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2021

## The Vorstellungsrepräsentanz

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# The Vorstellungsrepräsentanz

John Shannon Hendrix

The compound German word *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* appeared in Sigmund Freud's essay "The Unconscious" ("Das Unbewusste") in 1915: "Wir können nichts anderes meinen, als seine Triebbegung, deren Vortstellungsrepräsentanz unbewusst ist, den etwas anderes kommt nicht in Betracht"<sup>1</sup> ("We cannot mean anything other than an instinctual impulse, the ideational representation of which is unconscious, because nothing else comes into consideration."<sup>2</sup>) The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is an unconscious representation, in the form of an idea or thought, of an instinctual impulse. The word was translated by James Strachey as "ideational representation" in the Standard Edition. In the essay, Freud used the terms *Vorstellung* and *Repräsentanz* separately in various places. Freud is interested in how the unconscious thought, or "act of ideation"<sup>3</sup> (*Vorstellung*) is transferred from the unconscious to conscious thought. Either a representation (*Repräsentanz*) of the idea replaces its original representation in a different location in the mind, or the idea just changes into a different state. An idea is both conscious and unconscious; ideas are cathexes of memory traces. Behind the cathexis (concentration of mental energy, fixation of energy in a form) is the instinct (drive, libido, affect). In the conscious mind, it is the memory of an auditory impression (a *Vortvorstellung* or word representation, what Jacques Lacan would call the signifier); in the unconscious mind, the same idea, or sensory memory trace, is repressed. "Primal repression" prevents the ideational representation of the drive from becoming conscious. Unlike an idea, an instinct cannot be an object of conscious thought, or even unconscious thought, other than through an idea (*Vorstellung*) that represents it (*Repräsentanz*) (the ideational representation of the instinctual impulse).

## Philosophical Roots

In 1628, in "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," René Descartes distinguished between the "formal" reality of a thing or idea, which is its existence in perception, and the "objective" reality of a thing or idea, which is its quality as a representation of something.<sup>4</sup> This corresponds to the classical distinction between the *morphe*, or material substrate of the form, and the *eidōs*, the intelligible form. The idea for Descartes is the act of representing, or what is represented; representation is possible when the objective reality of an idea as representation has its origin in the formal quality of the idea represented.<sup>5</sup> Thus, having a sensory perception is thinking. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1700, John Locke said that words signify nothing outside their role in ideational representation: "words in their primary and immediate signification, stand for nothing, but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them."<sup>6</sup> Words, or "general terms," replace or represent ("stand for") the reality of things.<sup>7</sup> In his *Treatise on Human Nature* in 1739, David Hume described all perception as representational, and the power of representation is in the imagination.<sup>8</sup> Thoughts are composed of ideas, which are images in the mind; simple ideas are copies of sensory perceptions, while complex ideas involve representation, as for Descartes and Locke. In the 1780s, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant associated the word *Vorstellung* with the Latin word *repraesentatio*.<sup>9</sup> He used it to describe an idea as a synthesized

organization of perceptions, or apperception, based on a priori categories of intuition. All representations are structured by two forms of intuition, according to Kant: space and time.<sup>10</sup> In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807, GWF Hegel used the word *Vorstellung* as “picture-thinking,” an intermediary connection between the perception of a sensuous image and the formation of an abstract concept. As for Freud, the *Vorstellung* is involved in the transition of the thought from unconscious to conscious (*Phenomenology of Spirit* §463).<sup>11</sup> Because it is connected to the sensuous dimension, the *Vorstellung* cannot be pure or abstract thought (as in the Divided Line of Plato). The singularity of the abstract intuition in the unconscious is present to the mind through the multiplicity of the *Vorstellung*, which is where language comes into play. The *Vorstellung* is a transitional form of thought and associated with imagination. The role of the *Vorstellung* in both Hegel and Freud recalls descriptions of the imagination by Plotinus in the *Enneads* in the third century. Plotinus described imagination as making possible the translation of sensible objects in perception to intellection. Following Aristotle, the intellectual act is not possible without an accompanying mental image. The ability to form the image in the mind’s eye as a memory trace is always accompanied by the “verbal expression” (*Enneads* IV.3.30),<sup>12</sup> or the *logos endiathetos*, the word in thought. The intelligible image, and thus the sensible image, is not possible without the linguistic expression of it, and linguistic expression is not possible without the intelligible image. Perception of sensible objects is only possible after the idea of the sensible object is articulated in language in intellection. While the intellectual act is a singularity, as Hegel describes, “without parts,” as it has not been differentiated in language or perception, it “has not, so to speak, come out into the open, but remains unobserved within,” as unconscious thought, Plotinus explained. But language unfolds its content, “and brings it out of the intellectual act into the image-making power,” allowing imagination to form the intelligible image, the unconscious memory trace for Freud, which corresponds to the sensible image in conscious memory. In doing so, the linguistic articulation “shows the intellectual act as if in a mirror,” Plotinus says, as a representation, but the linguistic articulation in discursive reason does not contain the intellectual act; the intellectual act remains separated from sense perception. In the “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” Freud suggested that representation is a construct of thought completely independent from perception. The *Sachvorstellung* is the thing-presentation, the memory trace of the perceived sensual image. The *Vortvorstellung* is the word-presentation, the memory trace of the sounds of letters combined in words. The cathected mental acts in the unconscious which are not connected to sense perceptions can only become conscious in association with the memory traces of the *Vortvorstellungen*, as Freud described in *The Interpretations of Dreams (Die Traumdeutung)* in 1900. Freud’s teacher at the University of Vienna, Franz Brentano, held that all psychic phenomena involve presentations; the three classifications of psychic phenomena were presentations (*Vorstellungen* or mental representations), judgments, and emotive acts.<sup>13</sup>

### Freud’s Concept

The concept of the *Vorstellung* played a key role in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*. The *Vorstellung* plays a role in the “representability” (*Darstellbarkeit*) of dream thoughts in their transition to dream images. *Darstellung* involves the formation of signs, in distinction from *Vorstellung*. Displacement, a mechanism of dream work, transforming unconscious dream

thoughts into dream images (conscious memory traces), relies on visual representation. A psychical impulse in the unconscious re-cathets the memory trace of perception (Sachvorstellung), evoking the original act of perception, the original satisfaction of it, the excitation or affect. The impulse is a wish, and “the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish ...”.<sup>14</sup> Thought is a substitute for a wish, and dreams are wish-fulfilments. The “primary process,”<sup>15</sup> with the help of a “discharge of excitation,” seeks to establish a “perceptual identity” with the experience of satisfaction. The primary process forms a mental image of a desired object in order to satisfy the desire for that object. The “secondary process” seeks to establish a “thought-identity” with the same experience. It forms the ground of cathexis for representations, making thought possible. Thinking proceeds from the memory of a satisfaction to a cathexis of a reproduction of the same memory, connecting ideas together, in the passage from the Sachvorstellungen to the Vortvorstellungen.

In “The Unconscious,” the presentation of an object in conscious thought can be split up into the presentation of the word and the presentation of the thing. The presentation of an object in unconscious thought only involves the presentation of the thing. The preconscious links the thing to the word. This seems to reverse the formula presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that dream thoughts are in the unconscious and dream images are conscious memory traces. The formula presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams* corresponds to Lacan’s association of the Imaginary category, image making, with conscious thought, and the Symbolic category, language, with unconscious thought. In “The Unconscious,” conscious thought is only possible when the thing is linked to the word. This linking involves censorship. The presentation of the thing in the unconscious, before it is linked to the word and prior to censorship, exists outside of language as a primordial affect, as it were, and underlies the symptoms that the subject experiences in the conscious ego. The affect, drive or instinct, is repressed, censored, sublimated, and represented by language, as the thing presentation is linked to the word presentation, and conscious thought is made possible. In primal repression, the drive “is denied entrance into consciousness,”<sup>16</sup> but remains attached or cathected to the word presentation. The drive, affect or emotion, is cut away in the formation of the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz in conscious thought, in the cathexis of the Vortvorstellung and the Sachvorstellung. In reality, neither of these should be assigned to either conscious or unconscious thought alone. This is the uniquely human condition, and the presence of the unconscious, the absence in conscious thought. The ideational cathexis created by the drive is usually taken to be the Repräsentanz in the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz, which is then represented by the Vorstellung, object presentation or picture thinking in conscious thought.

In his essay “On Aphasia,” Freud described this complex relation between word and object perception: “The word, then, is a complicated concept built up from various impressions, i.e. it corresponds to an intricate process of associations entered into by elements of visual, acoustic and kinesthetic origins.”<sup>17</sup> The word becomes significant in its relation to the “thing,” which is “an open set of associated sensory impressions.” The resulting idea or concept is “itself another complex of associations composed of the most varied visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic and other impressions.” The Vorstellungen, according to Freud in “On Aphasia,” are “residues of impressions” which arrive through visual and auditory nerves, speech and sensation, and they are combined together in the cerebral cortex.<sup>18</sup>

### Lacan's Concept

In 1960, Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, two of Lacan's students, focused their attention on Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* in their essay "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study." According to them, the drive only enters mental life, conscious or unconscious, through the mediation of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The compound term is again translated as "ideational representative" (*représentant représentatif* in French).<sup>19</sup> As further explained in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, the *Repräsentanz* is the representation or delegation of the instinct, while the *Vorstellung* is the idea. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the delegation of instinct in the sphere of ideas. It is the idea that represents the instinct, rather than the idea being represented by something else.<sup>20</sup> An example of the delegation of instinct into language would be the Fort! Da! game described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the gone/here game enacted by the infant to compensate for the temporary departure of the mother. The interpretation of the game "was related to the child's great achievement—the instinctual renunciation (that is the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting."<sup>21</sup> The staging of the disappearance and return of objects was compensation, as were the words used. In the game, the ordering of reality in language is a substitution for instinctual displeasure and joy; the instinct is repressed, and represented by the object and the word in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The linguistic construction replaces the relation to the mother as object, and defines the subject in a network of relations in language. The instinct is cathected in the word representation, and the words Fort! Da! perpetually recreate the repressed instinct, perpetually recreate the absence of the object relation, what Lacan would call the *objet a*, the absence of the subject in language, the unconscious.

In *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, in "Interview on the Steps of the Pantheon," Lacan corrects his students' definition of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. According to Lacan, the *Repräsentanz* is the *représentant de la* representation, rather than the *représentant représentatif*. Lacan means to say by this that the representative is not a representation; representation is the act that takes place between representatives. The word in language does not properly represent the repressed instinct, although some form of representation might take place between the two. Affect, drive, libido, and emotion are not adequately represented by words, the ideational representatives, what Lacan would call the signifiers in the signifying network. According to Lacan, "affect, through the fact of displacement, is effectively displaced, unidentified, broken off from its roots—it eludes us. This is what is essential in repression. It's not that the affect is suppressed, it's that it is displaced and unrecognizable."<sup>22</sup> While his students argued that it is possible to see repressed affects as being represented by ideas, although there is a gap between them, Lacan insisted that there is no relation between the affect and the signifier. This poses a serious problem for psychoanalysis. The self-knowledge of the subject's emotional life becomes more problematic. The relation between conscious thought in the ego and the unconscious is one of *méconnaissance*, mis-knowing, as the representation of the subject to itself in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, in the signifying order, can't be taken for granted.

According to Lacan in *Écrits: A Selection*, "If linguistics enables us to see the signifier as the determinant of the signified, analysis reveals the truth of this relation by making the 'holes' in meaning the determinants of its discourse."<sup>23</sup> The signifier functions as the

Vorstellungsrepräsentanz, and the gap between affect and representation results in the holes in meaning, lacunae and scotomata. Because of the lack of connection between drive and the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz, “Freud seems suddenly to fail to recognize the existence of everything that the ego neglects, scotomizes, misconstrues in the sensations that make it react to reality, everything that it ignores, exhausts, and binds in the significations that it receives from language ...”.<sup>24</sup> The unconscious can only be grasped in méconnaissance. The result of méconnaissance is the objet a, the missing object of desire, the Freudian “thing,” das Ding, the void around which desire circulates, as desire is a construct of language, in the cathexis of the drive and the word. As Freud said that the unconscious can only contain the Sachvorstellung, the “thing” predates the formation of words in language, outside of signification. In Lacan’s *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, the “thing” is “characterized by its absence, its strangeness,”<sup>25</sup> in the context of the Vorstellungen. “Das Ding is a primordial function which is located at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of the unconscious *Vorstellungen*.”<sup>26</sup> Lacan does not see Freud’s Sachvorstellung as being organized by language, but rather a pre-linguistic form of representation, a bundle of unconscious memory traces. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud described the Sachvorstellung (later replaced by the term Dingvorstellung) as “made up of innumerable single impressions (or unconscious traces of them).”<sup>27</sup>

*Das Ding* and the objet a play a key role in Lacan’s description of the formation of the infantile subject in the mirror stage. When the infant first recognizes itself in the mirror, it sees itself for the first time as an object, an orthopedic totality isolated from its environment and “in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him”<sup>28</sup> prior to the visual association of experience to the body. There is a disassociation between the body and the unconscious Sachvorstellung. Freud described the same disassociation when a subject encounters another subject (nebenmensch, “fellow human being”) in the visual field, in “Project for a Scientific Psychology.”<sup>29</sup> The other subject is both a coherent “thing” (Ding) and an understanding based on memory in relation to the subject’s own body. In the composition of the conscious presentation of the object, the perception and understanding of the other subject combines the Sachvorstellung and the Dingvorstellung. But, according to Lacan, the Sachvorstellung is not properly represented by the Dingvorstellung, as unconscious affect cannot be represented by language, so the perceived other cannot be the object of desire in relation to instinct, but only as filtered through language; thus the objet a fills in for the absence of the object of desire in perception, as a product of the méconnaissance of the subject, as desire propels language to circulate around das Ding, the absence.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the images in the dream, the transposition of the mnemonic residue of perception, are the Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen described by Freud, which are not a representative representative (représentant représentatif) according to Lacan in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, but “that which takes place of the representation (le tenant-lieu de la représentation)”<sup>30</sup> between perception and consciousness, the gap in which the subject is constituted. The Vorstellungsrepräsentanz is located in the “schema of the original mechanisms of alienation in that first signifying coupling that enable us to conceive that the subject appears first in the Other,”<sup>31</sup> the unconscious, in the signifying chain, the product of which is the elision, the aphanisis of the subject. The subject is divided because as soon as it appears in the signifying chain, as represented by a signifier, it disappears, in the same way that the mnemonic residue of perception disappears when it is inserted into the signifying chain of the dream and is

replaced by the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is as the pronoun in language, that which replaces the absent subject in conscious thought, thus the divided subject.

According to Lacan, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is as the binary signifier in the metaphor, which in the process of condensation and displacement produces signification by substituting the name of one thing for something else, and an idea is formed in the combination of two names. In the glissement, or sliding of the signifier in language, the signified is transferred from one signifier to another, in what is called “signifying substitution” in the binary signifier. The idea, the subject, is produced in the gap between signifiers, at the point de capiton, the intersection of the Imaginary and Symbolic, conscious and unconscious, in the retroactive anticipation of presence. At the anchoring point, “sense emerges from non-sense.”<sup>32</sup> The binary signifier is represented in the algorithm of the metaphoric process:  $f(S'/S)S \approx S(+s)$ , where  $S'$  is the first signifier in the metaphor,  $S$  is the second, and the (+) represents “the crossing of the bar”<sup>33</sup> between signifier and signified, given by the condensation in the binary signifier. The second metaphoric algorithm illustrates the importance of displacement, the elision of the second signified in order for the metaphor to function:  $S/\$' \cdot \$'/x \rightarrow S(U/s)$ , where  $S$  is a signifier,  $x$  is the unknown signification,  $s$  is the signified created by the metaphor, and  $\$'$ , the barred  $S$ , is the elision of the substituted signified in the glissement. A third algorithm in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*,<sup>34</sup>  $S'/S \times S/s \rightarrow S'/s/S/S$ , shows the substitution of one signifier for another, and the elision of the first signifier, in the metaphoric process. The repressed signifier is placed in the *Unterdrückt*, the denominator under the bar, as the binary signifier.

As the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier in the metaphoric process of condensation and displacement in the formation of the dream, as that which takes the place of the representation, it is the supersession (*Urverdrängung*) of the signifier in condensation, between the conscious and unconscious, which creates the point of attraction (*Anziehung*), the point de capiton, through which the unconscious is momentarily revealed, and which creates repression in the *Unterdrückung* of the signifier, which is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.<sup>35</sup> It is that which occurs in the gap between image and language, between perception and consciousness, which is repressed, in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* which is that which takes the place of the representation, in the glissement in language which occurs in the in-between, and the in-between which occurs in the glissement. Signification occurs in the *Vorstellung*, while the *Repräsentativ* occurs in conscious thought. The ego in the Imaginary order of Lacan is a product of the relation with the other, the necessity of intersubjectivity. The subject is discordant in its inability to identify itself as the image reflected by the other in relation to its own disappearance in language, which preserves the existence of the other to the subject. The ego, the mechanism of thought, is itself an object which appears in the world of objects. Consciousness, the self-identity of the subject with its ego, is defined as a tension between the ego which has been alienated from the subject in its experience in language, and in the impossibility of its relation to the other, and the perception on the part of the subject which is external to ego, the primordial object identification prior to the mirror stage, a “pure *percipi*,”<sup>36</sup> seizing or receiving, as described in *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. In primordial object identification, in the *Sachvorstellung*, “the subject would be strictly identical to this perception if there weren't this *ego* which ... makes it emerge from out of its very perception in a relationship of tension. Under certain conditions, this

imaginary relation itself reaches its own limit, and the *ego* fades away, dissipates, becomes disorganized, dissolves.”

The subject of Lacan is alienated from itself in signification, from its own desire in language, by language. The subject is self-alienated in the doubling of its reason, in the doubling of the signifier which produces signification, and which institutes the objet a in language as the lack of the subject, the self-negation of the subject in reason, and its self-alienation in its language. As soon as the subject speaks, it desires, and as soon as the subject desires it does not know itself, and its méconnaissance is sustained by its desire. As soon as a signifier represents the subject to another signifier, the subject is alienated from itself in its desire. In *Seminar XI*, “Alienation is linked in an essential way to the function of the dyad of signifiers.”<sup>37</sup> As soon as the alienation is accomplished in the singular representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, the subject is eliminated from any further signification, which becomes self-enclosed and inaccessible to the subject. The subject cannot access that by which it is constituted. It is defined by the binary signifier, two signifiers operating together. “If we wish to grasp where the function of the subject resides in this signifying articulation, we must operate with two, because it is only with two that he can be cornered in alienation. As soon as there are three, the sliding becomes circular.” The alienation is accomplished with the binary signifier, as “the signifier is that which represents the subject for the other signifier.” As has been seen, the binary signifier is also the mechanism of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the dream. The representation which takes the place of the representation is the signifier which takes the place of the signifier, which represents the subject to it. The subject is elided in the dream in the same way, as the *Unterdrückung* of the binary signifier. The subject is thus self-alienated from its desire in the dream as well, in its aphanisis, which is a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the elision of the subject is the product of the binary signifier in conscious discourse, in which the mechanisms of the unconscious, metaphor and metonymy, determine the subject unknown to itself.

In Freud’s *On Dreams*, dreams are described as “disconnected fragments of visual images.”<sup>38</sup> Dream images do not appear in relation to the insertion by the subject of itself into the field; they are independent of the interaction between a representation of the subject and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, though the object identifications of the subject, the *Sachvorstellungen*, are present in the dream. The position of the subject in the dream then, for Lacan in *Seminar XI*, “is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows.”<sup>39</sup> The dream is not a product of perception, organized in relation to the subject. Seeing in perception is impossible in the dream. The subject will never “be able to apprehend himself in the dream in the way in which, in the Cartesian *cogito*, he apprehends himself as thought.” The relation between the Imaginary, conscious thought, and the Symbolic, the unconscious, which places the subject as a reference point, in relation to the other, in the constructed perception of the Other, the unconscious, does not exist in the dream, and as a result the Gaze is revealed, the lacuna in the field of perception which contains the absence of the subject in the unconscious and the lack of the subject in conscious thought, which is the stain, or the objet a, which is elided in perception, as it is based on the *cogito*, as the unconscious is elided in signification. In that the *cogito* is given by the illusion of consciousness, the subject is the consciousness of perception, but the subject cannot be the consciousness of the dream.

The image in the dream, the transposition of the mnemic residue of perception, is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* described by Freud, the representation of the representation, or that which would take the place of the representation, according to Lacan, between perception and conscious thought, or between unconscious and conscious, the gap in which the subject is constituted. The mnemic residue of perception disappears when it is inserted into the signifying chain of the dream and is replaced by the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is that which replaces the absent subject (the absence of the knowledge of unconscious thought) in the ego in language, the void around which desire circulates. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is as the binary signifier in the metaphor, which in the process of condensation and displacement produces signification by substituting the name of one thing for something else, and an idea is formed in the combination of two names. As the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier in the metaphoric process of condensation and displacement in the formation of the dream, as that which takes the place of the representation, it is the supersession of the signifier in condensation, between the image and word, which creates the point of attraction, through which the unconscious is momentarily revealed, and which creates repression in the *Unterdrückung* of the signifier, which is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. It is that which occurs in the gap between the image and word, or between unconscious and conscious thought, which is repressed, through the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. Signification occurs in the *Vorstellung* (picture thinking), while the representation occurs in perception itself. The thinking subject is unable to identify itself as an image in the context of its own disappearance in language. The ego, the mechanism of conscious thought, is itself an object which appears in the world of objects. Conscious thought, the self-identity of the subject with its ego, is defined as a tension between the ego that has been divorced from the thinking subject in its experience in language, and the perception on the part of the subject which is external to ego, the primordial object identification or *Sachvorstellung* in unconscious thought.

The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is an intelligible, separated from sense perception (as in the Divided Line of Plato) which is self-generating and self-supporting in intellect because it has entered into language. The internal perception of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* in imagination is taken as the archetype, as it were, of the perception of sensible objects, which is ephemeral and subject to change and given by the ego or conscious reason. In dreams, the particular quality of the image is that it does not correspond to the perception of the subject inserted into language, although linguistic structures are seen to compose the dream. The ego in language, in discursive reason or conscious thought, is present in the dream, in the latent content in the dream, the unconscious dream thought, as revealed by Freud, and the ego in perception is present in the dream, as images in the dream are products of the object identification of the thinking subject, and there is a transformative process between the latent and manifest content, dream thought and dream image, of the dream, as Freud has shown. A difference between the dream and waking perception is that the interaction between the linguistic and perceptual egos, word and image, which constitutes the subject in conscious perception, is missing in the experience of the dream, as it has been transformed through processes such as condensation and displacement.

As the dream image is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the representation of the mnemic residue, the connection between the word and image is lost between the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* and the mnemic residue, the memory trace. In the dream, the perceiving ego is not subsumed into and

repressed by the linguistic ego as it is in conscious perception; the dream represents more of an equal partnership, given the lack of requirement for communication in the dream. Conscious perception is always in reference to the relation with the object identification of the perceiving ego, which is only a fragment or a residue absorbed into language in conscious thought. The dream image is a product of the relation between the thinking subject and language, but the structuring of the relation between the subject and the perceived object in relation to language, the image in relation to the word, as the perception is subsumed into language in conscious thought, is not present in the dream, or unconscious thought. Images in the dream present themselves differently from images in perception. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud described dream images as competing in intensity and superimposition, and color impressions are given hallucinatory clarity in relation to the mnemonic residues.<sup>40</sup> As dreams are disconnected fragments of visual images, dream images do not appear in relation to the insertion by the subject of itself into the field of vision in the dream; they are independent of the interaction between a representation of the subject and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, *Sachvorstellung* and *Vortvorstellung*, though the object identifications of the subject, *Sachvorstellungen*, are present in the dream. The dream is not a product of perception, organized in relation to the subject. Seeing in conscious perception is impossible in the dream. The thinking subject is not able to apprehend itself in the dream in the way that it apprehends itself as conscious thought, in the relation between the image and the word that places the subject as a reference point in constructed perception in language.

In repression, according to Lacan, a word is “sunk underneath”<sup>41</sup> (*Unterdrückt*) in the unconscious, forming a network of relations with other words and parts of words that might be accessible to the preconscious or conscious thought. The binary signifier or pair of signifiers is lost from conscious thought in primal repression, cathecting with the drive, creating the unconscious, and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is created to allow the repressed signifier in connection to the drive to return to conscious thought. *Das Ding*, the thing, is the object in the unconscious that cannot be signified, the lost element in the process, the remainder of the object that can be signified in the *Dingvorstellung* and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. In Lacan’s scheme, the Imaginary, image making in relation to the signifier, is a faculty of conscious thought, while the Symbolic, the complex of language, is a faculty of the unconscious; but the unsignified image is also in the unconscious, as are the drives, the affects, which may or may not be represented in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, as they are cathected with signifiers. How exactly the drives might be represented is never clearly explained by Freud or Lacan. *Das Ding* and the drives in the unconscious require that the subject build defense mechanisms against them, avoiding them, as they threaten the foundation of rational, conscious thought. Awareness of them can cause obsession, hysteria, revulsion, aversion, or the feeling of being overwhelmed (*Überwältigung*); the object *a* of Lacan has the same effect as the *das Ding* of Freud. The subject is defined by the signifier in language, as the signifier is that which presents the subject to another signifier in the binary relation, so the absence of the signifier in *das Ding* threatens the existence of the subject. Psychosis involves a complete break between the signifier and the object of perception; the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is key to the proper functioning of the psyche.

The lack of clarity in Freud and Lacan as to how the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* represents the drive, and the function of representation in the psyche itself, has been pointed out by Bruce Fink and Adrian Johnston, among others.<sup>42</sup> According to Fink, Lacan identifies the *Vorstellung* with *das*

Ding, the lost object of perception in the unconscious as the result of primal repression, inaccessible to the signifier, and the Repräsentanz as the signification of the repressed Vorstellung. In primary repression, the representation of the drive is denied entrance into conscious thought. It is the signifier that is repressed, not the drive. But as Lacan says, there is no relation between the representation and what is represented, as in language there is no relation between the signified and the signifier. The concept of the signified in structural linguistics plays almost no role in Lacan's thought, because of the problematic nature of representation. The signified in structural linguistics is the picture in the mind that is associated with the phonetic sound of the word (the signifier) as a combination of the phonetic sounds of letters. The signified is the idea, the ideational representative, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. But Lacan correlates the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* only with the signifier. For Freud, the repressed ideational representations of the drives (*Triebrepräsenzen*) are the *Repräsenzen*, not the *Vorstellungen*. It is the drive that is repressed, not the signifier. Both of these schema are certainly at work. Either way, "representation" can only occur in a cathexis involving the signifier and the drive; the *Vorstellung* either remains repressed, with no connection to the signifier, or it is experienced by the subject in connection to the subject as the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. It can be properly called an experience or a sensation, as it is still connected to affect. In language it functions as a representation, as the signifier represents the subject to another signifier.

According to Lacan in *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, the *Vorstellungen* are located "between perception and consciousness,"<sup>43</sup> and are regulated by the pleasure principle, as for Freud the reappearance of a perception is the fulfillment of a wish. *Vorstellungen* are formed in the unconscious between perception and conscious thought, resulting from the sense perception of objects, the other, and surfacing in conscious thought as a result of the cathexis of the drive and the signifier as the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. No *Vorstellung* stands alone without relations with other *Vorstellungen*, just as no signifier stands alone. It takes at least two signifiers to define the subject, and at least two *Vorstellungen* for mental processes to take place. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is itself the binary signifier, according to Lacan. Thought, language, and image-formation are interwoven in a complex web of activities, mostly unconscious, resulting in conscious thought and perception, or apperception, the structuring of the visual field which occurs in the unconscious, as opposed to the *percipi*, primordial object identification prior to language, as celebrated by phenomenology. In psychoanalysis, the primary object identification, immediate perception, only exists as the repressed *das Ding* in the unconscious. All perception, beginning when the subject enters into language or the Symbolic after the mirror stage, is regulated by the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the complex interweaving or cathexis of language, objects and drives in the unconscious.

In *Seminar VII*, the "psychic organization ... is dominated by the function of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*," but "the whole effort of psychology has been to try to free itself from that."<sup>44</sup> The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* entail a splitting (*Spaltung*) in the psyche of the subject, in the relation between the affect and the signifier, a relationship which has not been clearly defined and which is in need of further development. The *Spaltung* is also connected to *aphanisis*, the fading of the subject, the disappearance of the subject underneath the signifier (the *Unterdrückt*), thus the matter of life and death. *Das Ding*, the thing, "is that which in the real, the primordial real ... suffers from the signifier ..."<sup>45</sup> Governed by the law of the pleasure principle, the

Vorstellungsrepräsentanz “involves flocculation [solidification], the crystallization into signifying units.” Here the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is described as the product of a chemical process, bypassing the problem of the definition of “representation.” There is nothing else that can be identified between *das Ding*, the repressed object of perception in the unconscious, and the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, which makes thinking possible: “there is nothing between the organization in the signifying network, in the network of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, and the constitution in the real of the space or central place in which the field of the Thing as such presents itself to us.”

The pleasure principle functions to “lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at as low a level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus.” Again, the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is explained in chemical or physiological terms. The signifiers don’t just appear separately in a chain, but they mutually influence each other in a complex matrix. They are subject to the principle of permutation, primarily through condensation and displacement, the mechanisms by which the repressed *das Ding* and the drives in the unconscious manage to be signified by signifiers in language or “represented” by the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*. Condensation and displacement are the primary mechanisms of dream work, according to Freud, through which unconscious dream thoughts are transformed into conscious memory traces or dream images. Lacan sees condensation and displacement as forms of metaphor and metonymy in tropic language. Thus the laws of language correspond to the laws of the pleasure principle in the neurological process of regulating the representation of the drive and the primordially repressed real in language.

The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* themselves are subject to the same laws of permutation and displacement, in the matrix of relations between signifiers. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* isn’t a singular ideational representation, but rather part of a network of signifiers, drives and representations, all operating within each representation. The function of representation can’t be reduced to a singular representative, as it is the process that takes place between representatives, between binary signifiers. Desire resides in the interval between two signifiers, and is what defines the psyche of the subject. When desire fails, in the relation between signifiers, or between the subject and a *Vorstellung*, or between the subject and an other, as in another subject, “the weak point of the primal dyad of the signifying articulation”<sup>46</sup> of the subject is revealed, as Lacan explained in *Seminar XI*. The result is the alienation of the conscious thought of the subject from its own mechanisms. The desire of the subject is constituted at the point of lack. The subject works to free itself of the “aphanistic effect of the binary signifier ...,” the effect of alienation. Psychosis, a physiological malfunction, prevents this from happening. The lack, the lacuna, the alienation, reveal the presence of the unconscious in conscious thought.

### **Conclusion**

As far as I know, the concept of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* has not been developed in any psychoanalytic theory outside the Freudian-Lacanian field. André Green, in his paper “The Logic of Lacan’s *Objet (a)* and Freudian Theory: Convergences and Questions,” presented at Lacan’s Seminar XIII in 1965, challenged Lacan’s concept and the privileging of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* over affect. According to Green, representation and affect are two

different kinds of signifiers, and affect had not been taken sufficiently into account by Lacan as part of the fundamental signifying operation. Repression, desire, instinct, discharge, anxiety, libido, drive, cathexis, transference, phantasy, phobia, mania, neurosis and psychosis all require an account beyond the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.<sup>47</sup> As Lacan himself said, the affects are not adequately represented by words. They are more likely repressed by words, and inaccessible. In my opinion, how the drives are represented in language was never clearly developed by Freud or Lacan. Freud contradicts himself as to whether images in dreams should be associated with conscious or unconscious thought. Lacan associates images exclusively with conscious thought, the Imaginary, which is too simplistic. *Vorstellungen* as images are signifieds in conscious thought alone, while the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* are repressed signifiers in unconscious thought. Lacan devalues the role of the signified in relation to the signifier in structural linguistics, basically eliminating it altogether, and sees the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as a signifier. In “Desire and Its Interpretation” in 1958, “This *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is strictly equivalent to the notion and to the terms of signifier.”<sup>48</sup> If the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is a signifier, then the signifier is always already a concept, a representation. The signifier represents or signifies the signified. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the signifier is the perceived phonetic sound of the letter and the combination of letters in words; the signified is the associated concept. The signifier is not the sound itself, though, but the mental image of the sound, an intelligible image in relation to a sensible image. According to Lacan, the signifier determines the signified, but the signified can only refer to another signification. Signification cannot go beyond relations between signifiers. Without other signifiers, a signifier cannot signify anything. The pure signifier signifies nothing; it is “floating” or “empty.” The “signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier,”<sup>49</sup> according to Lacan, and the subject is what slides in the chain of signifiers. This devaluing of the role of the signified in relation to the signifier by Lacan makes the concept of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* less clear and less significant in relation to psychic functioning. The lack of the role of the signified, and the association of the signified with the conscious image, and the association of the image with conscious thought, are problematic in Lacan. There needs to be more critical re-evaluation of Lacan in order for psychoanalytic theory to develop. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is a key term in explaining the functioning of the human mind in psychoanalysis. It is in need of further development, and the concept of representation should not be dismissed. The inability of the human mind to associate words and images is the very definition of psychosis.

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33. *Ibid.*, 164.
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