Plurality and complexity in psychoanalysis

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Introduction

That plurality is an indisputable feature of contemporary psychoanalysis is evident to anyone who is the slightest bit attentive to the inter-analytic debates which rock the intercultural exchanges within world psychoanalysis, as can be seen from the international congresses of the IPA. But just as this plurality permeates each psychoanalytic society, it is also intracultural.

The causes of this situation are undoubtedly diverse and varied in nature.

In the first place it seems to be the effect of the need for each culture to interpret its own version of psychoanalysis: so one can speak about different styles of psychoanalysis (or psychoanalyses?), French, Brazilian, English, American, etc. This diversity attests to the fact that psychoanalytic practice necessarily has to come to terms with a certain number of characteristics linked to culture: relations to the body, types of dominant social exchanges, diverse cultural influences, experiences of collective traumas, and so on.

But it also bears witness to the specific influence that a certain number of authors of reference have on each given society. One can scarcely think of French psychoanalysis apart from the influence that Lacan has had on French psychoanalysis as a whole, and even on those who are not Lacanian or even anti-Lacanian. The same is true for English psychoanalysis which is inconceivable without taking into account the legacy of Melanie Klein’s thought – there again, regardless of the position one takes towards it. The processes at work here are not always as manifest as in the two examples given, but they exist nonetheless. To give another example, even if it is more discreet, Argentinean psychoanalysis of the APA or Uruguayan psychoanalysis of the APU are only intelligible if one takes into account the impact of Willy and Madeleine Baranger.

A third factor of pluralism is linked to the diversity of the clinical pictures of patients in analysis. Even if the method is supposed to be the same (see the rest of my text) it presents considerable variations depending on whether it is applied to children, adolescents, or adults, but also quite considerably according to the modes of functioning and mental states it is dealing with: neurotic, psychotic, autistic or borderline states, just to mention principal and the most classical nosographical categories.

But there are also more essential reasons for this plurality that are connected with the hypercomplexity (E. Morin) of the human psyche which no model can claim to account for entirely – without falling into the ideology of a single way of thinking and a totalitarian system of thought – even if one accepts, as it is reasonable to do, that every model necessarily reduces the complexity of its object. This implies that one and the same piece of clinical

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1 Translated by Andrew Weller
2 We should also add the question of the translation into the local language of the major authors of psychoanalysis; for example, the translation of the Freudian corpus into English affects the reading of Freud in a way that is different from its translation into French, and no doubt also into Portuguese, Spanish, Italian or, let’s say, Romanian…
material, even when it is considered within a given context and transference configuration, cannot be interpreted pertinently in one way only: it always admits of several different and non-antagonistic interpretations.

In this account, which does not claim to be exhaustive but simply indicative, it appears that psychoanalysis – different ways of interpreting psychoanalysis, different ways of “playing” it are perhaps needed – must necessarily make certain adjustments, whether cultural, clinical or theoretical, if it is to be practised in an appropriate manner. It is a warrant of richness and creativity and, at the same time, a guarantee against the risk of ideological tendencies that threaten every undertaking of this kind, where totalitarian pretensions are a constant menace.

This raises various questions:

The richness of the diversity in psychoanalysis is subject to the conditions of inter-analytic dialogue. If plurality results in a form of “babelisation” that is pushed too far, dialogue is no longer possible; or it engenders so many misunderstandings that fruitful debate can no longer be envisaged.

It is also important to distinguish between those adaptations, modifications, and adjustments that do not encroach on its identity and those which, by pushing things too far, endanger its very definition. To what extent can such adaptations and modifications be taken too far while remaining “psychoanalytically” justified? This is a question that opens up the problem of the fundamental statements and propositions on which psychoanalysis is based. It is this question in particular that I want to consider in this paper.

But before doing so, I would like to draw attention to another problem connected with the question of diversity, namely, that of knowing if all the fundamental “psychoanalytic” precepts (or, at least, which are presented as such) are of equal value, if all the precepts practised are equivalent and produce the effects we expect from an analysis or a treatment that is said to be “psychoanalytic”. Currently, beyond empirical and intuitive means of measuring results, which are always in danger of being “purely” subjective, we have scarcely any system of evaluation that is intrinsically psychoanalytic. Evaluation is a specific feature of non-psychoanalytic grids or models (often cognitive-behavioural or psychiatric) built according to the yardstick of items and propositions that are not necessarily congruent with psychoanalysis and its objectives. Of course, some attempts are made to establish markers or indicators of the progress that is made in psychoanalytic treatments, but nothing really satisfying which carries decisive conviction, or even which is sufficiently widespread in the psychoanalytic community to form a consensus. This point will constitute the second axis of my reflection.

Some proposals for an acceptable and fruitful plurality
I will now try to sift out and reflect on some of the precepts that might serve as a basis for what could constitute a core identity of psychoanalysis.

A- Associativity, transference and narrativity, drives and drive conflicts
The first constitutive element of this hard core or kernel could be looked for on the side of the so-called fundamental method of psychoanalytic practice: psychic associativity.

By that I not only mean the announcement of the so-called fundamental rule of psychoanalysis, the rule of associating freely during the session, but a series of propositions that are associated with it and underlie it. If there is good reason for the fundamental rule to be at the origin of an exploration of the functioning of psychic life, it is because it is very probable that the psyche itself functions associatively, as Freud suggested as early as 18953 in

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3 At a recent conference in Lyon certain researchers in the neurosciences were questioned about the pertinence of considering brain functioning as resulting from a regulated associativity. They were all roughly in agreement with this proposition, even if their line of argumentation for supporting it drew on quite diverse arguments.
his “Project for a Scientific Psychology”. A rule of listening is deduced from it which is backed up by the principle of “free-floating association”: if two associative items follow each other, there must necessarily be a link between them. If the link is manifest, there is no problem; if, on the other hand, it seems idiosyncratic and does not obey “secondary” logic, it means that one or several links in the associative chain that have been kept unconscious or non-conscious, have “interfered with the psychoanalytic conversation”. This indicates that a regulatory mechanism has intervened in “the course of psychic events”, that censorship has been exerted on a missing link in the chain, and that a portion of psychic life has been kept unconscious or “is not capable of becoming conscious” (Freud, 1923b) in this form.

It is under these circumstances that an interpretative hypothesis, a work of construction, is required in order to try to circumscribe the missing link.

This brings us to the second pillar of the foundations of the method: during the session, associativity is organised by the presence of the analyst and the transference process that it provokes. Associativity is thus necessarily subject to narrative considerations. The “missing link” of the associative chain, the portion of reality that is not fully integrated with it, certainly indicates that a mechanism of defence is operating against it, but also that it is subject to a form of repetition-compulsion which pushes it to manifest itself in some form of “transference acting out”.

The third pillar of the theory of the method consists in the fact that the historical or present subjective experiences with which the subject has been confronted are subject to a “repetition compulsion” which is a compulsion to integrate. This compulsion to repeat is operative through and in the interplay of the drives and conflicts, and the ways they are processed during their psychic integration.

These three pillars form the propositions that I consider to be fundamental in the psychoanalytic method and the mode of listening that it implies. They represent an essential part of the hard core of psychoanalysis concerning which there should be a wide consensus amongst practitioners who adhere to its epistemology.

B- The gap between theory and practice and the principle of compatibility

Psychoanalysis cannot be an “influencing machine”, and this was even the postulate on which the whole of its undertaking was founded. While it is reasonable to consider that the total absence of any effects of suggestion, influence, or seduction is a utopian or even an ideological aim, it is still true that its practice is also vectorised by a powerful tension in the direction of suspending the effect of influence as far as possible.

In practice, the analysand must be listened to without “prior knowledge”, without theoretical a priori. The hypotheses forged for increasing the intelligibility of the psychic functioning under consideration must arise from listening to associativity. This is where what J.-L. Donnet has called the gap between theory and practice, requiring theory to be suspended during psychoanalytic listening, comes into play. Bion, for instance, argues that the analyst must remain in O, a virtual point where the analyst is “without desire or memory”.

But experience shows that, paradoxically, suspending theory entirely is only possible if the analyst has a very thorough knowledge of it, and even an extensive knowledge of the various theorisations available within worldwide psychoanalytic culture. One can only suspend what one knows sufficiently well. It should even be added that the suspension of all theory would make listening impossible and especially the intelligibility of the associative chains.

Once again we are faced with complexity: theory must be suspended and, at the same time, it is indispensable. So it is more the relationship to theory that is the issue here, and various propositions can be made to refine its most appropriate form.
The analyst’s state of listening to theory has been described as a state of “floating theorisation”. No model is privileged a priori; it is only retrospectively and as a result of the effect of the analysand’s associativity on the analyst that a model may eventually emerge. Its value and heuristic import are subject to the level of intelligibility that it makes possible. But this model in no way excludes all the others. It should be possible to envisage several compatible models, which does not, however, mean an infinite number of models. There are a few pertinent models, and only a few.

Furthermore, the theory thus employed to make a given piece of associative material intelligible must “leave clinical practice the possibility of contradicting the theory”. A model is always hypothetical and it must wait and see what its effects of “associative generativity” will be before it is given confirmation or fresh impetus. It must always be capable of being called into question by the psychic associativity that it provokes or makes possible. In other words, the work of interpretation or construction proceeds by a process of adjustment or refining in relation to what it produces, and must be conceived of as a work of co-interpretation or co-construction, which supposes the construction of an “analytic” alliance that is more or less consciously based on mutual consent.

Furthermore, models or interpretations are necessarily always “partial”. Psychoanalytic work is carried out “fragment by fragment, “detail by detail”; as Freud writes, it is a work of analysis even if this analysis sometimes takes on the form of a synthetic construction, even if this analysis correlates a set of findings into a general formulation. Indeed, it is owing to this necessarily partial character – justified at a given moment – that the idea of a plurality of possible and compatible interpretations can be defended, but only to the extent that it is recognised that each “partial” model is partial. I have written “justified at a given moment” in order to give a place to the work of reinterpretation which we are accustomed to in our daily practice. What we have been able to affirm at a given time X will be gradually modified by what follows in accordance with new elements of the associative process, the progression of the analysis, and the increasing complexity of the material.

I would like to say a few words now in relation to the proposition mentioned above concerning the necessarily reductive character of models. Living substance, in essence, comprises something that has “not yet come into being”, something unknown to come, which is related to an underlying creativity that prevents us from foreseeing and anticipating completely the future of the processes taking place. In essence, then, however sophisticated our hypotheses and models are, they cannot claim to totalise the psychic functioning analysed; at best, they can foresee it retrospectively, but they can never anticipate it completely. The “epistemological reduction” of the hypercomplexity of the psyche and of psychic life is thus inevitable, and any model which claims to totalise psychic functioning could justifiably be accused of being ideological. Moreover, accepting the partial and relatively reductive character of hypotheses and models is a necessity that is intrinsic to practice; we can only intervene and participate in the process taking place insofar as we accept the reductive character of our interventions. This being so, there are degrees of reduction that are “tolerable” because they are inevitable, and models where the degree of reduction is too great, models which simplify the complexity to the extreme and impoverish considerably the representation of psychic life they propose. I will give a few examples of this further on, since plurality invites us to embrace the complexification of models.

**Evaluation and the complexity of the models of psychoanalytic work**

I have already said that the plurality observed in psychoanalysis raises the problem of a possible “babelisation” of psychoanalysis and opens up the question of knowing whether all
models are of equal value, that is to say, the question of the evaluation of clinical hypotheses and theoretical models.

It is becoming a matter of increasing urgency to answer this question at a time when new societies are joining the international psychoanalytic movement, and when, at the same time, psychoanalysis is increasingly being attacked and contested on the subject of its results. But we can only answer it if psychoanalytically pertinent systems of evaluation are available, which does not seem to be the case at the moment.

I have proposed two research programmes with the aim of constructing these systems of evaluation. The first supposes a vast multi-centred study of the forms and variations of psychic associativity, and is thus directly linked to the fundamental method. It is none the less paradoxical that the method centred on listening to associativity is said to be “fundamental”, while the diversity of its forms have still barely been formalised. It is time that the forms and types of associativity were modelised and that we possessed a grid of evaluation, or even, more modestly, a means of approaching its evolution during analytic treatment.

The second is concerned with play, with its manifest and latent forms, that is to say, an object which “materialises” and/or “dramatises” directly the processes of symbolisation, and which is capable of covering not only the psychoanalysis of adults but also that of children from an early age onwards. But for such a programme to be heuristic, it is necessary of course to think of the model of play as including its latent or potential forms, that is, to hear the play underlying the transference processes, to be able to hear through the transference processes what form of play is seeking a terrain of deployment, what form of play is potentially present in a manifest form of non-play. It is also necessary to possess a “herbarium” of the most typical games at the different ages of life and in the major subjective or intersubjective formations: games for couples, family games, group games, games for social organisations, etc.

But in both cases the work that is necessary and the research that it implies at international level will take time to put in place and to produce its first results. In the meantime, I would like to propose a few thoughts on the question of the evaluation of our models, while taking account of the issue of complexity which, as I have already said, is essential for me.

(1) First, I should like to point out in passing that a form of evaluation can be provided “at the frontiers” of psychoanalysis by its interface confrontations with other disciplines which share the same object or related objects. For example, it is unlikely that the picture proposed in one of our models of the forms of emerging psychic life is completely incompatible with current studies in developmental psychology (see Dornes, 2002). That there is not necessarily a term for term correspondence is understandable owing to the different methodologies employed, but incompatibility in itself is not conceivable. It necessarily implies an epistemological study to account for the gaps, and if this is not satisfying, then we must draw the consequences, especially if alternative psychoanalytic models do not present the same problems of compatibility.

The same is true of studies arising from research in the neurosciences. If certain hypotheses proposed by some psychoanalytic models are not compatible with recognised studies arising from the neurosciences, we cannot ignore their existence or the questions that they raise, and even less the consequences that they imply. This is an implicit position in many of Freud’s statements, and no doubt in his whole approach, and there are always alternative models in psychoanalysis which do not present the same difficulties. And if, by some unlikely chance, this is not the case, well, then we have to build them. Psychoanalysis cannot be a sect cut off from the rest of scientific evolution; it cannot avoid dialogue with disciplines that share the same object, dialogue and confrontation with its models.

(2) But what I particularly want to explore is the question of the degree of reduction that is tolerable, and the degree of complexity that is necessary for a good enough psychoanalytic
theorisation, and for models that are really heuristic in clinical practice. To this end, I would like to give you a few examples, even if I cannot go into them in detail within the confines of this paper.

The first example concerns the method – that is to say, the way of understanding the question of psychic associativity, and hence the fundamental rule of listening to it.

In France, particularly with those who are sympathetic to the Lacanian movement – more than Lacan himself – there is a tendency to reduce associativity to verbal associativity alone. This position goes hand in hand with a series of considerations concerning the forms of symbolisation, envisaged particularly in terms of separation and absence. Now such implicit assumptions oblige one to adopt a negative attitude towards a whole part of psychic life and towards the course of psychic events, in particular when one is dealing with certain clinical pictures marked by the importance of suffering linked to issues of narcissism and identity, in which the body and sensory-motor factors play a more or less central role. Nothing indicates, however, that reducing analytic listening to verbal associativity alone is a necessity for psychoanalysis. The opposite is true, even, if we let ourselves be guided by the position of Freud, in whom I have found many traces of listening to the polymorphous forms of associativity (see Roussillon, 2010; 2012 ??? text not cited). That certain forms of symbolisation are “incomplete” (Freud, 1913c ??? idem) is obvious, but neglecting them in listening is quite another matter. It results in developing a “deficient” conception of whole sections of psychic activity, which detracts considerably from the pertinence of psychoanalytic listening. In line with the polymorphic character of psychic associativity, the psychoanalyst must develop a polyphonic mode of listening to it, and any reduction of listening to verbal language alone represents for me the typical example of an excessive reduction which invalidates some of the models that espouse it. In the same way, it is necessary to hear the potential linguistic and narrative value of a whole series of non-verbal psychic manifestations: there is a language of the body, a language of the act, a language of the sexual, and, generally speaking, all the forms of representation (représentance) of drive life must be apprehended in terms of their potential linguistic value: the drive is necessarily “a vehicle of messages”, according to the definition of its forms of representation proposed by Freud.

(2) A second example of harmful reduction can be found in another fundamental concept of psychoanalytic practice, namely, the transference. This tends to be understood only in terms of the relationship between the analysand and the analyst; at best, the analysing situation is also included. This leads to listening that is focused solely on the dimension of the “here and now” of the session to the detriment of the historicisation of the functioning of the psyche, and results in a form of “narcissistic” listening in which the analyst is above all sensitive to the weft of the transference which concerns him directly, even if it means relating everything that the analysand says to the relationship he or she has with the analyst. Now once again there is nothing here that compels us to make such a reduction of the prism of transference listening, or the pertinence of the concept of transference. Freud defines the transference as a “displacement of the historical situation on to the current situation” (Freud, 1914g, text/page not given?). Such a definition implies that the pertinence of the concept extends well beyond the analytic situation itself. It implies that elements of the transference can also be transferred on to certain aspects of the “current situation” of the analysand’s life, without these aspects being considered as lateral, for sometimes they are central. It is sometimes the case that “transference has already occurred” in respect of some aspect of the

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4 Translator’s note: *représentance* is a general category including different types of representation (psychic representative, ideational representative, representative of the drive etc) and which implies the movement, activity of representation.
analysand’s life, even before the analysis has begun. Wanting to see this transference at all costs in terms of the analysand’s relationship to the analyst, or even of the analysis, simply begs the question and hinders understanding of the complexity of the configuration (H. Faimberg) or of the transference constellation (Freud, 1940a [1938]) with which the analyst and the analysis are confronted.

Another aspect of the reduction of the complexity of the transference process is linked to the temptation of reducing the form it takes to the reactivation of a particular moment of the subject’s history. Thus in certain models only the “archaic” dimension of the transference will be privileged; in other cases, it is only oedipal “infantile” conflicts (in the restricted sense of the “genital” or phallic oedipal conflict) that will be taken into account; at best, the subsequent reactivation of oedipal conflicts in adolescence may occasionally also be taken into account. The analysand must then fit into the “mould” of the restricted type of listening with which he is confronted, and so he “learns” which material is relevant for his analyst. You will recall that the reduction of transference listening to infantile dimensions alone (the unconscious consists of infantile experience) led for example to a failure to take into account in analysis social traumas as important as the diverse genocides of the twentieth century which rocked our continent. After the Berlin Congress in 1985, moreover, many Jews entered analysis again in the hope that the effects of the Shoah on their psychic economy could now be heard. Analysands who have experienced the oppression of totalitarian regimes remain marked by their experience well beyond what may have been reactivated at the level of their archaic “totalitarian” anxieties, even if, naturally, this dimension cannot be underestimated, as analysts from South American countries who have just been through such social ordeals know only too well.

The complex transference constellation of a subject in analysis is comprised of psychic states arising from early infancy – and in this sense they are archaic – but also of states originating in their childhood, which are thus “infantile” and marked by the difference of the sexes and of generations which organises the oedipal configuration, as well as psychic states arising from their adolescence. These three “organising” phases can also be mixed in their “actual” psychic states in which the specificities of their actual world are also inscribed. It is this complex transference configuration, formed by the articulation of at least three historical phases or moments, which organises the associative narrativity in the session, and not the form reduced to only one of these dimensions that is recommended by certain psychoanalytic currents. This does not mean, of course, that it is not pertinent at a given moment to give particular attention to this or that dimension of the complex transference configuration. One cannot intervene on all levels at once; a certain reduction is necessary in order to be able to intervene, to be able to interpret or construct. This means that a model that systematises just one of these dimensions proceeds by reducing excessively the complexity with which analysis is faced.

(3) I will conclude with a third example, namely, the question of listening to drive life, whether or not the fact that the object of the drive is another subject is taken into account. This question, like the two above, is also one of the hot points of inter-analytic debate and of the question of the plurality of models in psychoanalysis. A first tendency, still fairly dominant within the IPA, is only to consider the effect of the drive on the object-relation; the mode of the object’s real presence, its mode of response to the drive impulse is thus largely neglected in practice, if not in theory. What will be described, then, is a mode of relating to the oral, anal, adhesive, or paranoid-schizoid object, and one will want to know if the subject recognises the alterity of the object or if the object is simply regarded as a “part object”, an object instrumentalised by the play of the subject’s drives alone.
In the diverse forms that I have just mentioned, the object is not really taken into account as an “object in itself” (Winnicott), and its reactions and responses are not “weighed up” in the analysis of drive activity.

In a certain way, even if these diverse theories evaluate the weight brought to bear by the subject’s psychic functioning on the object, starting from a “narcissistic” postulate, they neglect, in one way or another, the weight of the object’s subjectivity in the vicissitudes of the drives, the weight of its responses and reactions in the very organisation of the subject’s drive life.

This “theoretical” position is not unconnected with a conception of archaic and infantile sexual life, a theme that has always been considered to be central in analysis, according to which infantile sexuality is “autoerotic, objectless, and based on self-preservation” (Freud, 1905). From the moment infantile sexuality is considered as “objectless”, it is hardly surprising that the concrete characteristics of the object are neglected; from the moment it is autoerotic and derived from self-preservation, it is hardly surprising that the theories that are derived from it are “narcissistic”.

The problem is that such conceptions result from a de-complexification of the organisation of drive life, including archaic and infantile psychic life. A few pages before this famous assertion by Freud in 1905, we can read: “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” (p. 182).

He continues: “The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment a separation which becomes inevitable when the teeth appear…” (ibid).

There is scarcely any doubt that in this passage, Freud recognises quite explicitly the existence of an infantile or even archaic sexual satisfaction in the presence of the object, in the encounter with it, and not only in the object’s “absence”. It is also worth pointing out that Freud differentiates here between two phases, two “moments”, the first in which sexual satisfaction is obtained in the encounter with the object, and the second in which sexual satisfaction and nourishment must be detached: this is weaning, the beginning of the process of separation. I cannot take up here the whole line of argumentation that would be necessary to justify the full pertinence of a differentiation within infantile sexuality between a sexuality that I would call archaic (early or primary), and an infantile sexuality proper in the traditional sense of the term, but will simply evoke a few of the fundamental characteristics of the archaic sexual and of the polymorphous nature of the forms of pleasure that it entails.

It is important to stress the necessity of having a conception of the sexual that takes into account the complexity and the polymorphous nature of the forms of primary pleasure.

Let me just remind you in passing (for further details, see Roussillon, 2004) that I propose that it should be conceived of as an amalgam, an entanglement, a braid, formed of five “strands”, which takes up and adds greater complexity to the theory of anaclisis or “leaning on” at the heart of the primary situation which Laplanche has proposed to call the “fundamental anthropological situation”.

1. There is the pleasure associated with the satisfaction of the self-preservation drives, which is specifically dependent on the reduction of somatic tensions, such as hunger.
2. But the zones through which self-preservation occurs are also erogenous zones whose activation produces its own pleasure, pleasure that is potentially independent of self-preservation itself, an auto-sensual pleasure that potentially underlies auto-eroticism.
3. But these two pleasures can only form an ensemble and be really experienced thanks to the pleasure of encountering the object, thanks to the “sharing of pleasure” that this encounter makes possible, thanks to the “duplicated or mirrored primary homosexual
relation” which is established when the interplay of mutual tunings and adjustments is sufficiently good. If shared pleasure is not present in the encounter, the pleasure of self-preservation, like that of zonal erogeneity, may not be sensible, may not be perceived as a coherent ensemble, and may simply remain unconscious. With the question of the “sharing of pleasure”, it is intersubjectivity that plays an organising role in the polyphony of pleasures. Shared pleasure, and, more generally, the affect of the object, opens up the question of the latter’s position as subject-other (autre-sujet). It is through intersubjective sharing that pleasure leads to real satisfaction, that it becomes “satisfaction”, and that it transforms the primary narcissistic longings of the drive impulses into real intersubjective satisfaction.

(4) However, the “sharing of pleasure” has its limits; the pleasure of the object comprises an “enigmatic” part, to use Laplanche’s term, which, associated with the facts of adult sexuality, with the orgasmic potential that it implies, necessarily, inevitably, escapes the process of tuning to the extent that it refers to bodily experiences that are foreign to those of the baby, and with which the latter is unable to empathise. The enigmatic part of the object opens up the question of the father and beyond that, the question of the primal scene and of origins. When the enigma does not have a disorganising role, that is to say, when there is sufficient sharing of pleasure, it introduces the subject to the “pleasure of the enigma”, and this pleasure is taken as much in the enigmatic character of adult sexual signifiers transmitted by the object as it is in the enigmatic character of pleasure itself, of all pleasure.

(5) Finally, we should mention the pleasure taken in processes of interiorisation, the pleasure of incorporative forms that are earlier than the later ones of introjection through which the different forms of auto-eroticism are constituted. It is in this pleasure that subjective appropriation finds the platform on which it will be able to develop; it is in this pleasure that the inner spaces and volumes will be discovered in which the subject will be able to localise his interiority.

Gradually, the successive prohibitions which will develop – the prohibitions on cannibalism, on touching, on seeing, and then on specular representation – will oblige the child to de-condense this polyphony, this amalgam of forms of pleasure, insofar as he will have to leave the close physical relationship with the object and separate himself increasingly from the latter. Representative activity and symbolic exchange will have to compensate increasingly for the progressive loss of the first conditions of satisfaction.

In such a model it is not possible to neglect the role played by the responses and reactions of the object to the subject’s impulses and feelings. The possibility for the pleasure associated with self-preservation and the pleasure derived from erogenous zones to form a coherent ensemble and to be fully experienced by the subject, to be appropriated by him so that he feels the potential satisfaction that is linked to them, depends on the “mirror” found in the pleasure taken by the object in the “fundamental anthropological situation” and in all the situations of early infancy which condition the evolution of drive representation.

It is no longer possible to think of the subject’s “object-relation” independently of his effect on the object and of the particularities of the object’s affective and behavioural response towards him. The object plays an important role, then, in the development of the processes of the subjective appropriation of drive life and in its diverse “vicissitudes”, and the analyst is obliged to take this function into account in his understanding of the metabolisation of the drives of a subject in analysis.

To finish, I would just like to say a word or two about the subjectivity of the child. In his very last writings at the end of his life, those that he wrote in the form of short notes during his terminal exile in London, Freud stresses the weakness of the capacities for synthesis of the infant in relation to his primary experiences, and sees this as an explanation for the compulsion to repeat which sometimes haunts human beings. This note reminds us of Freud’s interest for the question of the psychic integration of early experiences, but it also points to his
interest in the weakness of the child’s capacities to carry out the work that it implies by himself or to cope by himself with the state of distress that it implies. The infant needs its primary environment to help him achieve the synthesis that he cannot achieve by himself.

Our current knowledge of infancy stresses the fact that the infant experiences diverse psychic states which, at the outset, are not correlated and which constitute the first state of subjectivity as “a nebulous subjectivity”. The infant is still unable to perceive himself in the complexity of the states that he is experiencing; he goes through one state after another, without being able to synthesize them or even simply to make a link between the diverse moments of self-experience that he is passing through. It is thus necessary for the environment to offer him experiences that help him to integrate his various states. The example of the fundamental anthropological situation which I briefly touched upon above can provide an illustration of this type of experience which weaves together the various components of the self. But it is also necessary for the environment to provide him with representations – thus not only lived experiences – of his complexity or even of the conflictuality that he experiences. It is precisely where this first function of the environment was insufficient, or was insufficiently appropriated, that the analyst will be led to gradually present the analysand with the representations of his complexity which he needs to continue his work of psychic integration. Complexity is thus not simply a speculative question, a theoretical question; it is also a crucial question for psychoanalytic practice.

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