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The *Verleugnung* in Freud: textual analysis and hermeneutical considerations

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Abstract: In this article we discuss the different displacements of the idea of “refusal”, “denial” or “denial” (*Verleugnung*) in the Freudian text. To promote this reflection, we first discuss the translations and meanings of the German term, and then analyze its appearance in the First Topic and its conceptual development in the Second Topic. We believe that although the concept of “denial” has found its specific formulation as a defense mechanism for fetishistic perversion, it is a much more extensive concept that is not restricted to perverse organization and is of great value for the critical understanding of certain aspects of contemporary society.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, Freud, denial, fetishism.

The objective of this text is to propose a theoretical study that can capture the different displacements of the idea of “refusal”, “renegade” or “denial” (*Verleugnung*) in the Freudian text. Our work is justified by the difficulty found at the very moment of the translation of the German term and by the conceptual difficulty of apprehending its meaning and its theoretical status in the Freudian text. Moreover, it not only indicates an important mechanism of defense of the self in the face of traumatic experiences, but also points to a decisive place in the constitution of the psyche, as its elucidation can contribute to the discussion about the new figures of subjectivity in a society considered “narcissistic” or “perverse” by some contemporary authors (Dufour, 2013; Lebrun, 2008).

In order to fulfill this objective, we chose to translate the German word for “denial” and subdivide the article into three sections: in the first section, we will consider the translation difficulties of the German word; in the subsequent section, we will record the references to the “denial” (*Verleugnung*) in the period of the First Topic (1900-1920); and in the final section we shall examine the concept of *Verleugnung* a little more closely in the Second Topic

The meaning of *Verleugnung*

Before we examine the use of the word *Verleugnung* in Freud’s work, let us first briefly review its current usage in the German language. In the German-Portuguese dictionaries, such as the well-known *Langenscheidt Taschenwörterbuch*, it is more common to not find the noun, but rather only the verb *verleugnen* meaning “to negate” or “to deny”. In Wahrig: a dictionary for Brazilians, in turn, the word also appears as “denial”, but its meaning is extended to “hide” or even to “pretend, dissimulate”, as in the reflexive expression *sichverleugnenlassen* (to

pretend or to say that it is not), or as in the case of one not being able to deal with one’s own feelings or beliefs, as in *sichselbstverleugnen* (denying oneself) (Irmén & Beau, 1995, p. 1144; Wahrig-Burfeind, 2011, p. 1139). In more complete dictionaries, we have already found the noun *Verleugnung* translated into Portuguese as “renegação” or “retratação” (Dicionário de alemão-português, 2000, p. 836) or for French it is seen as *dénégation*, *reniement*, *désaveau* or *démenti* (Grappin, 2007, p. 854). In the German-German dictionaries there are also the actions of “cover”, “occult”, “disguise”, “hide” (*verbergen*, *abstreiten*), both in an attempt to dissimulate something of itself in relation to another person) and in relation to oneself (Götz, 2003, p. 1114; Wahrig, 1968, p. 3822).

By consulting the dictionaries of psychoanalysis, we see in the classic *Vocabulary of Psychoanalysis* of Laplanche and Pontalis (1970) that the term used in French was *déni*, translated to Portuguese as “recusa (da realidade).” The book also indicates other translations, such as English (*disavowal*) and Spanish (*renegación*). However, this diversity shows the different possibilities of its translation, even though at the end of the entry the authors say they prefer the French term *déni* instead of *denégation* ([of] negation) because it is stronger and has a certain nuance of illegitimacy, as in the expression “refusal of what is due” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1970, pp. 562-565).

Surprisingly, David Zimmerman (2001) in his contemporary vocabulary of psychoanalysis, referring to Laplanche and Pontalis, chooses, in the naming of his entry, by the word “(of) negation” with the prefix highlighted so as to make a difference in relation to the simple “denial” and emphasize the plurality of meanings such as “renegade”, “negate”, “retract”, “deny” (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 98). On the other hand, in the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, written by Alain de Mijolla (2005, p. 478), the author of the entry on the Freudian concept uses *déni* (of *réalité*) or *désaveau*, having been translated into Portuguese as “desmentido

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[da realidade]”. On the other hand, in his *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Roudinesco and Plon (1998) reiterate the term *déni*. However, in this case, the term is translated into Portuguese as “renegação,” not “recusa”, indicating towards the Spanish *desmentida*. In addition, the authors note that “in 1967 the French psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato proposed translating *Verleugnung* as *désaveau* [denial, retraction] (instead of *déni*)” (p. 656). In the *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, written by Roland Chemama and Bernard Vandermersch (2007), the author of the corresponding entry again uses the term *déni* translated into Portuguese as “recusa”, indicating to the English *disavowal* or *denial*. In the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychoanalysis: the Legacy of Freud and Lacan*, by Pierre Kaufman (1996), the concept in Portuguese is named as “recusa da realidade” and “renegação” (pp. 213-215), but its reading must be done in parallel with the entry “forclusão” (pp. 446-448), written by another collaborator of the work.

This terminological oscillation not only seems to indicate the extension of the German word, but also point to the difficulty of its conceptual determination in the construction of the metapsychological edifice, even when Freud used it in a more specific sense as a fundamental mechanism for what would be “the complete explanation” of fetishism. He never strictly defined it and kept it associated not only with psychosis but also with the notion of negation referred to the unconscious processes involved in “verbal reaction” or negative judgment, as seen in *Verneinung* often expressed as “(of)negation” in order to mark in the German prefix *ver* – not only the logical negation, but its more emphatic psychological meaning, since there is no *neinen* in German (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1970, p. 373).

As can be seen – and this is common in all languages – the German term *Verleugnung* has been translated in several ways into Portuguese: “negação”, “recusa”, “desmentido”. In his useful Freud’s German Commented Dictionary, Louis Hanns (1996) decomposes the German term into its prefix *ver-* basically by designating the temporal or spatial extension of a phenomenon or the intensity of an action and the verb *leugnen* as “deny”, or “contest the truth” (pp. 303-313).

After listing the various meanings in German and Portuguese, as we have done earlier, the author presents a valuable series of examples of their use in Freud (Hanns, 1996). In it, we see how the notion has taken shape in Freud’s theory since “On the Child’s Sexual Theories” from 1908 when, when he perceives the genitals of his little sister, a child is led to “falsify” or “divert” refract “their perception in a passage in which the German term does not yet appear (Freud, 1908/1999c, p. 178). Subsequently, even in the First Topical, both the verb *verleugnen* and the noun *Verleugnungem* appear in various contexts, always corresponding to the denying action.

In the Second Topic, the concept outlined in the 1908 article is taken from “The Child’s Genital Organization” (Freud, 1923/1999f), as it is shortly afterwards in texts such

as “The loss of reality in neurosis and psychosis” (Freud, 1924/1999h) and “Psychical distinction of the anatomical distinction between the sexes” (Freud, 1925/1999i), the German term is associated with the mechanism of psychosis. Finally, in the article on fetishism, its use is fixed in the explanation of perversion, but it is a precarious fixation, as can be seen in the 1925 Freudian text “The Denial,” which was initially titled *Die Verneinung und Verleugnung* (The negation and the denial), to show a certain superposition of the two mechanisms belonging to the “logic of psychic defense”, the second of which was specifically addressed two years later in *Fetischismus* (Assoun, 2009, p. 374).

In Brazil, resulting from the impact of the Lacanian work and its commitment to construct a general theory of clinical structures, the *Verleugnung* appears as “the fundamental operation of all forms of perversion”, proposing that its French designation *comodémentiea* clearly distinguishes itself from other psychological operations such as “repression” (*Verdrängung*; *refoulement*) and “rejection” or “forclusion” (*Verwerfung*; *forclusion*) (Evans, 2000, p. 168). Nevertheless, we are not going to deal with the Lacanian conceptualization here, we will only go through some Freudian texts to locate the different movements of the term.

The *Verleugnung* in the First Topic

At least two apparitions of the term *Verleugnung* in texts prior to 1914 deserve mention. The first appears in the book *Psychopathology of everyday life* (Freud, 1905), and in the second case, although we do not find the term, we are faced with the idea of the refusal of reality in the text “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” (1911).

In section VII of *Psychopathology of everyday life*, entitled “The forgetting of impressions and intentions”, more precisely than in the first part, Freud (1905/1999b) presents several cases of forgetting the content of dialogues. The first refers to an experience that he himself went through when he intended to report to a relative a scene taken a few weeks earlier when he became angry with his wife because she was explicitly listening to a Viennese gentleman’s conversation with his neighbor in a public situation. However, as he recounts what happened, he forgets the content of that master’s conversation, an amnesia attributed to him by considerations from the person of his wife (Freud, 1905/1999b, p. 151).

After this account of a daily scene, other scenes of forgetfulness follow, but the most interesting is the description of a forgetfulness of Freud associated with a hypothesis relevant for the construction of the theoretical building of the psychoanalytic. Freud (1905/1999b) says that he made an observation to a friend (Fliess) that “these neurotic problems can only be solved when we base ourselves entirely on the hypothesis of the individual’s bisexuality”, when his interlocutor replies: “This is what

I told you two and a half years ago” (Freud, 1905/1999b, pp. 159-160). This oblivion reaches the great Freudian ambition in full, the desire for originality.

Examples are multiplied: forgetfulness of names, erasure of painful impressions, testimony in court, dismissal of the objections of other researchers in the case of scientific work, and even the concealment of painful memories for the feeling of a people in the genesis of their traditions. As seen, the *Verleugnung*, defined as oblivion motivated by painful representations and affections, is intimately associated with repression and its scope is universal: it affects not only neurotic people, but also healthy people; and not only individuals, but also the very genesis of morality, since Freud (1905/1999b) reaffirms “a complete analogy” (*einevollständige Analogie*) between the formation of the traditions of a people and the childhood memories of an individual (p. 164).

Regarding this “elementary defensive commitment” against distressing representations, which evidences the connection between memory and affectivity, Freud evokes an aphorism of Nietzsche extracted from *Beyond good and evil* in a note added in 1919: “‘I did it’ says my memory. ‘I cannot have done it,’ says my pride, and remains inflexible. Finally – it gives way to memory” (Nietzsche, 1886/1992, p. 68, quoted by Freud, 1905/1999b, p. 162). Nietzsche’s quotation in this passage reinforces not only the universal character of the defensive mechanism but also its preponderant role in the formation of moral consciousness. Nevertheless, the triumph of the moral conscience does not pacify the painful affections and only unfolds the conflict of the psychic forces on another level and therefore the defense must deal with the remorse (*Reue*) and the censures coming from the own moral conscience (*Gewissensvorwürfe*) (Freud, 1905/1999b, p. 163).

The appearance of Nietzsche’s name, whose death in August 1900 unleashed a flood of publications about him, began to be studied at German universities (Nolte, 1995, p. 10). In this way, his ascending authority endorsed the Freudian conception. In the same sense, we can interpret the sudden appearance of the name “of the great Darwin”, which “made use of notes regarding the objections made about his scientific work” (Freud, 1905/1999b, p. 164). This “Golden Rule” used by Darwin could easily work for Freud himself, who earlier had given an episode in relation to Fliess involving the question of bisexuality as an example of forgetfulness.

In these passages of the Freudian text we are faced with several interesting elements: the appearance of the term *Verleugnung* still without a more precise conceptual determination; its universal scope reiterating the fundamental thesis about the continuity between the normal and the pathological; the role of defensive oblivion in the genesis of moral consciousness; the possibility of using such a mechanism to understand the dynamics of the cultural formation of a people. We would like to emphasize two points: firstly, the passage in which *Verleugnung* appears as a defensive mechanism occurs following

the mention of the bisexuality theory, and secondly, the universal scope of the mechanism is also associated with its failure, as we saw in the case of the new kinds of suffering produced by the triumph of moral conscience.

In the first case, one should remember the controversial role of the bisexuality theory in the development of Freudian theory and all the *gimmicky* triggered by Fliess’s charge of plagiarism towards Freud. The mythical idea of the androgyne found in the developments of embryology, a scientific justification in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, one of its proponents precisely being Wilhelm Fliess, an intimate friend and scientific interlocutor of Freud. Natural bisexuality was not only a scientific subject to interest biologists and sexologists, but it actually became the subject of heated cultural debate in a society that was faced with the decline of patriarchy.

In the context of abandoning the seduction theory, Freud embraces Fliess’ bisexuality theory, but distances himself from biological bisexuality to emphasize his character of psychological organization, of unconscious disposition, and to take it as a trigger for repression (Roudinesco & Plon, 1998, pp. 71-74). The question becomes fundamental, because before the sexual difference the subject is forced to make a “choice” by means of repressing one of the constituent components of bisexuality.

Neurotic symptoms would be the price to pay for the choice made, as can be illustrated by the torture of moral conscience (as pointed out earlier in this text). Therefore, the failure of repression to ward off the painful representations and affections associated with bisexuality suggests the use of a more effective defensive mechanism to deal with bisexuality and the challenging of sexual difference, i.e., a mechanism that would overcome the insufficient force of the repression of the constitutive bisexual tendencies of the human being (Sulloway, 1981, pp. 173-175).

In “The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality”, Freud (1905/1999b) proposes the idea of the boy’s assumption that all knowing people possess a genitalia such as his. It would only be possible to give up this conviction after “hard internal struggles” in regards to the “castration complex” (*Kastrationskomplex*). He concludes this passage by stating that in place of the lost penis of women there are “substitutive formations” (*Ersatzbildungen*) that are relevant in the configuration of various perversions (Freud, 1905/1999b, pp. 95-96). It should be emphasized, however, that all this part related to the infantile sexual investigations was added in 1915, following the introduction of the problem of narcissism and the beginning of referral to the Second Topical and, therefore, towards the more detailed elaboration of the structure and the role of the Ego. This observation had already been made in the discussion of the “Little Hans” case, when he says that recognizing the absence of a penis

in his little sister would have been “a violent shock in his world view” (Freud, 1909/1999d, p. 341).

These issues announced in the considerations on infantile sexual investigations could only be addressed in the Second Topical after the emergence of the theory of narcissism and the re-elaboration of bisexuality in the light of the phallic conception, as can be seen both in “The genital child organization: an interpolation in theory of sexuality” of 1923, and in “Fetishism” of 1927, which we will discuss in more detail below.

In a small but important 1911 text, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning”, Freud addresses the relation of the Self to the disturbing reality. The text begins with the following statement: “every neurosis results in, and therefore probably, as a purpose, wresting the patient from real life, to alienate him from reality” (Freud, 1911/1999e, p. 230). The author goes on to say that the most extreme type of alienation occurs in hallucinatory psychosis, although “every neurotic does the same with some fragment of reality”.

In this passage, the tendency to alienate reality brings neurosis closer to psychosis and, in both cases, this “detachment from reality” stems from its unbearable character (*unerträglich*). However, it must be pointed out that this observation had already been made by Pierre Janet for certain basic conditions (*Grundbedingungen*), which Freud makes explicit in relation to the genesis of neurosis as the “process of repression” (*Verdrängungsprozess*), and then assign the remoteness of the reality in some cases of psychosis to the “denial of the event that caused the madness”.

In this passage the noun is not found, but there is the verb “deny” conjugated with modal in the passive form and strongly associated with the mechanism of psychosis (Freud, 1911/1999e, p. 230). Certainly this passage does not allow us to suppose that the term already indicates a clear conceptual determination. In fact, Freud interprets this action as removing a disturbing event from the action of the pleasure-displeasure principle in its unfolding as the principle of reality.

Resuming the thesis of his 1895 manuscript in his 1911 paper, Freud affirms that the growing significance of external reality, in addition to introducing a new principle, produces the amplification and sophistication of the sensory organs, which enables the solidification of the functions of attention, memory, consciousness and, thus, there is the transformation from the I-pleasure (*Lust-Ich*) into the I-reality (*Real-Ich*), without a total substitution of one over the other, since, after all, “in reality, the substitution of the pleasure principle for the principle of reality does not imply the dismissal of it, but rather only its protection” (Freud, 1911/1999e, pp. 235-236).

Why should there be protection or consolidation of the pleasure principle? For it is not enough to exclude unpleasant representations by means of the mechanism of repression, which always fails and produces new suffering, when it is possible not to be drawn by fantasies or to limit

mere motor discharge, as it is during the domination of the psyche by principle of pleasure, but rather by judging and changing reality. Containment of motor discharge as a means of relieving tension opens the possibility of the process of thought and action (Freud, 1911/1999e, p. 233). Nevertheless, the sexual drive remains for “longer” or can never be subtracted from the “domain of the pleasure principle” and, therefore, is intimately associated with fantasy.

In this way, Freud concisely observes, “a kind of activity of thinking has broken down (*abgespalten*), it has remained free from the proof of reality and remained subject only to the pleasure principle”, this activity is fantasizing (*Phantasieren*) (Freud, 1911/1999e, p. 234). Here, when emphasizing the autoerotic nature of the sexual drive, the theory of narcissism is already announced, and the use of the verb *abspalten* (to cut, to split) announces one of its consequences: the division of the self (*Ichspaltung*), a condition closely linked to the mechanism of the *Verleugnung*, as it would be conceptually developed in the Second Topic and dealt with in the small unfinished manuscript of 1938, entitled “The split of the self in the defensive process” (Freud 1940/1999l, pp. 59-62), and in Chapter VIII of the “Sketch of Psychoanalysis”, written in the same year (Freud, 1940/1999l, pp. 125-135).

The *Verleugnung* in the Second Topic

The concept of *Verleugnung* is commonly associated with the perversion and cleavage of the self. Let us also approach these central meanings, without forgetting their extension to a series of other phenomena in which Freud points out the incidence of the *Verleugnung* by inscribing it in the general functioning of the psyche, which is certainly present in neurotics as one of the expedients they use in the face of a traumatic experience, while also inscribing it as a common mechanism and not at all uncommon in the experience of children.

This extension of the concept does not see its specificity but rather shows its relevance to social criticism, which we will only briefly conclude at the end of this article. Although it goes beyond the strict limits of the Freudian text, we believe that such an objective is not impertinent if we do not only consider the continuity between the normal and the pathological, but also the critical potential of psychoanalysis in relation to culture, society and politics.

Let us now turn to the approach of these meanings in the Freudian text. Even before using the word *Verleugnung*, Freud had already conceived as a “denial” of children’s reaction to the painful perception of the girl’s absence of penis, i.e., when the disturbing encounter with the truth of castration occurs. This conception was formed in an elaboration of the theory of sexuality in the “Three Essays” of 1905, in “Childlike Sexual Theories”, 1908, and in “Little Hans”, 1909.

The *Verleugnung*, before being the specific mechanism of perversion in which the denial of castration is at stake, commonly occurs in childhood in relation to sexual difference. The same idea is taken up in the Second Topical in the light of the primacy of the phallus. In “Childhood genital organization: an interpolation in the theory of sexuality”, in reiterating some consequences of the sexual research of children, Freud states: “It is known how they react to the first impressions of the absence of the penis. They deny (*leugnen*), although they believe they see a member, they mask the contradiction between observation and prejudice” (Freud, 1923/1999f, p. 296).

In the Brazilian translation of the *Complete Works* the English editor notes how from that time forward “the concept of ‘rejection’ (*Verleugnung*) comes to occupy an increasingly important place in Freud’s writings. In this passage, the German word employed is *leugnen*, but then its place is almost invariably taken by the likely *verleugnen* form” (Strachey, 1976, p. 182). Note here, as in the editor’s note, the word *Verleugnung* has been translated into Portuguese as “rejection”.

Such a choice of translation was soon justified by the Brazilian translator as a means to avoid confusion with the German verb *verneinen*. However, in the Castilian edition, in the translation of the same note into Spanish, the term is *desconocimiento* or *desmentida*. Despite this oscillation in translation, what is important in the English editor’s note is to show how in this period, despite some fluctuations, the conceptual meaning of *Verleugnung* is consolidated.

In the 1923 text, “denial (*leugnen*) sexual difference” is elucidated in the context of the castration complex and the primacy of the phallus. In the short article of 1924, “The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis”, the recently proposed thesis about the difference in levels of conflict in the two affections – in neurosis the conflict between Ego and Id, and in the psychosis between Ego and the external world (*Aussenwelt*) – being complemented by the type of loss of reality and its compensation, i.e., by its final result: in neurosis there is escape from a fragment of reality that is now avoided; in psychosis there is an active phase of remodeling of reality. In short: “‘neurosis’ does not deny reality” (Freud, 1924/1999h, p. 365); she does not want to know anything about her. Psychosis belies her (*verleugnet sie*) and tries to replace her.

Shortly afterwards he attenuates the difference by indicating a certain substitution of reality in the fantasy in the neurosis, but again he differentiates the two affections based on the type of reparation reached. In neurosis, failure occurs not so much in the stage of the conflict between the ego and the drive, but in the second stage, at the moment of the failure of the “repression” (*Verdrängung*), whereas in the psychosis the pathology is already in the first stage when the denial (*Verleugnung*) of reality occurs, or, as he had just written, “the fragment of rejected reality”, always imposing itself on the soul life.

Although the consequences in both cases are similar – the failure of repair or the solution attained – the force of denial produces a much more severe disturbance of egoic functions. But why does this occur? Because the denial had already been originally inscribed in the very constitution of the Ego and cannot simply be considered the mechanism. The idea of denying the perception of the absence of the penis in the girl, as already mentioned in the “Three essays” and resumed in the “Childhood genital organization”, will be mentioned in the article on masochism, when, differentiating the three forms of masochism, erogenous masochism serves as the basis for the other two types.

Its original character (*ursprünglich*) can be accompanied by the development of the libido, and its crucial moment occurs in the phallic phase, from which the castration that must later be denied (*später verleugnet*) comes (Freud, 1924/1999g, p. 377). Shortly afterwards, in the 1925 article “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes”, in establishing the analogy between girls and boys in relation to castration, he states that when he sees the girl’s genital region, the boy “sees nothing or denies his perception” (Freud, 1925/1999i, p. 23).

The two occurrences of the verb *verleugnen* situate the action in the context of the castration complex and, therefore, in the context of the narcissistic constitution of the Ego. This process, says Freud, “which I would like to deny” would be neither rare nor dangerous, but “in an adult could introduce psychosis” (Freud 1925/1999i, p. 24). It is easily understood, therefore, that the reiteration of *Verleugnung* in the case of psychosis so drastically affects egoic functions as it would be the actualization of the constitutive cleavage of the Ego, and this is no more than its structural inconsistency.

Let us now follow the text on fetishism more closely. Freud mentions, after a brief clinical reference, two characteristics “of object choice dominated by a fetish”. In the first place, the fetish usually does not arouse suffering, but is seen as a convenient means of fulfilling a love life. Secondly, the choice of fetish stems from specific circumstances; depending on the singularity of individual history, as in the case report of the “nose glow”, the choice of the nose as a fetish as a result of fortuitous but striking events (Freud 1927/1999k, p. 311).

Soon after, he abruptly proposes a general statement covering all cases of fetishism: “the fetish is a substitute for the penis” or, rather, a very special penis that is of great significance during early childhood, after lost, and that the fetish must “preserve from disappearance”. This “very special penis” is none other than the “phallus of the woman (of the mother) of which the fetish is the substitute” (Freud, 1927/1999k, p. 312).

There is, in this passage, a shift in meaningful vocabulary from the conceptual point of view. It is no longer a substitute for the penis (*Penisersatz*) but a substitute for the “phallus” (*Ersatz für den Phallus*). At

first it can be said, as Freud does, that the fact that the mother does not have a penis puts the boy's penis at risk. However, the anguish provoked by the perception and the force of the defensive mechanism seems to indicate in the perception what is lacking in the other, the recognition of what is lacking in itself.

Hence the fetishistic solution, although pacifying, does not fully support itself, and belief is continually eroded by the "reality of failure": "it is not certain that the child after the observation of the woman has saved the unchanged belief in the phallus of the woman. He retained it, but he also abandoned it" (Freud, 1927/1999k, p. 313). The displacement of the penis to the fetish, the passage from an empirical object to a substitute that can be anything, points to the properly phallic nature of the fault, that is, its universal status, and hence the fetish retains the "horror before the castration" and to "erect a monument" (Freud, 1927/1999k, p. 313).

We are certainly here at the heart of the mechanism of fetishistic perversion. In rejecting the term proposed by Laforgue ("scotomize"), Freud refers this "pathological process" to "repression" (*Verdrängung*), "the oldest piece of psychoanalytic terminology", and then to observe: "the fate of representation and affection, and reserve the expression 'repression' for affection" (Freud, 1927/1999k, pp. 312-313).

One can draw attention to the association of repression with affection when it is known that repression focuses on representation (*Vorstellung*) and not on affection, which can only be inhibited or eliminated by repression (*Unterdrückung*) and not become unconscious (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1970). Freud completes by stating that for the fate of representation the correct German designation would be "denied" (*Verleugnung*).

We will not discuss this difficulty here, we limit ourselves to observing that in the context of the explanation of fetishism one wants to emphasize not the separation between representation and affection, with the consequent production of anguish, as in neurosis, but rather the denial of a representation relative to the external world, to a perception.

The failure of denial consists in the impossibility of "erasing" (*wegwischen*) the perception completely, as a drawing of a blackboard erases, and for that reason the term "escotomization" is rejected. The conflict between unwanted perception and contrary desire (*Gegenwunsch*) produces a compromise, and this is not of the order of a hallucination, as in psychosis, but of a belief. This denial gives rise to an oscillating and always reiterated belief whose goal is the maintenance of narcissism.

There is an interweaving between truth and lie, between knowing and not wanting to know about female castration and sexual difference (Sequeira, 2009, p. 223). It is precisely this structural dynamic of the belief, determined by the *Verleugnung*, that opens a promising space of social criticism. From this there is a

surprising passage in the Freudian text in which, shortly after mentioning the boy's fear of being castrated, the author states that "the adult will later live perhaps a similar panic when the cry is given that the Throne and the Altar are in danger, and it will lead to similar illogical consequences" (Freud 1927/1999k, p. 312). The Throne and the Altar are the pillars of society, and when they are shaken, panic spreads and irrational behavior soon ensues.

Here we can glimpse the problem of ideology and the possible social and political reach of the *Verleugnung* mechanism. The conceptual model of fetishist perversion can be generalized, since it reveals itself in traumatic situations when an unbearable reality insinuates itself. A little further on in the article on fetishism, Freud recounts his analysis of two young men who, when two- and ten-year-olds, had "escotomized" (*skotomisiert*) the death of their beloved father without any of them developing a psychosis and concluding: "There is also a part of the certainly significant reality that had been denied by the Ego, as in the fetishist similarly the unpleasant fact of the castration of the woman" (Freud, 1927/1999k, p. 315). In one of the two cases, (*Spaltung*) split was the basis for the development of "an obsessive neurosis of moderate severity" (Freud, 1927/1999k, p. 316).

A week after writing the article on fetishism, Freud wrote a few remarks about humor. In them he introduces the idea that humorous action represents an attempt by the psyche to get rid of a negative affect produced by some specific situation. As an example, he quotes the comment of a criminal being taken to the gallows: "Then the week begins well". (Freud, 1927/1999j, p. 383) Humor presents a certain kind of self-superiority, but a rebellious superiority, only the triumph of the self, but also that of the pleasure principle", a form similar to *Verleugnung* (Freud, 1927/1999j, p. 385).

It seems legitimate to us, therefore, as it also does in "repression", the generalization of "denial": specific mechanism of fetishism, also present in neurosis "as a process of damping memory and affectivity. . . . as a kind of freezing of affection" (Borges & Cardoso, 2011, p. 600).

Borges and Cardoso's instigating study shows how the "denial" mechanism operates in extremely traumatic situations, as happens with people living in a concentration camp, which requires an intense focus on survival, when "the psychism tends to operate in an operating mode linked to the 'current' record, which translates into a superinvestment of consciousness and attention, in response to the demand for work that the traumatic reality imposes on it" (Borges & Cardoso, 2011, p. 603).

As can be seen, the defensive mechanism denies the traumatic reality and makes it dull thinking and makes it impossible to deal with reality in a more comprehensive way to leave room for only reactive behavior and timely and artificial adaptation to everyday concentration.

Continuing our reading of the Freudian texts, it seems fundamental to us to work on two texts from 1938, namely, “The division of the ego into the defense process” and “Sketch of psychoanalysis”. The first one, considered by the English publisher to be a continuation of the article on fetishism, is a brief and inconclusive text. In it, Freud relates what would have happened in childhood with one of his patients. The boy’s ego found himself confronted by a drive for satisfaction and a real danger if satisfaction were to continue.

One solution could be the renunciation of satisfaction, and the other would be to “deny reality” while preserving satisfaction. The two paths are trodden at the same time: he “rejects” (*abweist*) reality with the help of certain mechanisms and recognizes the danger that arises from reality, assuming the anguish before him (Freud, 1940/1999m, pp. 59-60). In this passage we see that the mechanism used is not confused with that of the true “rejection” (*Abweisung*), but rather with the “denial”, whose effect consists of loosening the synthetic activity of the Ego and in the coexistence of the two antagonistic reactions.

But what would be denied? Soon afterwards, in another case report, a child threatened with castration “certainly denied reality (*hatte verleugnet*), but saved his own penis”. In this case, the “estrangement” (*Abwendung*) in relation to reality did not lead to a psychotic process, because it did not mean to “contradict” reality through the hallucination of the penis, but only a “displacement of value” (*Wertverschiebung*), the masking of reality by a fetishistic belief (Freud, 1940/1999m, p. 61).

Why is it important to note this? Because what was not perceived, the absence of the penis in the woman, could not even be perceived, since it was of the order of the lack of such, and this absence could not be perceived as the presence, which is only signified a posteriori by the threat of castration. The “displacement of value” can be interpreted as the construction of a fetishistic belief in a non-faulty reality.

The requirement for this is precisely the “cleavage of the ego” (*Ichspaltung*), that is, the weakening of the synthetic activity of the ego and hence of the activity of judgment, and implies, in a certain way, the abdication of thought in the face of the traumatic shock. The conceptual determination of *Verleugnung* as the specific mechanism of perversion also opens up other fertile theoretical possibilities.

Let us now turn to the second unfinished manuscript of 1938, the “Outline of Psychoanalysis”. Chapter VIII, entitled “The Psychical Apparatus and the External World”, begins with a brief epistemological digression, in which two points can be highlighted. The first of these lies in the affirmation of the need to go beyond the psychology of consciousness to understand the normal functioning of the mind.

The insufficiency of the data of “conscious self-perception” imposes upon us an easily understandable

difficulty: anything beyond consciousness and direct perception can only be inferred as corresponding to the “real state of things” that cannot be known in itself. The second point is to extend the specific difficulty of psychoanalysis, also to the natural sciences, and to adopt a general thesis on human knowledge summarized in the following phrase: “the real will always remain ‘unknowable’” (Freud, 1940/1991, p. 127).

These passages may be related to an assertion made at the end of the same chapter, in which Freud says “one should not believe that fetishism represents an exceptional case with reference to the split of the ego; it is only an especially convenient object of study” (Freud, 1940/1999l, p. 134). The author goes on to say that the child’s ego deals with the conflict between the real world and the unpleasant drives through “repression” (*Verdrängung*) and also the “denial of perceptions” (Freud, 1940/1999l, p. 134).

How do we relate this to the aforementioned epistemological considerations? Perhaps, in the following way: in addition to fetishism, the *Verleugnung* is a fundamental mechanism of human knowledge, for it is all in the unknowable. Or, rather, the unknowable is an essential condition of possibility of knowledge that at the same time is also a traumatic shock. Hence, there is a certain aversion to knowledge and its partial substitution or complementation through an ideology of completeness.

Final remarks

We seek in the development of this article to perform a careful reading of the Freudian text, accompanying the displacements and oscillations of the term *Verleugnung* in the first and second topic. Our intention was not only to produce an exegetical study, but also to contribute to the better understanding of the concept in its scope and complexity.

We believe, this being the original motivation of our study, as was pointed out at the outset, that textual analysis could serve as a basis for a much broader discussion regarding the relevance of psychoanalytic theory to a critical interpretation of contemporary subjectivation processes. Nevertheless, though intriguing, such a subject could not be approached in a minimally rigorous way within the narrow limits that we set ourselves in writing this article.

Thus, we conclude that, although the concept of “denial” has found its specific formulation as a defense mechanism for fetishist perversion, it is a much more extensive concept, it is not restricted to perverse organization and could reveal great value for the critical understanding of certain aspects of contemporary society. In the first topic the idea of denial appears linked to the theme of forgetfulness, but finds its last formulation in the second topic, as a defense of the ego in relation to the fragment of reality that presents itself as unbearable to the subject.

A *Verleugnung* em Freud: análise textual e considerações hermenêuticas

Resumo: Neste artigo abordamos os diferentes deslocamentos da ideia de “recusa”, “renegação” ou “desmentido” (*Verleugnung*) no texto freudiano. Para promover essa reflexão, discutimos inicialmente as traduções e significados do termo alemão, para depois acompanhar o seu aparecimento na Primeira Tópica e o seu desenvolvimento conceitual na Segunda Tópica. Acreditamos que, embora o conceito de “desmentido” tenha encontrado a sua formulação específica como mecanismo de defesa da perversão fetichista, trata-se de um conceito bem mais extenso, que não se restringe à organização perversa e possui grande valor para a compreensão crítica de certos aspectos da sociedade contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: psicanálise, Freud, desmentido, fetichismo.

Le *Verleugnung* chez Freud : analyse textuelle et les considérations herméneutiques

Résumé : Cet article aborde les mouvements de l'idée de « refus », « reniement » ou « démenti » (*Verleugnung*) chez Freud. Pour encourager cette réflexion, on discute d'abord les traductions et les sens du terme allemand, pour, ensuite, accompagner son apparition dans la Première Topique et son développement conceptuel dans la Seconde Topique. On considère que, même si le concept de « démenti » trouve sa formulation spécifique comme mécanisme de défense de la perversion fétichiste, il s'agit d'un concept bien plus approfondi, qui ne se limite pas à l'organisation perverse et possède une grande valeur pour la compréhension critique de certains aspects de la société contemporaine.

Mots-clés : psychanalyse, Freud, démenti, fétichisme.

La *Verleugnung* en Freud: análisis textual y consideraciones hermenéuticas

Resumen: El presente artículo aborda los diferentes desplazamientos de la idea de «rechazo», «renegación» o «desmentida» (*Verleugnung*) en el texto freudiano. Para promover esta reflexión, se discuten inicialmente las traducciones y significados del término alemán, para a continuación observar su surgimiento en la Primera Tópica y su desarrollo conceptual en la Segunda Tópica. Creemos que, aunque el concepto de «desmentida» haya encontrado su formulación específica como mecanismo de defensa de la perversión fetichista, se trata de un concepto mucho más extenso, que no se restringe a la organización perversa y posee gran valor para la comprensión crítica de ciertos aspectos de la sociedad contemporánea.

Palabras clave: psicoanálisis, Freud, desmentida, fetichismo.

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