

The impact of reality on the psychoanalytical treatment and on the work of renunciation of the patient and the analyst

Which are the realities involved in the cure?

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The notion of intrusive reality is often used in psychoanalysis and it is then associated with the idea of irruption and break-in. Several terms are thus linked: reality, intrusion, irruption and break-in.

In this podcast, I will broach the question of the irruption of a reality qualified as intrusive, having effractive effect, and its consequences on the session work, in particular the effects on the work of renunciation for both the analyst and the patient.

The choice of this theme was obviously influenced by the recent past, namely, the irruption of a pandemic. We can also infer some overdetermination emanating from the past, reminiscences of plagues which trickles down over the course of time even at the level of civilizations.

A law of mental life is thus enacted by this interlocking of temporalities which concerns the work carried out by the mind to deal with traumatic experience, whether it comes from inside the mind or whether it is awakened by external realities. This law concerns the utilization of a recent traumatic experience in order to deal with an old traumatic experience, the recent and the old being correlated with each other by games of mutual analogy and denial, with a transposition of the past onto recent events and an awakening of the past by recent events, but also with a concealment of the past by the present and vice versa.

In order to identify which reality can be described as intrusive, we first need to look at the psychoanalytic conceptions of the notion of reality and to differentiate between the reality of sensory perception, psychic reality proper including the reality of perceptual identity as we are familiar with it in dreams, the reality of the mind with the instinctual drive unconscious and the unconscious of processes; but also the reality of the psychic functioning of those who serve as identificatory supports for the setting-up of psychic life, the parents, and then as supports of the transference during a treatment, the analyst and the objects of lateral transference. It is also necessary to add the reality of the links and correspondences between these diverse realities: the correlations, transpositions, metaphorizations, identifications and confusions that are made between them.

Each of them can in addition give rise to other differentiations. For example, the sensory reality of perception can be broken down into tangible reality and the reality of lack. The first, the tangible reality, gives rise to traces that are capable of becoming thing-presentations, while the second, the reality of lack, is at the origin neither of traces nor presentations; it therefore calls for a work of thought with its emotional and sensual feelings. Both these realities, tangible reality and the reality of lack, are referred to by specific words in language, but the reality of lack is heterogeneous with the linguistic signs referring to it. Language, in itself, introduces a potential for denying the reality of lack. Due to the very fact of its positivity as a sign, the sign zero denies the reality of zero. Idem with the discourse on negativity, erasure and extinction. We are touching here on the insurmountable limits of language. With regard to the lack, all language is a negation.

Other differences concern the realities of which the mind is composed, psychic reality, consisting of imaginary productions, phantasies and formations of the unconscious, and the reality of the mind, consisting of the drives and processes at the basis of psychic work and identifications, these others that inhabit us.

At the heart of all these differences, the key difference within the mind is that which exists between the regressive tendency of the drives towards extinction and the tendency to produce psychic contents under the aegis of an imperative of registration.

Correlations exist between these various realities. Sensory perceptions are used by the unconscious components of the mind. Thus, the imperative to construct psychic contents utilizes tangible realities, while the extinctive tendencies are transposed on to the perceptions of lacks. This key difference within the mind is classically approached in psychoanalysis by means of the sensory reality onto which it is transposed, in this case the difference of the sexes, which in fact combines two pairs of differences, the feminine-masculine pair and the pair endowed/unendowed.

I am well aware that I am presenting you with a high degree of complexity, but it is necessary if we want to broach the notions of intrusion, effraction and irruption.

Thus, transposing what is endogenous on to external sensory reality, allows us to give greater complexity to the title given by Freud to his article of 1925, "Some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes". The opening of our eyes towards the difference of the sexes, its awareness, takes place after a transposition of the internal difference between the extinctive tendency and the imperative of registration on the anatomical reality of the sexes. Like the Oedipus complex, this opening of the eyes occurs for reasons that are

above all internal, and according to a temporality that is specific to them, consisting of various moments of denial, feelings, causal theories, misrecognition and recognition. The initial denial is shattered in successive stages during which it is replaced by psychic work which ultimately makes possible the discovery of the said difference of the sexes. The title of Freud's above-mentioned article thus becomes: Some psychical consequences of the transposition of an endogenous difference onto the difference of the sexes at the anatomical level. There are links between denial, the shattering of denial, transposition of the internal onto the external, an intrusion and break-in of the internal by the external, but also a break-in by an intrusion coming from the inside.

The experience of effraction therefore accompanies every shattered denial and the traumatic quality that accompanies it depends on whether or not the mind has the possibility of realizing a psychic work of latency. Theories of trauma that incriminate external reality alone and that conceive traumatic experience as a trauma of external origin are at the root of phobias. The externalization of the unconscious internal realities is the first stage of the process of *après-coup*, a two-stage process realized by the mind in response to traumatic experiences. This first stage produced all phobias since the childhood. This dynamic is then replaced by a latency and a regressive work of the latency.

This transposition onto an external tangible reality is accompanied by a causal theory attributing this external reality with the responsibility for the traumatic experience. This is the first stage of the psychic elaboration of the endogenous difference. The latter utilizes the two differences forming the difference of the sexes, the pair feminine-masculine and the pair tangible-lacking. The two terms of the first pair pertain to the tangible and its two categories, the visible and the sensible, while the second pair links the tangible and lack. The latter may be described as traumatic owing to the correlation that exists between the perception of lacks and the tendency to extinction at the origin of traumatic experiences.

These correlations play a role in initially concealing the endogenous traumatic reality. They externalize the internal traumatic dimension as an external danger according to the phobic rationales of childhood. Anxiety and fright are transformed into fear and terror. The creation of irrational causal theories completes this misrecognition through externalization. An external object becomes dangerous and responsible for castration which is the result of an act of excision. This is the function of infantile sexual theories, namely, to provide explanations concerning the origin of lacks. They treat them as the consequence of a sexual act that is supposed to lie at the origin of the pair endowed/unendowed. Castration is an infantile theory

that accompanies the correlation between the extinctive tendency and the perception of lack inherent to the difference of the sexes. These theories reduce in a first time the difference of the sexes to the pair endowed/unendowed. The tangible pair masculine-feminine can only appear in a second time, after a period of regressive work on traumatic experience, a period of latency occupied by the work of latency. We can recognize here the genesis of the third primal phantasy, namely, castration by the father, and of the *neurotica* with the incrimination of a seducer.

It is this act that is supposed to produce castration, thus a break-in, which is conceived in terms of scenarios of intrusion, invasion, being captured, penetration, possession, violation, etc., giving rise to agoraphobias of being penetrated-intruded upon (for example by snakes, etc.), but also of being absorbed-captured (as in the Novel of Maurice Pons, *Rosa*, or by moving sands). It is easy to notice that these theories are linked analogically to masculine and feminine erogenous sensibilities and to the act of penetration of the coitus: penetrating/being penetrated, capture-being captured. Hence the theories of intrusion and captivus, both conceived as acts through which break-in and castration occurs.

In both cases, they are false theories from the point of view of the reality of the anatomical difference of the sexes. This is not the result of a castration. But these theories express the psychological truth at grips with the traumatic dimension of extinctive drive regressivity.

What we see in the first stage of *après-coup* is a sexualization of the traumatic factor which has the value of a hallucinatory wish-fulfilment, an assumption of *jouissance*. Moreover, if castration is a consequence, it is possible to act on the cause.

Subsequently, the denial of the traumatic factor as reality will be broken. In the meantime, the detour through the infantile sexual theories will have taken place. External reality first has an animistic value, it is a drive representative, waking perception and oneiric perceptual identity being indistinguishable; then, later on, external reality is conceived as an obligation to carry out a drive renunciation.

This sexualization is a necessary detour in order to be able to recognize the existence of the endogenous traumatic reality as such, whether or not it is induced by external reality, and to recognize the work that it requires. This recognition is the true principle of reality. It consists of a renunciation involved in any test of reality.

When this period of regressive work is endangered, traumatic experiences of break-in by intrusion and capture dominate.

When such traumatic experiences are awakened, whether it has been anticipated or not, it is always envisaged as having been preceded by a denial. It is felt to be the consequence of this

shattered denial. Hence the intense activity after the event of reconstructing a past reality without denial that had supposedly made it possible to avoid the traumatic incident. Another world must be built. The dream succeeds in doing this for a few hours, and then waking up reminds us that the dream work is not enough. Of course, anticipation dampens the traumatic dimension, but it does not do away with it. Denial of the reality of lack is, in fact, continually active in a subdued way in each of us. It is flexible, reversible and useful.

The terms of irruption and intrusion account for this relationship to denial and the regular shattering of denial; the first shows that an anticipation should have existed, while the second introduces a theory about the origins of traumatic experience. In the session, experiences of irruption and intrusion, whether or not they are provoked by a chance event, are in turn conceived as emanating from internal and/or external causes. For some patients, dreams are emanations of their psychic reality which is unknown to them. They sometimes try to minimize their strangeness by appropriating them and treating them as a source of inspiration. Others experience them as an “external” reality breaking into their psychic life from the inside; hence the frequent accusation that dreams break sleep.

In the case of the pandemic, in the West, the outside was immediately incriminated in the form of a virus, or an animal, of a laboratory, of a programmed extermination for the purposes of power. But gradually, as the earlier denial was taken into account, the interplay of correlations between inside and outside was reintroduced. The castration complex rediscovered its causalities, that of unconscious guilt by the punitive rationale, and that of the drive by the aspirations to infinite enjoyment.

A difficulty appears for the psychoanalyst, who must accept that the shattering of the denial is initially replaced by a transvaluation of the external reality that serves to metaphorize the internal realities and to maintain the denial. There is, indeed, a risk of utilizing this sexualization to reestablish the denial, to avoid taking into account real external dangers and to continue to ignore the internal part of experiences of threat.

In the West, the “never again” concerning the atrocities of the two world wars of the 20th century implicating human beings was accompanied by a denial related to epidemics. We recall every year the horrors of the trenches and of the mustard gas of the first world war, and we commemorate the 20 million dead. But we are silent about the fact that the Spanish ‘flu killed between 2.5% and 5% of the population, at least 50 million people according to the WHO. If Covid-19 were to kill 2.5% of the current population of 8 billion humans, that would amount to two hundred to two hundred and fifty million dead!

The denial of a past can thus be continued by an exacerbation of the trauma of a present event.

Civilized countries think they are exempt from pandemics thanks to civilization, medicine, hygiene and vaccines. The denial continually shifts from one object to another.

The shattering of this denial had multiple consequences. The protocol of sessions had to be rearranged on the basis of physical distancing; hence the actualization of phobias of touching, and a modification of the analyst's work of abstinence. My intervention might have been called intrusion and the work of abstinence.

Of course, experiences of dangerous intrusion occupied associations. Then, the intruder was the object of a work of displacement and condensation. The associations have regained circulation.

The intruder could be envisaged current but also a matter of the memory; internal, taking possession of the subject, and external, irrupting in the form of a disturbing event, impeding the unfolding of the sessions to a greater or lesser extent.

The shattering of the denial promoted experiences of returns from the outside. The outside became dangerous. Families shut themselves in, the intra-familial Oedipus complex was denied and that of castration externalized. The number of infanticides increased.

Whatever the triggering factor of the traumatic experience is, whether it is external or internal or internalized by way of identifications, the experience of break-in by the way of irruption or capture, always means that the event has paralyzed the work of mentalization due to its intensity. But to respond to the threat of loss, the mind creates intensity and utilizes intensity in order to feel it exists. The more reality imposes itself in the session by a valency of danger, the less it allows the regressive psychic activities required by the regressive tendency to unfold, and the more the call for intensity attempts to saturate consciousness with the aim of denying any sensation of loss. This is particularly true with extremely clear dreams.

In such circumstances, external reality is used to objectify the theories I have referred to. These then lose their value as psychic theories and are replaced by beliefs of objective causality.

Thus, even when it is a matter of the impact of external reality on the mind by means of sensory perceptions during the sessions, and even when the external reality imposes itself and impedes any form of mentalization and deprives the subject of his dreams, we need to think about the correlations between the intra and extra. Of course, they are inaccessible at the time, one of them being used to saturate consciousness in such a way that the other is denied. But analysts are guardians of mental life. And we must respect, even encourage this period of immobilization of the correlations and of the necessary temporary denials.

These states of traumatic neurosis need the restoration of the desire to dream, to deny and to ignore. These desires become the object of our work, the object of our interpretations. They have the value of a renunciation without mourning. To deny is the first stage of renunciation of the aspirations to extinction. This stage is indispensable so that a renunciation with mourning can then exist, a renunciation that promotes the investments of the objects.

It is therefore necessary to allow the patient to find the time needed for this immobilization to yield and to be replaced gradually by moments of latency in the service of the regressive psychic activities of passivity, including dreams, until the process of *après-coup* is realized.

Of course, these remarks refer to other very specific situations, in particular the torture that hounds a subject into the corners of his masochism, depriving him of latency, sleeping and dreaming to the point of obliging him to resort to solutions beyond the pleasure principle. We also meet genocidal rationales, incessant and harassing pursuits and privations inflicted at a rhythm that prevents any process of renunciation.

This situation also evokes fortuitous private circumstances in which the subject finds himself confronted with successive bereavements at a rhythm exceeding his capacities for mourning.

The process of *après-coup* can no longer fulfil its mission which is to modify the regressive economy and its extinctive tendency, and to use it in order to register in the mind a share of new regenerative libido, a bonus of desire.