the cooperative development of societal groups. Proscribed sexual wishes and aggressive urges, if lived out could destabilize marriage and orderly interactions under the law, since social regulations can define perversions, but cannot extinguish them. The symbols of myth, and inhibition offer shared alternate outlets at a cost. Mythologically guided group formation reduces individual men to the status of mere elements in the organic unity of mankind.

Shared traditions and myths support the formation of societal groups. Traditions and mythic teaching transcend individual needs, causing limitations in the expression of the instinctual aspirations of individuals. Where can the needs of single beings find satisfaction and discharge in such a system? Psychoanalytic (dream and mythic) symbolic forms permit forbidden wishes to be expressed in surrogate form, while preserving the integrity of the commonweal.

Personal (cryptic) symbols and fantasies maintain reserve vitality for personal contexts involving power needs and sexual and aggressive drives which are alien to culture. They offer secret satisfaction through private interpretations of ritualized dramatizations of myths as well as by providing a venue for the venting of drives through night dreams. During the latency years, cryptic symbols populate the private fantasies that help in adaptation to stress. Group intactness is preserved by the presence of such safety valves for they keep in check or channel urges that would dissolve society. The capacity to form such symbols contributes to the potential for civilization in all living men.

Personal creative symbolizations negatively alter the panels used for detecting reality and encourage the bypass of social institutions. Flexibility of response in areas involving potential for individuality and divergent thinking, portends private creative capacity, which is potentially inimical to group stability. Their activation from unconscious memory is responded to with constant limitation. This is achieved through a process of sequestration, through which personal needs are de-emphasized or directly disregarded, as a result of hypercathexis of manifest group fantasy and belief.

Sequestered potential drive derivatives must be preserved if the evolving group is to adapt to and survive unexpected changes, challenges, and environmental stresses over time. Total extirpation of adaptable creative potential is ill advised. The unconscious life of mankind exercises ways of expressing its stifled needs, should there be new demands from the world. Dream and mythic symbols provide a pathway for occult exercise of the capacity of mankind to respond to realistic changes in the human condition. Repressed drives and fantasies can be called back from their role in dreams and put into action in the service of cultural change when technical inventions or environmental pressures call for a change in the adaptive configuration of the group. An example would be new and freer expressions of sexuality in the form of multiple types of domestic relationships following the technical flowering of reliable means of birth control.

Mythic and dream symbols serve a necessary function in the evolution of man. Through offering occult expression for counter-social drive derivatives they maintain the vitality of drives and their contribution to the potential for cultural flexibility that is required by the impact of change on society. War brings such a change. Men of peace are recruited in times of war to join armies on their way to killing fields, where instinctual forces inimical to culture are expressed. The myths of "The culture hero's expected return" in times of war and peril for the culture (See Stith Thompson (1975) A-580 P. 125. and Frederic Barbarossa's tale in this volume Chapter 3.) serve like endopsychic perceptions of this working of repression through symbols in society. Displaced expression through symbols preserves the strength of adaptive drive responses to potential threats, without threatening current mythically organized group solidarity.

Psychoanalytic symbols are necessary for mastery of unconscious content through dreaming, for preservation of proscribed adaptive responses, for an effective structure of latency, and for the transmission of culture that occurs with passive mastery of life's questions through the use of myths and symbols that have already been established in a given culture. Mead (1958) has placed the appearance of this symbolic form in the mainstream of man's evolution: "There is good reason to believe (said she) that man's evolutionary progress depends also on his ability to dream . . ." (P 488n) Dream symbols support the repression and suppression of impulses that makes living within a culture possible. Goodenough (1953-1968) has described the pressures that impel this phenomenon in the following. ". . . society as it has become civilized has developed institutions and ideals whose bases often go far down into raw strata of violence and bodily desire. The individual must repress in order to be an acceptable member of society; society must repress in order to achieve even the simplest civilization." "Societies cannot exist without a recognized limitation and code for sexual behavior and family structure . . . The more complicated the society . . . the more it tends to conceal, make even unmentionable, its sexual activity." (Vol. 12 P 114) The suppression of impulses that makes social living possible is enabled by repression expressed in drive discharge using the psychoanalytic symbols of art, dream and fantasy.

Psychoanalytic symbols are produced by repression, which in excluding symbolic linkages from consciousness, sunders the tie between represented and representation. Such loss of the capacity for total awareness of the self and the milieu defines the impact of psychoanalytic symbol formation on the conscious awareness of modern man.

## The First Appearance of Psychoanalytic Symbols

Symbolic distortions are found in the cognitive contents of artifacts produced through the use of psychoanalytic symbolization. As a consistent and universal culture element they are first seen in the demon figures depicted in primitive rock pictures. These may be seen in the Levant in Spain, where they first appeared during the second millennium B.C. In describing these figures Kuhn (1956) stated "The figures are not those of ordinary men; they are those of ghosts. They are not ordinary beasts that confront us on the written rocks; they are ghostly beasts" (P 105). "Side by side with simple line drawings there are paintings in which a demonic, a spectral character is clearly visible. There is for instance . . . a four-legged figure furnished with huge crab-like claws" (P 117). Unconscious motivation appears in these pictures. The people who painted them could have been aware of this. They were contemporaries of the Egyptians. We know from contemporary Egyptian sources such as "The Story of Sinuhe" (see Simpson, 1972), that ancient Egyptians were so aware of unconscious motivation that they used it as an element in their narratives. In the above-mentioned story, which dates from 1961 B.C., a man when confronted with a situation in which he hears of the death of a king is "impelled by some inner force he cannot explain to flee from the court . . ." (P 57)

There is a rock painting in the Hoggar region of Africa of a distorted monster figure, which is estimated to be 6,000 to 7,000 years old (the *Concise Encyclopedia of Archaeology* p. 49). We may conclude that by the dawn of history psychoanalytic symbolism was available and widely established in art and literature.

### HUMAN to HUMANIST (SYMBOLS in SOCIETY)

Simple symbols started with a gesture or a groan whose meaning was shared by a group. Words resulted from constant use of these sounds. Cryptic dream symbols were derived from these sounds as a response to social clues that required that word meaning be denied. The denial was then reinforced by the creation of a substitute entity in awareness. Through creation of dream content, culturally forbidden impulses of astounding force came to be lost from view. In their stead both then and now there were lifted symbols as banners, which proclaimed the hiding places in memory, where the muted presence of their referents are hidden.

Symbols and society matured in concert. Once psychoanalytic symbols were established, they served as diverting conduits to be used for the discharge of needs that were forbidden by social pressures. As a result persistent idiosyncratic private realities were created. In the process a secret vocabulary for the expression of each individual's forbidden human needs was developed.

Driven needs and patterns for their suppression are universal. For instance the vulnerability of the young mother and the dependent child makes unregulated sexuality in males a threat. Marriage and the family, following patterns introduced by example and transmitted across generations through myth—such as the story of Oedipus and Penelope or Orpheus and Euridice—set the banks for the streams that carry culture.

The importance of masking and cryptic dream symbols in diverting the discharge of culture forbidden private influences have been described by Mead, M. (1958) as necessary in the evolution of human society. Whitehead (1927) defined a similar role for masking symbols in maintaining the structure of an existing society. (P 113) Social instinct suppresses individuality. Individuality threatens society. Symbols offer a safe outlet for individuality. (P 113)

Mankind did not develop speech and awareness first and then at its leisure create the guides to suppression found in the mythic schemata of society. The mythic schematas that inform the beliefs of society were infused at the point in the evolution of mankind that made possible a shift of awareness from a world recalled in terms of three dimensions and the passage of time to an encoding in memory of traces modified by emotions, motivations, and abstractions.

Projections onto reality of an emotionally distorted personalized worldview, when supported by a sense of the omnipotent truth of one's thoughts, alter one's image of the real world. The process supports as many "realities" as there are people. This could create universal chaos. For a group to be able to exist in a society without chaos, a shared set of symbolic forms influenced by sensitivity to the needs and thoughts of others is required. When myths, elaborated from psychoanalytic symbols have been added to mankind's skills there is readiness for shared culture with content infused with myths. Sets of related symbols offer the details of that which is needed to create a group morality. Personal needs and their symbols have to be relinquished or suppressed in favor of symbolically and mythologically educated

group beliefs and the inputs and drives that support them. Possession of and belief in such myths define an individual as a participant in a defined social order.

Irregular rates of maturation during the evolution of symbols influence the nature of the creative culture borne myths of modern man. Kernels of old beliefs and “creeds outworn” persist as remnants side by side with the new customs and beliefs that serve current needs. They obscure drives by serving as discharge pathways for homeless hopes that have lost relevance in newly ordered worlds. An example would be the celebrations of witchcraft and goblins at Halloween that discharge aggression and represent the symbols of antique faiths in the evening before the day in which new beliefs will take center stage.

The ability to develop adaptive mythic schemata was part of man’s burgeoning capacity to use symbols in the creation of mythic (cryptic) alternative responses. Cryptic multiple alternatives increase when there is increase in the binding of instinctual discharge to unitary unalterable conscious patterns of socially decreed morality. Cryptic symbols support man’s socially shared morality by offering outlets through dreams and drama for urges that threaten the social fabric.

Man is not born with inherent knowledge of moral absolutes. Each man must be prepared for the life of his people through initiation into the symbols, myths, and patterns of his culture. In this way each man develops and survives by becoming a group animal. Permitted alternatives and traditions are not transmitted through instinct. They are acquired through education in the nature of the symbolic forms presented with the secrets of initiation. Each society has techniques for this transmission. (For instance see “the Ojibwa Dream Fast” in this book, Volume 3, Section B, Chapter 5.) Man’s survival as a species has depended upon it.

## THE SHIFT FROM EVOCATIVE TO COMMUNICATIVE SYMBOLS

### Relating to the World

A necessary evolutionary step in the development of the capacity of an animal to become a member of a group, bound together by verbally encoded traditions, is the ability to shift from life in which evocation of inner needs dominate verbalization to a life in which the ability to tune evocative

satisfactions to the communicative needs of the group becomes primary.

A growing sensitivity to the needs of others requiring suppression of the evocation of personal needs occurs during the evolution of symbols. The earliest symbols perpetuated emphasis on the expression of *evoked* memory and drives. The primary influences that first shaped the symbol were internal drive representations. These were antithetical to the development of cooperation in society. Suppressed aggressive urges and forbidden sexual fantasies, if lived out, could have destabilized the institutions of society such as marriage and orderly interactions under the law. Stability is born when drives are controlled and the motives for communication are influenced by the needs of others and society.

The needs of society require symbols that communicate and actions, which are selected with the needs of peers in mind. The conscious forms of symbols and speech must be altered away from evocation if they are to serve communication and the creation of a functioning society. The literature of prehistoric art is not mute about this transition. For instance Reinach (1903) noted that symbols in the art of prehistoric man and modern man were intrinsically different. He noted that "the prehistoric sculptor was never preoccupied with the intent to please, but with the intent to evoke" (P 265) magic and inner needs. Symbols are seen to be basic agents in the creation of the future. The magical appearance of game for hunting was the goal of primitive image formation. The mature symbols of modern man serve best when they are used for planning for the future using natural elements as the symbols that are selected for the modeling of possibilities, recognizing limitations in planning, and communicating declarative memory through mutually defined words.

Giedion (1962) in pursuing this phenomenon described the nature of the changes in symbolism from prehistory to high civilization as follows:

"In prehistory, the symbol as used by a society possessed the magical power to control reality before that reality came to pass. Images of gods had animal forms. By the time of the dawn of high civilization in ancient Greece, the symbol had developed a spiritual content and served abstract concepts." (See Giedion (1962) P. 371)

With this transition images of gods took human form. Art was tuned to realistic images and the needs of society. The influence of the needs of human companions introduced a measure by which social

behavior could be judged. Artistic representations of inner feelings, augmented by psychoanalytic symbols, created representations that hid referents while they please social audiences and partners. The art endured to influence later generations. Mature cryptic displacement based communicative symbols enable modern man's fulfillment of his potential to be a creature with rich sublimations, extensive internalized culture elements, symptom neuroses, and a potential to tune communication in speech and actions to the needs of others.

### **Internalization of Communicative Symbols**

The newly created gods of early religions became patrons—identified with—the moralities and public expectations of individual men, their families, their progeny, their group, and as men and their skills proliferated, their professions. When individual men left hearth and home to wander, to travel, or to trade, the influence of the public opinion of their home group was not left behind. As part of their identity, admonitions associated with their gods followed them. Even in the absence of fellow tribesmen, they adhered to dictates of the morality of home that had been internalized. The message that was infused through myths of faith was 'written in their hearts' (Jeremiah). Legends based on shared worship of personal gods shaped the borders of a culture steeped in myth.

Manifest psychoanalytic symbols used in a communicative mode contributed a binding force to culture. They provided shared countercathetic myths that drew attention from and hid universally repressed drive derivative referents, which were threats to society. This mechanism used repression empowered by superego motivated affects and guided by superego contents to limit transgression. Drives held in check by these internal mechanisms found alternative outlets in expression through the evocative psychoanalytic symbols of dreaming.

### **Zoomorphic to Anthropomorphic God Figures**

Giedion (1962) observed that during the fourth millennium B.C. there was a change in emphasis from the zoomorphic view of man as an animal amongst animals, to an anthropomorphic view of man as unique and separate from animals. He related the change in the use of symbols—from self expressive to communicative—to this change in the philosophical orientation of the self of humankind (P 90). Osborn

(1975) noted that when men came to think of themselves as beings higher than the animals, the animistic choice of animals as the rulers of man's fate fell out of favor. This change brought on symbols for gods, which had human forms and attributes. These were worshipped as holy (higher than man) and worthy to control man's earthly fortunes (P 25).

The animistic choice of zoomorphic (animal form) god images as the rulers of man's fate dominated ancient Egyptian religion. They persisted in ancient Greece in such metamorphic remnants as Zeus appearing as a swan. In the Norse myths Loki became a salmon. To this date the zoomorphic level of religious symbolism and iconography may be seen in the images of gods of the Hindu religion. There are for instance the elephant headed Ganesh as well as the avatars of Vishnu as a boar or a lion. And there are the Vahanas. These are animals identified with the gods upon which the gods are transported from heaven to earth. This group includes the Garuda bird that carries Vishnu, the Makara sea monster that carries Varuna the god of the oceans, and the Boar vahana of Vishnu that carries Prthividevi the cow earth goddess. In other modern religions there are animal metaphors for gods such as the paschal lamb and the substitution of a sacrificial lamb for Isaac.

The shift from a zoomorphic to an anthropomorphic deity without animal characteristic and an absence of sexual proclivities coincides with the advent of ethical monotheism. The god therein is represented in picture, word and statue as having human form and espousing inhibition of sexuality and aggression in human motivation. The spirit of monotheism has no place for the sexually motivated god. A god who is capable of parenthood plants the seeds of polytheism.

### **Evolutionary Effect of Verbal Communication on Symbols**

Pictorial expression long preceded writing as a means of preserving and condensing ancient beliefs. Visual thinking and the logic that it supports bypass the rationalism available to people, who have attained abstraction based on inputs carried by a verbal medium such as a book. Any shift from visual to verbal symbols in forming representations enhances the rational and abstract qualities of symbolic thinking.

Visual depictions such as tapestries, stained glass windows, figures on an ancient vase, and

patient's dreams, limit interpretation to abstractions about that, which is concretely present. One must be ever on the alert to realize that the establishment of linkages through which referents can be expressed using visual symbols evokes the human tendency to make identifications on the basis of superficial physical similarities and propinquity (pseudoabstraction and abstract thinking). Visual thinking supports arbitrary linking through condensations, and displacements. Arbitrary identifications between gods and concepts can be made through visual clues of similarity. A gathering of symbols in one visual image creates a representation that elevates predicate identification. Goodenough (1953 vol. 5-6) noted that "... (t)he clustering of symbols upon the single figure is the symbolist's way of expressing the abstraction ..." (P 181). The relationship is fixed and there is no room for rational challenge.

Manifest concrete symbols are based on representations, which are related to their referents through symbolic linkages between visual elements that have superficial similarities. Abstract symbols are established through symbolic linkages that involve intrinsic similarities that can only be conceptualized and communicated through words. Thomas Cole, Lucas Cranach, and Richard Dadd (V.I.) were aware of this. As a result they added written descriptions to fix in place the meaning of their visions. Symbols based upon abstract symbolic linkages may or may not be affected by repression. When not transformed by repression, abstract symbols appear as metaphors.

Visual symbols are vassals to the priest who can shape interpretations to fit an old order without fear that its logic will be challenged. Books steer men and offer more opportunity for reflection and challenges to logic than exposure to visual symbols. Verbal symbols and written commentaries can carry concepts over time periods that dwarf the life of individuals. Written words extend the period within which reaction can take place and concepts can be evolved that challenge fixed beliefs. Reservation of sacred texts only for the initiated is a technique used to limit such challenge.

### **"PRIME SYMBOLS" AND THE "MOTHER LANDSCAPE"**

Spengler (1918) called the symbols, which are at the root of a culture's world view "prime symbols" (P 279 Vol. 2) noting that "... there are a series of prime symbols each of which is capable of forming a complete world out of itself ..." (P 180) through "... endowing that which is outside ... with the whole content that is (within)" (P 164 Vol. 1). What is being described is projection. Prime symbol refers to the

core referents of the “Mother Landscape” (P 203 Vol. 1). These contain the impressions through which the world is interpreted. Their extension into the world shapes the worldview through which symbolization transforms its essence. Spengler noted that “Each of the great Cultures, then, has arrived at a secret language of world feeling that is only fully comprehensible by him whose soul belongs to that Culture.” (P 178 vol. 1) There are “. . . as many worlds as there are waking beings and like living, like-feeling groups of beings. The supposedly single, independent and external world that each believes to be common to all is really an ever-new, uniquely-occurring and nonrecurring experience in the existence of each.” (P 164 Vol. 1) “It is particularly the common symbolic of language that nourishes the illusion of a homogeneous constitution of human inner-life and an identical world-form . . .” (P 179 Vol. 1). The mother landscape contributes to the “. . . birth of its outer world through the symbol of extension (P 174 Vol. 1); and thenceforth the symbol is and remains the prime symbol of that life, imparting to it its specific style and the historical form in which it progressively actualizes its innate possibilities.” (P 174 Vol. 1) “The spirit of the mother landscape unites with the soul that has sprung from it.” (P 203 Vol. 1) Indeed culture arises from the mother-landscape.

Cassirer (1955 Vol. 2) assigned the source of the mother-landscape to transcendent religious content, stating that the structure of society “. . . is decisively determined by . . . religious imprint . . .” (P 193) for it is through the figure of his gods that man remakes his identity. (P 211)

New cultures produce new boundaried groupings of symbols. These are the defining characteristics of culture. Manifest symbols that are specific to each culture’s myths, color local explanations of reality. Examples of such explanations are symbols of Greek mythology such as weeping Niobe whose despair came after the murder of her many children by Aphrodite. She had bragged that her prowess exceeded that of the goddess who had but one child. In response the goddess turned her into a rock from which flowed tears. Her plight and metamorphosis explained the presence of a rock from which water flowed. Such manifest content is available to anyone. Referent secret meanings, which are handed down rather than inherent, are known only to the initiated.

Each society has a proprietary “mother landscape” made up of such symbols. They are based upon a consistent arbitrary set of referents, which conform to the cultural worldview of a society and can be grouped in a contiguity that creates logical connections suitable for representation by visual groupings,

whose meaning can be locked into place through verbalization. The cultural definition of reality is identified with these symbols. Man's place in that reality and in his role in the world is derived from maps constructed from a landscape made up of these symbols.