

Oedipus blown up and the Infantile omnipresent.

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Panel on:

The feminine, the maternal, the masculine, the paternal, in today's parenthood.

with Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Julio Moreno, and Julie Augoyard.

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Introduction

Until *yesterday*, the whole psychoanalytic community considered, after Freud, that the basic criteria of a resolution – be it asymptotic – of the Oedipus Complex were the capacity to acknowledge the difference of sexes and the difference of generations.

Today, in our Western society, the “vertical”, generational vertex of the society is at stake since several decades. As to sex difference, we observe two paradoxical trends developing simultaneously:

- On the one hand, after an important movement of feminism and of “gender” studies, we have now come to a “post-gender” period, where bridges are constantly built between men and women, where boys and girls share the same education, where comparisons and similitudes in diversity are developed, and where identifications stem from the different layers of object relations with the biological sex one does not have, or with the biological sex one does not imagine to share our life with. Although the situation is far from being perfect, symbolic elaboration seems thus to develop consistently.
- On the other hand, however, and as a consequence of such an erosion of the limits linked to the biological sex component of our identity, more and more persons dare claim their need to change sex, expressing a basic pain to have been born with theirs. Such a concreteness in their demand is accompanied by an impressive determination to get what they want by any means, regardless to the price they have to pay and the intensity of pain they have to endure over many years of medical and surgical treatments. Reminding what Freud said about the Ego being above all a body Ego, identification processes, mourning processes of the lost object and symbolic elaboration in their intra-psychic and interpersonal functioning raise several questions, as far as the area of their body Ego is concerned.

As Julio Moreno puts it (Moreno, *The origins of life*, 2018) we are not any more in a Promethean vision of the world, but in a Faustian one: our *hubris* drives us continually out of our limits and we consider our borders as opportunities to find out how to trespass them.

However, our identity coherence is at risks if we cannot keep our capacity to think about the whole process in which we are engaged, *including the unconscious part of it*.

In my presentation, I shall examine the main conditions for a healthy development of the *infant's* psychic internal life and creativity, not only for her adaptation to everyday life, whatever the latter would be. Should we keep up to our Faustian future, we had better

contribute to our children's development. Otherwise, instead of new utopias, we would find old wine in new wineskins.

Oedipus today and tomorrow

In our post-modern time, *Oedipus Complex* too is *deconstructed*. I recently contended (Guignard, 2015, 2019) that nowadays' Oedipus was not any more structured as a "Complex", with the qualities of organisation involved in such a definition. However, its elements keep organising parts of our intrapsychic and interpersonal life, even at a very early level of development. Moreover, its broad field of *unconscious identifications* is still invaluable for our understanding of psychic life.

Diana Ehrensaft speaks of an "Oedipus Complex in circle", meaning that only a circle contains all the possible geometrical shapes corresponding to any situation of giving birth to a new human being. In a very Faustian impetus, she writes: "As long as our culture continues to privilege genetic over non-genetic family ties, such genetic asymmetry may be a lethal weapon decimating the intricate weavings of the various geometric shapes that include the intended parents, whether genetically or non-genetically related to the child within the oedipal circle. When any of those inner shapes are destroyed, denied or compromised, the child is at risk for being left with a void in relatedness, or an anxiety *about the bonds to one or both intended parents*". (Ehrensaft, 2014 in M. Mann¹, p.30, *my italics*).

We could also speak of a "blown up Oedipus Complex", arguing that Freud's triangle is *an internal one*, not an external one. The triangular, oedipal shape of a relationship is a competence happening in the *internal psychic space* of the *infant*, and we have to differentiate it from any behavioural *adaptation* to a given environment.

The Infantile.

Infantile sexuality discovered by Freud paved the way to the acknowledgement of immediacy and ubiquity of the drives as being the psychic inheritance of human instincts. Moreover, the "infantile" allowed him to discover the dynamic structure of the psychoanalytic care, linking "infantile neurosis" to "transference neurosis".

About twenty-five years ago, I proposed the concept of "*The Infantile*" (Guignard, 1996²) to describe the basic psychic *locus* where drives, mnesic traces and capacity to think are joining together to organise our preconscious level of mental functioning. I contended that this personal, unique and unconscious expression of our sensory and motor experiences and of our fantasies of origins is active lifelong, structuring our psychic processes and our search for meaning. Our Infantile is organising every category of sexuality, of object relations and identifications. As it is present – needless to say – in every caregiver, I studied and described

¹ Ehrensaft D. 2014 Family complexes and oedipal circles: mothers, fathers, babies, donors, and surrogates, in: *Psychoanalytic Aspects of Assisted Reproductive Technology*, Ed. Mali Mann, Karnac, pp. 19-43.

² Guignard F. 1996 *The Infantile in the analytical relationship*, London, The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, *IJP.*, vol.76, n°6, pp.1083–1092, translated by Philip Slotkin, And: *Au Vif de l'Infantile. Réflexions sur la situation analytique*, Coll. « Champs psychanalytiques », Delachaux & Niestlé Lausanne. 2^e éd. Mars 2002.

in details how the psychoanalyst's Infantile is working³, helping or disturbing our therapeutic device through its obscurities.

Studying the field of trauma, I also argued that the temptation of perversion never leaves the ground of human psyche, whatever the competences and the fame of the person. Speaking of "confusion of languages between adults and children", Sandor Ferenczi (Ferenczi, 1932⁴) insisted on the *helplessness* of the child whose sexual drives are aroused by a seductive adult who dares discard his role of a *Nebenmensch* in such a loathsome way.

More recently, Jean Laplanche (Laplanche, 1987⁵) spoke of "primal seduction" as a "fundamental anthropological situation", meaning specifically the seduction exerted by the unconscious of the adults of the new-born's environment.

Nowadays, with the multiplicity of the actors taking part of the birth and the care of a new-born, it might well be that the unconscious seductive component of parental care would increase considerably.

My question for this Panel is as follows:

According to the latest pieces of research, both in neuroscience and in the psychoanalytic field, it is now well established that *memory, attention, and primary relational identifications* are the three basic, earliest and most precious competences of any human new-born. Keeping in mind, on the one hand, the growing and inescapable movements of migrations – and hence, of children born in traumatic conditions – and, on the other hand, the asymptotic increase of babies born with ART, how can we figure out the development of these three competences in today's and tomorrow's new-borns, considering the number of persons and places possibly involved in the creation and the care of a baby?

In order to study such a question, let's examine in details the three competences involved:

1. Memory

A. Implicit memory

"Implicit memory", also named "procedural memory" was first mentioned in 1985 by Graf & Schacter⁶. It depends on sub-cortical cerebral centres formed and ready to function very early in the foetal development⁷. Thus, it is already functioning *in utero*, well ahead of the constitution of the "explicit memory", linked to the acquisition of language and symbolisation.

Such a discovery questions the whole field of research about memory, both in neurosciences and in psychology. We owe to our late and regretted Italian colleague Mauro Mancina, an outstanding neurophysiologist and psychoanalyst, several major works on that topic⁸, as well as on the "mirror neurons" and on sleep and the dream.

³ Guignard F. 2019 *Psychoanalytic Concepts and Technique in Development*, London, The New Library of Psychoanalysis. Routledge / Taylor & Francis.

⁴ Ferenczi S. 1932 "Confusion of Tongues Between the Adult and the Child (The Language of Tenderness and of Passion)". *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, (1949) **30**: 225-230. Also in *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis* (ed. Michael Balint).

⁵ Laplanche J. 1987 *Nouveaux fondements pour la Psychanalyse. La séduction originaire*, Paris, P.U.F.

⁶ Graf p. & Schacter D.L. 1985 Implicit and explicit memory for new associations in normal and amnesic subjects, *Journal of Experimental Psychology. Learning, Memory and cognition*, **11**, 501-518.

⁷ Especially *hippocampus* and *amygdalis*.

⁸ Mancina M. a) 2006 *Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience*, Springer. b) 2007 *Feeling the words. Neuropsychanalytic Understanding of Memory and the Unconscious*. London, The New Library of Psychoanalysis.

Implicit memory could also be associated to Melanie Klein's concept of "memories in feelings", and to Jean Laplanche's elaborations about the "non-repressed Unconscious"⁹.

B. Brain sensory metabolism and implicit memory: their role in the development of the capacity to think.

Implicit memory plays a major role in organising the developmental potentialities of the foetus, because of its link with the foetal "brain sensory metabolism"¹⁰.

Let us remember that, in his psychoanalytic theory of thinking, W. R. Bion, modified his views about the sensory elements β : to begin with, he designated them as being useless for thought; then, he discovered that they were precisely the "food" for the capacity to think – the α function¹¹ – the matter to be transformed first into emotions, and then into symbols used to explicit the subject's *Weltanschauung*. Let us also remember that he described the condition *sine qua non* for acquiring such a competence: the new-born should be contained and attended to long enough and by a particular competence of attention of the mother or caregiver, specific to the *normal projective identification*. He named such a competence "capacity of reverie of the mother" and considered it as the prototype of the "capacity to think the thoughts". A new-born who will be given such an attention long enough, will start an interaction with "the mother" on the mode of a normal projective identification that allows the baby to regularly get rid of painful experiences and to progressively re-introject a first model of a capacity to "think the thoughts".

We know the role of sensory functions in psychosomatic diseases and mental functioning¹². We also know the effect, on children's academic competences, of placements in a community during early childhood. It is a well-known clinical fact that the more an *infant* is being taken care of in a multiplicity of places, with a multiplicity of people, whatever their competences, the more difficult it will be for her to build a first, strong and meaningful attachment. R. Spitz (Spitz, 1946¹³) already observed it long ago, and named it "hospitalism".

We might need some more time to observe the long-term effects of the immediate and definitive deprivation at birth from the sensory elements that fed the implicit memory during their prenatal life of babies born from surrogate mothers. Would Marcel Proust have found out the so beautiful and sensuous memory of the "petite madeleine", had he been separated from his mother at birth¹⁴?

2. Attention

⁹ Guignard F. 2006 La pensée de Jean Laplanche. Convergences et apories. *Psychiatrie française*, Janvier 2006.

¹⁰ Busnel M.C. & Héron A. 2010 Le développement de la sensorialité foétale. In : *La Naissance : histoire, cultures et pratiques d'aujourd'hui*. R. Frydman & M. Szejer, Paris Albin Michel p. 633-643.

¹¹ Bion W. R. 1962 A theory of Thinking, *Int. J. of Psa.*, 43/4-5. Also: 1967 *Second thoughts. Selected Papers on Psycho-analysis*, London, Heinemann Ltd., (reprinted London: Karnac Books 1984).

¹² Marty P. 1991 *Mentalisation et psychosomatique*, Paris Les empêcheurs de penser en rond.

¹³ Spitz R. 1946 *The First Year of Life*, New York, International Universities Press.

¹⁴ « Et tout d'un coup le souvenir m'est apparu. Ce goût, c'était celui du petit morceau de madeleine que le dimanche matin à Combray ma tante Léonie m'offrait. La vue de la petite madeleine ne m'avait rien rappelé avant que je n'y eusse goûté. Mais, quand d'un passé ancien rien ne subsiste, après la mort des êtres, après la destruction des choses, seules, plus frêles mais plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles, l'odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps, comme des âmes, à porter sans fléchir l'édifice immense du souvenir. »

Marcel Proust, 1913 *Du côté de chez Swann – À la recherche du temps perdu* Paris, Gallimard 1946 p.68.

A. *Attention at birth, and aesthetic conflict*

The *infant's* attention is one of the most beautiful things one could observe. Not only are we thrilled when she pays attention to what surrounds her, but we keep on being moved by the next step, when she gathers herself – at birth, by falling asleep, a few days later, by hanging her little hands together, and within two months or so, by vocalising to lull herself.

When D. Meltzer¹⁵ conceptualized the “aesthetic conflict”, somewhat ahead of the first publications about implicit memory, he proposed to put in words the sensory feelings of the new-born discovering “the beauty of the world” at birth: “*is it as beautiful ‘inside’?*”. Such a formulation supposes both a memory of this “inside”, and some sort of a primary defence – let’s call it primary repression and denial – against the discovery that this “inside” is now lost for ever.

However, if her most ancient mnesic traces briefly give the new-born the illusion to still own her uterine container, the shift to a new reality, from which she immediately acquires mnesic traces as well, will quickly bring her an acute feeling of loss. Such a painful feeling heralds the premises of the reality principle, upon which *depressive position* will then take place.

Capacity to accept the loss and to mourn our first object of love/hate/knowledge is a prerequisite to discover and cathect “a third party” and to constitute an early oedipal relationship¹⁶. It is also a prerequisite to acquire a capacity of symbolisation, however, at the expense of the renunciation to possess the object to be symbolised. And denial of such a loss requires a shift of attention from the cathected lost object, to another one, preferably inanimate and replaceable.

B. *The “feeling of being” and the trauma of the external reality’s concreteness.*

On the side of the beauty of the world, the “ordinary beautiful mother” (Meltzer, op. cit.) will be the first attractive objet for the *infans* whose attention requires to be supported by the “capacity of reverie of the mother” in order not to be exposed without a shelter to what I call “the reel without the human”. Without such a psychic help, pain would be too acute for the *infans*, who would use violent and (auto)destructive defences that could damage her capacity to think and her primary links of object relations/identifications.

On her way to discover the world, should the new-born meet too many inanimate objects, too unbearable non-human noise, too glaring, non-intimate light, too many mechanical movements, too many different places to live in for too short a period, then, her discovery of our beautiful world, started with her brand-new sensory and motor capacities, would turn into a traumatic nightmare, a catastrophe impossible to decode, bringing in its wake a deep confusion, and radical defences against it. Rank’s trauma of birth (Rank, 1924¹⁷) would take place instead: exposed to such a brainwashing turmoil, the new-born does not possess the necessary competences to organise a minimum of coherent “feeling of being” (Winnicott). She then would defend herself by being *compliant to the splitting – even the fragmentation* – imposed upon her. Ferenczi¹⁸, then Meltzer¹⁹, described those splits imposed to the child by

¹⁵ Meltzer D. & Harris Williams M. 1988 *The Apprehension of beauty. The role of aesthetic conflict in development, art and violence*, Clunie Press Perthshire.

¹⁶ Klein M. 1928 Les stades précoces du conflit œdipien, *Essais de psychanalyse*, Paris Payot 1967 p. 229-241.

¹⁷ Rank O. 1924 *Le traumatisme de la naissance*. Tr. fr. 2002 Paris Payot et Rivages.

¹⁸ Ferenczi S. 1931 “Child Analysis in the Analysis of Adults”. In *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis* (ed. Michael Balint, trans. Eric Mosbacher). New York : Brunner-Mazel (1980). [London : Karnac Books (1994)].

¹⁹ Meltzer D. 1967 *The psychoanalytical Process*, London, Heinemann.

the external world, and that “jam” the normal lines of cleavage necessary to install a first good relation to a first object acknowledged as being “good, I want to swallow it”, and to detect its complementary opposite: “bad, I want to spit it off” (Freud, 1926²⁰).

“Apperception” (Winnicott, 1967) and “the experience of being²¹” would not take place properly, as the baby would constantly be occupied to “cling” perceptively to the variations of the environment, in order to try and foresee the next emotional state around her. She will abandon her own needs and desires, and she will not experience her perceptions as her owns.

C. ADHD and other psychic troubles: looking for a universe without object loss nor grieving process.

Healthy psychic development requires to keep a capacity for attention in good conditions. And the above observations suggest that this depends on our courage and determination to accept undertaking a grieving process whenever we lose a cathected object. Instead, nowadays children suffer more and more from DAMP and ADHD syndromes, which means that their genuine competences of implicit memory and attention are neglected, even mistreated by their way of living.

I contend that many pervasive personality disorders originate from a pathology of the object’s mourning processes, which leads in its wake an imbalance between pleasure/unpleasure and reality principles. Such children defend themselves against the law of psychic reality, that brings them to face loss, to keep going, and to mourn to develop oneself. For instance, B. Salomonsson observed serious troubles in symbol formation (Salomonsson 2006²²) in children suffering from DAMP or ADHD syndromes.

To conclude: the abyss of the unknown.

The historian Philippe Ariès (Ariès, 1971²³) demonstrated how the child’s place in the family is a rather recent sociological construction in our western civilization (18th century). 20th century progressively deconstructed the kind of parenthood that had been functioning during more than two centuries. 21st century inherited of a motherhood and a fatherhood that proved their fragility and their ephemeral nature. Together with the deconstruction of the heterosexual supremacy in the couple of lovers, deconstruction of the feminine brought about the complementary deconstruction of the masculine. Only the Infantile resists, as being the psychic quality that keeps on organising every human unconscious psychic life from intra-uterine life to death.

However, today’s and tomorrow’s children will have to find out other supports to identify and to develop than those we experienced and acknowledged as being necessary for human development until yesterday. Whatever flexible and adaptable be our feeling of identity, it cannot modify without considering our contingent psychosomatic reality. To our unconscious way of functioning, any modification of the boundaries ensuring our feeling of identity is

²⁰ Freud S. 1926 *Negation*

²¹ Winnicott D. W. 1967 *Le rôle de miroir de la mère et de la famille dans le développement de l’enfant. Jeu et réalité*, Paris Payot 1971 p. 153-162.

²² Salomonsson B. 2006 *L’impact des mots sur les enfants souffrant d’une hyperactivité associée à un déficit de l’attention (ADHD). Conséquences pour la technique psychanalytique. Int. J. Psychoanal. Tr. fr. F. Guignard L’Année Psychanalytique Internationale 2007*

²³ Ariès P. 1971 *Histoire des populations françaises et de leurs attitudes devant la vie* Paris Seuil coll. « Point histoire » p. 326.

distressing, be it from a somatic, psychic, societal or climatic origin. In my opinion, societal dimension of such an identity modification needs still much more time, if ever achieved. Even scientific research is impaired by the amount of time required to integrate any change in the way of thinking, especially in the realm of human and social sciences.

To my mind, deconstructing biological sex attribution and biological reproduction are typical Faustian steps. Yet, managing historical migrations and their procession of misfortunes and disasters are rather Promethean steps.

In the future, most children will come from one of these two horizons, and we shall have to invent new ways to help them to foster their precious competences – implicit memory and attention – in order to become something else than a computer.

Whether an embryo starts its career in a uterus or in a test-tube, she is neither responsible for the way she was created, nor for the motives, relational or narcissistic, for which her coming on earth is more or less desired. Not only has she the right to develop in good medical containing conditions, but in good humane containing conditions. And if the more complicated the conditions of conception, of gestation and of becoming parents, the more difficult it is to gather these humane containing conditions, we also have to consider that, the more uncertain and traumatic a baby's first environment, the more difficult it will be for her to overcome the epigenetic inscription of transgenerational trauma²⁴, and to keep working through her implicit memory and her attention towards a symbolised and creative construction of herself and of the world.

The least we can do, as psychoanalysts, is to be at the side of everyone who feels concerned about the future of human beings. We shall need a lot of people and much determination to bring about everybody's qualities and competences to build a new society of *Nebenmenschen* (Freud, 1895²⁵). And this, I am afraid, is rather a Promethean's perspective... Still, I would like to remind you these beautiful words of Leonard Cohen: "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" (*Anthem*).

²⁴ Giacobino A. 2013 Stochasticité : la troisième variable, in : *Revue médicale suisse*, p.396.

²⁵ (Freud, 1950a [1895], p. 318).