

Clinical work with the "tyrannical child"

Reflections on children at the present time

L. Lutereau*

One of typical childhood figures of our time is what might be called the parents "tyrannical child". Who has not seen the recurring scene in which a minor, faced with certain frustration in the middle of the street, accuses (or even insults) who leads him by the hand? Already by 1914 Freud had referred to the particular pregnancy of narcissism in childhood with the expression "His majesty, the baby"; but in this circumstance it seems that isn't only about a baby, and that His Majesty aspires to a broader government.

The core of the issue may lie in the type of relationship that the adult has with the child's demand. On the one hand, contemporary culture (or rather, the market) places the child at the zenith of offers; almost there is no product that cannot be adapted to a version "for babies". On the other hand, adults have succumbed to a growing infantilism. Once, on a plane flight I remember the circumstances in which a child screamed to his mother: "Mom, Dad is bothering me!" The latter was contending with him for a portable game. The diagnosis is unambiguous: adults are not so adults when they are so exposed to the consumption circuit as children.

By definition, the consumer subject is childish, delimited on the basis of his comfort and his taste. That is proved by the proliferation of approval surveys. In these there are no other questions, if the child-adult was given enough, according to his well-being ... is the position of the baby which is at stake here. So, one might ask: isn't the pediatric advice of breastfeed on demand the theoretical reflection (and pseudoscientific) of

* lutereau@googlemail.com / [CV](#)

a cultural and commercial situation? We are born to be served, so that our satisfaction is at the center of our personal fulfillment.

Here's a highlight nuance by G. Lipovetsky in his book "Paradoxical happiness" (2007). No longer is the capitalism of production; or the version that places the subject in the potential buyer category; but the aestheticization of the social experience, through a strong emotional commitment: "The *Homo consumericus* of the third kind is born, a kind of uncontrolled, mobile and flexible turboconsumer, freed largely of the ancient cultures of class, with unpredictable tastes and acquisitions. From the consumer subjected to the social coercions of the standing we have gone on to the hiperconsumer in wait for emotional experiences and greater well-being" says the French sociologist. It only remains to add, as we have said, that the new *Homo consumericus* par excellence is the child.

Then, in our day, the child can be sometimes the father of the man; or, put another way, the growing parity that seeks to impose itself between children and adults is correlated with an unexpected effect: violence. This is highlighted by Colette Soler in her book "What remains of Childhood" (2015): "But perhaps the ravages of the widespread child, with what implies with respect to the classic disparities between the adult's authority and the obedient child, but also between teachers and students, i.e. the end of its hierarchy, is not perceived in what we begin to regret of the child who is not only indomitable but sometimes tyrannical, both in families and in schools? ". Ultimately, all social bonds involve a disparity, and when this cannot be sustained there takes place what Soler calls "ravages": the impotence where eventually fall the adult leads to symptoms of the removed authority (not only the physical aggression, but the subjective subjugation that implies responding to the child's demand with entertainments).

From the point of view of the Freudian psychoanalysis, there are three impossible professions: to govern, to educate and to analyze. Regarding the first, the aestheticization of politics (according to the fatal prescription of Walter Benjamin) is an accomplished reality. In relation to education, the indomitable children are the sign of a destination: the rejection of knowledge in favor of something more urgent than the satisfaction of a desire, that is, the urgent need for a full enjoyment.

Finally: psychoanalysis. Perhaps in the latter case it could be about the only virtuous impossibility, the one that can become the cause of subjectivation, in which the loss might

neither be frustrating nor succumbing to the mass effect. Fortunately, there could never be a consolation for psychoanalysis. Therefore, in this article, we will try to put a strain on what can be blamed on our time together with what must be recognized from a structural point of view. The exception is obvious: neither a psychoanalyst can afford to fall back into a nostalgic or, worse, into a moralistic view. In what follows, then, we will take three pillars: violence, tantrums, crying. We intend to think current modes of expression from the perspective of the subjective constitution. In conclusion, we will make some considerations about the game, in order to extend its application border, not just beyond a technical issue, but as a reading tool concerning the ethics of the analyst.

Violent children

It is common for adults to worry about the relationship between children and violence. In particular, children seem to be, spontaneously, violent beings playing to fight, with weapons and, even, they celebrate videogames that are about stealing, shooting and, at best, killing. Faced with this situation, adults often consult an analyst or other specialist: "Is this good for them to play?".

The moral character of this question is often uncomfortable. And rightly so, a preliminary step would be to examine what is the psychic value (before the educational value) of such games. Specifically, the question should be rephrased as follows: this playful experience, in what fantasies is it sustained?

First, we should make a preliminary remark regarding the statute of fantasy in psychoanalysis. Every so often it happens that certain thinker denies that Freud would have confused fantasy with reality at the beginning of his theory: by neglecting the traumatic theory of neurosis, and promoting that the child seduction would be a fantasy, he would have ignored the real character of abuses in childhood.

There is nothing further than the binary opposition between fantasy and reality in Freud's theory. To say that seduction involves a position in fantasy (to declare oneself as "victim") does not deny that the fact may indeed have happened. In any case, what Freud points out is that, facing the fact, it continues being a subject position. So when the inventor of psychoanalysis said "I do not believe anymore in my neurotic" he did not allude

to a patient, but to his theory of trauma while it does not involve the subject as a victim. In this way, the traumatic would become the real of the fantasy!

The children's interest in the traumatic situations it's often substantial. They long to see the place where an accident has occurred, or they fantasize about the most varied scenes where fires, explosions, etc. occur. Precisely, unlike the Freudian neurotics, for them the extent of complicity with the real does not disappear. One of the aspects of the effectiveness of repression lies in the control of the desire drive, equivalent to the acquisition of an unrealized state, evident in the assumption of an Other that would have acted as an agent of castration.

However, this doesn't mean that children are not in relation to castration, but that their access mode is unique: through the scene that eroticizes violence, this is the place where a specific fantasy is constructed, the so called "primal scene" in which the excitation is obtained from suspecting that the bond between man and woman has an aggressive touch. For that reason it is hard to find directly sexual manifestations in children; and when they appear they are particularly striking and important for diagnosis, because infantile sexuality is expressed through that specific interest in what is violent.

When a child plays to kill, it should not be feared that this will be the germ of a future murderer, since often, in the act of submission, the possession concerning sex is at stake. In the same way, the motives of shooting, the fact of being wounded and the death itself can be interpreted. Indeed, there are many young people that, when becoming adults, compete to see who "gets" further...

Death, as such, is not registered in child's psyche. It is something that can be checked with the questions that children ask in occasion of the death of a family member, "Where did he go?" "Is he in heaven now?" Ultimately, with the verification of finiteness in childhood, the representation opens elsewhere, but not the anguish of an end.

In any case, so that the anguish gets tied with death it is necessary that the sexual fulfillment register the castration, from the relationship with the other sex, typical motive of adolescence in its last section: only when we notice our being for sex is that death becomes a problem, and often the cancellation of sex life is the equivalent of death itself.

The children's "tantrum"

Often children do tantrums. Similarly, adults often complain of children's tantrums. They tend to characterize them as "capricious"; with these demonstrations, the child "deliberately" would seek to twist his parents will.

However, a first approach to the question imposes noting that not all tantrums are equal. In particular, in this section I would like to stop on one kind of tantrum that usually appears between the two or three years old, and that has an important consequence in the constitution of the subject.

After the first year of life, following the infant oral stage installation in relation to the other, a particular index of the anal drive is verified on the child pregnancy to the orders. From one side to another, the child obediently pays attention to the most diverse indications, in a clear exercise of his affirmation through empowerment (with time, this prepares for toilet training). A child learns to go potty in so far as, first, he retains feces that then he ejects according to their parents' demand. To eject, the retention is condition.

Now this functional circuit to toilet training is correlated with an increase in challenging attitudes. That child who meekly went from one place to another obeying his parents, at some point begins to rebuff them. And that kind of denial is not linked to the typical negativism of orality, but it has as specific feature some guilty attitude. To take an example, the mother keeps a toy in a drawer and the child begins to cry furious while he requests that that object should be placed elsewhere. "He became a tyrant," say certain parents

However, the mentioned tyranny involves considerable suffering. This tantrum of the child, which mimics a kind of miniature obsessive neurosis (to which some parents refer to as "it is necessary to do things as he wants"), is far from being a voluntary and harmful attitude that should be governed.

First, it is important to note that this act has as psychic precedent a detachment of the due obedience. At the same time that else's control is assumed as own regarding to feces, in the character this movement is performed in the opposite sense, which does not

imply a regression but an important growth factor. To account for this point is worth noting that, along with the negative, in a second time the child performs an act of concession to the other. According to the example mentioned, at the same time that he says that the object should not be stored there, it is possible that afterwards he may store it in the same place. Simultaneously with the complaint about the other that wants to touch his fork to eat, it is possible that he say that the fork should be placed ... in the same place where the adult left it. This piece of information allows delimiting that this delayed response includes a guilty aspect that must be sifted: the child does not deny else's demand without further ado, but he assumes it through guilt. Thus, he assumes it in the denied way. "It's not you who are telling me that, but it is me who is telling it" would be the structure of this situation. Here is a fundamental movement for the child's subjective statement, which also is revealed in the importance that begins to gain the saying at this time. It is not uncommon that at this time also the games on who said this or that begin.

Second, the child's guilt is reinforced by the fear that the other gets angry. It is particularly noteworthy how at this time children think their parents become unfriendly for the most varied reasons. This assumption of moving from anger to anger is fundamental so that the adults get really angry since they would reinforce the guilt that is a necessary crossing. In this way it is that these false punishments that are the penances (like going to the bathroom to think or other stupidities), - which have the intention that a child could take responsibility for an act or understanding the consequences of its motivation- could be avoided. It's ridiculous, because the child is initially in a position of guilt. In any case, much more importantly is to remove the adult anger to warn that there is not only one way of doing things.

It is true that we are not many the parents willing to have a more empathetic attitude with children's tantrums. However, that is not due to fatigue issues, parenting methods or other excuses. Ultimately, once faced to a child's tantrum, the adult persists in thinking that the child must understand that such a thing must not to be done in certain way, but instead it must be done otherwise, so that he accepts that the authority must be obeyed and other nonsense; we also know who could not defeat his tantrums and he continues acting them despite the age.

Children's weeping

Sometimes it happens that a child cries, and his crying seems to be out of proportion to the scene. The adult suffers confusion, he excuses facing the others, saying: "But, it's not such a big deal...". The situation might be that a negative instruction had been uttered to him but he has not been reprimanded at all; or not even that; I remember the situation in which to a three years old child his glass was removed from the table before he ended drinking, while he, absently, was doing another thing; but when he noted that his glass was no longer there he burst into an inconsolable crying and he got angry at the one who had removed it.

This situation, in which a disproportion between an incident and its effect is verified, invites to assume an intermediate link that turns understandable the reason why (and it is something common) children cry in such a particular way, with which they accuse the other of having done them some harm ... as if he had struck them. And by the way, there is a Freud's paper entitled "A child is being beaten" which allows clarifying this situation.

In this paper, Freud defines a fundamental aspect of the childish position of the child: the erotization of the loving bond with the adult. This coordinate is found in various children games, such as those involving the child's body as an object that can be "eaten" (by a wolf or other fictional animal), "thrown" (in fight games), "discovered" (or spied on, hidden, etc.), but also may be invoked (for the order or the tenderness of the song). The child's body establishes a direct relationship with the enjoyment of adults, who, bluntly, allow themselves to do the most direct transgressions (even in the form of games) on that corporeality. In other words, no one is authorized to sit the wife of a friend on his lap (or to raise her) when he is introduced to her. Children are caressed without their consent, we mess up their hair and even we ask them a goodbye kiss ... By definition, the child's body is an abused body, beyond any contingency in which the abuse could take the form of statutory rape or pedophilia.

Now, the erotization of the loving bond with the adult that takes the look of an erotization of the body offering (on the part of the child) is correlated with the fact that such transgressions become object of child's demand. Young children not only ask to be "eaten", "thrown to the air", etc., in certain games, but also we find the case of children who "ask for" punishments, looking for the limit and the scold.

However, based on the situation mentioned in the beginning, what happens when the situation seems to turn around and it appears that, without putting the body, the child claims to have been "hit" (or scolded, or damaged in the broadest sense)? At the beginning, it should be noted that at this point it is about an important achievement of subjective constitution. Seduction is something effective to be realized in fantasy. Also, we should recognize that it is the mother or a substitute mother (which could well be a man) the real agent of the loving bond erotization. In the object position, the child is, essentially, for the mother desire. In fantasy, however, the father is in charge of the hit; but how this substitution is achieved?

What we have called "object position" of the child implies its phallic nature. The child is the phallus of the mother. When he stops being it, and the removal of spontaneous seduction occurs, the child lives with guilt this juncture. He has harmed the mother! Therefore, father is all what comes to position itself as the repairer of this fundamental guilt of the child, when he loses his phallic being. The child calls the father (who may well be even his mother) so that the guilt may find grounds. Punishment, then, is "deserved".

The intermediate link of this passage is also the discovery of masturbation: on leaving his phallic being, the child discovers that he can get enjoyment from his phallus. The phallic enjoyment (the "phallus ´ narcissism", as Freud called it) will be, par excellence, the guilty enjoyment or, rather the enjoyment of guilt. Always there is something masturbatory in guilt. Thus, to conclude, this explains why Freud also said that the fantasy "*A child is being beaten*" was welded to masturbation. The father is not who prohibits or punishes the masturbatory enjoyment but, conversely, who puts the child safe from the guilt of having left the mother.

Game time

The child's game is not an act among others. Even in the context of psychoanalysis, the game is not a specific technique or an adaptation of the mechanism with adults to work with children. Play is the way that children meet the fundamental rule of the analysis, the free association, understood as a way of speaking differently from everyday life, based on utilitarian activities.

The gaming experience is characterized by a certain temporal specificity: while the daily proceedings involve a predetermined time (we would say that someone who delays an hour to hammer a nail is doing something else), the game time escapes the objective chronological boundary. "Now, again" it could be the figure that best expresses its temporalizing character; because, on the one hand, it escapes any succession of instants and, on the other hand, it involves an own notion of repetition.

This dual consideration could account for a trivial fact; I am referring to the common situation in which an adult tries to wrest the game its unique status by asking a child, "Did you play a lot?". The game escapes the duration, which also is verified in those other circumstances that, following an adult's claim (due to some need of the objective time), a child answers, "Five more minutes." Clearly, here he is not asking for an "amount of time".

The "five" (of the "five minutes") defines the true object of the game: the repetition time that, as such, is the result of a clearing operation. The "again" of the game is never "once again" but a sort of "still" with a purely differential value. The vacuum with which one plays is the purest difference that is in the cause of the subject's relationship with time.

I think of how many scenes with children that, usually, tend to be thought of as "tantrums" or "lack of limits" could be re-signified and be thought in playful terms from these considerations. There is no major clinical indicator of intrusiveness of adult in a child's game that a rebuff that, by abuse of "adult-morph", we call "whim". It never ceases to be surprising that Freud could see a scene from the game (called "fort-da") where others saw an 'annoying habit' "(sic).

The fact that the child plays with time is something that have already glimpsed several philosophers, such as W. Benjamin, E. Benveniste or G. Agamben, with much more lucidity that many psychoanalysts have. But there is something typical in the psychoanalytic consideration of game, that no philosopher could glimpse: what Freud called its "economic" aspect, i.e., the way in which the gaming experience introduces the driving circuits of childhood. In other words, that the child play with that object we call time or, rather, that he transform the time in that object that is not an object but, rather, it is a rest that escapes the temporary totalization; or put another way, that childhood is a treatment of time as a rest (in the sense, for example, in which Derrida coined the notion of "*restance*"), which makes of the rest-of-time an object that is no more than "nothing" (those "five more

minutes"), realizes a fundamental aspect: the enjoyment that establishes the gaming experience is the eroticism of the subject, either that this "nothing" reaches the oral (as shown by the "checkers" and other "eating" games), the anal (present in several rule games), but fundamentally the scopical (based on the function of illusion and deception) and the invoking (articulated to secret function).

One always plays with a rest. One plays to constitute oneself as a subject. So, the game that matters to psychoanalysis is not the one that means something, or the one that can be interpreted, because the game itself is an interpretation that plays the grammar of the body. Here's a point where we should distance ourselves from Freud. If for him the continuation of the game, in young people, occurred from the fantasy as daydream, we could emphasize that this Freudian consideration is based on the prejudice that makes of game a symbolization or an instance of representation. These positions are trivial. The game is closer to the erotic experience than to the hermeneutics.

This last remark allows noticing, then, that the continuation of the game lies in the discovery of two typical experiences of the adolescence: the caress and the kiss. The time of the caress escapes the one of the mere touch; ultimately, it should be recognized that when mimes are made (Sartre and Levinas already said it) one does not touch anything, but the own body is discovered through the other body. Children do not caress, only after puberty this new type of act appears. And the same could be said of the recurring scene in which we see a young couple kissing each other in a square. When the first kiss is given? Perhaps, it should be recognized that adolescents seek in the act of kissing a unique kiss ("Now again") that is never updated

Young people kiss each other to recover that kiss that is none, which is nothing, because only meanwhile it is lost, it causes the act of kissing, and it is evident in every farewell, whether we see them kissing again (again, still), or when by phone one asks the other: "Did you hang up?" and the other replies: "No, hang you up." And they spend hours playing, loving each other, in a time that is not in everyday time. In this way, many current phenomena which are usually pathologized beforehand in contemporary times (such as the

so called "*previa*"* of the adolescents) could be rethought. We will focus in this issue on a next paper, with the same criteria that we are following here for children: the reading made by psychoanalysis always goes against the grain of any psychopathological disquisition, thinking subjective positions even there where they look like detours, because any rule is no more than a supposed ideal.

*TN: *Previa*: is the meeting during which adolescents drink alcoholic beverages, before going to dance.