

Fear of the feminine dimension and its conquest in adolescents of both sexes

Jacqueline Schaeffer

"There is one particularly constant relation between femininity and
instinctual life."
S. Freud (1933a: 116)

The sudden emergence, at puberty, of bodily aspects in psychosexuality appears both as a breaking-through and as a deferred action process. On the one hand, the sexed body is awakened by the biological and hormonal upheaval of that period and has to deal with what I have called a drive-related "nourishing break-in" (Schaeffer 1997a) which both does violence to the ego and, assuming all goes well, enhances it and channels it towards further growth. On the other hand, this awakening of the second stage of the two-phase development of human psychosexuality reactivates the Oedipal conflict, with its anxiety about incestuous enactment, and gives rise to narcissistic and self-identity disruptions. This second stage, however, may facilitate a deferred reorganization of issues that have not been adequately processed in the Oedipal phase itself; over and beyond the inevitable disruption, this moment of crisis can have a positive impact by reworking the earlier cathexes and identifications of the individual concerned.

What in fact emerges at puberty is the erotic feminine dimension, which in all adolescents, boys as well as girls, suddenly breaks its way in.

The feminine interior

For both males and females, the basic terror has to do with their proximity to the mother's sexual organ out of which they were born. The overwhelming upsurge of the instinctual drives can never be satisfied; it is terrifying insofar as it implies devouring, i.e. being swallowed up by the maternal body, which is both an object of fear and the paradise lost of fusion / confusion.

Theoretically, boys can break free of their mother's hold thanks to the fact that they possess something which their mother does not have: a penis. Consequently, *via* their castration anxiety, they can negotiate the symbolization of a *pars pro toto*. Their paternal identification, too, helps them in this.

Sex (from the Latin *sexus*, with its radical *sectus*) means what has been severed, cut off, separated. Through his possession of a visible penis, the boy can separate from his mother and

differentiate himself from her. It thus implies a frontier, a difference that leads to a representation of the sexual organ and of the difference between the sexes; as such, it can support symbol-formation.

What, however, about the erotic feminine dimension? Is any kind of negotiation possible here? How can an "interior" that represents everything be symbolized, and how can one's own "interior" be separated from that of one's mother? In women and girls, drive-related phenomena are closely tied up with the body, with origins. As Melanie Klein pointed out, the inside of the female body can give rise to anxiety and may be threatened with destruction -- and menaced even more by invasion and intrusion than by something that can be torn away or cut off.

That is why, on the one hand, anal representations of what comes out of the body, of what can be lost and yet renewed, linked together through various transformations (Freud 1917c), and, on the other, phallic representations of castration and the wish for a penis may represent for women and girls positive symbolizing defences against their anxiety about the feminine dimension (Schaeffer 1997b), their anxiety about what comes inside in an invasive manner.

The change of object towards the father with his penis who separates the girl from her pregenital mother enables her to cathect the father's penis and the child that he will give her, etc. The child given by the father, however, belongs to the phallic and anal line of descent -- a gift, a replacement object -- and therefore still remains within the gambit of what I call the *work of femininity*.

What still remains to be symbolized is the "interior", as well as everything that enters therein. This is the *work of the feminine dimension* and has to be accomplished throughout a woman's entire life, in parallel to the symbolic processing of the loss of part-objects to be done, as with men, on what is visible and on the other person's body.

In boys and men, narcissistic hyper-cathexis involves the penis; girls and women cathect their entire body, and they depend for reassurance on the manner in which other people look at them. It is on that basis that I make a distinction between *femininity* -- external appearance and seduction -- and the *feminine dimension*, which has to do with what is inside.

Breaking free of seduction and the grip of the maternal imago

In the phallic stage, children try to break free of the hold which the maternal imago has on them. That stage, in which the penis is narcissistically over-cathected, is one that both girls and boys go through, because it is one way for them to break free of the grip that the pregenital maternal imago has on them.

In boys, sexuality is destined to be one of conquest and penetration; supported by their anal aspects and their castration anxiety, boys usually turn towards activity and keeping control over any waiting they have to do.

Girls, on the other hand, are fated to wait: they wait for a penis, then for breasts, their periods -- the first time, then every month thereafter -- penetration, a child, delivery, weaning, and so forth. Girls never stop waiting. Most of these waits involve uncontrollable experiences of *real* loss of parts of themselves or of their objects (menstruation and delivery, for example); these are difficult to symbolize, unlike in boys, in terms of anxiety about losing an organ which in reality is never actually lost. At the same time, there is a great deal of upheaval to their narcissistic economy, hence the need for a sound basis in primary masochism which, as Freud (1924c: 164) put it, "still has the self as its object", thereby enabling the individual to experience him- or herself directly, with no mediation. Thus libidinal co-excitation, which eroticizes pain, is for girls a permanent need to re-appropriate their own body, given that its successive feminine sexual changes are specifically linked to the maternal feminine dimension.

Puberty

Puberty generates an overwhelming influx of libidinal urges. The ego of self-identity and that of the defences find it difficult to deal with this, and may even feel threatened by it. Internal excitation is continuous. Castration anxiety linked to changes in the body, the sudden emergence of genitality, feelings of narcissistic incompleteness and confusion between imagos reactivate anxiety about becoming merged with the maternal body; the potentiality for achieving sexual intercourse reawakens the fantasy threat of incest. All of these anxieties require a differentiated reorganization of the imagos and call for a new change of object.

Seduction fantasies may take on a persecutory note. Adolescents have to maintain some distance between themselves and their parents -- they no longer put up with the cuddles and caresses they used to like so much, and the outside world frightens them. All of this may lead to counter-phobic and defiant behaviour, or they may close in on themselves -- or perhaps even slide into addictive, delinquent, etc. behaviour.

The Oedipal conflict is rekindled and anxiety relating to the feminine dimension has to cope with the difficulty of disentangling it from its pregenital counterpart. The shift from pregenital anxiety about intrusion to genital anxiety about penetration is often characterized by rape fantasies.

The urges of puberty emerge long before any capacity to integrate sexual relationships has been adequately worked out. As Winnicott suggested, sexual activity is more a way of getting rid of sexuality than of trying to experience it in any real sense.

It is when adolescent girls cathex sexual penetration and the eroticism of the vagina that defects in internalization and threats of narcissistic breakthrough may once again come to the fore. In such cases, puberty will have a traumatic impact and will call into question the outcomes of earlier arrangements and repression.

The mainly female pathologies of anorexia and bulimia have to do with anxiety about the feminine dimension -- the body's openings and closings -- and bear witness to the fact that this has not been adequately processed. The bulimic person responds by filling everything up, while the anorexic shuts down all openings and outlets. Becoming pregnant at an early age may also be a way of filling oneself up and shutting down all the outlets.

The sudden emergence of the female sexual organ

The great discovery brought about by puberty is that of the vagina which, according to Freud (1925j; 1931b), remains unfamiliar to both sexes all through childhood because of the intense phallic cathexis -- the narcissistic cathexis of the penis, the only sexual organ known to children. Freud built his theory of the castration complex around this. The vagina is not recognized as such by children -- it is not that little girls do not realize that they have a hollow, a slit, but the fundamentally erotogenic nature of that organ can be revealed only through a sexual relationship of ecstatic pleasure.

The phallic organization is based on an infantile sexual theory, that of a single sexual organ, the phallic penis. Freud constructed a phallogocentric theory of psychosexual development, and Lacan went on to make it the central signifier of what he called sexuation, of desire and ecstatic pleasure. The phallic organization is a necessary one because it plays the part of a defence against any irruption, during the Oedipal phase, of the discovery of the difference between the sexes.

On the other hand, at puberty, it is not the perception of the difference between the sexes and the enigma of the relationship between the parents that burst forth -- what now comes to the fore is the female sexual organ, the vagina, which can no longer be denied. Adolescent girls begin to have "extra" things -- no penis will grow on their body, but breasts do. The whole feminine dimension now breaks through -- its sudden emergence, indeed, means that "Throne and Altar are in danger", as Freud put it (1927e: 153).

This sudden emergence of the feminine dimension at puberty redefines the issues to be dealt with. The castration complex is no longer what it used to be: anxiety is not exclusively related to losing the penis or to not having one. For the adolescent boy, it has to do with how to make use of his penis in sexual intercourse. For the adolescent girl, anxiety involves how to live through these bodily transformations that no longer concern simply something that is missing -- because

now her breasts are developing -- but pull her dangerously close to the primal scene and fulfilment of incestuous wishes. How is the girl to break free of the maternal imago when her body starts to have an even closer resemblance to that of her mother? At that point, girls, who until then used to be more responsive to affectionate cuddles, may feel disgust at their mother's body and refuse any kind of bodily contact or seduction. The fantasy analysed by Freud (1919e), "A child is being beaten", shows that the female Oedipal desire for the father, deeply repressed, can be expressed only via masochism. How can a pubertal girl approach her real-life father otherwise than through being maltreated by him and provoking him? How can she avoid running away from him?

The adolescent's sexed body may be experienced as an enemy, foreign and abnormal. Conflicts of identification are very much implicated in this. What other people can see is important insofar as it buttresses the adolescent's quest for self-identity, although the manner in which that self-image is mirrored is both eagerly awaited and violently rejected -- adolescents want to be acknowledged, they want to identify but at the same time they need to dis-identify.

In both sexes, then, how are the fantasies generated by the discovery of this new organ, the vagina, to be processed? The "other" sex -- for everybody, male or female -- is always the female sex. For everybody, the male sex is always the same.

To castration anxiety will be added that of penetration -- for both sexes, but in an asymmetrical way corresponding to the difference between the sexes. The phallic-castrated pairing of the phallic phase will thus have to go through certain necessary steps to construct a masculine-feminine pairing.

Example: a clinical vignette

This session concerns Virginie, a 14-year-old girl; her psychotherapist is in supervision with me. Virginie is in a passionate pairing relationship with her mother, a psychologically fragile woman; her father left when she was 4, and her mother attempted suicide when Virginie was 8 years of age. Since her father's departure, Virginie's mother has had several violent partners who maltreated her. Virginie's father, who comes from abroad, left immediately after the divorce and lives on one of the Pacific islands; he has a female partner, but no other children. Virginie and her father communicate *via* their computers -- she is both flattered by and aggressive towards what she calls "this paper relationship" -- not very long ago, in fact, she managed to tell him that. She does not, however, want to leave her mother and live with her father for, say, a year, because her mother could not go on living without her.

At the beginning of the session, Virginie expresses her anger with her father, who sent her some pearls for her birthday, the kind they make on the island where he lives. Virginie belittles

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the gift, saying: "He's got lots of these, he used to work in a jeweller's, it didn't cost him a penny." She seems to be implying that her father has many women to whom he gives pearls -- there is the notion here of her being vexed on an Oedipal level. In the transference, the issue is to seduce the therapist-mother by showing her that the father is not a desired object.

Virginie: *Something I must tell you about, but I don't dare. My breasts, their size, they're out of proportion, the nipples too. The gynaecologist said that this affects only about one woman in a hundred. [Our regards, in passing, to the gynaecologist's sadism in designating her as abnormal.] I want to see a cosmetic surgeon to get part of the big breast removed. Because I can see what'll happen with boys, I daren't wear an ordinary top and I wouldn't let any boy touch my breasts.*

Therapist: *What does out of proportion breasts mean for you?*

Virginie: *A feminine thing that's unfinished.*

Therapist: *Well, why does a feminine thing that's unfinished have to do with the big breast that must be made smaller rather than with the small breast that might increase in volume?*

Virginie: *I'd rather be flat-chested than have breasts that are out of proportion.*

Therapist: *Flat-chested like a boy rather than being an unfinished girl?*

The therapist's intervention there in fact stopped all working-through rather than encouraging it to continue: not having breasts does not turn you into a boy, because a boy has something else -- a penis. That sends Virginie back to issues revolving around the wish for a penis. The problem with female castration anxiety is, at puberty, the failure to get beyond the phallic defence of the image of the castrated girl through having something "more", the developing breasts, together with the emergence of a truly female sex-organ. The latter is revealed by the flow of menstrual blood, which may be experienced either as a castration or as an advancement, depending on the context of identification with the mother and the father's attitude towards femininity.

Virginie: *I imagine how boys would react if I took my bra off. Adolescents are cruel.*

Therapist: *Cruel?*

Virginie: *They'd make fun of me. Boys of my age, they want to be sure that their thingmy is in good working order and they talk to their friends about it.*

A perfectly adequate projective echo of castration anxiety in boys, who might hurt her narcissistically, and of their need for reassurance in homosexuality. Virginie can thus leave her own anxiety aside for a bit.

Therapist: *Do you think that all boys are like that?*

The therapist is attempting to bring in a paternal image that might be different.

Virginie (in a surprisingly aggressive tone): *I already told you that I don't want to be a carbon copy of my mother (the real mother abandoned by the father, the mother maltreated by her successive partners, the suicidal and masochistic mother). I'm not sure I'll be able to find a boy. Because I'm old enough now, I'm entitled to have that kind of desire.*

Comment:

After the therapist's interpretation, the emergence of aggressiveness against the maternal imago in the transference could be expressed thus: "I want to break free of my mother, of any identification with her and of the hold she has on my body and my sexuality. What's that got to do with you?"

In other words, and still in the transference: "You're my mother and you made such a mess of me because you don't want me to grow into a woman."

Refusal of seduction and of maternal comforting. Only a paternal image can reassure her as to her feminine dimension, by saying to her: "You are desirable, even though your breasts are out of proportion." It is the way boys look at her that counts.

An echo in fantasy of the grievances against her mother, who did not give her a penis, who gave birth to her as a castrated girl and who now castrates her as regards the feminine dimension to which she is entitled. That feminine dimension is prohibited by the pregenital imago of an envious mother attempting to preserve a relationship that is under threat: the homosexual mother / daughter pairing. It is prohibited also by the imago of an Oedipal mother who cannot tolerate her daughter's feminine dimension and who therefore castrates her so that there can be no rivalry between them, no rivalry with the daughter to whom the father sends pearls.

Early maternal seduction

How do mothers seduce their children?

Freud wrote of the awakening of erotogenic zones through maternal care-giving on "the firm ground of reality" (Freud 1914d: 17). If that pleasure is shared, we could see in it the first extracting of the sexual drive from and in opposition to the self-preservative drives. The nourishing breast makes way for the erotic breast, thereby both gaining and providing the kind of satisfaction that, according to Freud, is the prototype of orgiastic satisfaction in love.

In what he calls "primary generalized seduction", Laplanche (1987) takes into account the mother's unconscious in the sense that she offers her child enigmatic signifiers, verbal and non-verbal, that are impregnated with unconscious sexual meanings. The enigma experienced by the child, he says, could be formulated in the following terms: "What does this breast, which gets excited as it feeds me, want of me?" The infant at the breast also seduces the mother. According to Laurence Kahn, the enigmatic message from the infant could be expressed thus: "What does this child -- with no limits and quite shamelessly, cannibal, homosexual and incestuous -- want of me?" In this way, what was originally -- though unknown as such to the mother -- the emergence of her own unconscious activity towards her infant, is now turned back on her.

Maternal seduction excites more than just the erotogenic zones. It arouses the infant's capacity to react towards whatever constitutes a surprise. For example, "peek-a-boo" games, the tickles and caresses the mother gives her infant, repeating them then suddenly doing them again when the child is not expecting them. By then holding her baby tightly to her, she will give reassurance, and they will be able to laugh together. That seduction is a kind of initiation ceremony, preparing the infant for the sudden emergence of something new, something strange or unexpected, something that destabilizes, even perhaps with a potentially traumatic dimension. The idea is to contain the increase in excitement within a play area, thereby enabling the infant to follow the path that leads to the transformation of excitation into drive, making it possible to create his or her own play -- the cotton-reel game. The mother is thus simultaneously exciting and a barrier against excitation.

Early maternal seduction is therefore a way of learning about drives and objects. It is an experience of initiation. The sudden break-through of paternal seduction will be its deferred action. Early seduction is part of a movement that structures the mind and infantile sexuality, while at a later stage seduction reveals whether that structuration has been successful or not.

We could therefore say that seduction underlies every relationship -- all the more so, of course, when that relationship involves dependence.

In the reciprocal seduction between child and mother, there is an exchange of glances in which can be read the promise that each protagonist will fulfil the other's wishes. The impossibility of that fulfilment implies that the promise which is inherent in every seduction can never be honoured -- it can lead only to disappointment and disillusion. The emergence of

sexuality inflicts a narcissistic wound on every human being -- and the infinite hope of reparation to which seduction gives rise is inevitably doomed to disappointment.

When paternal seduction suddenly breaks in

Paternal seduction is formative when it comes at the proper time, in the sense that it enables disillusion with respect to omnipotence and the advent of castration anxiety, the organizer of the Oedipus complex.

Both girls and boys have then to make a change in their choice of object. The testing experience that suddenly erupts -- though in an ultimately nourishing manner in spite of its traumatic impact -- is that of the difference between the sexes. Freud (1927e) described it as the most powerful of all traumatizations, the one that puts "Throne and Altar in danger" and mobilizes in children of both sexes an immense amount of energy for cathexis and counter-cathexis. The Oedipus complex, via castration anxiety, rapidly sets in motion the phallic phase, a road that both sexes have to follow, because it is one of the first ways in which infants can break free of the grip in which the maternal imago holds them and, in doing so, turn towards the father. Boys thus find the haven that is paternal identification, while girls turn to their father and enter into the Oedipal situation like a boat entering harbour.

Things are not quite as simple as that, of course. The Oedipus complex in boys does not simply blow away, and even in that harbour girls are still buffeted by strong gusts of wind. In boys, even when castration anxiety has been channelled into safer zones with the onset of the latency period, it still lies smouldering under the embers and will burst into flame when puberty arrives. In girls, the fantasy of "A child is being beaten" bears witness to the abrupt emergence of the father figure into the feminine form of the Oedipus complex and to the call for a penetrating form of seduction: the fantasy of being "beaten" by the father implies -- regressively and completely unconsciously -- the wish to be "sexually penetrated" by the father. This is a fantasy of a suddenly-occurring seduction, in line with the masochistic nature of feminine erotic desire; this will abruptly re-emerge in adolescence, with all the ego defences, and, on encountering a lover who gives her intense sexual pleasure (Schaeffer 1997a), can lead to a feminine ecstatic dimension.

Paternal seduction thus plays the part of a deferred action which reorganizes early seduction. It includes both features -- it is a breaking-through in the sense of a disruption that may well be traumatic; but it is also nourishing in the sense that it restructures. It is therefore initiatory.

Self-seduction in adolescence

I would suggest that, at puberty, when the Oedipal conflict is reactivated, some degree of reorganization is necessary in order to make a break with earlier sexual cathexes and identifications; in addition, a difficult operation has to be undertaken in which one's own body and sexuality have to be re-appropriated by means of drive-related *self-seduction*.

First of all, this refers to the internal attack of the libido, the internal foreign body, which is the ego's first nourishing break-in.

Becoming an erotic object for oneself implies establishing or reinforcing one's secondary narcissism. This in turn means that libido has to be withdrawn and detached from objects and turned back towards the self. Self-seduction requires a break with the seductive links to the object by turning back towards the self (Freud 1915c). This comes between early maternal seduction and paternal seduction, with a change of object.

It may take the form -- well-known at this point in development -- of a self-seduction that goes through some other person who, whatever his or her gender, is felt to be a kind of *doppelganger* that links internal seduction -- that of the drives -- to an external one, that of a stranger who, *per se*, is troubling. Hence what I would call a *transitional object-person* who may be dropped completely later on, once its function as a transferring *doppelganger* has been carried out. The relationship is homosexed rather than homosexual, because its aim is to avoid having to confront the difference between the sexes, which generates too much anxiety.

At puberty, the seducer is not only external -- the possibility of a traumatic seduction of the child by an adult means that many defensive operations are set up in order to escape such a situation -- but also and above all internal, in the re-awakening and intensification of drive-related urges, in the genital aspects that emerge within the body and in what comes from the internal world: wish impulses, sensations.

The problem for adolescents is the encounter between these two seducers, internal and external, and the intermediate stage of turning back towards the self.

It is important for the seduction fantasy to be processed in a transitional space, which I call self-seduction, in order to enable adolescents to re-appropriate their body and their sexuality, before the forthcoming sudden emergence of seduction by and through the sexuality of another person.

The concept of seduction is based on Freud's work with his hysterical patients and is thus closely related to that of trauma. However, once Freud abandoned his *neurotica* -- the reality of traumatic seduction -- the impact of seduction could be generalized in order to encompass all kinds of intensification of excitation, either linked to a fantasy that generates internal excitation

or triggered by external excitation that reactivates the unconscious scenario. This excess of excitation may threaten the continuity of the narcissistic envelope.

Intensification of excitation can result from anything that causes some disruption in the libido. Every trauma could thus be thought of as seductive since, according to Freud, any disturbance to the body or to the mind liberates a flow of libido. That was how he defined libidinal co-excitation -- "It may well be that nothing of considerable importance can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct" (Freud 1924c: 163, quoting Freud 1905d: 204-5). Adolescents, therefore, may well experience self-seduction through their ongoing search for traumatic break-ins that make them feel they exist: drugs, other addictions, self-harming, dangerous behaviour through which they try to attain some degree of calm...

Rites of passage, "private rituals" of self-sacrifice in which adolescents put their body in danger, sacrificing their body or through their body -- self-harm or anorexia, for example -- are intended to preserve the absolute and exciting representation of self-founding, self-generation.

Self-seduction is an operation, a counter-traumatic manoeuvre that aims at side-stepping the inevitable trauma of adult sexuality -- which, too, has become inevitable; an intermediate situation has to be found because of the anxiety that surrounds confrontation with the parents' sexuality, the primal scene and fantasies of fulfilling Oedipal wishes.

Between the lengthy period in which maternal seduction remains active and the change of object that leads to sexual encounters, adolescents have to tear their body and their sexuality away from the imprint of their mother's grasp in order to re-appropriate them and thereafter abandon them to another "nourishing break-in" of adult seduction, the heir to paternal seduction.

The doppelganger function

Cathecting curiosity is a sexual cathexis. The psychoanalyst who is presumed to think only about sexual matters may immediately be thought of as being a pervert. The analyst's exciting curiosity comes face to face with the adolescent's curiosity and appeals to it. The fantasy of seduction is very much to the fore.

A session with *Benjamin*, a 15-year-old adolescent full of charm and highly intelligent. He is extremely phobic, overwhelmed by anxiety about his body. He feels himself still to be a child, he takes no part in group activities and never gets involved in any dirty talk with his friends. He wonders how to distinguish between friendship and feelings of love for a girl. With a friend who is almost another version of himself, he goes around with others -- including girls, even though he hardly dares approach them. He tells me that he tries to

seduce girls by showing them a photo of himself when he was 4 years old, with his father, then telling them about an accident in which his father almost lost his life. In that way, he makes girls feel compassionate towards him -- he is a bit ashamed of that -- and they confide in him. Then he tells me that, when he was 12, he used to look at very hard-core pornographic websites, of a paedophile and bestial kind, and that he had become addicted to this.

In that adolescent, traumatized by what he "has seen", self-seduction involves "showing himself" to some other person as well as to himself. He shows girls how things were in his childhood, as a kind of transitional space where he can take stock of his wish to seduce them. When he tells me about the pornographic website, he gives me a picture of the traumatic seduction of a child by perverse adults and of the excitation he himself experienced. He puts me through this negative form of seduction, evoking in me feelings of disgust and rejection.

However, the fact that I was able to share these affects with him without either condemning them or taking pleasure in them turned me into a kind of twin version of himself, thereby helping him to break free of these faecalized visions of primal scenes and to detoxify them.

Benjamin thereupon tried to re-appropriate the disruptive aspect of sexuality. He asked: "Why is it that Jules, a guy who's not even handsome or macho, can ask girls 'How well do you suck?' and get off with them? Maybe I'm too romantic, maybe there are things I'll have to learn, I'll have to make an effort."

In a later session, he said: "Since I've been coming to see you, I feel I'm entering into adolescence".

Beatrice, who is 17, brings along her personal diary. I do not read it, of course, but I invite her to tell me about it or to read out some extracts if she wants to. She does that -- so that we thus find ourselves in a situation of reciprocal seduction.

I think that these two adolescents self-seduced through the transference relationship and the acceptance, by the analyst, of their sexuality; there was no seduction or superego-like intervention on the analyst's part, nor did she allow herself to be thrown off track or become worried. Self-seduction was carried out by means of "showing oneself" after each adolescent had shown him- or herself to the other person, and through the turning back on the self of the seduction aimed at that other person.

The therapist thus seems to play the part of a transitional double / object that is pliable and can be discarded -- neither external nor internal object, this enables a shift from breaking free

from the cathexes and identifications linked to the primary objects towards cathecting a sexual encounter. This shift requires a space for self-seduction, thereby allowing for drive re-appropriation and subjectivation.

Towards a further seduction: the initiatory promise of sexual intercourse

Whereas before it was traumatic and a source of anxiety, seduction has by now become something that promotes structuration of the mind and the development of psychosexuality. It can be thought of as the prototype of every relationship between human beings and of life in society.

But how is one to progress towards adult sexuality?

In his *Seducer's Diary*, Soren Kierkegaard shows how the seduction by someone who is one step in front of another person enables the latter to follow a path he or she knew nothing about initially, a path which ends by revealing that person to him- or herself. This, therefore, is an experience of drive introjection and subjectivation -- on condition that there be nothing perverse in the seduction.

The space of self-seduction may lead to the acceptance of a seduction experienced as an initiation into the life of desire, an initiatory promise made by the lover-for-ecstatic-pleasure. The final "nourishing break-in", that of a sexual encounter, can perhaps be worked through as regards the representations involved; it can only be carried out in a *locus* different from the treatment setting itself, on "the firm ground of reality" (Freud 1914d: 17) of sexual intercourse. The therapeutic relationship should provide the conditions for the self to open up to libido and to the other person, for the difference between the sexes to be acclaimed, for the road to genitalization to be started upon and -- this at least is our hope -- for the feminine and masculine dimensions to be accepted by both sexes. This implies going beyond what Freud (1937c: 252) called the "bedrock of the repudiation of femininity".

Love relationships in adolescence

These usually begin with the desire to merge completely with another person; it will later prove difficult to move on from that without paying too high a price. There is the desire to re-enter into the body-to-body situation with the mother and recover an intensely close sensuality - - but now the love object is no longer the maternal object; the body involved is that of another person, a stranger.

The archaic traces of the ecstatic pleasure drawn from the body-to-body situation with the mother will have been transformed by the logic of the Oedipal phallic position. If that is not the case, the desire for such an intimate bond, for being wholly merged with the other person, may

turn into a deadly engulfment by that other person who, on the most primitive level, is always devouring.

Adolescence is a phase, a time for separation.

Erotic experiences may often turn out to be very disappointing – like the similarly deceptive promise contained in the famous "You'll see, once you've grown up....!" "So *that* 's what it was all about....?"

Leaving one's familiar space, going towards other people, towards an unknown person, strange and disquieting yet so attractive -- that is what it is all about.

The girl wants her boy-friend to love her truly; the boy wants to experience sexual and phallic pleasure with his girl-friend. Castration anxiety could hardly ask for less! The former may give her body in exchange for love; the latter may offer love in exchange for that conquest. Both will soon come to realize the limitations of their approach.

Flirting is a typically adolescent activity.

The major issue at this stage, however, has to do with the existence of the second sex, the female sex. What is at stake in flirting with the opposite sex is the feminine dimension with which each person has to come to terms within him- or herself before any other encounter.

Falling in love

The function of fantasy scenarios is to dramatize representations. Falling in love involves two fantasy scenarios via each partner's auto-suggestion (or the suggestion of each influencing the other) in relation to infantile prototypes. As Freud (1921c) noted, a person who falls in love is always highly receptive to suggestion -- hence love at first sight! As the poet André Breton (1937) said, falling in love is meeting someone who tells you about yourself.

Fantasy representation is a way of binding the libido which participates in the emergence of desire and in sexual ecstasy. Before love enters, communicating fantasy scenarios has to do with seduction. It is more difficult to communicate in this way during actual sexual intercourse, because it is a matter of unveiling, sharing or imposing in an erotic way fantasies which are often incestuous or masochistic and which contribute to sexual ecstasy. Eroticism comes into play. No fantasy can properly be called perverse. What is perverse is the grip in which the other person is held, the physical or psychological manipulation brought to bear on him or her.

It is all a question of the polymorphously perverse disposition, normal and acceptable as such, which is part of the psychosexuality of all human beings.

The twofold change of object

According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949), "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". I would argue that the feminine dimension, like its masculine counterpart, at the genital level is not established once and for all at puberty, as Freud (1923e) pointed out, once the person has had sexual intercourse. The bodily transformations and sexual excitation experienced at puberty do not in themselves process the difference between the sexes as far as the psychic apparatus is concerned. One has to wait, as women wait, for the arrival of a "lover-for-ecstatic-pleasure" for there to be a true experience of the difference between the sexes in sexuality.

This is a co-creation, that of a masculine-feminine pairing. In order to maintain that relationship, it has to be worked at all the time, in its association with the constant thrust of the libido.

The indisputable fact of male domination in the organization of any society has, from a psychoanalytic point of view, to do with the necessary phallic paternal function as a symbol that introduces the law-of-the-father, enabling the father to separate the child from the mother and to lead him or her towards social relationships.

In the erotic relationship, I would argue that the lover-for-ecstatic-pleasure is also this separating third party who pulls the woman out of her primitive relationship with her mother. The mother does not give her daughter a penis -- nor is it she who gives her a vagina.

When her lover makes a woman experience sexual ecstasy, the genital relationship enables a fully developed change of object to be carried out: she is taken out of her auto-erotic relationship and away from her primitive mother figure. Thanks to this new object, she can fulfil the promise of the Oedipal father. This is, therefore, a twofold change of object -- from pregenital mother to Oedipal father (i.e. to the genital mother), and from Oedipal father to the lover-for-ecstatic-pleasure.

This object change modifies the kind of submission that is in place: anal submission to the mother, from which the young girl tried to break free through her wish for a penis, becomes libidinal submission to the lover. From time immemorial, men have had to tear girls away from the night of women, from the "queens of the night".

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