

The Same, the Other, and the Different

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The question of identity constitutes a central issue today whose different approaches allow for the establishment of multiple configurations that are sometimes contradictory or even paradoxical. In what ways can psychoanalysis contribute to the study of this central issue equally at both the individual and collective level?

First, an in-depth analysis of the future of an essential principle of psychoanalysis must take place, one that sets the difference between the sexes as the foundation of the psyche, in its dynamics and most fundamental privacy. It is a process of unravelling the tendency to focus too concretely on sexuality in the reality of its practice and fails to fully consider its psychic and unconscious components, by neglecting the vibrancy, even violence, of the internal conflicts that it incites. These same shifts determine the thought processes that have been supported by the evolution of the practice and the psychopathology that accounts for the major changes in the current state of psychoanalysis, which is moving toward the increased importance of narcissistic and depressive suffering, grouped together under the term “identity issues.”

This will require sometimes radical modifications of theory and method in which early stages of life, early relations, and how they manifest take a strong lead. In this regard, a certain confusion about the conception of “the archaic” emerges from the fact that regression is insufficiently factored in during and after the fact, which results in otherness drowning out that which is different. Essentially, if the question of limits and the states that stigmatize them are defined by the insecurity of the boundaries between within and without, and by the porosity of the envelopes, which leaves an opening for intrusions, projections, and the combination of the two, then the interest and the psychoanalytic listening process primarily focus on the differentiation between the self and the other, between subject and object, though these latter terms are not clearly defined. The confounding of time, so valuable throughout the analysis when it is formed as a product of transference, loses its gravity and is reduced to points of fixation held in chronological temporality. The other then comes to represent that which is not the self, the fellow-creature or the stranger, identified as a “not-me” whose sexual component is suppressed. The difference between the sexes becomes secondary in a way, set in the background, and as such, it is set aside; this representation, namely the Oedipus complex, is the most well-known, but also the most normalized and thus the most deformed.

Supporting this trend within the psychoanalysis, numerous works about narcissism and depression often condemn approaches that are too focused on sexuality, which may neglect the vital contribution of the first stages of life, a movement that strangely echoes cultural pressures. From these transformations of the clinical field – which one could believe to be very linked to the expansion of psychoanalysis’ direction – one very quickly moves toward Freudian metapsychology, the need to expose the gaps in its understanding, the obligation to fill them, or even abandon them due because of their obsolete nature.

It's as if, for example, “sexual liberation” had definitively resolved not so much the symptoms, but rather their causes, which would then be explored after the fact.

As such, one risks forgetting the two large movements throughout Freud's body of work, organized by two paradigms – hysteria, for one, and narcissism and melancholy for the other. From the first comes

Freud's first topic and first drive theory which sets self-preservation drives and sexual drives opposite from each other, and the other paradigm links the second topic and the opposition between the drive to live and the drive to die. The first follows the path of pleasure, satisfying one's desires, and getting better, while the second encompasses masochism, pain, repetition compulsion, and the rejection of healing. No analyst can reject this two-fold path and the necessity to admit its dual nature without excluding either one.

All the arguments are already there, as well as all the promises that, according to Freud, facilitate understanding of how contemporary analysis could compel us to change our references, adopt a myriad of new concepts, and invent a new analytic language. Is it necessary, then, to forget the origins, or deep roots of thought and the analytic method? Can we not lean on our identifications and that which remains and is retained of lost objects? And, if we can admit it, if we can recognize it, should we not return to the question of sexuality, watch over its future, and respect its examination?

We can follow the progress of a movement that, based on narcissistic excesses of melancholy, seeks other forms of seduction and masochism, and of activity and passiveness. In effect, these are the same sexual movements that organize these configurations. And there is another logic behind it, that of the difference that supports and affirms, beyond otherness, the existence and awareness of internal objects within networks of sexuality, no matter the extent. The oedipal is not used exclusively in the most structuring configurations: referring to the difference between the sexes and generations does not mean that they themselves are psychically accepted without hesitation or even confusion. This also isn't to say that we are therefore systematically confronted with fusional and dependent infantile fixations, like an *infans* in distress, always searching for another fellow-creature, without other forms of expectation other than the satisfaction of the self-preservation drive. The infantile is sexual and remains that way: in the treatment of adults, it is never confined exclusively to the most disturbed zones of indifference. The infantile inevitably faces the difference between sexes and generations; it more or less adapts to it. This does not at all presume object choice in the reality of love life. Bisexuality, this immense Freudian construction, is always just as persistent and only leans "a little bit more" to one or the other; it does not signify the confusion of the sexes, but signals the existence of both, masculine and feminine, and their configurations that are both singular and plural at once.

Which similarities or paradoxes are discovered during analysis between the same and the different, for one, and the private and the foreign for another? In a bit of a simple or hurried way, we may think that the private relates to that which is unique, and that which appears and assembles at the highest point of convergence, setting the foreign apart from the different, that which interrupts, derails, or takes over, precisely because they are not the same. Effacement, as an attempt to negate the different and move towards the same, is most clearly shown in the effacement of the difference between the sexes, which is at least the most "visible." The classic construction of seduction fantasies, at the origin of their underlying theory, is quite the opposite of separation, as it is dissymmetry that creates trauma from the first Freudian theory: the difference between sexes and generations scorned by the perverse actions of an incestuous father.

The paradoxical synthesis of this fundamental principle of psychoanalysis organizes that movement towards fantasy, and its translation into fiction, and, in the edification of the "nuclear" complex of Oedipus, finds a route towards resolution through the establishment of incest and murder taboos: the mix of the two does not yield to separation. Another logic about the different is established, alongside the former, yet does not exclude it: jealousy, when it manifests, can be useful to oppose the deleterious effects of idealization and the negation of differences, as it is (sometimes obsessively) attached to wanting what the other has, and what the self is deprived of. The closest person, the

friend, the brother, becomes the enemy, and serves as the primary target of hatred: his qualities, as far as what they reveal about him that the self lacks, are sources of danger and threat as soon as his powers of seduction come into play. Repulsion is attraction's faithful companion and fear is close by, which transforms this differing other into the persecutor. The biblical tale of Cain and Abel opens the abyss of unfathomable repetition because it appears to be separate from sexual rivalry, though only in appearance: that which creates the distance, the difference between the two brothers, is in fact the "little bit more" love given to one over the other in a configuration that remains triangular. Yet, it is in the inequality of love, in the part that imagined to be withheld, where the hatred of difference is formed. Between Cain and Abel, to what extent do we discover the traces left by genuine sexual identifications, one more feminine than the other, the innocent victim and the persecutor?

The session is full of these possible representations, where extreme privacy connects with a radical strangeness, and this dual movement manifests between the two partners, by calling confusion between these two opposites into play: the within and the without are prone to mobilizing precisely when the analysis is not enough to construct the difference in its sexual essence. In that sense, I do not find the sex of the analyst, like the sex of the patient, to be irrelevant: not that it lends itself to the unique qualification of transference, maternal or paternal, definitively masculine or feminine - the identificatory synthesis is indeed there to signal the infinite complexity of the event - but because there is something of the same or the different initially present, which can only manifest in the representation of the other, simply defined as one who comes from outside.

Maybe that which is private should remain out of reach, out of the range of a foreign ear; maybe it should not extend beyond the boundary of the self. The effect that privacy has does not belong to us: if the movement behind it strongly reverts to a driving factor that pushes towards affect expression, it remains uninterpretable as an act of transference. There lies its virtue as a paradox: it reveals secrets and keeps the intention behind them intact. That said, it appears to me, in the force that constitutes a "being-with," actively participates in the construction of the story of a singular analysis. In my opinion, this unique history created by both the analysts and the patient establishes the nexus of privacy, which is so difficult for us to transmit or communicate without being immediately seized by the fear of betrayal. Fiction is thus the most suitable way to testify to the experience, undoubtedly because its status as fiction creates distance from the idea of betrayal. Paradoxically, it enables an approach towards the experience, and not the truth, insofar as what is experienced.

The same paradox essentially governs the analysis: secret thought is a necessity for the psyche and is crucial to the analytic method. How can these two constraints be reconciled? It is in between them that private invokes dreamy thought: it involves the recognition of the right to keeping secrets by transgressing it. It speaks to the boundaries between the self and the object, the meeting between the familiar with the foreign, but also between masculine and feminine. It erects a private theater showing representations to the analyst, the privileged and solitary spectator, who is included through the discovery of their humanity and role of "human witness," snatched from the divine spheres of omnipotence by their gender: the limits of possible transference, the deformation involved, and its incomplete nature ensure the viability of privacy and its inevitable inability to be communicated. These are the qualities that characterize the question of gender: separation ensures that not everything can be said or heard until, even beyond otherness, the difference between men and women is accepted.

Translated from the French by Benji A. Muskal