

A plea for a third topicality

An intrapsychic representation of the intersubjective bond (link) even before the discovery of the object

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My name is Bernard Golse and it's a pleasure for me to be able to express myself on the question of the mental representation of links and about the interest of a possible topic of links.

Before that, I would like to thank Gaetano Pelligrini, Julia-Flore Alibert and the International Psychoanalytic Association for their confidence in giving me the opportunity to do this podcast in the context of the "Talks on Psychoanalysis".

I must finally apologize because I don't speak a very good english, so I have to speak a little bit slowly.

Introduction

The two topics proposed by S. FREUD, namely the first one (Unconscious/Preconscious/Conscious) and the second one (Id/Ego/Super-ego) formalized from 1920 (onwards), both refer to a conception of the psyche organized into psychic places, or instances, which are the result of a completed process of intrapsychic differentiation.

These two topics are obviously still relevant, and we know the heuristic dimension they have from a clinical, technical and theoretical point of view when working with differentiated subjects as children, adolescents and adults.

On the other hand, when we work in the field of perinatality with babies, or with subjects who are still poorly differentiated (such as patients with so-called archaic pathologies and especially autistic ones), these two topics belonging to a metapsychology that is essentially intrapsychic, their use is inevitably subject to caution.

Indeed, if the baby does not impose any renouncement of our usual psychoanalytical mark points (the theory of the drives, the theory of anaclysis and even the theory of the deferred action), its fundamental incompleteness, its

fundamental immaturity - both psychic and physical - require us to rethink the topical point of view about it, which remains by essence strictly intrapsychic.

This is why we are proposing today what we might call a third topic, which would be a topic of the mental representation of the bond, with the double idea - paradoxical in appearance only - that, on one hand, primitive bonds could be invested even before the subject and the object are clearly delimited and that, on the other hand, this pre-object representation is the sine qua non condition of the emergence of the object.

In any case, this is a proposal that we make, knowing that this hypothesis of a third topic has already been evoked by different authors but in other fields than early development.

The topical at the risk of the dyad and the triad

"An infant alone does not exist".

Everyone is familiar with this famous phrase by D.W. WINNICOTT, which implies that the baby cannot be understood outside of the links he forms with its primary environment.

The psychology, psychopathology and psychiatry of the baby have been in full expansion for several decades and our knowledge of dyadic and triadic functioning has greatly developed.

Whoever says dyad or triad, refers ipso facto to the interpersonal register and not to the intrapsychic one.

We know that the historical conditions of the birth of the two great theoretical corpus, psychoanalysis and attachment theory, mean (explain) that the former is basically centered on the intrapsychic register, whereas the latter is centered on the interpersonal one.

These two theoretical corpora were born, in fact, in extremely different historical contexts: the end of the 19th century for psychoanalysis with the enigma of the inside of the object (with the same year, in 1895, the discovery of X-rays by ROENTGEN for the inside of the body and the writing of studies on hysteria by FREUD and J. BREUER for the inside of the psyche), and the end of the 20th century for attachment theory with the problem of interpersonal security and insecurity.

Psychoanalysis is therefore naturally marked by the question of the intrapsychic while attachment theory is centered on the question of the interpersonal and the problematic of security.

The debates between the supporters of psychoanalysis and the supporters of attachment theory were lively.

D. WIDLÖCHER proposed the idea that these conflicts may have been the result of a missed rendez-vous (appointment) between english psychoanalysis and hungarian psychoanalysis.

As a matter of fact, M. BALINT's concept of primary love, could have made it possible to overcome the splitting between the primary nature of attachment and the secondary nature of love according to psychoanalysis.

Whatever these historical reminders may be, it is clear to see the impasse of an intersubjective topic (dyadic or triadic) including a baby whose internal world is not yet sufficiently differentiated to allow that the metapsychology concerning him could really be intrapsychic.

Now, I would like to say some words about the question of

Representing the link before representing the object

This proposal is much less paradoxical than it seems, especially if we consider the genesis of the links in perinatality.

When we speak, as it is classic and frequent, of object representation, this concept often appears to be too global, too macroscopic, and it is undoubtedly useful to decompose, to deconstruct, to diffract it into several distinct levels, at least three.

The representation of the place of the object is one thing, the representation of the links to the object is another one, and the representation of the object itself is yet another one.

1) The place of the object

The place of the object probably has its own level of representation and there are several arguments to support this idea.

- Those of us who work in nurseries know well, for example, that children placed from birth for adoption seem to have the idea of what "a parent" is very quickly, if not immediately.

Certainly, after some time they may have the opportunity to observe visits from other children's parents, but the question is deeper.

The neotenous baby may have a kind of innate representation of the other who is necessary for him, the helpful other, the "Nebenmensch" of the psychoanalysis without whom he cannot live and which he fundamentally needs in the

framework of the "fundamental anthropological situation" proposed by J. Laplanche.

- This is probably what W.R. Bion wanted to evoke with his concept of preconception.

When W.R. Bion talks about the breast, he sometimes said: "The baby seeks the breast where it is accustomed to be".

This strange but stimulating phrase perhaps does not mean that he seeks it on the mother's body according to the memory traces he has of each feeding or according to an instinctive attraction by the smell of the milk, but rather that he seeks it at this very location of which he would have a sort of proto-representation.

Otherwise, we know that for W. R. Bion, the proto-representation can only become an effective representation when it meets in external reality the object that corresponds to it and which stabilizes it through the emotional experience of this meeting.

- This is also what S. Missonnier (2009) takes into account when he speaks of the register of the virtual in relation to the 'first chapter of life' that pregnancy represents.

He even speaks of a virtual object relationship, which is generally understood to mean the representations that parents may have of their unborn child and which correspond in part to what has been described as the 'imaginary child'.

But perhaps we should also consider that the fetus, for its part, may also have the possibility of investing a proto-representation of its future parents, proto-representations of functions, of course, rather than this or that more or less figurative static characteristics...

- In the field of art, among many other possible illustrations of the importance of the place of the object, we could mention:

- "The Desert of the Tartars" written by Dino Buzzatti (1949), a book in which the hero spends the whole of his life scanning the horizon until death, the horizon where he thinks an improbable enemy army might emerge
- the theft of "The Mona Lisa" from the Louvre Museum in 1911, following which, between 1911 and 1913, D. Leader (2011) tells us that there are never been so many visitors to see the empty place of this painting, more visitors than to go and admire this masterpiece itself which nevertheless attracts crowds!

- and the temporal place finally of the object in the work of Jorge Luis Borges (1993).

2) The representation of links to the object then constitutes another level of object representation

2.1) Even before this debate, S. Lebovici, as early as 1960, had this somewhat enigmatic sentence: "The object can be invested before it is perceived".

We could also say about the game of Fort/da: the string (as a link) is invested before the reel itself...

A first reading of S. Lebovici's sentence can be made according to the axis of narcissistic-objectal equilibrium (balance) in the sense that the object can be invested while it is still perceived as a part of oneself (as a narcissistic object) before it is truly perceived as external to oneself (as an objectal object).

Another reading of this sentence can also be made in relation to the theory of attachment with, here again, the idea that one can become attached to an object that is still experienced as indistinct from oneself, which would give to the first attachments the subjective value of self-attachments.

In any case, this investment in the object before it is perceived as such, appears in some way as the opposite of the desobjectalizing drive studied by A. Green (1986) as the death drive.

For this author, the desobjectalization of the object would be the consequence of a devitalizing investment, whereas for S. Lebovici, it is the vitalizing investment of the pre-object that would prepare the objectalisation of the latter in the perspective of a life drive.

2.2) The concept of interaction representations

The concept of interaction, emblematic of the general theory of systems, is today, as we know, at the heart of all the studies and research concerning the baby and the beginnings of its development and the concept of interaction obviously refers to the question of the link.

We often talk about the observation of babies by adults (according to Esther Bick's setting for instance) but we forget to say that the baby is himself a great observer of the adults who take care of him, his caregivers.

The baby observes us carefully, he is a great clinician of our affects and of our emotions.

This observation of the mother by the baby and its work of evaluating its differences from the usual, begins in the first six months of life through the attachment system. The baby sends signals, inscribes in his psyche a sort of average of maternal responses in terms of attachment, and at the time of each new interactive meeting with her, he will then "measure" the difference between the present maternal response and these average representations that he has formed of her, average representations that are none other than his future "internal working models" described by I. BRETHERTON (1990).

In the second half of life, this observation of the mother by the baby is done through the analysis of the mother's interactive style, for instance the quality of her affective attunement (D.N. STERN, 1989), which is more or less uni or transmodal, more or less immediate or deferred, more or less attenuated or amplified, and whose intra-psychic internalization will take place at the level of "generalized interaction representations".

If the mother is not as usual (because she is anxious or depressed, for example), the baby is then introduced to tierceity (third-party), since it is better to incriminate a third party than himself at the origin of these maternal modifications.

This question will infiltrate, as we know, all our love stories throughout our lives insofar as it is the question of the difference of the beloved object from what it is usually, will always arouse in us the fear of a rival third party, in the way that, as a baby, we were introduced to tierceity by this question of a variability of the image and functioning of our mother.

As we can see, the attachment system, like the affective attunement system, allows the baby to represent and psychically inscribe the variations in maternal responses, which undoubtedly corresponds to a certain form of representation of the links with the object, but which says nothing about the formal characteristics of the object (is the mother blond or brown, tall or short, fat or thin...)

This is an investment in the variations of maternal responses and not an investment in the mother as an object.

As a result, we can indeed speak of an investment in the pre-object link and this is what I wish to underline here.

To conclude with this level of representation of the links with the object, let us add that G. Haag has often said that in a certain way the baby paints an abstract portrait of his mother, a rhythmic portrait based on the representation of his

dynamic interactions with her, before being able to paint a truly figurative portrait.

In her opinion, this agrees with the hypotheses of A. Leroi-Gourhan (1983) who said that abstract art would in fact be much older in the evolution of humanity than figurative art, as shown by certain paintings discovered in caves long before those of Lascaux, with their scenes of hunting, fishing and war...

So, the idea would be that modernity is in some way a return to abstract art...

3) The representation of the object itself

It is finally this level of object representation to which we intuitively think when we speak of object representation.

It's the level that corresponds in particular to the concept of mental image in the classical sense of the term, image of the other, representations of faces, places, objects ...

The idea proposed here is that this level of object representation would finally be later than the two previous levels of which it would be a sort of resultant or outcome.

Plea for a third topical

From there, if a metapsychology of the dyad or the triad, or an intersubjective topic appear to be unsustainable, can we move towards a perinatal topic of the mental representation of the link?

We are among those who think that it is possible to deal with the perinatal clinic and very young children while having the legitimate claim to remain psychoanalysts in these particular conditions, knowing that it is the metapsychological dimension and the topical dimension that are probably the most challenged by the fetus and by the baby.

How can we think in metapsychological terms about the dyad and the triad with this central difficulty which the passage from the interpersonal to the intrapsychic register is undoubtedly?

Are we right to suppose that the father-mother-baby system is in itself the carrier of the dynamic ability of transposing triadification (in the interpersonal register) into triangulation (in the intrapsychic register)?

Nothing is less certain, in reality, and it is the whole question of interiorization that is raised.

So, a metapsychology of the link is necessary here, which opens up a "third topic" that would allow us to overcome the splitting between interpersonal and intrapsychic.

What, however, is meant by the metapsychology of the link?

The establishment of the psychic apparatus, which is always, whether we agree or not, a representation of the link - in the link and by the link - is played out at the interface of the intersubjective and the intrapsychic, and joint psychotherapies particularly promote the double movement of interiorization and specularization that underlies the passage from the interpersonal register to the intrapsychic register.

We can think that the presence of a third party is, here, necessary.

So, the joint parent-fetus-baby therapy device that we practice at the Necker-Enfants Malades hospital would be, precisely, able to provide the dyad and the triad with a framework acting as an observing and participating third party able to induce this movement of mentalization of the perinatal behavioral interactions.

In any case, it seems to us that the framework of joint therapies offers a fertile paradigm for testing and clinically legitimizing the concept of the third topic.

Joint parent/baby therapies have developed along three distinct lines: psychoanalytically inspired joint therapies, interactive video-feedback guidances and, more recently, attachment therapies.

The question is not so much to know which technique is more effective than another, but rather to specify the differential indications in the sense of "what for whom?".

Following the major research carried out in Geneva in the 1990s by Bertrand Cramer, Francisco Palacio-Espasa and Daniel Stern, it appears that brief psychoanalytically inspired joint parent/baby therapies - which are often conducted by two co-therapists at the rate of one session per week or every fortnight - are particularly indicated :

- when there is a positive pre-transference
- when the parents' projections onto the child are non-psychotic
- and when a relatively recent focus of symptoms can be clarified beforehand.

Today, we can probably add that psychoanalytically inspired joint therapies are best suited to parents who can see themselves in words, while interactive

guidances with video-feedback is best suited to parents who see themselves mainly in images.

Within this framework of joint therapies, we can then imagine that it is precisely the psychic work of the third party, either the therapist or the co-therapists, which plays a decisive role in opening the way to the investment of this pre-object link.

Although it is undoubtedly still too early to know whether this framework of action will provide or not decisive elements for reflection, it is however already plausible to affirm that the father-mother-baby system targeted by perinatal joint therapies provides an ante-natal prefiguration and then a post-natal figuration of the future intrapsychic triangulation.

Therefore, they can claim (pretend) the status of "psychoanalytical" as soon as the material collected is interpreted in reference to the concept of trans or intergenerational.

And now, some concluding remarks about the question of demand

The pre-object investment of the link accounts for the movement towards the outside (what we call an intransitive demand) even before the other is identified as such, which is clear in the context of the treatment of autistic children (as shown by G. HAAG).

In the light of the permanent process of construction/deconstruction of the object, the intransitive demand would not be addressed to the object but it would already attest an investment of this intersubjective pre-objectal link whose we are trying to trace the intrapsychic representation thanks to the concept of the third topic.

This type of demand seems to us essential to be heard specifically with parents during pregnancy, with babies, with autistic children and in some cases with adolescents.

Of course, the counter-transferential challenges of this type of demand are important since it would be a question for the therapist to accept to regress himself beyond his status of object in order to find and hear the non-object-oriented link in the framework of archaic pathologies.

It is indeed in this respect that the discussion of this third topic of the link and the polymorphic metapsychology of its traces in the transference and

countertransference can inspire the psychoanalyst in his daily clinic of all ages of life.

To conclude, if in the course of development, the link is primary at both the intersubjective and intrapsychic levels, the absence of a link is not freedom, far from it, but rather an a-lienation.

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