

A close-up photograph of a yellow pencil being sharpened by a metal sharpener on a sheet of lined paper. The sharpener is a small, silver-colored metal device with a central hole for the pencil. The pencil is positioned diagonally, with its tip pointing towards the sharpener. Several shavings of yellow wood and dark graphite are scattered on the paper around the sharpener and the pencil. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light brown color.

The metaphor of life as a machine has a profound impact on the way we approach facts. We are not aware of this influence in our daily lives. Because of this perspective, we experience time as an arrow that drags with everything in its path. This overwhelming force leaves us with no possibility of reconstructing our experiences (towards the past) or transforming our options (towards the future). Under this premise, we live clinging to an irremediable past without choices in the present to address the future.

What would happen if we think that the past was never behind us? For our inner world, past is not a matter of time. It is a set of decisions which we use to face situations in the present. What we bring to the present are the decisions which set the structure to our inner landscape.

The past is not behind us because, if it were behind us, it would have remained there. Why do many situations in the past stay so influential in the present? The past is still present because our inner landscape has been blocked in a compulsive response pattern. We cannot get out of that past situation because that response pattern has become the center of the landscape. If this landscape cannot be transformed, we cannot leave a symptomatic position.

## When the past becomes future

Marcelo Manucci

# The meaning of the symptoms

The oppressive present expresses the impossibility of something new entering our lives. Symptoms arise from a tension between the inertia of the past (as repetitive patterns of responses) and changes of the present (the breadth of forms to address the new). The symptom is not a consequence of the past. It represents the impossibility of dealing with the future in the present. The symptom represents the inability of your landscape to create new options to address the new. We carry from the past the impossibility of having dealt with the future at that moment. In other words, this overwhelming present was the future against which we had no answers in the past.

The oppression appears in our lives because of compulsively repeated decisions. Why we compulsively repeat our decisions? Because there is a chemical-symbolic dependence that reinforces the compulsion to the past that impedes innovation in our lives. Chemical reliance with the past is related to blocked emotions in a survival mode. The symbolic dependence is related to a narrative that justifies and sustains the inability to accept, create or maintain something new in your life.

The oppression of the present is because we live swinging like a pendulum between an irremediable past and a frustrating future that leaves us locked in resignation or resentment. We feel the oppression when the past became our future.

The power of the symptom will depend on how much you need it to sustain the inertia of your landscape. Instead of expanding the response options, we invent a reality that fits into the only alternative to which we cling. This misrepresentation of the facts causes victimization and dependence.

**The causes of the problem are not in the past. They are in the future because a person does not find the direction to address the present.**

When the past invaded the present and took the place of the future, people will depend on their dysfunctions to maintain their adaptation to new realities.

A person or group (family, organization, community) suffers a symptom or dysfunction because their internal structure (cognitive, emotional, historical) cannot deal with the present because they do not have a sense of direction (purpose) that guide them in this struggle. A symptom represents a knot in the development of people. It is a knot that keeps you tied

to stereotyped patterns of response. In the classical concept of disease, symptoms appear due to an external episode or an internal traumatic situation. In both cases, the causes are in the past. From this perspective, if you solve these causes in the past, symptoms will disappear. However, the knots are simple signs (not the reasons) of the vulnerability of a person to address the new in his or her life. The symptom is a manifestation that shows the structural weakness of the people coping with new realities.

**We do not suffer “for what happened to us,” we suffer because we cannot create something new that transforms our inner landscape. We cannot create something new because we do not have a horizon to frame the new in our life. Without a horizon, the past becomes our future.**

The inability of the person or group to transform itself to deal with new conditions of life generates dysfunctional structures that support (as prosthesis) a fragile dynamic of the interaction. The knot is an ally of the vulnerability. The magnitude of the dysfunction depends on their function. The strength of symptoms depends on its importance as structural support. The risk of the dysfunctional structure is if there is no transformation of this structural vulnerability, the symptom will define the direction in people's life.

Why do people sustain their life at the cost of symptoms or dysfunctions? In general, the cost of the symptoms is less disturbing than the process of transformation. The function of symptoms is to maintain the permanence of the living conditions (in the past) without structural modifications (to deal with the present). This situation represents the paradox of the symptom: on the one hand, it makes life more painful (dysfunction), but it also allows the benefit of inertia (function).



# The subtleties of change

How to deal with the landscape to untie the knots that keep you inert? To untie the knot, you must work on three levels.

**Transform the future into inspiration.** This movement leads us to raise the gaze of the everyday world to spread the horizon and contemplate the possibility that the new enters our lives.

**Redefine the past in new experiences.** This movement allows us to leave situations that occurred in the past, just in the past. This is not to deny, resign or underestimate what happened to us, but that is an act of courage to take on the situations in time due to them. That is, to accept the past so that it does not extend to the present, or project to the future.

**Recreate the present with more alternatives.** This movement is essential to contain personal grief between the past landscape and the possible landscape. About the present, people live a transition in which they bid farewell to the known to create the unknown. At this moment, it is necessary to sustain the personal commitment so that the new does not drown between an irremediable past and a frustrating future

