

Sexualisation and desexualisation in psychoanalysis (Moscow, October 2004)

René Roussillon

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René Roussillon is a full member of the Paris Psychoanalytical Society and professor of clinical psychology in the Lumière University of Lyon. He has focused particularly on narcissistic identity disorders and on the way in which these impact on the psychoanalytic setting, particularly in the treatment of borderline patients.

He has written many articles, and three books of his are especially important: *Paradoxes et situations limites de la psychanalyse* (PUF, 1991) [*Paradoxes and Borderline States in Psychoanalysis*], *Logiques et archéologiques du cadre psychanalytique* (PUF, 1995) [*Logics and Archaeologies of the Psychoanalytic Setting*], *Agonie, clivage et symbolisation* (PUF, 1999) [*Agony, Splitting and Symbolization*].

The sexual remains one of the crucial themes in contemporary psychoanalysis; it also remains one of the ‘shibboleths’ of Freudian psychoanalysis. But its central importance is in fact under threat from certain developments in Anglophone psychoanalysis that, especially under the banner of narcissism and ‘self’ analysis, are strangely diminishing its impact and scope of reference. It is also a theme that has recently returned to ‘fashion’

through the centenary of the writing of the *Three Essays* (1905d) and more generally in the psychoanalytic literature, in all the discussions concerning the necessity and pertinence of the concept of the drive as it has been developing in the international literature.

Despite these debates, yet perhaps even more so revealed by them, in Francophone psychoanalysis, the sexual remains a major reference-point, even a defining one. But is this reference necessarily clear and unambiguous? Although all French psychoanalysts acknowledge its central position in metapsychology, do they agree about what precisely it covers or does the apparent consensus that seems to unite them under its emblem in fact conceal some divergences as to the essence of what the concept involves?

Often, and the same probably applies to many concepts that have this same defining quality, the sexual and what it covers seems self-evident and to need no definition, as if its mere utterance sufficed to describe it and subdivide its issues.

My reflection starts from the opposite assertion, which is that this is a highly problematic concept that probably still needs to be refined in contemporary psychoanalytic theory and thought, and that there is a real difficulty in the use and reference that can be made of it by psychoanalysts in practical terms.

The problem

First of all, it seems to me important to remember that psychoanalysis is not and could never be a 'sexology', that is a knowledge of the sexual and sexuality, nor a 'psychology' of the sexual or sexuality.

What it means instead is thinking about the role of the sexual in the psychic process and even more specifically in psychic functioning during the session, while taking account of its specific characteristics.

It also seems to me, although of course I will return to this essential point, that the evolutionary trend in the theorisation of the sexual in psychoanalytic metapsychology emphasises sufficiently the effort to adjust the theorisation to the needs of the metapsychology 'of the psychic course of events', as Freud wrote in 1911, that is to say of the psychic process, and specifically the psychic process during the session.

In other words, it seems to me that one of the lines of development in the psychoanalytic theorisation of the sexual is increasingly directed at inscribing it in what I call a 'metapsychology of processes'.

This means, more specifically, that the position of the sexual and sexuality in psychoanalytic thought increasingly seems to have to be evaluated by the yardstick of the issues of symbolisation and subjective appropriation that vectorise psychoanalytic practice and the psychic work of the session. It is according to and starting from the

position and the role of the sexual in symbolisation and subjectivation that psychoanalysis makes its contribution to an understanding of human sexuality.

This problematic and these difficulties underlie the detours, even bifurcations, that the concept has undergone throughout the history of psychoanalytic thought and its various applications, which seem to me to tend increasingly to separate sexuality as a behaviour from the sexual as a specific psychic process of cathexis.

At the outset, and this is the first aspect of the evolution and therefore also the difficulty, the sexual and sexuality do not overlap, no longer overlap, even if they are not totally disconnected either. There is some sexual beyond sexuality, some sexuality apprehended as 'sexual behaviour' and, moreover, there is some non-sexual in sexuality itself, as the sexualisation of certain psychic functions or functioning found in clinical practice sufficiently emphasises.

The same applies to the connection between the sexual and the drive.

Here too there is no exact overlap between terms. Freud was able to define the self-preservative drives that are 'drive-based' but can oppose the 'sexual' drives, in which he was able to describe some forms of transformation of the sexual drives that can themselves 'be desexualised' in their progress and their transposition.

The mere statement of these formulations is enough to convey at the outset the complexity of the issues involved and the subtleties of how they are treated.

I cannot claim to encompass all this complexity in the present framework of reflection and I would be satisfied for my part with pointing out certain aspects.

I will start with the assertion, presented as my first line of reflection, that *the sexual is not and could never be similar to itself in psychoanalysis*, that it is necessarily the site of a diversion that determines it less ‘in itself’ than as a form of process that is specifically characterised by its metaphorising capacity, its generative capacity.

In other words, it seems to me that the evolution of psychoanalytic thought leads us to place increasing emphasis on a processual dimension of the sexual, on the sexualisation or desexualisation processes that psychic material is likely to encounter ‘in the course of psychic events’.

But before reaching that stage and to be well placed to do so, it is necessary to recall certain points that are essential here.

The identical and the different: towards the primal scene

Although the drive is born in/of difference, and born of what is non-identical to itself, it tends to restore identity: at its origin, it is pleasure in the same, pleasure in discovering

the same, the identical, whether this is ‘identity of perception’ according to the primary-process model, or ‘identity of thought’ according to the more relative and moderate secondary-process model.

The sexual is engendered by difference but its primary meaning consists in the desire to reduce difference, the attempt to find the identical in the other, to produce the identical from the other.

It is only in its historical and then intrapsychic course¹ that the drive integrates the need to recognise and accept its own origin, that it can be constituted as a pleasure taken in / by difference, that it ‘discovers’ difference and its organising role, that it discovers that it is the ‘product’ of this difference, that it discovers and recognises that it is the ‘sexual’ outcome of a *sexion*.²

We know that in this process, the encounter with the question of the father’s position – the paternal value and the models it conveys – is essential. It is the father’s symbolic function that makes it possible to recognise the value of the pleasure of difference, the pleasure taken in and by difference. It is the paternal metaphor that makes it possible to transcend the mastery of the pleasure in the same; it is this that blocks the return to origins, to the identical, and opens the way to a pleasure taken in and by difference.

From then, the sexual has to combine and dialectise three forms of difference to be organised, to allow it to unfold and assume its full meaning.

To state it quickly, and in a concise formula, sexual difference engenders a generational difference that itself then engenders a difference in the sexual, and it is based on the play of this three-fold difference that the question of identity then has to be tackled.

It is in the first encounter with the object that the sexual is born within a relationship in which the 'primal separation' of birth is constantly 'reduced' by a relationship 'in duplicate' or 'in the mirror', and therefore 'primary homosexual' relationship.

An initial component of the sexual is thus produced in the object's presence, as Freud broadly anticipates when he writes: 'No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life' (1905d, p. 182).

However, this first form encounters some obstacles that also contribute to structuring it.

There are some periods of absence of the object, with the discontinuity they introduce into the bond and the subject's need to confront them; we know that this need is the source of the auto-erotisms.

There is also the inevitable encounter in the maternal mode of presence with some heterogeneous aspects that are alien to the baby's psyche, broadly enigmatic to him, and

connected with the impact of the mother's adult sexual organisation. It is this heterogeneous element that introduces the question of the father and thus at the same time a difference of sex and the sexual.

But it is only later, in the shaping of the 'primal scene', that these various forms of difference can be represented and organised around the presentation of generational difference.

This is why the 'primal scene', considered not as a fantasy but as an organising 'concept' of the psyche, is so essential to our approach to the sexual, is foundational for it.

The 'primal scene' structures sexual difference and generational difference in a unified metaphor, but it also integrates at its core the question of the child's mode of presence, that of the difference between infantile and adult sexuality.

It integrates in an organised form all the facts relating to the problem posed to the psyche by the sexual; it also integrates the question of the identical, one parent at least being of the same sex, as well as that of difference

With the concept of the 'primal scene', the sexual is thus forged from the differences it organises; it both results from these and produces them, the sexual is then what makes difference 'generative', what allows the generative value of difference to be released.

As has often been observed, the primal scene thus seeks to shape the question of identity based on the presentation of the question of origin.

Origin of the sexual

But the question of the origin of the self is intensified by that of the ‘origin of the sexual’ itself, which also then has to be reflected in the symbolisation process.

The question of the origin of the sexual is at the heart of the debate that divides proponents of ‘source-object’ theory (such as Laplanche, in his theory of the enigmatic signifier) from adherents of a theory of the drive that is internal and ‘bio-logical’ from the outset (as Green argued in the debate between these two authors a few years ago).

Does the sexual come ‘from within’, from the somatic foundation of the psyche, or does it come ‘from outside’, from the object or from the relationship with it, with its otherness?

It seems to me that this opposition is interesting insofar as it discovers one of the oppositions revealed by clinical practice in connection with various forms of ‘sexual theories’. But to assume its entire interest, this opposition must be interpreted or even transcended within a ‘metapsychology of processes’ that simultaneously posits the origin

as undecidable and the sexual as emerging from the meeting-point between inside and outside, their chiasmus and the work of their differentiation.

It seems to me that the origin of the sexual can only be well conceived metapsychologically as a process of *différance*,³ a differentiation process that is carried out starting from an initial amalgam in which self and object are mingled and enmeshed.

The sexual arises when outside and inside, the subject and its object, meet, collide and fuse, 'amalgamate', to produce this 'primary material' of the psyche mentioned by Freud various times in his work from 1900, which is later cathected by the drive impulses.

Although the sexual is initially produced in the encounter between the subject and the other-subject object, it is only manifested as such, understood as such in the resumption and incorporative internalisation, as indicated by the theory of anaclisis (leaning on) and auto-erotism, or conversely in an evacuation and an excorporation, a subjective discharge.

The internalisation process manifests the drive cathexis of experience, it manifests its sexualisation, it makes it perceptible by separating it out from self-preservation.

The oscillation we have just described, the oscillation of an experience between inside and outside of an internal, internalised experience, characterises a primary level of subjective appropriation of the experience of the sexual.

This in its turn will have to be newly understood, reflected and secondarised. It seems to me that it is the role of the primal seduction fantasy to produce the vagaries of this second resumption.

The seduction fantasy will tend to rock from one side or another the terms of this basic dual polarity; it tends to resolve the undecidability of the origin by assigning a precise origin to the birth of the drive.

A 'sexual' seduction therefore occurs every time one or other of the two amalgamated terms tends to be ousted, whether the sexual is represented only as a biological effect and therefore a kind of 'biological seduction', by the biological, or is conceived only as an effect of the encounter with the object, a seduction by the object.

The sexual 'seduces', just as it must be able to be conceived as seduced; it is perhaps that which is defined only by its overflowing of dichotomous categories, beyond 'simple' oppositions, precisely that which can only be bound with difficulty by bipolar representational systems.

The difficulty I have just indicated also encourages us not to seek a 'positivised' definition of the sexual, not to tackle directly the question of its definition, but rather to seek to define it from the way in which it functions in the psyche of specific subjects, or

from the way in which it has ‘functioned’ in the history of psychoanalytic thought, the second seeking to eliminate the impact of the first.

This encourages us to reconsider some milestones that are particularly centred around the question of the impact of the sexual in the treatment.

The injured sexual and the diverted sexual

Schematically at the origin of psychoanalytic thought, the sexual is that from which or by which ‘we suffer through reminiscence’.

The sexual appears at the outset as an injured sexual, as a traumatised, injured sex, as a suffering sex, even, we will return to this point later, as a sex in suffering.

The 1895-96 aetiological theory of the neuroses presents the cause of neurosis as the result of an inadequate or incomplete sexuality. It is traumatic precisely to the extent that it has lost its naturalness.

Either its discharge is hindered, as in the theory of hysteria, in which affect remains ‘jammed’; or, to the extent that the discharge is inadequate, the malfunctionings of sexuality in current neuroses are presented by Freud as the effect of sexuality in which discharge does not occur in the ‘right’ place or is carried out ‘without an object’ beyond

the object. In the 1895 theory, Freud presents psychaesthesia as the effect either of onanism or of various forms of incomplete sexuality – ‘coitus interruptus’ or restricted coitus.

Although the connection with ‘genital’ sexuality is still very much present, and as we can see this is the lived experience that underlies the symptoms, by contrast the symptomatology already ‘metaphorises’ sexuality, only evoking it symbolically.

The disconnection of the sexual from sexuality, considered as a genital sexual behaviour, then enters the theorisation with increasing emphasis, without ever becoming completely detached from it.

As the introduction of an infantile ‘oral’ or ‘anal’ sexuality confirms still further; anality or orality are only ‘sexual’, in the sense of sexuality, as a result of their offshoots in the ‘preliminary pleasures’ of adult sexuality or its forms of perversion; they very quickly overflow the field of sexuality as such to designate relational models.

The idea of a ‘phallic’ sexuality thus forms the pivotal bridge between ‘infantile’ and ‘genital’ sexuality.

In the term ‘infantile sexuality’, its ‘sexual’ quality is initially defined only as a result of its future evolution into sexuality.

Oral or anal infantile sexuality is only said to be sexual because its traces are later found in adult sexuality or its perversions.

It is indeed always, at least at the outset, adult sexuality that serves as a referent to the sexual, and then in a second derivation that which relates to orality or anality is retroactively defined as ‘infantile sexual’ on this initial foundation.

The sexual and the drive: primary sexualisation

It is this diversion from the sexual that also introduces the idea of ‘drive’, and which makes it theoretically necessary. The concept of the drive indicates a disparity between the sexual and sexuality itself, a disparity between ‘adult’ sexuality and infantile sexuality.

Sexuality from this point is nothing more than a specific instance of drive activity, a specific case of the ‘sexual’ that will instead then be better defined by the drive.

But the theory of the drives, the first drive theory, introduces in its turn a disparity between the drive and the sexual, and sexuality. There are the sexual drives and the so-called self-preservative drives, which are not yet ‘sexual’.

However, the analysis of conflicts such as the hysterical blindness analysed in 1910 demonstrates that self-preservation can be ‘sexualised’.

In summary, we still suffer from the sexual, but this time it is the sexualisation of a field that is not essentially sexual.

Thus the first drive theory simultaneously restricts the field of the sexual – not everything is sexual – and conceives its possible extension. Although everything is not ‘sexual’, by contrast everything can be sexualised and thus become sexual through this metaphorising diversion.

Thus we begin to move gradually from a sexual considered as ‘in itself’ to a sexual that appears to have issued from a process of ‘sexual’ cathexis, a mode of functioning or a function that are ‘sexualised’ as a result of this cathexis.

Although everything is not sexual, everything can begin to be ‘sexualised’ and the model of a conflict that has emerged from this sexualisation can begin to be developed.

The phallic model of sexualisation and integration

As I began to indicate above, the pivot of this ‘sexualisation’ is so-called ‘phallic’ sexuality.

One of the key characteristics of the 'phallic' organisation is to generalise sexualisation, to apprehend everything, in a concern for integration and completeness, in terms of the binary phallic/castrated opposition, that is to say to interpret and 'sexualise' everything according to this model.

In the infantile economy, this need corresponds to the need to inscribe everything in the orbit of the pleasure-unpleasure principle but also in that of a sexual identity, that is one characterised by difference, thus to enmesh the question of pleasure with that of difference, to transfer gradually from the pleasure of the same, the pleasure of the double, to that of the pleasure of difference, taken in difference.

What matters to us here relates to the fact that this conception of the phallic impulse introduces the concept of a sexualisation process that transcends the sexual/non-sexual opposition, thus considered to oppose to each other 'in itself' categories, to define a process of inscription in the sexual domain as a basic modality of binding and integration, in particular from a metaphorisation process based on sex and the sexual.

Although not everything is sexual, everything will have to be inscribed primarily in the coordinates of the sexual to be libidinised and thus cathected and integrated.

The scope of the shift thus described is enough indication that it contains some fundamental narcissistic issues. It is also probably based on their understanding that the concept of narcissism will be elucidated.

Before being fully elucidated as such, narcissism needed to be recognised as phallic-narcissistic.

However, from the point that the sexualisation process is conceived, the first drive theory proves untenable. There can no longer be any opposition between the sexual drives and the self-preservative drives, to the extent that the self-preservative functions must also be 'sexualised' in the process of integration.

As a result, the opposition tends to oscillate within the sexual that then covers the entire field, between the sexual drives of the ego – ego libido – and sexual drives directed at objects – object libido. This becomes the second drive theory, the second because, contrary to what is sometimes asserted, there are in fact three in Freud's work.

The drive is either 'sexual', narcissistic-sexual, taking the ego or its attributes as an object, or it is 'objectal-sexual', taking the object as a drive goal.

There is no more specificity of the sexual, there is no longer a field reserved to the sexual, at least as concerns the primary cathexis and the functioning of the primary processes.

And the potential question becomes that of desexualisation, then that of non-sexualisation, of the failure of that primary sexualisation.

Without this always being very clear to him or his successors, the evolution of Freud's thinking towards the third drive theory will be carried out in the direction imposed by this implicit theoretical 'constraint'.

To conceive the secondary 'desexualisation' process is to conceive the organisation of secondarity and the problem of the superego, and specifically the post-oedipal superego; we will return to this question later.

To consider the problem of non-sexualisation, the failure of the primary sexualisation process, is to consider one of the aspects of the death drive, the problem of the failure of drive fusion. The experiences 'beyond the pleasure principle' are ones in which the primary libidinalisation process has failed at least in part. The nature of the trauma changes; it is no longer connected only to an overflowing of the drives, it can also be connected with an effraction and a failure of primary binding by the sexual.

The third drive theory, that is to say the life drive / death drive opposition, entails a 'processual' theory of the drives; with this, the picture of the problematic of the sexual in Freudian psychoanalysis is now fully on view. It also involves, and we will return to this point, an analysis of the organisational modalities of the drive.

This is what I must now develop to continue to present my questions.

The model of sexualisation by libidinal co-excitation

In this conception, the sexual is no longer only a first and ‘constitutional’ ‘order’; psychic integration rests on the binding capacity of Eros, the life drive, which is revealed particularly in the concept of libidinal co-excitation.

The model of libidinal co-excitation provides a different model for the sexualisation of psychic processes; it extends and amplifies the model of phallic sexualisation.

Libidinal co-excitation refers to the process by which a psychic experience is ‘sexualised’ to be bound at a primary stage, particularly when it does not directly entail satisfaction, or not sufficiently.

The libidinal co-excitation described in relation to masochism only appears then as a particular case of a much more general process, which can be defined as that of the necessity of a primary binding or a primary libidinisation of psychic experiences.

Its description in relation to masochism results from the especially paradoxical shift that it then makes, in which it has the task of converting an experience of initial unpleasure into an experience of pleasure.

But it works progressively on all psychic experiences, and this is an essential characteristic of infantile sexuality; it ‘must’ be able to work to bind these.

It represents the imperative to inscribe psychic experiences within the pleasure-unpleasure principle, an inscription necessary for integrating and binding these psychically within subjectivity; it represents the fundamental vector of subjective appropriation, its categorical imperative.

From this point, the characteristics of infantile sexuality must be conceived in terms of this fundamental appropriative task, in the direction of the phallic-narcissistic organisation that represents the culmination of this 'entirely sexual' process.

Everything has to go through the sexual to be assimilable, which is why although not everything is sexual, there must be some sexual in everything, such is the constraint of the primary process. But it is also an imperative of subjective appropriation, an imperative of the subjectivation process.

To be able to be subjectivised, the subject's experience must first be inscribed in the sphere of the pleasure principle, and this is carried out by means of its sexualisation.

What eludes this process of integration and binding then appears threatened by the mastery of the repetition compulsion, by what are said to be forms of the death drive, beyond the pleasure principle, those which concern what is failing subjective appropriation. We will have cause to return to this point.

Secondary desexualisation

It is then clear that such a process can only be maintained if, in another psychic system, a secondary desexualisation process simultaneously operates, to which we must return.

Desexualisation does not consist in withdrawing the primary sexual cathexis; it is only 'secondary', concerns only one psychic system, that of the secondary process; it is a partial, relative desexualisation, which concerns only the mode of drive fulfilment, not the foundations of the cathexis.

Classically, the work of desexualisation is carried out under the aegis of the superego, which differentiates its modes of drive fulfilments.

The superego has to differentiate between what can be realised in representation, that which must be realised only in thought or in words, and that which can also be realised in the act.

It raises the possibility of other modes of realisation than those of the act (the hallucinatory fulfilment of desire or its interactive equivalents), that is to say the possibility of a 'desexualising', even sublimatory, work of metaphorisation.

Sublimation is then conceived as a mode of realisation that takes the representation, the mere representation, as a new and only drive goal. Representation then ceases to be the means or medium by which the drive represents its object; it becomes the very object in which the drive is satisfied.

This process is absolutely fundamental to the organisation of symbolisation; this is what makes the symbolisation work so necessary to the drive economy.

To desexualise is to make do, in the name of the reality principle, with symbolically representing the drive fulfilment; it is diverting the realisation with the aid of successive displacements that provide 'distance' from the first source of the drive, which metaphorise it, change it beyond recognition and repress it. To desexualise is to emerge from the hallucinatory realisation of the desire or its equivalents; it is to emerge from the necessity of the identity of perception to adapt to the identity of thought.

Desexualisation and defusion

We must not therefore confuse this process, which 'secondarises' the drive, with the mode of 'desexualisation' that is only what results from the operation of the death drive, for which the term drive 'defusion' has instead traditionally been used.

This 'desexualisation' is only a form of unbinding, of primary drive defusion. It thus only demonstrates the 'poor quality' of the primary binding by the libidinal co-excitation, a poor quality that prohibits its later secundarisation and therefore threatens its integration.

The question of this 'poor quality' raises, as we know, the entire question of excess and trauma; it raises the question of an excitation that does not achieve its organisation into a true drive – presupposing a minimal organisation and in particular an object/source differentiation – or its binding into a representable drive form.

This has led to the prevailing idea that the drive is also no longer to be considered as an entity 'in itself' but rather as something that results from an organisational mode of excitation. It then becomes theoretically necessary, as I proposed at Cerisy in September (2005), to differentiate various levels of organisation of excitation in the drive and in desire.

In the light of this evolution in the paradigms of the theorisation, we can observe how the first conception of the sexual has evolved.

Although we still suffer from the sexual, this is now a sexual that cannot be organised as such, in its process, in its beating, its pulsation.

We still suffer from the sexual but, although we can always suffer from the excess of the sexual, we also now suffer from the lack of being sexualised.

The processual sexual and the object

It can easily be observed that the understanding of the sexual in terms of the process dynamics of sexualisation/ desexualisation 'transcends' a certain number of difficulties connected with a 'naturalistic' definition of sexuality and the sexual; it also transcends, by framing it differently, the genital/pregenital opposition, leading to a conception of sexuality connected with the work of binding and symbolisation and with its boundaries.

It allows the sexual and sexuality to be connected, but without being trapped in the alternative of a sexual considered as proceeding solely from biology or the object-relationship. To the contrary, it is inscribed in a conception that takes the drive/object pair as the fundamental organiser of metapsychology. For such a process implies that the question of the object is posed; it makes it unavoidable.

In fact, whatever the 'achievement' of the binding and symbolisation capacities of the psyche, it cannot by itself alone bind the drive impulse in its entirety. Whatever the quality of the sexualisation/desexualisation process, it cannot process the whole of the sexual 'force'. Whatever the quality of the auto-erotisms and 'sublimations', they cannot exhaust the internal tensions.

There is a need for the object, for objects; we need the difference that they alone are capable of introducing. This is where we encounter difference.

This also begins to open up the question of sexuality, of the drive exchanges with a different object. Sexuality opens up where the 'binding' sexual is lacking, where intrapsychic erotism is necessarily, inevitably, lacking.

Infantile sexuality, a point on which Freud becomes increasingly assertive, remains fundamentally unsatisfying; it is even in the final analysis what shatters the Oedipus complex. Sexualisation by the primary process leaves an unbindable residue, a lack that engenders a difference in the sexual, *the* difference in the sexual.

The desexualisation operated by the secondary process comes up against this residue that paradoxically 'endrivens' the secondary system, penetrates it and 'claims' the discharge, demands an object 'for' the discharge, another modality for processing the sexual.

It is the non-event of infantile sexuality, its failure to occur, and therefore what is left unbound by it, that claims its place in secondarity, forcing it to reconsider the question of the sexual and to integrate it differently.

It is what could not occur in childhood sexuality that seeks to make its way into secondarity, seeks to be fulfilled in the secondary system and instigates adult sexuality.

This is why it cannot be definable without reference to the negative of childhood sexuality. We repeat, but in the sexual we do not repeat only what might have taken place; it is above all that which has not taken place that we repeat in and through sexuality, we repeat the non-occurrence of ourselves.

Let us move on to the generative process to conclude our reflection.

No object, either, can in itself enable us to bind what is lacking and strives to be discharged; an object of the object is required, another object, that is to say another subject, a third subject. The unbindable residue engenders an objectalising generativity that is simultaneously a socialising generativity. We know that this can only be maintained and developed if it too can be adequately desexualised at a secondary stage.

Is this pulsation of sexualisation and desexualisation not the essence of what psychoanalysis can bring to a reflection on the sexual in contemporary clinical thought?

The adolescent sexual and the enigma

It is against this background that adolescence then introduces its specific 'revolution' in the sexual. It is in the 'orgasmic potentiality' that it seems to me the revolution specific to adolescence must be understood most fully, but it is also that the sexual will have to find conditions of satisfaction in the reunion with bodily contact of the other-subject object, in

conditions that evoke the first physical contact. I have previously (2000) tried to assess the importance and extent of the upheavals incurred by the introduction of sexual maturity into the relationship of adolescence to symbolisation, and I would like to amplify these initial reflections here with some supplementary remarks on the trajectory from the baby's sexuality to that of the adolescent.

The orgasmic potentiality, as the quotation from Freud comparing the baby's satisfaction at the breast with the pleasure of adult sexuality implies, puts the psyche at risk of a confusion between the first hallucinatory experience in created-found and the sexual experience of the orgasm, as if adolescent pleasure 'rediscovered' the baby's first and lost satisfaction. The idea that adolescent and adult sexuality rediscovers the path of primal pleasure, rediscovers the maternal breast, even the very site of their origins, is a highly topical idea in psychoanalysis and it is probably subtended by the primal fantasy of the 'return to the maternal womb'. But the adolescent's orgasm is not the hallucinatory realisation of the baby's desire and the amalgam that threatens to be carried out between the two subjective experiences is probably as necessary as threatening to the adolescent's psychic organisation.

It is necessary because the amalgam is probably inevitable for psychic integration; it prefigures the work of establishing psychic continuity that is imposed by the crisis undergone at adolescence and the experience of rupture it contains. But at the same time it is accompanied by the threat that the gains of the work of differentiation in childhood, those of the mourning process connected with the elaboration of the oedipal constellation,

and those of the symbolic organisation and the sublimations it makes possible, will be lost on the way, made obsolete by the new potentialities offered by the accession to adult pleasure. The threat is that a short-circuiting from the baby's pleasure to that of the adolescent may be instituted.

Once again, I do not think that a certain part of the short-circuit is entirely avoidable; what matters is that it should be moderated by the maintenance of an adequate cathexis of the factual realities of childhood, that the buffer and the work of differentiation produced by the elaboration of specifically infantile sexuality is interposed between the early sexual of the baby and that of the adolescent.

I should like to conclude these reflections with an observation concerning the adolescent evolution of the enigma incorporated in the object's pleasure for the baby and the child, the 'enigmatic signifiers' described by Laplanche. The discovery of orgasm produces a 'partial lifting' of the enigma of the object's pleasure; it produces a reorganising retroactive operation of the relationship the subject has formed with it and probably, in the same shift, a reorganisation of the concept of the primal scene. I propose the hypothesis that, furthermore, one of the remarkable revisions thus made possible is a modification in the subject's relationship with the unknown, a reopening of the 'capacity for the negative' (Bion's 'negative capability') that contains the concept of a cathexis and a potential pleasure found in what is unknown, imperceptible. The adolescent's capacity to solve equations with unknown elements, to explore the physical and chemical sciences based on hypotheses beyond the sensory and even perceptible universe (atom, bounds of

the universe etc.), the cathexis of spiritualism common at that age, then for some the cathexis of ‘depth psychology’, and therefore the acceptance of an unconscious psychic reality, seem to me to stem from and be made conceivable by this profound revision in the relationship to the enigma of pleasure.

There is therefore one final implication that particularly concerns clinicians and takes us back to intersubjectivity, which concerns the form of thought about the unknown and the imperceptible that is contained in the encounter with the concept of the unconscious and specifically that of the object’s unconscious. The baby and the child encounter the unconscious of objects with which they have had to construct themselves; they undergo its effects and vagaries; they also organise their psychic life according to the impact of this unconscious. Proponents of ‘theory of mind’ have rightly emphasised the importance for the socialisation process of constructing a conception of the other’s mind, which I would personally formulate as the capacity to imagine that the object is a subject-other, with his own desires, intentions, emotions and so on. But this ‘theory’ does not engage with the question of the importance for psychic life of an unconscious dimension of the mind – that is to say, the question of the mind’s reflexivity and its mode of relationship with itself. I think this capacity is only truly completely acquired at adolescence and in the wake of the above-mentioned revisions concerning the lifting of the enigma of the object’s pleasure. The discovery of a pleasure in oneself unknown to oneself (‘a pleasure unknown to itself’ as Freud said in relation to the Rat man) opens up the question of a pleasure of the object that is unknown to the object itself; it engages the paradox of an unconscious affect. The accession to the true dimension of intersubjectivity cannot be

gained without taking into account in intersubjectivity of this particular characteristic of the human subject: he is inhabited by a shadowy and unknown zone; his messages contain a dimension that eludes him, an unconscious dimension that nevertheless acts and interacts between one subject and another. And what is true of oneself is also true of the object, and the parental objects, which is one of the aspects of the ‘murder of the object’ encountered in adolescence, with the acquisition of the concept and the right to explore the object’s unconscious, a supreme site of psychic transgression.

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¹ Cf. Roussillon, ‘Le rôle charnière de l’angoisse de castration’ in *Le mal Être*, PUF.

² This term for the establishment of gender also implies a cut, through a play on the French word *section* (*Translator’s note*).

³ Derrida’s term *différance* plays on the meanings of ‘différer’ to coin a concept of difference that implies deferral (*Translator’s note*).