

Sabina Spielrein's theoretical views in her letter to Carl Gustav Jung (1917-1918)

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Abstract: There has been recently an increasing acknowledgement of the originality and pioneering character of the theoretical and clinical views proposed by the Russian psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein. However, few studies were so far specifically dedicated to the analysis of her theories. Besides her published work, the letters Spielrein exchanged with Jung between 1917 and 1918 contain rich theoretical reflections that allow for a better understanding of her thought and the hypotheses she was about to formulate in the following years. This article aims at analyzing the concepts of symbolism and subconscious that Spielrein presents in her letters to Jung from the period mentioned above. It is argued that, with these concepts, Spielrein further develops the theory she had begun to formulate in her early publications and attempts to integrate her own hypotheses with some ideas of Freud and Jung. This integration, in turn, results in the elaboration of an original theory of the psyche.

Keywords: history of psychoanalysis, Sabina Spielrein, mental functioning, symbolism, subconscious.

Despite the originality of the theoretical and clinical proposals by the Russian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Sabina Nikolaevna Spielrein (1885-1942) and her pioneering activity in many areas, Spielrein has, during a long period, been kept in oblivion. With the publication, 1974, of the letters exchanged between Freud and Jung, in which she is many times mentioned, Spielrein started to re-emerge in the history of psychoanalysis (Ovcharenko, 1999). However, the interest for the author was intensified specially after the publication of the book *A secret symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud* (Carotenuto, 1980/1984). The interest in Spielrein, awoken by Carotenuto's publication was specially focused, at first, on her biography, so that her role as an innovative clinic and the creator of unprecedented concepts in the psychoanalytical field remained in the background, as commented by Cromberg (2012). Although the situation is being reverted in the last years with the publication of works focusing mainly on her theoretical production (Caropreso, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Cooper-Whiter, 2015; Covington & Wharton, 2003; Cromberg, 2014; Harris, 2015; Noth, 2015; Santiago-Delefosse & Delefosse, 2002; Skea, 2006; Vidal, 2011), there are still only a few studies specifically dedicated to the analysis of her thoughts, which can allow for the understanding of the complex theory elaborated by Spielrein and to assess her importance for the history of psychoanalysis and psychology. This context justifies carrying out studies directed towards the analysis of her theoretical proposals.

In her first published work, entitled "On the psychological content of a case of schizophrenia", Spielrein (1911/2014) analyzes the case of a patient who presented a condition of *paranoid dementia* and, based on

it, formulates some hypothesis on schizophrenia and on the general mental operation. The ideas elaborated there are developed in her second publication "Destruction as the cause of coming into being" (Spielrein, 1912/2014). In the letters Spielrein sent to Jung between 1917 and 1918, she recalls and reformulates her conception on mental dynamics and structure developed in her two initial texts. It is found, in the letters, rich theoretical reflections by Spielrein and Jung, which contribute to better understanding the author's theoretical thinking and the theory she would formulate in the following years. This article aims to analyze the ideas on the mental operation and the symbolism that Spielrein formulated in the letters to Jung in the mentioned period and to discuss how are these hypothesis related to the ones presented in her 1911 and 1912 texts. It also aims to point out some converging and diverging points with Freud's conception, which allow to glimpse the originality of Spielrein's ideas. It begins with a brief exposition of some of the main ideas in her two texts and, after that, it comments the letters.

Spielrein's initial formulations on mental life

In the text "On the psychological content of a case of schizophrenia", Spielrein (1911/2014) argues that humans have a conscious life and an unconscious one, and that the latter is responsible for the creation of the affective tones of the first one. One can have the impression that the affections related to our conscious lives are stem from themselves, however, it would actually be the unconscious experience, connected to it, the responsible for the experienced affective tone, argues Spielrein.

In the text "Psychoanalysis and association experiments", Jung (1906/2011) presents the hypothesis of

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a mind constituted by “complexes”, which would be upper functional units composed by many molecules, which, in their turn, would be composed by aggregates of sensorial perceptions, intellectual components, and affective tones. The integration of these molecules in the complexes would occur according to a certain affective tone, so that they would be groups of unconscious ideas associated to events or themes that are affectively charged. In her 1911 and 1912 texts, Spielrein adopts Jung’s hypothesis of the mind composed by complexes.

According to the author, unconscious constellated complexes create the affective tone of our conscious experiences. However, this unconscious material would ultimately come from the past of the species. She presents how the fantasies of her schizophrenic patient presented a mythical content and brought to life the experiences of countless generations. The author thus supports that “we also inherit the sedimentation of our ancestors’ experiences” (Spielrein, 1911/2014, p. 213). Therefore, the unconscious would dilute our present experiences, which would then surpass the individual experience. This dissolution process is on the basis of the production of schizophrenic symptoms.

Spielrein (1911/2014) argues that her contribution for understanding schizophrenia is this very “phylogenetic view”. According to her, although Freud and Jung had already demonstrated the existence of a special parallel between neurotic and oneiric phenomena and the manifestations of schizophrenia, this phylogenetic perspective was not present in the hypothesis formulated by them.

The ideas elaborated in “On the psychological content of a case of schizophrenia” (Spielrein, 1911/2014) are developed in the text written by Spielrein in the following year, as aforementioned. In “Destruction as the cause of coming into being” (Spielrein, 1912/2014), the author affirms that, although the process of dissolution is evident and exacerbated in schizophrenic fantasies, it is part of the general mental operation. The author recalls the hypothesis that conscious thought is followed by the same unconscious content, transformed according to the language of the latter, and, to illustrate this phenomenon, she uses examples from hypnagogic phenomena, described by the Viennese psychoanalyst Hebert Silberer (1909).

One of the mentioned examples by Silberer is the conscious thought of “I want to repair a rough spot”, which is followed by a symbolic thought in which the individual sees himself “smoothing a piece of wood with a plane”. Spielrein (1912/2014) comments that this example depicts how the line of thought proper to the present is adapted, in the unconscious, to the previous “experiences” of numerous generations. The expression “rough spot” of work is extracted, by analogy, from another representational content, the one of smoothing wood out. In the conscious, the sense of the expression is fit to the present, being thus different from its origin. However, the unconscious takes the words back to their

original meaning of the rough spot of wood that is smoothed out. Therefore, the present act of improving one’s work is transformed into the act performed many times (by our ancestors) of smoothing wood out, explains the author.

Therefore, the conscious would be differentiated from the unconscious, while the latter would be dissolved and would assimilate the conscious experiences into previous experiences transcending the scope of individual experience. During this process, a personal experience is transformed into an experience of the species, so that personal characteristics are eliminated, that is, the “I” is dissolved into “us” (Spielrein, 1912/2014).

In “Destruction as the cause of coming into being”, Spielrein (1912/2014) proposes a differentiation between a “collective psyche” – which would contain the registry of the experiences of countless generations – and an “Ego-psyche” which would contain mnemonic registry stemming from individual experience. Both psyches would be kept at conflict, given that they are moved by opposed tendencies. The collective psyche has a “tendency for dissolution and for assimilating” the individual content in the collective, which would be the psychic expression of species conservation pulsion. On the other hand, the Ego-psyche contains a “tendency to differentiate”, which would express the self-preservation pulsion.

The tendency to dissolution and assimilation has positive (creative) and negative (destructive) components, and, due to that, it is transforming. For Spielrein (1912/2014), creation would have as its condition destruction; the negative component is the condition for something to be created, so that there would not be creation without destruction and vice-versa. In this sense, Spielrein describes the tendency to dissolution and assimilation as dynamic, in opposition to the individual psyche’s tendency to differentiation, which is static, since it aims at inertia, at maintaining the current self-state. As the second tendency does not have the negative component, the destructive one, it would not bring the new, not being creative. According to the author’s hypothesis, the death instinct – a destructive impulse inherent to the sexual instinct, or to the species conservation pulsion – would be the engine of the tendency to dissolution of the collective psyche¹.

Therefore, Spielrein formulates a conception on the mental dynamics that places at the basis of psychism memories stemming from the species’ past experiences and the tendency of it being superimposed over present experiences.

In “The claims of psycho-analysis to scientific interest”, Freud (1913/1998a) comments that, during the last years, psychoanalysts such as Spielrein, Jung and Abraham had realized that the thesis that ontogeny is a repetition of phylogeny would also have to be applied to

¹ For a more detailed understanding of Spielrein’s death instinct concept and of its differences in relation to the Freudian death pulsion concept, see Cromberg (2014), Caropreso (2016) and Caropreso (2017b).

the psychic life. In the same year, in “Totem and taboo”, Freud (1913/1998b) applies this theory to the Oedipal complex, proposing that it would be an ontogenetic recap of a real occurrence in the development of civilization. However, he only integrates this phylogenetic view clearly in his metapsychological hypothesis in his second theory on the psychic device. In “The Ego and the Id” (Freud, 1923/1998), it is presented the hypothesis that the Id is composed partly by phylogenetic acquisitions (Caropreso, 2017a).

Spielrein’s metapsychological proposal in the letters to Jung

Between 1908 and 1919, Spielrein and Jung exchange a series of letters, in which they discussed personal matters and theoretical hypothesis by both, just as some of the Freudian concepts. In the last letters, specially the ones written after 1917, it is notable the domain Spielrein shows over Freudian theory and her attempt to bring the thoughts of both authors together, showing points of convergence between them and drawing the attention to the value of both theories.

In the letters between 1917 and 1918, Spielrein proposes some conceptions on the structure and dynamics of the mind, which can be considered as a development of part of the theses elaborated by her in the mentioned 1911 and 1912 texts. It can be said that she attempts to integrate her concepts with Freud’s metapsychological proposals on the psychic device, specially with the division established by him between the conscious, preconscious and unconscious instances. Spielrein proposes that the last two instances are part of a broader psychic domain, called “subconscious”, and, with that, formulates original ideas on the mental operation.

Considering the mentioned theoretical elaborations by Spielrein, the central letter is the one she wrote to Jung in December, 20th 1917, given that it conveys the most detailed exposition of her conception on the topic and mental dynamics. However, the ideas presented in the previous and latter letters complement the hypothesis presented on the December, 20th letter and allow for a better understanding of it.

Mental instances

On the December, 20th 1917 letter, Spielrein proposes a differentiation on the mental life between “conscious”, “subconscious”, “preconscious”, and “unconscious”. More precisely, the last two instances would be different parts of the subconscious, so that one can say that there is a conscious domain and a subconscious one, and that, within the latter, it is possible to distinguish the subconscious corresponding to what Spielrein calls “lateral consciousness”, the preconscious and the unconscious. In a letter to Jung written some days before, in December, 15th 1917, she wrote:

In my study “Destruction, etc. . .” I always replaced the expression “unconscious” by “subconscious”, or wanted to replace it, without yet realizing, I believe, that Freud means something fundamentally different by “unconscious” from what I meant when I wanted to replace his term “unconscious” by “subconscious”. As your pupil, I was used to conceiving of the “unconscious” in your sense of the non-conscious, and only later did I realize that you and Freud meant entirely different things by the expression (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 60)

In the following letters, she corrects the mistake and elaborates the hypothesis of a differentiation between subconscious, unconscious, and preconscious. In the letter of December, 20th 1917, Spielrein proposes the designation “unconscious” for the mental domain that would be the target of repression; which would have been blocked by censorship. The preconscious would be the censoring agency. She characterizes it as a powerful force that separates, in some part of the subconscious, certain childish impulses, preventing it from penetrating in the consciousness. Thus, through the censor action (preconscious), it appears, in the subconscious, the unconscious as a differentiated area, inaccessible to the consciousness.

According to Freud’s ideas, Spielrein presupposes the existence of a censorship that would act on desires stemming from intense organic pulsion, that would contradict the conscious self. These desires – which, being recognized is opposed to a strong self-preservation and development instinct – would be mainly the ones related to child sexuality and to the Oedipal complex. The author argues that, for normal men, these desires are sublimated, that is, the energy of the desires would be removed and transferred to higher areas or to a normal romantic activity. However, it would always exist a reflux of energy towards this ancient direction, so that the marks of child instinctivity in us would not disappear and would create pleasure feeling, of whose origin could not penetrate in the conscious.

Also according to Freud’s thinking (1900/1998), in the December 20th letter, Spielrein defends that the visual plan of consciousness would be extremely restricted, since it covered only a small part of mental processes. In the consciousness, there would be a type of “directed” thought, opposed to “non-directed” thought, which characterizes the operation of the subconscious, which is also called “subliminal thought”.

As explained by Vidal (2001), the notion of “directed” and “non-directed” thought was initially proposed by Jung in the second part of “Transformations and symbols of the libido”, published in 1912. For Jung, directed thought was conscious, adapted to reality, verbal, and containing logical relations. It would be governed by a higher representational capacity, which would originate the sense of direction. While non-directed thought would

not be conscious nor adapted to reality; being subjective, symbolic, constituted by a succession of images and thoughts. Jung considers that, if this kind of thought has taken on a pathological shape, specially the schizophrenic one, it is either expressed as a dream, myth, or artistic creation, revealing a state of childish mind rooted both in the individual history and in the past of humanity (Vidal, 2001).

According to the ideas presented in the December, 20th 1917 letter, the non-directed, or subliminal, thought would emerge as the directed thought is weakened by weariness, narcosis, or other factors. Spielrein refers again to hypnagogic phenomena, described by Silberer (1909), to exemplify this kind of thought. Such phenomena would constitute the first degree of subliminal thought and allow for understanding some of its characteristics. According to Spielrein:

The observation of hypnagogic phenomena teaches us that the course of subliminal thoughts represents the course of conscious thoughts with symbols, and not only visual symbols, but also acoustic and dynamic thought symbols. *Subliminal symbols are more general and older than their equivalents in conscious thinking.* (Spielrein, 2014, p. 369, author's emphasis)

The rest of subconscious – which does not consist of what is repressed or of the preconscious – is called “lateral conscious”. This part would be composed by contents related to personal life and contents belonging to the species. Spielrein (2014, p. 370) argues that “one needs to push many of one's ‘complexes’ to the subconscious, not only due to the lack of time, but also due to intolerance, distrust, etc. – in sum, due to personal affective reasons. Therefore, some complexes would be excluded from directed thought due to affective reasons”. They, however, unlike “unconscious” representations, would remain “capable of consciousness”, says Spielrein, once they have not been separated from the conscious through censorship. As explained by Cromberg (2014), Spielrein differentiates *Unterdrückung* (suppression) from *Verdrängung* (repression). The first mechanism would operate between the conscious and the subconscious (lateral consciousness), while the second would act between the subconscious and the unconscious.

Both the part excluded from directed thought (target of the *Unterdrückung*) and its part composed by derivatives of censored instincts (target of *Verdrängung*) would be connected to the individual experience. One can infer that this is the “Ego-psyche” described by Spielrein in 1912. However, as aforementioned, the subconscious would also contain a material that transcends individual life, so that it may be inferred that, in it, would also be contained the “collective psyche”.

On the December, 20th 1917 letter, Spielrein affirms that the psychic individual life is extended to the collective psyche and argues that “the subconscious

possesses a high degree of moral cultivation, since it is the repository of the entire history of human development (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 65). Further on, on the same letter, she clearly differentiates a “personal subconscious” from a “collective subconscious”. In her words:

If we are in the territory that the conscious tolerates, among matters of a higher nature, if we are dealing with higher thoughts or emotional conflict – then we are in either the personal or the collective subconscious, but if we encounter hair-raising things that belong to the realm of outgrown instincts or something that seems equally shocking because it appears in an inappropriate context – then we are in the unconscious proper (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 66).

Thus, in the subconscious part corresponding to the lateral consciousness, it would be possible to differentiate a personal subconscious – constituted by the contents excluded from the directed thoughts – from a collective one – constituted by the “repository of the entire history of human development” (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 65) and composed, thus, by heredity, as Spielrein says in the letter on January, 6th 1918. However, it may be inferred that also the unconscious would have a personal original, so that, if one tries to relate the “personal psyche”, described in 1912, to the theoretical proposal of the letter to Jung on the 20th of December, one is led to the conclusion that both the personal part of lateral consciousness and the unconscious (repressed) would correspond to the “Ego-psyche”.

The prospective character of the subconscious

In the letters exchanged between Jung and Spielrein, it is sometimes discussed the hypothesis defended by Jung that the unconscious would have a prospective character. This is one of the main points of disagreement for Jung in relation to the Freudian hypothesis of the unconscious. In the letter of December, 15th 1917, Spielrein argues that, surely, in our subconscious we preserve advices, signals and indications of direction for our future lives. However, according to her, this prospective character could be present in the subconscious, but not in the Freudian unconscious².

This question is discussed again on Spielrein's letter on January, 6th 1918. On in, the author recognizes the possibility for the subconscious to be prospective, however, establishing her difference in relation to Jung, arguing that, although the subconscious of every person is probably, up to a certain point, predictive, one must not consider it always prophetic. The subconscious elaborates many tendencies existing in us and shows

² Most times that Spielrein uses the word “subconscious” without specification, it is possible to infer from context that she refers to the lateral consciousness.

us possibilities and probabilities that are in the air, that is, that are close to realization. However, it may also make mistakes; be subjected to suggestion, that is, it can be induced to look for the solution for a problem in a “higher” or “lower” form, argues Spielrein. This possibility of making mistakes and being influenced by suggestion would prevent it to be conferred an always prophetic character, although one can consider it, up to a certain point, predictive.

On the same letter, Spielrein uses her own fantasy of Siegfried – the son she wished to have with Jung – to exemplify the possibility of error by the subconscious thought. According to her, during a period, her subconscious would have intuited the possibility of this fantasy’s “real” realization and advised her to not oppose to it. However, this realization was prevented by the circumstances of reality and, thus, her subconscious positioned itself against the “real” solution for the problem and in favor of a subliminal path to solve it. Therefore, she says: “Although the subconscious does not reveal to us any specific fate, but only solves problems according to circumstances, or points the way, or gives us encouragement or warnings, etc. – methodological observation of these processes is tremendously valuable and interesting” (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 78).

The discussion continues on Spielrein’s letter on the probable date of January, 27-28th 1918. On it, she reaffirms her belief on the prospective and prophetic meaning of the subconscious. However, she reports considering necessary to put the following questions:

Is every person’s subconscious prospective? Probably yes. Is it prospective in everyone to the same degree? That is, is it like a divine formula, let us say, which everyone can read within himself if he only wishes to? Or is it a capacity, like intelligence, for instance, which manifests itself with different force in different people? (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 85).

Spielrein does not formulate a direct answer to these questions. What can be perceived is that she defends that the non-repressed part of the subconscious could have a prospective character, which, however, would be influenced by the circumstances and subjected to error, so that, despite being prospective, the subconscious would not be necessarily prophetic. Despite being capable of predicting based on current circumstances, the subconscious would not be necessarily prophetic, that is, would not necessarily have the ability of anticipating something that in fact came to pass. Spielrein also suggests that this prospective and prophetic character would maybe not be equally developed for all people.

The notion of symbolism

In the letter of December, 20th 1917, Spielrein argues that the repressed material, which constitutes the

unconscious, is also expressed in the subconscious (lateral consciousness) by subliminal symbols, which would represent commitments between repressed unconscious desires and higher tendencies. However, as aforementioned, they would not express just the unconscious content, but also archaic ones, belonging to the collective psychology, truly subconscious representations (belonging to what Spielrein calls “lateral consciousness”), just as body feelings. In this excerpt, in the letter of January, 6th 1918, she affirms about symbolism:

At a certain level of consciousness it displays an individual character, and then, the further one progresses, the more archaic it becomes. The contents of the individual *conscious* become transformed into the collective conscious, individual problems appear as age-old problems, etc., and from them individual problems and their solutions again crystallize; sometimes one can trace them all the way up to the conscious (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 72, author’s emphasis)

In the letter that Jung (2001) writes on December, 18th 1917, he expressed himself regarding the difference defended by Spielrein among psychic instances. He says that her notion of the unconscious seems arbitrary to him, that it is not clear how can she practically distinguish between a lateral consciousness, a preconscious, a subconscious and an unconscious; he questions where do dreams come from³.

In the letter of December, 20th 1917, Spielrein answers to this question asked by Jung and exposes her notion on the symbolic elaboration on dreams, which would not differ from the general subliminal symbolic elaboration. She clarifies that body feelings would also be expressed in subliminal symbols and thus proposes that, in the symbolic elaboration of dreams, there would be a collaboration of: conscious and subconscious psychic contents, body feelings, and repressed desires. A complete analysis of symbolism, says Spielrein, should reveal at least these four instances.

To illustrate the symbolism of subliminal thought, Spielrein recalls, in the letter of December, 20th, an example by Silberer that had already been mentioned on her text on destruction, in 1912. In this last text, to exemplify the hypothesis that each conscious thought had a parallel unconscious thought trail, which transforms the former in a specific language, she mentions the following example of hypnagogic state described by Silberer: “I think on the advance of human spirit within the complex and dark region of the mother problem (Faust

3 On Sabina’s letter to Jung on December, 15th 1917, she briefly presents her hypothesis of the division of mental life between conscious, subconscious, preconscious, and unconscious. On Jung’s letter to her on December 18th of the same year, he poses the critique just exposed. Spielrein’s letter on December 20th seems to consist on a response to Jung’s critique; an attempt of better explaining her hypothesis and answering the question he asks on the dreams.

part two)” (Spielrein, 1912/2014, p. 233). It thus arises the following symbolic thought: “I am on a platform of a lone rock placed at the very center of a dark sea. The sea water is almost merged in the horizon with the air, which is deeply shaded and mysteriously dark” (Spielrein, 1912/2014, p. 233).

Spielrein (1912/2014) explains that being taken within the dark sea corresponds to penetrating the dark problem. The fusion between air and water, the amalgam of the upper and lower parts, may symbolize that, on the mothers (as described by Mephistopheles), all times and places are merged together. She points out that, in this example, as in the thought of ancient peoples, the sea is seen as the mother – the creating motherly waters, from which everything had come into being. The sea (the “mother”) in which one penetrates is the dark problem, the state where there is no time, place nor opposites (higher and lower), since it is still what is non-differentiate. The image of the sea (mother) is simultaneously the image of the depths of the unconscious, which lives concurrently in the present, past and future, that is, out of time, to which all places are merged together and to which opposites have the same meaning, explains Spielrein.

This analysis, presented in the 1912, illustrates the hypothesis that conscious thought would be followed by a symbolic thought expressing archaic contents, belonging of the species’ psychism; In the letter of December, 20th 1917, Spielrein recalls this example and adds a possible meaning for such symbolic thought related to the unconscious and to the body. From the point of view of the non-repressed subconscious (lateral consciousness), the dark sea would be a symbol of the difficult problem in the subconscious and, at the same time, a symbol of many other thoughts connected to it. From the point of view of organic sensations, it would be possible to say that the image of the dark sea, just as the difficulty in the conscious task, would be just an expression and symbol of the respiratory activity that has become harder. According to Spielrein, this example also depict how the symbols are interchangeable, that is, how the subconscious symbolizes the conscious and vice-versa.

In the letter of December, 20th 1917, after exposing this interpretation of the many signification levels of subliminal symbolism, Spielrein questions on what would be the correct interpretation. She answers that this depends on which capacity one wants to clarify through the analysis of symbolism, once the most varied capacities contribute to the formation and choice of the symbol. On Jung’s letter on December, 28th 1917, he says that the correct interpretation of a symbol is what brings most values to our lives, which is characterized as a pragmatic view.

Spielrein (1980/1982) summarizes her notion of symbolism in the letter of December, 21st 1917 by saying: “a symbol is the product of compromise, constellated

by processes taking place in the subconscious and the unconscious, which for their part receive elements consisting of remnants of conscious life and subconscious “organic sensations” (p. 68).

In the letter of January, 27-28th 1918, Spielrein exposes to Jung her view on the difference between his and Freud’s notions of symbolism. She says:

You are now devoting all your attention to the individual’s “vocation”, which finds expression in subliminal symbols (*you call them “semiotic signs” – what does that mean?*). Freud does not pay any attention to this, because he believes that it is sufficient to present a patient with the instinct fixations that are making him ill and *to submit them to his conscious for processing*; this is supposed to call forth a healthy reaction, so that he will now consciously find his life goal. Therefore subliminal symbolism has interest for Freud only as a disguise for instinctive desires... (Spielrein, 1980/1982, p. 84, author’s emphasis)

For Spielrein, subliminal symbolism had a composite origin: organic, unconscious, subconscious, and conscious. Her emphasis lies on the determination and reversibility of symbols. With this notion, Spielrein seems to highlight the multivalent character of subliminal symbols, without emphasizing one of the aspects, as Freud and Jung do, according to her interpretation. Although she does not deny the prospective character of the subconscious, Spielrein has reservations to Jung’s notion. Similarly, even though she does not deny that subliminal symbolism is also an expression of the repressed unconscious and recognizes the value of interpreting it in this manner, she does not place this level of signification above the others.

The relation between Spielrein and Freud’s topics

In the letter of December, 20th 1917, Spielrein affirms that her difference in relation to Freud is the notion of the subconscious, given that he does not consider the subconscious itself, but rather unites it to the conscious. At the time, Freud had just published his “Papers on metapsychology” (1915-1917), in which he reviews and systematizes his notion on what was called the first theory on the psychic device.

On his papers on metapsychology, Freud (1915-1917/1998) proposes that the psychic device is composed by the instances of the “unconscious”, “preconscious”, and “conscious”. Just as he has defended in “The interpretation of dreams” (Freud, 1900/1998), the first of these instances corresponded to the primary process and the second to the secondary one. The primary is characterized by the free flow of excitation, which would lead to the lack of logical relations, timelessness, and to

the substitution of the external reality for the psychic one. The secondary process, on the other hand, would be an inhibited, temporal process, which contained logical relations and was governed by the principle of reality (Freud, 1915/1998b). The representation within the unconscious, or the primary process, would be the target to two types of repression: the “primal repression” and the “repression proper”.

According to the hypothesis presented in the metapsychology paper “Repression” (Freud, 1915/1998a), the primal repression consists on not including certain representations in the preconscious, so that they would remain unconscious and, thus, not passible of consciousness ever since their origin. These representations would not be integrated to the preconscious because they were not associated to word representations. In this phase of his theory, Freud considered that only representations associated to words would be accessible by the consciousness, at the normal waking state, and that the preconscious arises after the constitution of language. The repression proper, in its turn, would be a process that excluded from the preconscious – and, therefore, from the access to consciousness – representations that, because they contradict moral values, had become conflictive and sources of displeasure. Considering this, one can say that the unconscious would be composed by repressed representations (ever since their origin or *a posteriori*) and that would thus remain “not passible of consciousness” in the normal waking state. Whereas the preconscious would be composed by representations connected to words and that, thus, were accessible to the consciousness, despite having to overcome an existing censorship between the consciousness and the preconscious in order to become effectively conscious (Freud, 1917/1998). Therefore, it is possible to affirm that, in the preconscious, there are two kinds of representations: those blocked by the last censorship and the ones that are not blocked, which could reach consciousness. The preconscious, among other functions, would be responsible for another censorship, the one at the base of the repression proper⁴.

The characteristics of directed thought, which Spielrein accredits to the consciousness, are close to the characteristics of the secondary process described by Freud, so that Spielrein attributes to the consciousness a characteristic that, for Freud, would belong to the preconscious. As mentioned, for Spielrein, this last instance would be restricted to exerting censorship, so that her notion of the preconscious is very limited in relation to Freud's. Non-directed thought would be present in the rest of the subconscious, with characteristics closer to the ones of the primary process described by Freud. Part of the representations in it

would have been displaced from the directed thought by emotional reasons. They would, however, remain passible to consciousness. It is possible to relate these representations to the ones Freud considers as preconscious, but blocked by the censorship between the conscious and preconscious. However, they present characteristics that would be closer to the Freudian primary process, so that Spielrein seems to propose the existence of a primary process passible to consciousness, that is, that has not been subjected to repression. Thus, in a certain way, she broadens the Freudian notion of primary process.

To Freud, susceptibility to consciousness is a characteristic of the preconscious, however, this characteristic would depend on the connection to words. Therefore, Spielrein seems to propose the existence of processes that are susceptible to consciousness but are not connected to words, once the subconscious' non directed thought (lateral consciousness) would not be verbal, despite being susceptible to consciousness. This is a hypothesis that Freud (1923/1998) incorporates in his theory a few years later, in “The Ego and the Id”.

Another part of lateral consciousness integrates what Spielrein calls collective subconscious, that is, it would be composed by memories coming from the past of the species. This subconscious created by heredity seems to be the main difference between Spielrein and Freud. In the metapsychology theory on the psychic device presented by Freud, there does not seem to exist something similar to it, although, as aforementioned, Freud (1923/1998) has in a way included this hereditary segment in his second theory on the psychic device developed in “The Ego and the Id”.

The unconscious described by Spielrein is identified to what is repressed, blocked by the censorship due to the opposition exerted by self-preservation pulsion. She explains that what she calls unconscious is the same as Freud's designation of the term, even though she never mentions the Freudian hypothesis of primal repression, and refers to repression as a process similar to what Freud has called repression proper.

Spielrein's notion on the interchangeable relation between the conscious and subconscious, given that consciousness would represent the subconscious and vice-versa, does not seem to find its equal in the Freudian theory. According to the latter, it is possible to say that the preconscious and the conscious would symbolize the unconscious, but not that the unconscious could symbolize the conscious and the preconscious. This is also an original notion by Spielrein.

Concluding remarks

On the analyzed letters to Jung, Spielrein attempts to integrate some of the ideas formulated in her initial texts with the hypothesis defended by Freud on the psychic device at the time, just as to some Jungian notions. Among these,

⁴ A detailed analysis of Freudian notions on the psychic device can be found on Caropreso (2010).

it is highlighted the notions of directed and non-directed thought, the existence of a psychic material transcending personal experience and the matter of the prospective character of psychism. Spielrein dialogues to the theories of these authors and aims to show that, in many issues, they are compatible. With the subconscious notion, Spielrein develops the notions of “Ego-psyche” and collective psyche, formulated in her text on the destruction and, based on that, continues her theory on symbolism. Despite that attempt to integrate Freud and Jung’s hypothesis, the theory elaborated by Spielrein presents originality, which justifies a greater highlight in the history of psychoanalysis.

As commented by Cromberg (2014), the theoretical formulation elaborated by Spielrein in the letters, specially the introduction of the subconscious and subliminal notions, characterizes her singular thought as psychoanalytical in relation to the topic and dynamic of the Freudian psychic device. These hypotheses constituted the impetus that allowed her to formulate, in the following years, pioneering and original concepts on the appearance and function of language, besides her own theory on the formation of the symbol and on thoughts, which would be developed in subsequent years with the collaboration of Jean Piaget.

As hipóteses teóricas de Sabina Spielrein nas suas cartas a Carl Gustav Jung (1917-1918)

Resumo: Tem havido um crescente reconhecimento da originalidade e do caráter pioneiro das propostas teóricas e clínicas da psicanalista russa Sabina Spielrein. No entanto, ainda são poucos os estudos dedicados especificamente à análise de sua teoria. Além de suas publicações, as cartas que Spielrein enviou a Jung entre 1917 e 1918 contêm ricas reflexões teóricas, que contribuem para uma melhor compreensão do seu pensamento e das hipóteses que ela viria a formular nos anos seguintes. Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os conceitos de subconsciente e de simbolismo que Spielrein apresenta na correspondência com Jung do período mencionado. Procuramos mostrar que, com esses conceitos, a autora dá continuidade à teoria que começara a formular em suas primeiras publicações e tenta integrar suas próprias hipóteses a algumas ideias de Freud e Jung, o que tem como consequência a elaboração de uma teoria original sobre o psiquismo.

Palavras-chave: história da psicanálise, Sabina Spielrein, funcionamento mental, simbolismo, subconsciente.

Les hypothèses théoriques de Sabina Spielrein dans ses lettres à Carl Gustav Jung (1917-1918)

Résumé: Il y a une reconnaissance croissante de l’originalité et du caractère pionnier des propositions théoriques et cliniques de la psychanalyste russe Sabina Spielrein. Cependant, il y a encore peu d’études consacrées spécifiquement à l’analyse de sa théorie. En plus de ses publications, les lettres de Spielrein à Jung entre les années 1917 et 1918 contiennent des riches réflexions théoriques qui contribuent à une meilleure compréhension de sa pensée et des hypothèses qu’elle formulera dans les années suivantes. Cet article vise à analyser les idées sur le subconscient et le symbolisme que Spielrein présente dans sa correspondance avec Jung dans la période mentionnée. Nous cherchons à monter qu’avec ces concepts, Spielrein poursuit la théorie qu’il avait commencé à formuler dans ses premières publications et essaie d’intégrer ses propres hypothèses à certaines idées de Freud et de Jung, ce qui aboutit à l’élaboration d’une théorie originale de la psyché.

Mots-clés: histoire de la psychanalyse, Sabina Spielrein, fonctionnement mental, symbolisme, subconscient.

Las hipótesis teóricas de Sabina Spielrein en sus cartas a Carl Gustav Jung (1917-1918)

Resumen: Recientemente, ha ocurrido un creciente reconocimiento de la originalidad y del carácter pionero de las propuestas teóricas y clínicas de la psicoanalista rusa Sabina Spielrein. Sin embargo, todavía son pocos los estudios dedicados específicamente al análisis de su teoría. Además de sus publicaciones, las cartas que había enviado a Jung entre los años 1917 y 1918 contienen ricas reflexiones teóricas, que contribuyen a una mejor comprensión de su pensamiento y de las hipótesis que iba a formular en los años siguientes. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las ideas sobre el subconsciente y el simbolismo que Spielrein presenta en la correspondencia con Jung en el período mencionado. Se busca demostrar que con estos conceptos la psicoanalista continúa la teoría que había comenzado a formular en sus primeras publicaciones e intenta agregar sus propias hipótesis con algunas ideas de Freud y Jung, lo que resulta en la elaboración de una teoría original de la psique.

Palabras clave: historia del psicoanálisis, Sabina Spielrein, funcionamiento mental, simbolismo, subconsciente.

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