SHAPES OF FEELING, SHADOWS OF MEANING

Gilbert J. Rose

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Table of Contents

7

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> To describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual . . . left out from the description . . . would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal. . . . All the various feelings of the individual . . . are strung upon . . . the axis of reality. . . like so many beads. . . . Individuality is founded in feeling.
>
> William James (1902, 490-92)

Susan Langer's distinction between nonverbal, presentational symbolism and discursive symbolism was discussed in the last chapter. Music is an example of the former-its very structure transforms feelings into an objectified form that may be reflected upon. Discursive symbolism, on the other hand, is translatable into language and intellectual thought.

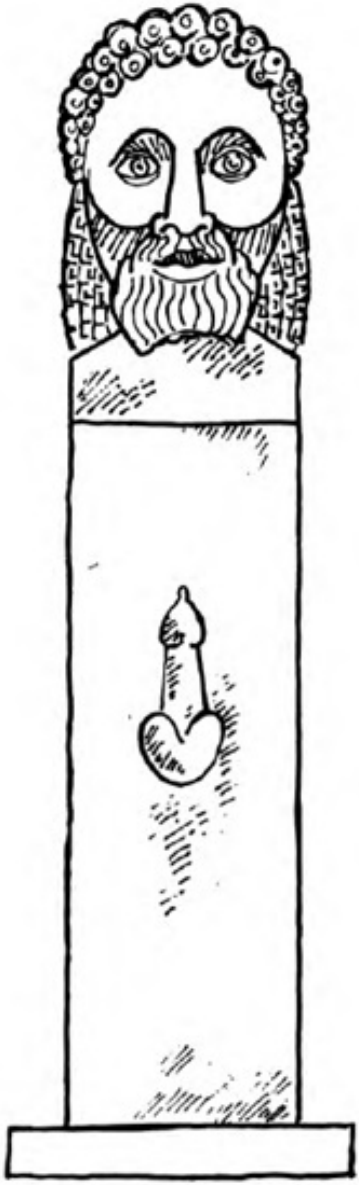
Language and thought both develop out of an affective and bodily matrix. As a result, feelings permeate thought and perception from the beginning. Daily habit has a deadening effect on the wholeness and sharpness of experience-turning it into a kind of half-life-and probably necessarily so in order to damp down the brightness of stimulation to workable proportions. But live experience is thought-feeling-perception-not conceptual dichotomies of pure reason swayed by emotions.

Two lenses-that of pathology and art-will be helpful in taking a closer look at the affective

backdrop of language and thought: developmental arrests magnify the contribution of feelings and physicality to language and thought; the art of language draws on the same sources and refreshes thought and perception with body-feeling.[16] "Shadows of meaning" is meant to suggest nuance and aspects of obscurity-the impossibility of seeing things directly rather than the shadows they cast on the walls of Plato's cave.

Meanings, in other words, are not self-evident. The process of interpretation and the methods by which meanings are derived is the domain of hermeneutics. The word *hermeneutics* is related via a common source in Hermes (in his character of deity of speech and writing) to the ancient Greek *hernia.* The *hermae* were signposts or boundary-markers protecting land and possessions and were common to both Greek and Roman culture. Its figuration was anything but neutral in tone. "It took the form of a head carved in the round surmounting a simple angular pillar, on the front of which was added a set of mah genitals, usually erect" (Johns 1982, 52).

Thus hermeneutics has to do with meanings, but, as the phallic herma eloquently testify, meanings are embedded in imagery, and inseparable from emotions; they-the imagery and emotions-cannot be deracinated from their sources in the body, nor fully translated into words. Yet, they contribute to much of the force and power of meanings.



Herma with the head of Hermes. (Siphnos, c. 520 B.C.) Drawing by Gabor Peterdi.

Hermae were ancient Greek or Roman boundary markers. The word is related to *hermeneutics*, signifying the principles by which meanings are ascertained. As the hermae illustrate, meanings are not to be disembodied from feelings.

It is said that, before creating the world, Odin leaned over the bottomless chasm until the swirling mists below formed themselves into shapes. We probably all repeat this in shaping our world though we are now more inclined to think that it is a more active process of constructing forms than of passively waiting for them to shape themselves. Out of the original pandemonium of sheer impression, together with the direct physical reactions to sentient stimulation, our sense organs abstract groups and patterns of sense data and construe them as forms rather than a flux of impressions. They bring a seeming order and predictability to William James's (1892) "big booming, buzzing confusion" of sensory stimuli. These forms gradually come to include working models of self and others, by which we keep oriented in a world of shared and shifting reality.

For James, the endless subtlety and individuality of experience meant that experience was always thought-feeling, not cognition plus affect. In agreement with this, when we refer to forms we mean to indicate feeling-forms, since feeling is embodied within them. "It is entirely possible that feeling is what is given first and that all perception begins in feeling, since it may be true that we perceive forms first and that feeling is the soul of form" (Dufrenne 1953, 423).

According to Susan Langer (1942), these feeling-forms are symbols-direct metaphorical expressions of the sentient life from which they have been abstracted. They are the primitive root of the power of abstraction and constitute our first abstractions. Since abstraction is the keynote of rationality, the conditions of rationality thus lie deep in our pure animal experience of perceiving.

Every symbol refers simultaneously to the body and to the outside, hanging like a

hammock between the internal, body pole and the external pole of the outside world (Kubie 1953)-The first learning concerns itself with bodily things and, as it expands to the world outside, symbolic connections are etablished between our own body and the external world. Language arises out of original feeling-forms. It begins with the body-in the infant's gestures (Ferenczi 1913), sphincter activity (Sharpe 1940), and nursing patterns (Spitz 1957). The differentiaion of number and of spatial relations, and the linguistic expression of actions all start from the human body, its parts, its actions (Cassirer [1923] 1953).

In time, speech becomes increasingly practical and prosaic and ordinary language becomes well adapted for communicating the intellectual content of thought and factual observation. What had been originally the underlying *affective* matrix of language is more communicable through style-the how of language rather than the what-in short, the art of language. This early affective matrix is also discernible in magnified and distorted form in developmental arrests such as autism.

A gifted therapist identified "autistic shapes'' in her work with such children (Tustin 1984). When young autistic children began to talk, they would tell her about their "shapes"-entirely personal shapes and not the objective, geometric ones located in external space that we all share, though they did involve the rudiments of the notion of boundaries enclosing a space. Furthermore, it was the "feel" of such "shapes" that mattered to the child. The feel of an object held *loosely* in the hand could be a "shape. " In the younger children, touch was more important than the other senses, but all sensations, whether of sound, smell, taste, or sight, tended to be "felt" in the form of "shapes" rather than simply heard, smelled, tasted, or seen.

Early shapes apparently arise from the feel of soft bodily substances such as feces, urine, saliva, food in the mouth, and soon. However, it is the "shape" of the material rather than the bodily substance that is important to the child. (One is tempted to say that the importance of form predominates over that of content.) The child soon learns that he can make some "shapes"

recur by dint of his own movements, and they become self-induced.

In normal development this capacity to make “shapes” out of sensory impressions becomes associated with the actual shapes of actual objects. Eventually they contribute to the formation of percepts and concepts and facilitate a working relationship with others in the world of shared reality.

But autistic children apparently get stuck at the level of private "shape-making.” Their personal “shapes” seem more real than actual objects and certainly easier to manipulate. Thus, they may smear feces to make “shapes” on their skin. Or, once toilet-trained, they may manipulate feces internally to make “shapes” there. Or they might wriggle or rock, twirl, swing, or bubble saliva in the mouth to make “shapes.” Speech is either absent or characterized by echolalia. When they do get to arithmetic and the alphabet, they use numbers and letters as contrivances to produce “shapes” rather than conceptually. Whatever the particular devices, they tend to become rigidly repetitive as they make the familiar shapes recur over and over, depending on these “shapes” to give them some sense of control.

As Tustin states, “Normal sensation shapes are the basic rudiments for emotional, aesthetic and cognitive funtioning” (p. 280). In keeping with their preoccupation and involvement with the creation of sensuous “shapes,” it comes as no surprise to learn that “These children are often poetic, artistic and musical (p. 286).” It also seems likely that, whatever control or other functions are served by preoccupation with "shapes,” they also reflect an expressive need.[17] This becomes the key for establishing communication. The aim of her therapy with autistic children is to make contact with their “shapes,” in the hope of “chang[ing] and transform[ing] their 'shapes’ into common coin, . . . enriching [the] psychological possibilities of everyday life with ordinary people” (p. 281). When successful, this leads them into the shared world of sanity and common sense while preserving their individuality.

How does this take place? (1) An essential ingredient for the mysterious transformation of private sensuous “shapes” into meaningful discourse is a caring relationship. (2) A way to get in touch with these nonverbal processes is through *metaphor.*

Tustin describes a crucial therapy session with an eight-year-old autistic child. After he had made a move toward becoming more accessible, therapist and child were able to play out and talk about his distorted body-image: he felt he had no stomach to connect his head with his bottom. In place of a middle to himself there were nameless dreads that might burst forth at any time. For example, how did food entering one end of his body turn into feces coming out the other? She writes:

> As these “nameless dreads” were “stomached” in the therapeutic ambience of the session, he no longer needed his magical envelopment by “shapes” and so we could settle down to a discussion of "growing-up” properly. This was concluded when I said that I had turned over his “shapes” in the stomach of my mind and he had turned over my "shapes" in his, and something new had come out, to which he had replied “I suppose that's thinking,” to which I replied somewhat sententiously, “And you can’t touch or handle thoughts” (p. 287).

The author speculates that this child's “perseverative ruminations associated with his idiosyncratic ‘shapes’ had been transformed [mysteriously] into ‘thoughts,’ through interplay with another person’s ‘shapes’ which facilitated a process of psychological digestion” (p. 287).

Much in this account suggests Winnicott’s (1953) intermediate area of experience-that of transitional objects and phenomena-the area formed when the mother is closely enough attuned to the infant’s needs that the infant has the illusion that he or she has created the external correspondence. Winnicott felt that the main function of transitional objects and phenomena was to give shape to an area of illusion and serve as a bridge between the familiar and the strange,

thus facilitating the acceptance of the new. On the one side transitional objects are connected to the subject and serve to allay separation anxiety; on the other, they are connected to the environment which is thus acknowledged, in part at least, to be outside the subject and not self-created.

One wonders if autistic “shapes" represent presymbolic bodily precursors of language-self-generating (autochthonous) sensations which create an independent autosensory world as a safe retreat from the external one. Perhaps the autistic child’s constant handling of his “shapes” is analogous to the way a normal child in the course of early language development treats words as transitional objects. He seems to carry them with him like objects he owns-repeating them (echo-lalia) in mother’s absence to reasure himself.

Establishing connections with the outside world depends on the therapist’s tuning in so closely to the needs of the autistic child that an intermediate area, with its potential for transitional phenomena, is created. Within this privileged space, the figures of speech the therapist sends out are symbolic rescue missions, attached, like all symbols, to the body of the therapist and reaching out toward the isolated, autistic child for use as transitional objects. An effective vehicle of such symbolic speech is metaphor because its very nature is to bridge. Its vital support is the affective ambience of a trusting relationship. Sensorimotor, presymbolic, and preverbal elements intertwine inseparably with cognitive and affective meanings to form the hammock, the bridge, for the child to connect with and traverse with transitional language.

While images may be skillfully conveyed in metaphorical language to help deliver a psychotic child from its autistic “shapes,” images may also be automatically perceived metaphorically with traumatic results. We have already seen in chapter 3 how the perception, “She’s throwing stones at my car” was instantly translated into, “She’s throwing stones at my body.” Combining with traumatic childhood memories of sexual assault, it erupted psychotically into rape and murder.

The reverse process-translating a symptom into a metaphor and replacing that symptom with discourse-was, of course, the key discovery of Breuer and Freud (1893-95). If a metaphor could be discovered lying embedded in a symptom, symptoms could now begin to make sense and be made amenable to treatment through the use of words: the unconscious metaphor could be made explicit by translating it into words and this new verbal construction could serve as a brige between an unconscious thought-feeling and conscious thought. Not only lengthy psychoanalysis but immediate analytic first-aid became possible.

For example: A happy, healthy three-year-old girl, Lolly, suddenly developed a phobia of taking walks, becoming acutely anxious when she and her nursery school companions were to take a "trip" through the woods to see the ducks in the pond.[18] At the same time she developed a facial tic consisting of a tight closing and wide opening of her eyes. The disturbance seemed to be spreading further when she showed panic at being asked to paint Easter eggs in school. When she was shown the other children painting the eggs, she seemed momentarily bewildered and then, vastly relieved, was able to participate.

What proto-metaphor lay hidden in the symptoms of tic and phobia-' A single conversation with Lolly brought out that she and her older brother took walks in the woods. One day the two chiildren had come across a dead bird. On another "trip" they had found a dead rabbit. They brought it home and buried it. Lolly had been struck by the wide-open, fixed eyes.

In the light of this, she was able to speak about fears of death in connection with "trips," including the vacation trip her parents were planning to take. Thereupon the facial tic disappeared and never recurred. Her sunny disposition returned. The fear of "trips" subsided within a few months.

Evidently, the rapid blinking of the eyes expressed in metaphorical body language both the fear of dying and the self-reassurance that she was, indeed, alive. The solution to the sudden

panic when Lolly had been asked to help paint Easter eggs was this: The teacher had not asked the children to paint the eggs; what she had said was, "Let's *dye* some eggs."

While many individuals take pleasure in pictorial imagery and tropes of all kinds, others find them not merely pleasing but essential.

It would be no exaggeration to say that some patients come to treatment craving appropriate metaphors as lifelines to make sense of their thoughts and feelings. A woman who happened to be a professional photographer put it this way:

PATIENT: Somehow I have to create an image to get me out of the tight places I get into. Or I need you to give me verbal images when I get confused and I'm afraid the fuses will blow and I'm in disarray. The images are much richer than you think, and so for me to explore them is enlightening. It's almost primitive, like a ritual. I hook everything up visually. I need to understand them because they are in my head anyway and I can only do this with certain people who also think with images. Sometimes I think of myself as just a leaf in the wind. But then, if I think of myself as the skipper of my own sailboat, it narrows things down. In the first place, the boat has everything it needs. It is not a mess. All I have to do is know its qualities. Is it a keel boat or a centerboard? If it has a keel, I'm going to get hung up if I try to go over the sandbar. And if it's a centerboard, I better get it down if I'm going to sail into the wind. I cannot change the wind. I only have to have a destination, know the boat, and trim the sails. That's all. The beauty of the image is that I don't have to do or know everything. Now, take my husband. I cannot expect him to do what he can't do. A turtle can't lift its leg to pee, because that big shell is right there hanging over it. He's inside his shell, too. Kicking won't make any difference. He's insensitive. [Long pause] Sometimes the things he says and does just blow me away.

THERAPIST: Is that when you see yourself as a driven leaf?

PATIENT: Say! That's OK!

The way ahead now lay a bit more open to interpret the connection between her sense of disarray and confusion and the underlying anger at her husband.

THE LIMITATIONS OF WORDS

Several things should be noted about all the examples that have been given-from the autistic child with his "shapes," through the child-murderer, to the child with the facial tic and phobia of "trips," to the woman photographer. (1) In contrast to the presentational symbolism of music, where the formal structure and inner relations of the work express the quality of emotional life, these are all examples of discursive symbolism. (2) The operative questions have been, "What is the underlying metaphor that might serve as a clue to the latent thought-feeling? How might the metaphor be translated into words so as to form a bridge between this subjective and possibly unconscious thought-feeling on the one hand and objective meaning and discourse on the other?" (3) The metaphors are inseparable from pictorial imagery. (4) They and the imagery are imbedded in intense affect. This holds irrespective of whether they are used consciously (by the therapist with the autistic children, or the photographer searching for images and metaphors with which to rescue herself) or are formed unconsciously (the child-murderer, or the child with the tic).

This calls our attention to the potency of metaphorical language itself, whether consciously crafted or unconsciously shaped. Whence comes its power? Metaphorical language sweeps in fast waves over deep currents of feeling and taps their force. It is the power of this underlying feeling that determines what meanings, conscious or unconscious, progressive or regressive, will be ascribed to the metaphor. It will influence how or even whether the pictorial imagery will be consciously perceived. All this is so contrary to common sense and surface, rational appearances that perhaps it explains why metaphorical language often seems suspect-even subversive.

In the seventeenth century it was thought that the mathematical and physical sciences might provide a logically appropriate language that might once and for all sweep out the obscurities and cant of the schoolmen. Such was the immense prestige of scientific method that it seemed plausible to consider real only those things to which mathematical principles were applicable. The inherent imprecision of words was the enemy of reason. Leibniz believed in the possibility of constructing a logically perfect language-one that would truly reflect the structure of reality as revealed by science.

As this new rationalism spread into the creative arts, the Royal Society in England came out against metaphor and a proposal was made in Parliament (1670) to outlaw "fulsome and luscious" metaphors. Hobbes and Locke saw metaphor as moving passions and thus misleading judgment into wrong ideas. In France, too, writers were to be plain, literal, and precise, and were to avoid embellishments.

In order to correct these "imperfections" and transform language into an ideal instrument for describing truth and reality, some philosophers and logicians closer to our own time express their ideas through mathematical signs. This does succeed in conveying ideas of quantity and dimension, relation and probability; it organizes and communicates facts without feelings. However, it necessarily places a mathematical imprint upon the world so described, and thus distorts it precisely to the extent that everything else has been left out.

Even within such a mathematically described world, uncertainty creeps in. For example, the goal of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* was to derive all mathematics from logic without contradictions. The effort floundered when Godel showed that there were *undecidable* propositions in the *Principia Mathematica* and related systems. (No axiomatic system whatsoever could produce all number-theoretical truths unless it were an inconsistent system. If a proof of the consistency of a system such as that presented in the *Principia Mathematica* could be found using only methods inside the *Principia*, then the *Principia* itself

would d be inconsistent! Cf. Hofstadter 1979.)

Philosophical idealism attacks the reliability of physics as the royal road to truth. It argues that the question of meaning in the exact sciences boils down to how space, time, and matter are defined. They are defined operationally in terms of their measurement. However, measurement requires acts of human judgment and discrimination; it is itself a value judgment created by the human mind. Thus, quantification is no guarantee of an objective physical world. There is not even any meaningful boundary between a subjective and an objective approach to things. As Poincare maintained, mathematical truth is based not in reality but in convenience. Facts are selected to fit in with one's intuitive sense of the harmonious order of nature. They are chosen according to a hierarchy based on certain aesthetic criteria-simplicity, elegance, symmetry, economy-as well as on the basis of what seems to have the highest frequency of recurrence. Our views of space and time are nothing more than *metaphors* to ward off specific anxieties as to merging and unpredictability. They are matters of conviction-essentially, of faith. In sum, science is the modern religion designed to ameliorate the human condition and allay the fear of chaos. "It is we, not nature, who abhor the vacuum" (Jones 1982, 48).

Lying at the opposite pole from the rationalist distrust of metaphorical language is the tendency on the part of social scientists to overemphasize verbal thinking as being *the* characteristic of normal thought. This prejudice may be accounted for by the fact that this occupational group is itself significantly more inclined toward verbal thinking than are experimental and theoretical scientists such as biologists and physicists (Roe 1952; Bush 1968).

It is easy to overestimate the importance of words. Yet, anyone who takes language seriously in the conduct of his life's work is consistently up against its limitations. As clinicians well know, many compulsively articulate people use words to comfort themselves with sound, massage the silence, and drain words of their meanings through intellectualization. In short, language may be used to conceal as much as to reveal. "Because one has only learnt to get the

better of words" (Eliot 1940, 188).

Lazar (1982) has written: "At best, words can only spy on the inner world and send out abbreviated Telex messages about what is briefly glimpsed." He quotes Ionesco (197 1): "I am lost in the thousands of words . . . that are my life. . . . How, with the aid of words, can I express everything that words hide?"

Again (Ionesco 1968):

> I ought to have embarked long ago on this stubborn quest for knowledge and self-knowledge. . . . Instead of writing literature! What a waste of time; . . . indeed, it is because of literature that I can no longer understand anything at all. It's as though by writing books I had worn out all the symbols without getting to the heart of them. They no longer speak to me with living voices. Words have killed images or concealed them. . . . These words were like masks, or else like dead leaves fallen to the ground.

The current linguistic reformulation of psychoanalysis can be viewed as part of the overemphasis on the centrality of language for thought. It receives its impetus largely from Lacan, whose central thesis is that the unconcious is structured like a language. This effort includes the attempt to break with drive theory, biologism, and economics attributed to ego psychology. It aims to "return to Freud" by situating the analytic situation and the operations of the unconscious within the field of speech and language (Ricoeur 1978).

Ironically, this "return to Freud" comes very close to one of the main tenets of *Jung's* psychology. It holds that the unconscious directly represents itself in metaphor; it assumes that some innate, conflict-free symbolic function of the psyche is given over to representing the self in the form of metaphor; this symbolic function precedes repression, may be distorted by repression, but is not a consequence of repression (Satinover 1986).

In a similar vein, a recent paper argues that a basic metaphor is far more than an analogy. Rather, some metaphors derive from structural properties of the human mind. They are generative cognitive structures which represent part of reality; they help accommodate language to the causal structure of the world (Michon 1983).

In any event, the linguistic reformulation of psychoanalysis should not blind us to the fact that less than the full content of thought resides in language, and more than language to what comprises therapy. Since linguistics tends to neglect the pictorial and sensuous aspects of words, it has little to say about affect and subjectivity (which is more the domain of rhetoric). Yet, it is precisely these matters that are relevant to psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis meanings depend more on affects than words (Modell 1984). Linguistic competence is surely important for the proper conduct of psychoanalytic therapy, but is likely to be sterile in the absence of affective attunement.

Linguists as well as modern philosophers have been rediscovering what poets knew and complained about two thousand years ago: language conveys only very partial truth. For one thing, words clutter up the communication of facts by transmitting too many feelings along with the facts. On the other hand, a message may convey feelings irrespective of the words. For example, experimental evidence confirms common knowledge that the tone of voice tells far more than the content of an utterance (Argyle et al. 1970). Indeed, subjects can reliably interpret the emotion of a recorded utterance even when the words have been electronically masked and rendered unintelligible (Dawes & Kramer 1966; Scherer et al. 1972).

If there is much more to thought than words, what is thought composed of? Someone once compared thought to the flowing river while language gives only the contours of the river bed. This is not the place to go into the differences between primitive and developed thought but only to stress their common origin in and of the body. From the autistic child's "shapes," to the concrete thought of the psychotic person, to the raw physicality of street-talk,[19] to the conscious

and unconscious metaphors of ordinary language, to the creative thought of science and art, much thought seems to be embedded in a sensuous matrix which includes visual imagery and kinesthetic impulses.

Sensitive observers of their own thought sometimes report a backdrop of muscle tonus patternings. This may be a dim reflection of the microscopic impulses toward trial action that lie remotely behind thought-a description of thought in its preverbal state. Nor should this be surprising. It is psychoanalysis itself which holds that motoric impulses toward action lie behind thought; that thought is trial action using minute quantities of energy. Why is acting-out discouraged in analysis? In order to block discharge in action and foster the development of verbalizable thought. By detouring motoric impulses away from action it is hoped that the formation of primitive ideation, dreams, images, and finally verbalizable thought will be driven forward, providing material for analysis.

Einstein (1955) was explicit in describing the muscular as well as visual elements that were essential in his own productive thought processes. It was only when they were sufficiently established in a “combinatory play" that he could begin the laborious search for words or signs which would communicate their discursive content-if not his experience of them-to others. One would assume that the original sensuousness of the experience of his own thoughts in their early form found no representation in their final communication through conventional language.

Creative writing restores the affective matrix of thought by drawing on this underlying physicality of thought-exploiting the weight, texture, and motoric rhythm and cadences of words against silences. Many poets-Valery, Shelley, Eliot-have testified that a poem often first appears in the mind of its author not in the form of words but with an awareness of rhythm (Burnshaw 1970). Dylan Thomas (195 1 147, quoted by Hamilton 1975) wrote: “I wanted to write poetry in the beginning because I had fallen in love with words. The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes, and before I could read them for myself I had come to love just the words of them, the

words alone. What the words stood for, symbolized, or meant, was of secondary importance. What mattered was the sound of them. . . .I knew that I had discovered the most important things, to me, that could be ever. . .

The wife of Russian poet Mandelstam described his experience of writing poetry as follows (I am indebted to Martin Bergmann for the reference):

> A poem begins with a musical phrase ringing insistently in the ears; at first inchoate, it later takes on a precise form, though still without words. I sometimes saw M. trying to get rid of this kind of "hum," to brush it off and escape from it. He would toss his head as though it could be shaken out like a drop of water that gets into your ear while bathing. But it was always louder than any noise, radio or conversation in the same room. . . . The "hum" sometimes came to M. in his sleep, but he could never remember it on waking. . . . The whole process of composition is one of straining to catch and record something compounded of harmony and sense as it . . . gradually forms itself into words. The last stage of the work consists in ridding the poem of all the words foreign to the harmonious whole which existed before the poem arose. Such words slip in by chance, being used to fill gaps during the emergence of the whole. They become lodged in the body of the poem, and removing them is hard work. I noticed that in his work on a poem there were two points at which he would sigh with relief-when the first words in a line or stanza came to him, and when the last of the foreign bodies was driven out by the right word. Only then is there an end to the process of listening in to oneself. . . . The poem now seems to fall away from the author and no longer torments him with its resonance (Mandelstam 170, 70-7 1).

Perhaps to the poet the completed poem brings relief as it "seems to fall away from the author"; but its words and images give life to drooping thoughts, as illustrated by the following lines by the Welsh poet, W. H. Davies (1963):

My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

(I am indebted to Daniel Haberman for the reference.)

Closer to home, a woman intuitively turned to poetry to shape and convey the feelings that accompanied a difficult period of analysis. *Mi ndsong (for G. J. R.)* (quoted by permission of the author):

The seagulls that circle the widening sky

and the canvas that billows and bellies so high

and the steadying waves on the hurrying keel

will be gone in an instant: the mainsail will fly

and go flapping forever, the sea will congeal

and be lava, the birds in the blistering sky

will become pterodactyls, unless I can feel

your breathing behind me, your hand on the wheel,

and the world turning back again, letting me feel

the steadying waves on the hurrying keel

and see canvas that billows and bellies so high

to the seagulls that circle the widening sky.

The violent content of the verbal metaphors equate the author's state of mind with her fear of being stranded alone and helpless in a floundering sailboat about to be incinerated in a volcanic sea. The form of the poem, however, imposes order which contains the turbulence. The unfailingly regular pulse of the meter bespeaks control. Moreover, there is a visual metaphor in addition to the verbal ones: the lines are indented obliquely like waves in groups of three, depicting in graphic form the unhurried and absolutely uniform motion of waves in an untroubled sea. The poem as a whole, in form and content, thus embodies (internalizes) the therapeutic interaction between patient and therapist.

The fact that this poem, like many others, makes a visual point by the placement of the lines on the page, turns our attention to the importance of pictorial elements in language. According to Spence (1982), because so much thought is composed of visual images, and because words inevitably misrepresent pictures, putting thoughts into words at best yields only a coarse translation. Language is simply unable to capture the quality of visual truth; it muddies as much as it mediates.

For the same reason, Spence claims, telling a dream cannot possibly convey an accurate description of the dream: much is lost in the quantum leap from the visual-plus-feeling mode of the dream to its verbal narration. As he makes amply clear, the situation is not as simple as Freud sometimes implied when he made it sound as if the dream were a rebus and each dream-thought had a word attached to it.[20]

Thoughts contain pictures, pictures cannot be translated into words, neither pictures nor language can be matched against reality in a precise and objective way (as Wittgenstein discovered when he later rejected his book *Tractatus*, on which his reputation still rests). While a visual image is unsurpassed in its ability to arouse the viewer, it has serious limitations both in

its capacity to express the artist's own state of mind or to transmit any other information. The theory that holds art to be a form of expressive communication has been termed an unwarranted transphenomenal leap from the linguistic model (Casey 1971).

One example (Gombrich 1972) is particularly well suited to illustrate the limitations of art in expressing the artist's state of mind. Van Gogh, in several letters to Gauguin and to his brother Theo, clearly establishes his expressive intent on painting *Bedroom at Arles* (1888). The portrayal of this little bedroom of his was intended to depict a haven of tranquility: "absolute calm," "simplicity," "suggestive of rest and sleep," "the picture should rest the head, or rather the imagination," "should express undisturbed rest." Van Gogh compared *Bedroom at Arles* with *The Night Cafe,* in which he wished to show that the cafe was a place where one could go mad. In still another letter to his brother he stressed that in *Bedroom* there was no stippling or hatching, nothing but flat areas in harmony. Gombrich concludes: "It is this . . . that Van Gogh experiences as being expressive of calm and restfulness. Does the painting of the bedroom communicate this feeling? None of the naive subjects I have asked hit on this meaning .... Not that this failure of getting the message speaks against the artist or his work. It only speaks against the equation of art with communication (p. 96)."

No image tells its own story either in reflecting the artist's state of mind or in transmiting any other information. It depends mostly on the viewer's ability to "read" the image-and this involves many elements of knowledge as to the code and context. Mostly, however, it depends on the images already stored in the mind of the viewer. These are of preeminent importance and depend, in turn, largely on previous emotional experience.

The newest research suggests that early affective responses are among the key events of infancy. These first emotional "attunements" in the interplay between mother and child influence the quality of later affective attachments and character development (Stern 1983)-They also strongly influence the selectivity of perception, determining what kinds of percepts will be

augmented, minimized, distorted, or totally denied. One of the far-reaching results of trauma appears to be that, thereafter, rapid subliminal scanning will take place for potentially threatening stimuli: anything that may lead to further trauma tends to be defensively screened out. Since perception and affect are interrelated with cognition and memory, the clinical syndromes of traumatic origin may include an intolerance of *any* affect (Krystal 1984).

Art regularly stimulates feelings that unconsciously influence the way it is perceived. Diana's reaction to the Van Gogh paintings-bleaching out all color and transforming them into black-and-white compositions-is only an extreme example of what happens more or less regularly. Less dramatic and more usual is the experience of most viewers of Picasso's seven-foot-tall bronze nude statue *Man with a Sheep:* they do not consciously perceive that the man is clearly portrayed as emasculated (Legault 1981).

Conversely, viewers often do not see male genitals where they are just as clearly present. Recent art-historical research has uncovered more than a thousand Renaissance images which insistently emphasize the genitalia of Christ both as an infant and as an adult; yet, heretofore, these have been just as persistently overlooked or explained away (Steinberg 1983). Some examples: a theme of the Madonna exposing the child's sex, always ceremoniously; artists as diverse as Roger van der Weyden and Antonio Rossellino have the infant Christ pulling his dress aside to flaunt his penis and parade his nakedness; others have the Christ child touch himself, or have his genital solemnly manipulated by St. Anne while Joseph looks on (Hans Baldung Grien's woodcut of the "Holy Family," 1511); the emphasis on the genitalia recurs in images of the dead Christ, with repeated groin-searching gestures and erections.

Steinberg's thesis is that these images are not the product of runaway naturalism or irreverence but, rather, indicate that it was Christ's "humanation"-his partaking of humanity-that was being declared. His divinity was taken for granted. Why was all of this tactfully overlooked or explained away for half a millennium? Carefully excluding psychological factors from

consideration, Steinberg refers to it as a "mystery"-on the same order of "mystery," in fact, as Renaissance art's refusal to acknowledge Christ's (or David's) circumcision. Such visual denial of circumcision, he points out, is hardly attributable to ignorance or indifference, since Catholic theologians of that time were hotly debating the fate of Christ's foreskin, assigning it as a relic to several churches or awarding it to St. Catherine of Siena as a mystical betrothal ring. "The reason for the Child's apparent uncircumcision," he offers weakly, "must lie in the artists' sense of the body's perfection" (p. 159).

It would seem, rather, that however ingenious the theological reasons for the emphasis on Christ's genitals, the explanation for the five hundred years of silence and failure to note his clearly portrayed genitals is identical with that of the refusal to acknowledge visually his circumcision. Both lie less in the realm of mystery than the necessity for mastery of castration anxiety. Unveiling, touching, presenting, and peering at the Christ child's genitalia as the main action of devotional imagery, or celebrating the dead Christ's genitals by focusing attention on it even when, as sometimes happens, it throws the pictorial economy off balance, serves the same purpose as re-endowing his penis with a foreskin: it allayed the castration anxiety of the Renaissance audience. Except for this interlude, normative Christian culture disallows direct reference to the genital as unmentionable and undepictable. For subsequent audiences, therefore, the overemphasis of the genitals represented an especially bold violation of the taboo against looking. Castration anxiety was restimulated; the offending perception of the *conspicuousness* of the genitals needed to be repressed-just as in *Man with a Sheep* it is the anxiety-provoking *absence* of the genitalia that is repressed.

Many of the issues of the foregoing discussion with its emphasis on the co-mingling of feelings with thought and perception are condensed in the following clinical vignette:

A painter dreamed: "Water was coming down inside the wall of a closet. It made the wall look better than my own painting which happened to be stored in that closet." The particular

painting was a reference to a painful episode in that it was a painting similar to one he had given to his ex-financée; she had broken their engagement shortly before their marriage was to have taken place. The closet was a reference to still earlier experience, and of the same nature. It had been his sister's closet. She had been his mother-surrogate since his father died. The patient was four at the time. This early loss of his father had been compounded by his mother's emotionally abandoning the family by taking a lover and becoming alcoholic. When the patient was ten, the sister, now sixteen, left the family, and he had fended for himself, more or less, ever since. The water running down the walls of the closet reminded him of tears.

It was easy for both of us to suppose that the images formed on the inside wall of the closet by the symbolic "weeping" limned his sorrow at the loss of the most significant women in his life-from first to last. Since the teary images on the wall of the closet "looked better" than the painting stored in the closet, we could also glimpse some of his efforts to put a good face on his mourning. The symbolism of being "in the closet" combined a sexual meaning with the attempt to deny all feelings. All this suggested the depth and nature of the emotions and defenses that lay behind his painting: feelings about early parental abandonment, sexual longings, and attempts at active mastery and control over earlier helplessness. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there was *nothing* in his oeuvre, which was nonrepresentational, that gave a hint of this underlying personal architecture. It found no "expression" in his painting.

Immediately following this session the patient had another dream that appeared to confirm our mutual work: "I was working on a painting with a brush. I cleaned off the center with a palette knife and suddenly, where I cleaned it, it became a window. The rest of the canvas was fogged like on a winter's window pane. I thought, 'Finally, I can see! Or at least, I can see through it!' " Without pause, he related this to beginning to see more clearly how his past lived on within his present-and lay, invisibly, behind his painting.

It would seem that the awareness of the shapes of old feeling was indeed enhancing the

perspective of his world with new light and shadow.

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Notes

16 Little effort will be made to distinguish between "feeling" as awareness of affect, "affect" as the subcortical contribution to thinking, and "emotion" as the complex mixture of

affect and our previous experience with a particular affect (Basch 1976)."

17 The most unusual case of artistic talent in an autistic child underlines the importance of the expressive element (Selfe 1979). Nadia's drawing skill appeared suddenly at three and a half while playing with her mother, after mother had returned from three months in the hospital because of breast cancer. As her expressive language and spontaneous speech slowly improved by age eight or nine, she seldom drew any more. Selfe points out that this flies in the face of traditional teaching (Buhler 1930) that children's drawings are graphic accounts of essentially verbal processes. It would seem, rather, that expressive need is primary and seizes upon whatever talent is available as an outlet.

18 The following vignette is based on Rose 1960b

19 I am indebted to Dr. Ruth Lidz for telling me the way one says 'piano' in pidgin in New Guinea: "Big-Fellow-Brother-Belong-Box-You-Hit-Him-In-Teeth-He-Cry."

20 Spence goes on to question the reliability of dream interpretation to undo memory distortions and the manifest content of the dream and return us unerringly to the latent content of underlying thoughts and feelings. But, of course, in the actual conduct of contemporary analysis one relies at least as much on the dream as part of a process, and on the w a y it is narrated, and its nonverbal and transferential context, as on the dream simply as a rebus message carved in stone.