

ANTHROPOLOGY OF ADOLESCENCE

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1. The age of the century

In 1960 Philippe ARIES¹ wrote that, if **youth** was the favourite age during the 18th century, and **childhood** during the 19th, then the 20th century was the age of adolescence. Nobody doubts any longer that adolescence is a socially and culturally determined phenomenon.

Every epoch, society and class, views adolescence differently. These differing views, have a modifying effect on the course of adolescence, to an extent that we would not have believed a few short years ago.

If the transformations which are inherent in the process of adolescence, involve much psychic activity, the forms these transformations take, and their failures are particularly dependent on the environment existing in the associated society².

Adolescence as a **moment of psychic transformations**, usually radical and spectacular, only approximately associates with the physiological transformations of puberty.

Although it's birth was recent, it is valid to wonder in what **historical circumstances** this phenomenon of the omnipresent "Teenager" arose.

Antiquity, at the climax of Greek-Latin civilisation, certainly had some teenagers similar to ours. It's not fortuitous that the cult of Adonis coincided with the Golden Century of Greece. It was then equally a fast changing society, inventing democracy and individualism, which put great value and hope on the progress of its youth.

The *adolescens*, expanding and growing, was in those days, to paraphrase FREUD, the "*adultus*" father, the one who had stopped growing up.

However, **this teenager has disappeared from the scale of ages for centuries.**

We will see further that the archaic or traditional cultures, like formerly the lower social classes in our society, have always reduced this age to its simplest expression.

The more a society develops toward a western liberal-individualistic pattern, based on the one hand on an increased division of labour, and on the other hand, on sexual freedom and extinction of the traditional family, the more the ages differ from each other, **the more adolescence tends to get the most important role, as opposed to traditional societies where the elders enjoyed the greatest privileges.**

In the 19th century, the child became king. If this privilege, given to childhood never had existed, FREUD would probably never have written, "*the child is the father of man*"³. The questions which psychoanalysis studies would never have been raised, in any case not in the forms that we know today and which the psychoanalytic doctrine designates as the "Oedipus complex".

When MONTAIGNE writes, speaking about his dead children: "*I lost two or three babies, if not without regret, at least without grief...*" there is no reason to take offence of it. In that time, the child was not the object of an investment whose loss could give rise to extreme mourning and pain as happens nowadays.

PASCAL writes likewise: "**A child is not a man**".

The **cult of the child**, product of the middle-class culture, got its powerful voice in Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU's "Emile".

As for the modern teenager, Philippe ARIES sees him taking shape as the Cherub in Figaro's wedding. He has the traits of a pre-pubescent boy, androgen and rather feminine. The awakening of love and

¹ Philippe Aries. L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime. Plon, Paris, 1960.

² Philippe Jeammet. Adolescence et processus de changement. In D. Widlocher. Traite de Psychopathologie. Paris, PUF, 1994, p. 715.

³ Freud S. (1913). L'intérêt de la psychanalyse. GW, 8, p. 412.

sensuality touched the public of that time, despite the fact that the Cherub evolves without embarrassment in the world of adults. The 18th century was still ignoring the segregation of the generations.

This segregation is the new major issue causing the rift between the generations, as it never happened before.

“The actual segregation we create between our youth and elders leads to a perception of both youth and old age as distinct groups as well as different phases of life. Neither is this phenomenon accompanied by the social acknowledgement of a positive function, which would be ascribed to these groups of individuals and by this give them, as a class, a structure, a status or an identity.

It is for the first time that youth on one side, and old age on the other, massively tend to define themselves by in terms of social interdictions and experiences of frustration, which are neither accompanied by a system of compensations nor integrated into an age scale of their own, that could give them validity and provide the means for a further development.

Thus, the harmful character of segregation takes shape. This segregation is harmful because it is not meaningful and is experienced by those who are exposed to it, as rejection, dereliction, spiritual solitude and not as a condition or reverse of an aggregation process anymore, which was always the case in the primitive or traditional societies”.⁴

Since the outset of the 19th century, the prototypical teenager figure changes very fast. With the rising romanticism, **a narcissistic upheaval** occurs.

Aware of his value, if not of his identity, the egotist emerges deeply unsatisfied with the world surrounding him - “*I was born too young in a too old world*” complains MUSSET -, desirous to escape the world or to change it utterly.

Totalitarian regimes will know how to exploit this craving for a change by exalting the youth, in order to make them join their ideal. It is well known what Hitler, Stalin and some others made out of it. This led Milan KUNDERA to say that youth never deserved so much until now, the qualifier of “**silly age**”.

At the edge of the 19th century, ROUSSEAU sensed that a **dangerous age** was approaching for the individual as well as for society. Therefore he proposed to prolong the duration of adolescence by extending the length of the educational process, by introducing longer instruction periods, social and nature studies, in order to alleviate, in the best way possible, the turbulence he anticipated as inevitable.

As for education, there is no doubt that Rousseau's recommendations were put into practice beyond any expectation. Concerning **the temporal extension of adolescence**, this is such an obvious phenomenon that we hardly need to mention it.

On the barricades in 1830, 1848, 1870 until 1968 and 1994, “teenagers” were the majority of the “troops”. Many of the elders tacitly approved, while the authorities let the revolution proceed. But these rebellions, however symptomatic of the bad state of societal affairs, did not really threaten the basis of the social order which, by sliding more and more into anomie (DURKHEIM), could not define its identity any longer except by referring to itself as post-modern, a meaningless definition.

“As a social group, could youth, as we say, change social life, meaning to take over the historical mission of the proletariat, a mission that this one could not realise until now in the industrialised countries? The answer is clearly and frankly: no. Youth is not a social class able to act as such, even though it has become nowadays a distinct social group with its concerns and problems, that is to say posing problems to society”⁵

Another more recent but absolutely undoubted phenomenon is the **destinal equalisation of both boys and girls**, as they actually enjoy the same sexual and material privileges.

⁴ Michel Philibert. L'échelle des âges. Paris, Seuil, 1968, p. 172.

⁵ Henri Lefebvre. Introduction à la modernité. Paris, Minuit, 1962, p. 331.

We hardly can dispute the fact that the teenager has become **a fascinating object** for the adult observer or so-called.

“Adolescence is so important nowadays that it suppresses equally the earlier as the later generations that frame it. Children tend to wish to enter it earlier and earlier, whereas the adults have a tendency to leave it later and later. Marriage doesn't any longer represent an event that puts an end to adolescence. If you like Truffaut's movies, you can see that the personage performed by Jean-Pierre LEAUD represents just the image of the married adult still being an adolescent.”⁶

The fascination that the teenager exerts, sometimes provokes **a new pathology** in the parents. Many of them regress into adolescence, when their children approach this age and submit to the “middle age evil”.

This fact certainly contributes to increase the identity problems of the children while other parents show instead, early symptoms of old age, finally giving up any sexual life, which has disturbing effects too.⁷

Undoubtedly, the **decline of the paternal imago** associated with **the loss of identification reference points** that leads to it, are very important for the promotion and the exaggeration of adolescence.

“Whatever may be the future of this decline, it represents a psychological crisis. Perhaps it is this crisis that can be put in relation to the appearance of psychoanalysis itself. The sublime change of the spirit doesn't explain by itself why it is in Wien, (the centre of a state being the melting pot of the most various family forms), that a son of a Jewish patriarch came to think of the Oedipus complex. What ever it may be, these are the prevalent forms at the close of the last century which have disclosed that they are intimately dependent on family conditions... Our experience forces us to indicate that their main determination is the paternal imago, somehow always lacking and absent, humiliated, divided or futile. According to our conception of Oedipus, this lack dries up the vital impetus and corrupts the dialectic of sublimation... ”⁸

Whatever these derivations and failures of identification, which tend to become the “century's weariness”, we still are allowed to assume this:

“... Every generation has assumed that the teenager of the preceding generation was different. This certainly is as for the difference between the social orders. Anyhow, we may find some major constants from one to the other generation. Today's teenagers very often belong to one of the groups to which the teenagers of Romanticism had belonged too. On the one hand, those who as Werther or René revolt against reality, who do not surrender to the Law, private or public, always searching for the unknown, solitary and impoverished, are often attracted by taking risks and even by death. On the other hand, there are those as Rastignac, Rubempré or Julien Sorel who submit to the rules of the social game: the ideology is to win”⁹.

Obviously, there is no categorical contradiction between these two types of teenagers: the **romantic revolted**, thinking like Rimbaud that “we don't belong to this world, real life is elsewhere” and the **young dynamical wolf**, like Lucien de Rubempré who exclaims: “*Paris, just you and me!*”

Nevertheless, this typology, however summary and caricatured it may be, recovers some psychological reality, the one of the subjects preferring reasoning and dreaming in contrast to the one of those extolling action and contest. It is a binary couple, conveniently designated as the one of introversion in opposition to extraversion.

⁶ Pierre Nouilhan. L'adolescent dans l'échelle des âges. In Adolescences, Toulouse, Privat, 1987, p. 18.

⁷ Philippe Gutton. Adolescence: trois crises au lieu d'une. In Adolescences, Toulouse, Privat, 1987, pp. 39-56.

⁸ Jacques Lacan. La Famille. Encyclopédie Française, tome 8,40,3-16,1938,p.16.

⁹ Pierre Nouilhan. Op.cit.,p.18

2. The passage and rites of initiation

Every society was preoccupied with organising the shift from childhood to adulthood by proposing to teenagers a model of initiation, as fit as possible to realise these transformations in the most economical way, inherent in the actual age.

If we refer to the so-called primitive societies, we are amazed by the universality of what is commonly called “rites of passage” since VAN GENNEP¹⁰ underlined this fact.

As Claude LEVI-STRAUSS¹¹ reminds us: “*All over the world, the most different archaic societies conceptualise in the same way the initiation rites.*”

We have a special interest in addressing our attention to this question. A great amount of specialists on adolescence, emphasise more and more that a large part of psychopathological disorders at this age may be interpreted as behaviours attempting to compensate for the obvious lack (in our Western culture) of any institution similar to those which, in the archaic and ancient civilisations, guide and organise in a quasi-immutably way, the passage from childhood to adulthood.

As Philippe JEAMMET¹² notes:

“What might the archaic rites and today’s adolescence have in common?

Nothing at all when we see the contrast between these children cast by a brutal ceremony to the adult world and at their own side, teenagers who never seem to reach the status of an adult and live in a society where the length of the training period only becomes longer and longer, corresponding and following life expectancy as well as the cohabitation of generations.

We can wonder whether the psychopathological problems of teenagers do not take the function of a personal myth and acquire a dimension of a Ritual.

This is especially the case in our culture, where any behavioural disorder means insanity... The disorder becomes an indefinite commemoration of the failed alliance between adult and teenager, through the monotonous repetition of the same troubles, of the same pathological behaviours, in a kind of everlasting ritual that characterises the adult pathology.

The disorder does not represent anything other than a personal ritual that is no longer linked to the social consensus. It is a “senseless” act that can only be regarded as a “disease”, a pure biological enigma that has even ceased to put forward the question of its sense and its communicative value.

The pathological response is always a failure of the development process. The behaviour disorders and everything, which can be qualified as pathology of acting out, are a good example. The evolution seems to favour their budding by facilitating the shift from a conflict issue, as in neurosis, to a relational one, as in disorders of dependence and this by the weakening of the interdictions counterbalanced by the augmentation of the demands of performance.”

¹⁰ Arnold Van Gennep. Les rites de passage(1909).Paris,Picard,1981

¹¹ Claude Levi-Strauss.La pensée sauvage.Paris,Plon,1962.

¹² Philippe Jeammet.Op.cit.,p. 720

Psychopathology of adolescence becomes clearer when we compare it with the major ways the rites of initiation pass through.

More and more alarming clinical facts demand our attention: ¹³

- a) More or less marginal youngsters have recourse to adopt behaviours which strongly recall the rituals of initiation in traditional societies and which seem to aim in a confusing, way at provoking **an abrupt change of identity**.
This is the case of many drug-addicts, adhesion to sects, fascination stirred by extremist movements and totalitarian ideologies and even of teenage prostitution, a new phenomenon, which doesn't seem only determined by a miserable socio-economical status, but equally might be supported by a need for sexual initiation in a violent and traumatic manner.
- b) Taking into consideration patients, forced to radically change their psychic structure in order to **adapt themselves to an environment felt as strange or hostile** which is the case of the emigrants of the first and second generations and above all of their children;
- c) **The obvious similarity between some delirious discourses and the main themes of the rites of passage**. This similarity is easy to explain if we take into account the fact that all these themes are in direct contact with the question of the change of identity, of sexual assumption and with the difference between both sexes and generations and therefore with the primal fantasies such as seduction, primary scene, castration, return to the womb of which FREUD said they are the "*core of the unconscious*", a result of the primal repression. ¹⁴

If the psychotic collapses correspond to the failure of the primal repression as well as to the return of the contents of primal repression, there is no reason to be surprised by the narrow correspondence between the themes involved in the rites of initiation and the primal fantasies, who pattern themselves precisely as the "organisers" of the basic drive dynamic.

So we are on track to enable ourselves to understand what the rites of passage consist of, and also their purpose.

We have tried to approach these archaic rituals with some tests, which in the present western culture might have an analogous significance. However, it is too obvious that we can only see colourless copies of the primitive rites.

"In our society, a number of experiences (religious rituals, military service, the system of examinations and contests, counseling for contraception, surgical interventions) can get the significance of a initiatory ritual, due to their symbolic content. But the variety, the heterogeneity, the individualistic character of such experiences force the teenager to invent his own personal myth, his own ideological or religious beliefs and give therefore more and more importance to his family, to the behaviour of his parents, and to the conscious and unconscious familial interactions." ¹⁵

Finally the rites have, among other things, the goal of taking child out from his biological family in order to introduce him into the world of adults, which is the world of the group, the clan or the tribe, - sharing the common mythological believes.

On the other hand, it is evident, as psychoanalytical experience teaches us, that the western subject has the greatest difficulties in getting out of the family cocoon, because he is limited by the task to create somehow or other a personal myth, with its unpredictability and precarious character.

¹³ Tobie Nathan. Traumatisme, identification et mémoire. In Adolescence. Toulouse, Privat, 1987, pp. 147-158.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud (1917). Fragments de l'histoire d'une névrose infantile (L'Homme aux Loups), in cinq psychanalyses. Paris. PUF, 1967

¹⁵ B. Brusset. Psychopathologie de l'Adolescence. In Lebovici, Traité de Psychiatrie de l'enfant et de l'adolescent. Paris. PUF, 1985, pp 801-820.

The latter cannot stand the comparison with the cohesive force and the rich significance of the collective myths, which guarantee the group identity. The primitive mythologies are of an extraordinary

richness but, except for a few, we only have second-hand versions ¹⁶. Nevertheless, today we can have a rather exact idea about what the rites of passage represent. ¹⁷

The finality of the rites is clear: for the adults it is a matter **to integrate**, as efficaciously as possible, the teenagers into the social group by imposing on them some **violent ordeals**, which demand a total submission, and where the **body** is directly involved by getting tangible marks. This must place him **in the straight line of the sexes and generations**. At the same time the subject receives a lesson that aims to introduce him to the secrets of the tradition.

The pattern of initiation is composed of the three phases, which VAN GENNEP has conveyed as classical: **separation, recession in an isolated place or *limen*, aggregation and return**.

The separation is always brutal. Around the age of twelve, the child is literally uprooted from his family. Everybody pretends to believe that he will never return, that he will almost certainly die.

The phase of recession is unequivocally assimilated to the return to the maternal womb. The neophytes, most frequently completely naked, are imprisoned in a closed space where they have to keep silent and immobile.

They are going to receive a polyvalent teaching (social as well as moral, religious and “technical”) that will introduce them to the world of beliefs, occult powers, magic, mysteries of filiations, sexuality and generation.

What impresses us most is **the extreme violence of the physical and psychic ordeals**. The candidate is generally threatened with death and with the most painful tortures, in a way that is no fun at all, for he is seriously beaten and mutilated. He has to solve impossible riddles, he is humiliated for his ignorance and pushed to the border of madness by being exposed to **the most paradoxical injunctions**.

These ordeals, as we realise, are part of a system of **paradoxical logic**, which for instance asserts that a young man will not really become a man unless he has been raped or even has raped or killed the oldest woman of the tribe.

Bodily marks never lack.

According to the opinion of most anthropologists, circumcision ¹⁸, excision, infibulation ¹⁹ and other mutilations tend to confer an adult status by erasing the signs of sexual ambiguity specific to childhood, the foreskin and clitoris being considered as the ridiculous and undignified vestiges of the opposite sex.

The second phase of the initiation ends with the ritual imitating of the birth process that make the candidate clearly understand that he is definitively dead to childhood, **radically separated from the maternal world** and set free from bisexuality.

The **return** sanctions **the social reinsertion**. Notwithstanding the fact that they are henceforth regarded as genuine adults, the initiated teenagers are generally received as babies who must be carried and who must all relearn from zero, even the names of their kin they are supposed to have forgotten.

¹⁶ Marcel Griaule. Dieu d'eau. Paris. Fayard, 1966.

¹⁷ Victor W. Turner (1969). Le phénomène rituel. Paris. PUF, 1980.

¹⁸ Jean Laplanche. Problématiques II. Castration, symbolisation. Paris. PUF, 1980, pp. 163-260.

¹⁹ Véronique Mathonet. Altérités féminines. Essai d'interprétation des marques sexuelles chez la femme. Mémoire de licence en Arts et Sciences de la Communication. Université de Liège. Liège, 1994, 147 pages.

We become easily aware of all the tests administered during the rites of passage,

- the brutal weaning from the mother's world,
- the loss of childhood,
- the dangerous rivalry with both the elders and peers,
- the achievement of a stable and differentiated sexual identity, purified of any sexual ambivalence,
- confrontation with the other sex (marriage often follows after the rites),

are basically **internal psychological operations**.

The rituals allow these operations to be entirely **externalised** and, directed by adults, realise in a very short time the passing through the crucial problem of adolescence, which may be summarized in three points:

- to shift from the non-sexualised child status, to either male or female status, to a specific sexual identity.
- to attain a firm identity, based on a sharp delimitation of the ego, regarded as the instance able to make a clear distinction between the interior psychic space and the exterior material world, and
- to assimilate the rules which guide physical, sexual and social exchanges, in the full awareness of their fundamental violence.

Violence, as seen, is everywhere.

Far from denying or hiding it, as we consider sanity and good in respect of our education, the "primitive", at least in the ritual, asserts and pushes it to the uttermost, with the clear purpose of not expelling, but of integrating violence.

These anthropological facts do not run counter to the Freudian thesis,²⁰ which sees in the rites of initiation **as a double reinforcement, as well of the prohibition of incest and of homosexual relation with the father** and thus also, as a consequence, the fact of the symbolic carrying out of castration by circumcision, excision - **a genuine reduplication of the primary repression**.

We arrive at a striking conclusion:

In traditional societies, adolescence is limited to a turning point, emphasized by the ritualised operations, which tend to strengthen the primal repression.

In our culture it corresponds instead to the exact opposite phenomenon, that is, to **the return of the repressed**. This explains the reason why, even under ordinary conditions, adolescence appears as a true "mirror of psychopathology".²¹

The research we did by using the Szondi test²² on some African and South American Indian populations confirm the thesis of the consolidating of the primal repression. We put forward the acquired Szondian data conclusion that the results we got, assert and **consolidate what was acquired during the latency period**.

In other words, it is as if the traditional cultures wanted at any price, to prevent the return of the Oedipus, and keep the individual fixed at the early stage reached just before puberty.

There is no doubt that, in the regions where the rites of initiation are still practised, they are - for us - extraordinarily operative and effective.

Nevertheless, one question is posed insistently: how ?

²⁰ Sigmund Freud (1912) .Totem et Tabou.Paris.Payot,1967.

²¹ Georges Amado.La crise d'adolescence,modèle pour la psychopathologie.Psychiatrie de l'enfant,30,2,pp.375-418,1987.

²² Jean Mélon,Brigitte Herman et Martine Stassart. Le Szondi des"primitifs".Szondiana,12,1,1992,pp.64-69

Why is the myth alone not enough for initiation? Why is it absolutely necessary that the rituals have to be added to it ?

3. Traumatism and identification

For all we know, nobody ever offered a good metapsychological explanation of the process at work in the rites of initiation, which might give us an account of their unquestionable effectiveness and of the effective reality of the deep identity transformations, which they produce.

We found Tobie NATHAN's ²³ attempt at explanation, probably the most convincing of those mentioned until now. The author notices first the **seemingly relentless opposition between the psychoanalytic and the anthropological ethnological points of view.**

According to FREUD and to the entire psychoanalytic tradition, the core of the psyche, formed in infancy, before the decline of the Oedipus complex, remains active and nearly unchangeable, determining strictly the subsequent identity transformations, which never could be anything other than superficial or minor.

On the contrary, anthropology makes the irrefutable observation that, under the effect of peculiar constraints, imposed by the rites of passage, the subject's psychic personality deeply changes, and moreover in an exceptionally short time.

Nevertheless anthropology is unable to explain the mechanism of this transformation, except by invoking the famous "symbolic effectiveness", which is not very satisfactory, at least for those who are interested in understanding the psychodynamic origin of the process.

What after all gives to a subject his own identity, as far as it has the quality of temporal continuity and spatial uniqueness, is definitively **a kind of memory.**

The psychoanalytic theory distinguishes between three kinds of memory:

- memory understood in the common sense of the term and left to the concern of cognitive psychology
- memory expressed in the symptomatic formations and which corresponds to the return of the repressed – in the sense that the "hysteric suffers from memories" - and
- The most unconscious memory, and also the most important one for the analyst which appears in the transference relationship, activated through the repetition compulsion; the *Wiederholungszwang*, which the analyst always hopes to transform into simple memory. However without being able most of the time to pass further than the stage of the (re)construction, which fortunately is nevertheless sufficient to limit the damage produced by the repetition that FREUD assimilated to the death instinct. ²⁴

Nevertheless repetition is initially linked to trauma.

The well-known example of the "infant with the spool" ²⁵, invoked by FREUD in an epigraph to "Beyond the pleasure principle" is most significant in this respect.

The trauma resides here in the mother's departure and absence, assimilated to her loss. Through the play "Fort-Da", the infant obviously repeats this trauma, but it is also clear that he is completely unconscious of both the sense of the trauma and the fact that it is a repetition.

²³ Tobie Nathan, Op.cit., p.148.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud (1920). Au-delà du Principe de Plaisir. In essais de Psychanalyse. Paris, Payot, 1960.

²⁵ Sigmund Freud (1920). Au-delà du Principe de Plaisir. In essais de Psychanalyse. Paris, Payot, 1967, pp.15-18.

In other words, repetition **is opposed to memory; it even abolishes it.**

Instead of an eventual depression, stirred by the pain of losing the maternal object, we have an individual in the true sense of the word: - in-divis - who, through a repetitive game, consisting basically in throwing away the object, attains a kind of beneficial hypomanic identification which, due to the repetition itself, becomes, so to speak, a second nature.

The most traumatizing experiences are those, unexpectedly occurring, that have the quality of the unthinkable, unimaginable. They incite to **total oblivion as a solution**.

If the recollection assails him, the subject becomes dead alive, as we can observe in the chronic traumatic neuroses.

This is what Jorge SEMPRUN remarkably expresses in his latest book ²⁶.

The recollections from Auschwitz were so unbearable for him that he could only survive at the cost of forgetting them. This explains why the survivors of the concentration camps are generally mute in respect to this experience.

“The new generations don’t understand this kind of silence. Nobody gets through such experiences undamaged after being, if not a victim, at least a witness of the inhuman. This absolute revelation of the fact that inhumanity is not man’s abandonment by God but, much more profoundly, the abandonment of the essence of the human being’s essence by himself. This is partly the reason why this silence appears.” ²⁷

It is not unreasonable to associate this “horror” to that one experienced by the little infant when he realizes the most unimaginable: mammy has disappeared.

The operation of manic surrection, originally traumatic, must have been effective, as FREUD underlines in a footnote:

“The infant lost his mother when he was 5 years and 9 months old. This time, the mother being really gone far away (o-o-o), the infant didn’t show any grief.”²⁸

The hypothesis proposed by Tobie NATHAN seems convincing: the rites are effective because, by arousing fright, they artificially provoke a traumatic neurosis in the subject, more precisely a “**fright neurosis**” (*Schreckneurose*), of which the desired outcome is, likewise as with the abolition of the childhood memory, the production of quite a new being, commanded to introject “at high speed” a series of absolutely new identification figures.

NATHAN reminds us that FREUD had already noticed that fear not only provoked the repetition of the traumatic experience, but also the **mimicry**.

On this topic, we can find in one of his early articles ²⁹ the assumption that convulsive tics would appear as chronic symptom, resulting from the imitation of the mimicry perceived in a moment of terror. The hypothesis is not original because it is mentioned by a large number of psychopathologists in 19th century, particularly Gilles de Tourette who gave his name to the disease of tics or infantile St. Vitus dance.

The identifications precipitated by the rites of initiation, would operate by **mimetic introjection**; this psychic operation is made possible by the specific state, very poorly known as we must admit, to which corresponds the “**fright neurosis**”.

We may draw the parallel with the fetishistic scenes or objects that, in the perverse behaviour, commemorate the “horrible” moment of the revelation of the difference between sexes.

²⁶ Jorge Semprun. L’écriture ou la vie. Paris, Gallimard, 1994.

²⁷ Jorge Semprun. Interview au journal “L’Express”, 2271, 26 Janvier 1995, p.64.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud (1920). Au-delà... Op.cit., p18

²⁹ Sigmund Freud (1892). Un cas de guérison hypnotique avec des remarques sur l’apparition de symptômes hystériques par la “contre-volonté”. In Résultats. Idées, Problèmes I. Paris, PUF, 1984, pp.41-42.

FERENCZI’s example of the “Little Cock- Man” ³⁰ is a particularly suggestive one in this respect that NATHAN remarkably interprets:

“Here we have several psychoanalytic concepts related one to another, and which will be useful in the confrontation with the anthropological data: traumatism, memory, repetition, fright, mimetic behaviour.

Ferenczi, who, in contrast to Freud, never abandoned studying the concept of traumatism, enriches our psychoanalytical harvest. In his text on “the little cock-man” (1913), he suggests to us a different hypothesis.

It is the analysis of the case history of a 5 years old little boy, who after having his penis bitten by a cock, started one year later to imitate the cock’s behaviour, to cackle etc. At a given time, he entirely lost the use of human language. Afterwards, he passionately wished to witness the cutting off of the hen's throats but felt at the same time, a very intense fear for the poultry.

When questioned about the reason of his fear, he invariably told the same story:

“One day, he went to the hen coop and urinated inside; it was at this moment that a chicken or a capon with yellow feathers (sometimes he said they were brown) came and bit his penis. Ilona, the housekeeper, dressed his wound. Afterwards, they cut the neck of the cock which died.”

As a consequence of this event, Arpad has developed a veritable curiosity concerning chickens, which he never stopped watching.

In this case, we see again the above concepts of trauma, memory (fixation and repetition) and mimetism all gathered

But we know that Freud relied on this case to set up his two concepts, borrowed from the anthropology of his time: “Totem and Taboo”. We may justifiably assume that little Arpad has chosen the cock as a totem, which he worships and hates simultaneously, and imitates with accuracy in everything, but also wants to cut the throat off, to kill and to devour.

At last, he compares the women and girls he likes to the hens and Ferenczi ends his text with this juicy remark: “ As a conclusion, we will report a last Arpad’s comment, demonstrating that it’s not for nothing that he observed the poultry’s behaviour for a long time. One day, he seriously said to the lady neighbour: “I will marry you, your sister and my three cousins and the woman in the kitchen, no rather mammy than her.” He really wants therefore to become the “peacock of the village”.

We can see that in the Arpad’s case the trauma is situated in the origin of a new imaginary filiation evoking the totemic systems and ranging Arpad in the line of "the descendants of the poultry".

The traumatism has psychically taken effect on Arpad, metamorphosing him into a chicken and starting his rebirth on the day he was bitten. The trauma (such as experienced by Arpad) would thus have the power not only to change recollection (by erasing the preceding events, reorganizing the recollections starting from new reference points; in short, by establishing a new chronology) but also to define a new filiation with imaginary ancestors and rituals (Totem and Taboo).

Although neither Freud nor Ferenczi ever analysed the causal relation between the trauma and little Arpad’s identity modification, **this idea of a shock, associating pain, fright and mimetic reaction, as the origin of a modification of the imaginary filiation**, seems to be present in their thoughts.”³¹

We circumstantially quoted this text because it provides an enlightening example.

If we return to the rites of initiation and when we acknowledge the great impact of the main effect, which is undoubtedly fright, we may think, along with NATHAN, that they correspond to a deliberate formation of a severe psychic trauma.

It is in this way that they efficiently realise the transformations expected by the traditional societies,

³⁰ Sandor Ferenczi (1913).Un petit homme-coq.Oeuvres complètes,II.Paris,Payot,1970.

³¹ Tobie Nathan.Op.cit.,pp.149-150

this means:

- an entire **metamorphose** of the subject.

- a production of the **identical**: the initiate has to become “mimetically” identical with his elder initiator in order to be able to do the same later with the youngest; that is how the anevolutivity of the archaic societies can be partly explained.
- a modification of memory: the past experiences have to be erased. Nostalgia is banned. Life begins from moment zero of the initiation, the previous existence doesn't matter anymore, and the blank created by the **amnesia of the personal history** is filled with the myths and the ancestral legends.
- a **complete amnesia of the experiences** that have been lived through, the ritual performance, comparable to the post-shock amnesia encountered in fright neurosis. If nevertheless some memories are remembered, this is anyway a taboo subject that nobody would dare to evoke.
- a **stereotype behaviour**, which doesn't ascribe any importance to the fantasies that in our culture correspond to the obsessive cult of “narcissism of the little difference”.

At last, it is not useless to underline the fact that the psychotherapeutic rituals, much better known than the rites of initiation³², are rather accurate copies of these ones, repeating their stages, because **illness is always regarded as the consequence of an initiation failure**.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the initiator, the psychotherapist (shaman, healer, wizard, marabout, “medicine man”) never makes use of terror. His maternal qualities prevail by far over his paternal function.

4. Oedipus adolescent.

FREUD anticipated the reason why **Oedipus is the basic myth of the unconsciousness**:

“Each listener experienced once to be Oedipus in imagination and got frightened by the realisation of his dream transposed in reality, he shudders depending on the degree of repression which separates his childhood state from his adult state.” (Letter to Fliess, 15th of October 1897).

It is interesting to note, in respect to what has been said about fright, that the verb used by FREUD the first time he referred to Oedipus, was “*zurückschauern*” : **to retreat from fright**. This is to say that in Freud's mind the reactivated affect is exactly the one called “*Schreck*” in German, from where the expression “*Schreckneurose*” comes from, the most current word for the traumatic neurosis.

From this moment on and till the "Abstract" of 1938, the whole theoretical elaboration converged on the repeated affirmation of the primacy of the castration anxiety, anxiety of all anxieties, which puts in theory a definitive end to Oedipus and rings the knell of the childish expectations.

However, FREUD never seriously turned to the interpretation of the Oedipus's myth. He was always very interested in mythology and gave some shrewd interpretations to several Greek myths, particularly in connection with Prometheus and the head of Medusa. However as for Oedipus he never made an analysis of it.

We might say that Freud did not analyse Oedipus because he recognized himself too well in the personage. He immediately identified himself with Oedipus and projected himself on him as the unconscious incestuous parricide he discovered in his dreams. At the same time he projected Oedipus on the whole of humankind – for it is a never questioned postulate that in every human there is the whole human – insofar as parricide and incest are the supreme abomination.

Their interdiction and repression exist in theory in every civilization, without exception.

³² Jean Mélon. Notes de cours de “Méthodes d'action psychologique:orientation dynamique”. Université de Liège. Cercle des étudiants en psychologie. Liège. 1994, pp. 1 à 48.

The Hellenists³³ criticized FREUD and the psychoanalysts for not paying enough attention to **the contextual signification of the Oedipus legend** and particularly to Sophocle's tragedy.

Many studies ³⁴ have attempted for 30 years to analyse their multiple facets, especially the socio-historical ones of the Oedipus myth.

Among them, an anthropological approach especially stands out, notably resumed in Jean-Joseph GOUX's ³⁵ recent book. But before explaining GOUX's thesis we must say a few words about Marie DELCOURT's ³⁶ work that opened new doors in this matter. Her book is both a starting point and the necessary reference for everyone who is interested in the interpretation of the Oedipus myth. Marie DELCOURT has the merit of exposing right from the beginning and very clearly, her basic thesis:

“The legend of Oedipus has arrived to us through some late poems, as all the epics of the theban cycle have been lost. However it is one of those in which the mythical elements are easily discernible and also the most intelligible.

Six episodes succeed one another in such a way that they compose a biography. All of them have the same value: they mean greatness, conquest, domination, and taking over of power. Each of them can be found in other legends too, but no other legend presents them all together. Even though their fate was to be synonyms, their origins are very different, that is to say that, gathered together, they transpose on a fabulous ground a particularly rich ensemble of rituals that, coming from very different epochs, beliefs and contexts, all relate to the concept of *royalty*.

The story of Oedipus is certainly the most complete of all the political myths. If analysed with some patience, it can tell us about the pre-history of sovereign power among the ancient Greeks. This fact is therefore interesting, as the Greeks have even lost the Indo-European name of *king*. Only the legends allow us to go back to the ancient times, where human groups chose a chief and submitted to his authority.” ³⁷

We can see that what is first presented is **the question of the royal investiture and of the rites which preside over the enthroning**.

Deliberately limiting her study to the area of Greek legends, Marie DELCOURT isolates a small amount of themes:

- the exposed infant,
- the victory over Sphinx,
- the solving of the enigma,
- the marriage to the princess,
- the union with the mother.

She spots these themes in all the known Greek myths, gives the most plausible interpretations and tries to highlight their specific significance through the myth of Oedipus that condenses them in an exemplary way, better than any other myth.

All the themes she analysed appear as vestiges of the ancient initiation rituals that must have presided over the enthroning of the kings.

Her general basic hypothesis is that the myth emerges when the rites preceding it risk losing their meaning and therefore their efficacy.

We shall see further how this thesis is retaken and amplified in GOUX's work.

Marie DELCOURT incidentally notes some facts that are crucial for our discussion.

³³ Jean-Pierre Vernant et Pierre Vidal-Naquet. Oedipe et ses mythes. Paris, Editions Complexe, 1988.

³⁴ Voir notamment: Oedipe. L'écrit du temps, n°12, Paris, Minuit, 1986.

³⁵ Jean Joseph Goux. Oedipe philosophe. Paris, Aubier, 1990.

³⁶ Marie Delcourt. Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant. Liège. Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et lettres, 1944.

³⁷ Marie Delcourt. Op.cit. p.3.

First, the fact that the rites of royal enthroning and the pubescent rites of initiation are only indirectly known and relatively comprehensible through the Indian myths concerning enthroning and through African myths concerning initiation.

Then the fact on which Freud had already insisted (but Marie DELCOURT does not seem to know that he had preceded her on this point) that what makes the greatest difference between the archaic and modern cultures is that in the archaic ones there are conscious taboos specially on parricide and incest - and their symbolic counterparts - whereas in the modern cultures, there are no taboos anymore but instead internalised interdictions which produce their effects without the subject's awareness. We can even say that the less conscious the subject is, the more the effects are powerful.

On this point, Marie DELCOURT shares, without knowing it, FREUD's opinion. She finally well demonstrates that the myth of Oedipus reveals a sharp conflict, correlative to the archaic - modern antinomy, between a model of collectivist legality like in the clan and an individualistic model that privileges the family nucleus, home, the "*oikos*" against the "*genos*".

Marie DELCOURT severely criticises FREUD on a very precise point: the quasi-necessary relationship he establishes between parricide and incest. Her work ends with the following consideration:

"Nobody would deny that a rivalry between father and son really exists. This rivalry, I think, has its origin far more in the desire for power than in the libido as such"

In this regard, the position of Marie DELCOURT is identical with Alfred ADLER's one, off whom FREUD split in 1911, precisely because ADLER wanted to see in the desire for power and in the conflicts for power the unique source of all human miseries, thus erasing the importance of sexuality.

The refusal to link incest to parricide leads Marie DELCOURT to entirely deny the existence of the incestuous desire from which she only accepts the metaphorical meaning.

Then, the "fusion with the mother" does not express anything other than the desire, either to possess the earth by conquering it, (like Cesar who crossed the Rubicon after having an incestuous dream), or, on the contrary, to return to the earth, meaning to die.

In his "Oedipus philosopher", John Joseph GOUX adopts the comparative method used by Marie DELCOURT. Like her, he imposes himself to remain within the limits of Greek mythology; like her, he recognizes in the legend of Oedipus the major themes of a coronation myth; like her, he notices **the analogy between the enthroning rites and the puberty initiation rites** which are the rites of passage between childhood and adulthood, of entering the world of the differentiated human beings, man and woman, each of them with their rigorously delimited roles and functions.

But the innovation that will call our attention is that the myth of Oedipus is qualified as absolutely "**aberrant**" in contrast with the other enthroning myths. Among these three classic examples are invoked: Perseus, Bellephoron and Jason.

It is easy to notice the three initiatory ordeals imposed to the candidate designated to succeed the reigning king. To the three successive phases correspond the **three figures of the king-father, in this order: the persecutor, the mandatory and the donor.**

The first probationary ordeal shows the king-father as a persecutor. Anxious about having the best successor, the monarch "exposes" the candidate, puts him in an extremely dangerous situation. This is the meaning of the "exposing" rites; if the heir, abandoned in savage nature, contrary to all expectations survives, it is because he is either exceptionally robust, or protected by the favour of the gods.

The second ordeals corresponds to the appearance on the scene of a mandatory king, who summons and orders the survivor to confront, actively this time, a situation of more extreme danger. He has to brave in a face to face combat a well-known invincible monster, partly man, partly woman, and partly beast, to kill it and bring back its skin.

Finally, as a reward of his success, the donor king gives a princess's hand in marriage, usually his own daughter, to the candidate who becomes his worthy successor.

It is flagrant that **in the myth of Oedipus, only the figure of the persecutor king appears**. And if we adopt the viewpoint of the persecutor father, it is evident that Oedipus missed his first step as he was supposed to be dead. From our viewpoint, he did not undergo the first ordeal because instead of being exposed, he was saved by a shepherd and adopted by Polybe and Meurope, kings of Corinth. But Oedipus returns to his birthplace and **without being elected** by anybody, of his own accord and almost accidentally, he is induced to pass the second ordeal.

His victory over the Sphinx is only an intellectual contest of a particular shortness compared to the thousand adventures that, in other enthroning myths, accompany the fierce combat against the monster and constitute the very essence of the drama.

Thus the Oedipus' victory is not one of a courageous warrior; it is the victory of a man supposed to be intelligent and in addition a self-made man.

He is crafty, his knowledge is innate, and he has received no initiation instruction.

Two anomalies dominate the myth of Oedipus: on the one hand, the king-father is absent as mandatory and donor; on the other hand, there is no true combat with the female monster. Instead and in the place of these anomalies, what do we find?

Parricide and incest.

IN SUMMARY:

- A. The motive of the ordeal imposed by a king is absent; instead, we find the murder of a king who is the hero's father.
- B. The dangerous confrontation with a female monster has the following irregularities:
 1. no god's assistance; neither Athena nor Hermes is present to help the hero.
 2. no mortal's assistance; neither advice of a sage soothsayer nor assistance of a fiancée.
 3. no spreading out of the ordeals leading to the final victory
 4. no mobilization of the physical force but only the utterance of a single word; the consequence of which is the suicide of the monster, as a substitute for its actual murder.
 5. Marriage, not with a king's daughter but with his own mother (op. cit. p.24).

That is what authorizes J.J GOUX to qualify the myth of Oedipus as "**atypical**".

Oedipus is atypical indeed if compared to the sovereigns that got the power by successfully passing the ordeals imposed by tradition³⁸.

Besides Oedipus is not a king but a tyrant.

His access to the throne has not been legitimised by the passing of the rituals of initiation. Only equipped with his reason, herald of the logos, the people of Thebes regard him as the equal of Apollo.

With regard to the tradition, he commits a sacrilege, the sign of his "*ubris*", of his self-conceit. The inaugural confrontation with Tiresias sufficiently shows the little respect he accords to the priestly function.

³⁸ JJ Goux refers to the three traditional functions – the sacredness, the war and fecundity – linked to the royal institution in the Indo-European culture as they have been isolated by Georges Dumézil and resembled in a trilogy. One sees immediately that with Oedipus, in the myth and even more in the tragedy, these three functions undergo a deep alteration. This point would ask a more extended development, therefore refer to the author's work.

As Hegel ³⁹ brilliantly pointed out, the coming of Oedipus on the scene of the universal history marks the break between the archaic age, structured by the "*muthos*", to the modern one, where the reason frees itself in the assumption of the "*logos*", about which Cicero said that it was "*Ratio, oratio and proportio*".

If Oedipus incarnates the prototypic hero of reason in the modern sense of the term, if he is the precursor of the age of Enlightenment, the moment of the encounter with the Sphinx gets a crucial importance.

What may the Sphinx represent?

Quoting LAISTNER ("*Das Rätsel der Sphynx*", Berlin, 1889), Marie DELCOURT showed that the "overwhelming daemons" like the Sphinx impose three kinds of ordeals to their victims: their caresses, strokes and questions.

To triumph over the female monster, which is not difficult to identify with the primitive, ravenous, phallic, enchantress, seductive and mortifying mother, the hero has, in this order:

1. to resist her seduction,
2. to mobilize the aggression in the sense of destroying the primary maternal element, to rape it; otherwise it is the monster that kills and rapes.
3. to acquire a knowledge making him successfully cope with the mental diversion provoked by the "winged Muse's" song.

The analogy with the rites of passage is striking, as we know them from the African model. In Greek mythology, Dionysus incarnates this metamorphosis.

The symbolic castration is not one of Jacques LACAN's inventions; the archaic cultures have always practised it.

As the Ortigues well demonstrated in "African Oedipus" ⁴⁰, the African cultures do in such a way that the Oedipus complex- as we know it as nuclear complex of the unconsciousness – cannot get constituted.

At one side the prohibition of incest is explicitly proclaimed, accompanied by a series of very precise prohibitions. As a consequence, defying the prohibition is not heroic at all but is behaving like an ignoramus and risking the worst: the relapse into infantilism. ⁴¹

On the other hand, the conflict between generations is concealed. The rebellion against the father does not have to occur. There is no reason to kill the father for he is already dead.

The only fathers deserving this name are the ancestors, the ritual practice having the mission to connect them to the world of living people, of which they are an integral part.

Two things always shock the Africans:

- our cult of little children
- the lack of regard for our elders.

How significant is the difference between the mentalities!

Let us return to Oedipus.

³⁹ Hegel. Esthétique. L'art symbolique, chap.1, vol.2. Paris, Flammarion Champs, 1979, p. 76.

Commenting on this passage, Goux writes (p.169) "Oedipus facing the Sphinx... In the confrontation between the dark monster that asks riddles and the one who victoriously answers "the man", we find condensed a decisive historical step, a threshold of thinking and a turning way of the spirit. Man is at last in the center. This is why Hegel made of this mythic episode the primitive scene of philosophy. Oedipus is the inventor of this new position, promised to a great future, and that sets the Occident apart.

⁴⁰ Edmond et Marie-Cécile Ortigues. Oedipe africain. Paris, 10-18, 1973.

⁴¹ Like the fact of falling ill often is assimilated to a relapse in the infantile, the therapeutic rites are generally an imitation of the initiation rites. As already expressed before, illness is indeed considered as the consequence of a messing up of the initiation so this one has to be recommenced.

If he really is this hero of reason and autonomy, the first individual who assumes an Ego identified to what he thinks and says in his personal name, then it is necessary to see- and this is the J. J. GOUX's thesis- that the change he accomplishes this way in **the elision of any initiation**, actually corresponds to rejecting the tradition and the sacredness that it preserved, to killing the father(s), to (re)opening the regressive ways (re)leading to the primary mother.

We find here again the Freudian thesis. Neurosis is the illness of our culture and what we find at the base of both of them, as their tenebrous other side, is the "nuclear complex" of neurosis.

We understand why the definitive disappearance of the rites of passage consecrates the break with the traditional patri- or matriarchal culture, into a modern society (some would say post-modern), filiarcal and also why the price to be paid is neurosis or psychosis or more the border case, all expressions of the "**uneasiness in the civilization**" ⁴².

Henceforth, authority has ceased to be an external agency:

"A significant change occurs from the moment the authority is internalised, due to the super-ego agency. Then the phenomena of (moral) conscience emerge at another level, and we should only speak about conscience and feelings of culpability after this change has occurred" (Op. cit., p.82).

From this point of view, **Oedipus is the first great culprit**. This is the reason why he puts out his eyes.

"The castration even appears in the legend of Oedipus. The hero indeed puts out his eyes to punish himself for the crime he has committed, an act that, as the dreams show, is a symbolic substitute of castration" ⁴³.

Had he been initiated, no doubt Oedipus would never have reached this extreme. It is well known that in primitive societies, neither suicide nor self-mutilation exists. The subject is somehow vaccinated against self-punishment.

But those times have gone forever.

"The modern man will never again pass the threshold by a crucial ordeal which cuts off, in a bloody way, the windings of the snake-mother, following the advice of an mandatory authority and being helped by gods and wise men.

His fate will be the long-lasting liminality, through a process of an open, unachievable, indefinite process of self-initiation.

The subjectivity of the modernity, filiarcal, is the one of the liminality that became an endless process and not a passage any more. It is the whole existence that is a critical threshold.

The non-achievement and the opening of the heroic course, shakes and surpasses the patriarchal stability." ⁴⁴

The transition has imperceptibly occurred but it is easy enough to date it.

It has been prepared all along the century of Enlightenment and was accomplished after 1789.

It is not by chance that, as we have pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, that the child and then the teenager become so important.

The explanation is resumed as follows: **Oedipus has returned**.

"There is a tight link between Oedipus and History. Ideally, in a society "without History", mainly based on the repetitive handing down of an intact tradition from generation to generation, a figure such as Oedipus could not have a fundamental significance. It is nothing but an aberration. But since the wisdom of the ancestors stops guiding infallibly, the thinking and actions of people, each individual, as an almost unwilling violator of the depreciated education of the great dead, is condemned to the Oedipal audacity and confusion.

⁴² Sigmund Freud (1929). *Malaise dans la civilisation*. Paris, PUF, 1971.

⁴³ Sigmund Freud (1938). *Abrégé de Psychanalyse*. Paris, PUF, 1967, p.62.

⁴⁴ JJ Goux. *Op.cit.*, p. 206.

Thus any culture experiencing History as a second nature, any society breaking away from repetition and experiencing something like a "progression", a "development", a permanent "innovation", is Oedipal. The tragic Oedipus pervades such society in its deepest levels, in both its fate and spirit. From this point of view, the myth of Oedipus is not a fiction for us; it is the structure of significance in which we are really caught as subjects belonging to an "open society", "de-traditionalised", or "autotelestatic".⁴⁵

If we admit that Oedipus is the prototype of the filiarcal hero, who emerged in the Greece of the 5th century as the tragic figure of the Greek miracle that sees for the first time man attaining truly self conscience, his return after a "latency period" which has lasted more than two thousand years, marks all together the entry to the democratic era with its ideology of progress, its ideals of individuation, of self-determination and autonomy, of education and indefinite ongoing training, of development and of History - with HEGEL and MARX - but also ... of neurosis.

Neurosis is the ransom paid for the progress accomplished by **passing from the collective ego, forged inside the crucible of the rites of passage, to the personal ego, produced from the abstraction of the paternal figure**, for the individual repression and the silent interiorisation of the primary interdictions - that's what FREUD probably meant by saying that the noise of the world entirely comes from Eros whereas the death-drive works in silence⁴⁶.

"Since the self-making determines the constitution of the subject, Oedipus (in Theba and in Colone) represents our fate.

Western civilisation is not patriarchal in the same sense as some societies have been or still are. It is hollowed by the abstraction of the father. What makes its anomaly and its originality since the "Greek miracle" resides in the filiarcal pushes that disturb it. The son's emancipation from the father, the individual's uprooting from the ancestor's imperatives, this is the insistence that determines western civilization as History. Both Patriarchy and Matriarchy have in common the domination of tradition, respect for the past, the imitation of ancestors and truth based on authority.

The sons' thinking springs out from a break in the symbolic reproduction, from a denial of paternity".

" Being completely autonomous means, in the mythical language, taking the place of the father. Therefore, the democratic subject, as one constantly animated by the will for autonomy, is confronted with this difficulty...

The position of psychoanalysis is assigned by its function within a socio-symbolic and democratic regime: it takes charge of the shadow, the symbolic and unconscious counterpart, inherently created by the subject's will for autonomy: the Oedipal conflict. Thus the Oedipal structuring of both pathos and knowledge is the specific trait of the post-traditional world, where the dramaturgy of the conveying has entirely disappeared as a social practice, and where the passage of castration (pulling out, cutting) becomes optional, individual, self-operating and, in some sense postpone, permanent, indefinite. Therefore the historical world would not be a world where the initiation process has disappeared, but a world where nobody has ever done with it."⁴⁷

5. Passage and/or crisis.

If adolescence basically corresponds to the revival of the Oedipal drama in respect to the complementary slopes of nostalgia of primary love and to the revolt against the rival parent, this is enough to characterize it as the major crisis of human existence from which should emerge the qualified adult for all that, in one respect, he would have sufficiently well accomplished the mourning of parental objects by setting himself free from the sexual infantilism.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 207.

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud (1924). *Le moi et le ça*. Paris, Payot, 1967, p. 218.

⁴⁷ JJ Goux, *Op.cit.*, p. 210.

At another respect, he would have assumed the primary identification with the father,⁴⁸ as token of a stable identity and ability to sublimate.

However we must notice that this conflict, critical in the strong sense of the term, tends nowadays to eternalise, perhaps because the Prometheus' ideals of autonomy, individuation, and independence, of surpassing oneself and of endless progress thoroughly dominate the unconscious teleology of our culture.

But the counterpart of progress is regression because "the development of the ego depends on distancing oneself from primary narcissism and generates an intense aspiration to recover it again".⁴⁹

It is as if traditional civilizations would have understood the danger the evolutionary process keeps hidden, and would have worked by short-circuiting the adolescent process, in order to prevent the emergency of that kind of megalomania that corresponds to the "crisis of juvenile originality"⁵⁰ and the intense regressive movement of the libido towards the archaic libidinal investments, (pre-genital), phenomena observable to the extreme degree in schizophrenia.

"How not to believe that the violence of the rite does not refer to the violence of the risk"?⁵¹

Big is the risk of a **double failure**:

- **genital failure** concerning the fate of the objectal libido when it does not succeed in integrating the violence inherent in any relationship with a sexual object, the door opens to neurotic, perverse or psychotic pre-genital regressions and
- **identificatory failure** concerning the fate of the narcissistic libido when the homosexual trend cannot be sublimated in a social bond and if the passion cannot be turned into creation.

We clearly see that it is this double failure which the rites of passage try to ward off

- by forcing the objectal libido to become genital as completely as possible **by the radicalization of the sexuaction.**
- by blocking the ways to regression **by condemning definitively the maternal** and the infantile assimilated to the non-being,
- by strengthening the homosexual bonds sublimated **by making the master-neophyte relationship sacred,**
- by preventing the individualising autonomy from capturing the narcissistic libido in such a way that **the ego ideal remains mixed with the group ideal**, the narcissistic trend being tightly canalised in the way of introjection of the qualities prescribed by peers. "*Dance-with-the-wolves*" is once for all fixed in a metonymic identity that rigorously defines it.

We should neither idealise ancient civilisations nor cultivate nostalgia. We cannot go back. Faced with the irresistible advancement of the ideologies of progress, traditional cultures are condemned to disappear.

The modern ideals of autonomy and progress require precisely of the subject, that he becomes **autonomous** in the strong sense of the term. That is to say, that he produces his own rules of existence according to a symbolic Law that is getting more and more abstract, while the nuclear family forms the main transmission belt, which explains the current over-dramatisation of Oedipus, as LACAN reminds us in his introduction to the article in 1938 on "The Family".

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud(1924).Le moi et le ça,op.cit., p. 200.

“Whatever may be the resistance that the character will have to oppose to the influence of the abandoned sexual objects, the effects of the first identifications, realized in the most precocious phases of life will always keep there general and durable character. This leads us to the birth of the Ego ideal, because behind this ideal is dissimulated the first and most important identification made by the individual: the one with the father of his personal prehistory. This identification does not seem to be the consequence or the outcome of the concentration on an object. It is direct, immediate and anterior to all concentration on any objet...»

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud (1914).Pour introduire le narcissisme.In La vie sexuelle,Paris,PUF,1970,p. 104.

⁵⁰ M.Debesse .La crise d'originalité juvénile.Paris,PUF,1941.

⁵¹ Philippe Jeammet.Op.cit. p. 719.

A question is insistently posed: what are the means of solving the unavoidable crisis of adolescence, in other words, how to get through?

As already stated, in our culture there is no equivalent of the rites of passage anymore, except if we consider schooling as such.

The analogy is valid to a certain degree if we consider that, entering the primary cycle coincides with the beginning of the latency period, the secondary cycle with puberty and the superior one with the "*final period of adolescence*" (BLOS). The "*post-adolescence*", as a period of consolidation of achievements of the "final phase", cannot occur before firmly and permanently realising the choice of the genital object and the socio-professional integration - "love and work".

But nobody would dare to deny that, along with the movement of accentuated de-traditionalisation, this consolidation becomes increasingly more and more problematical, which makes the time of leaving the post-adolescence period unpredictable.

In his classical study⁵², Peter BLOS puts this crucial question:

The late adolescence is a decisive phase; in other words, it is a time of crisis. Last crisis of adolescence that, so often, solicits to the utmost, the capacity of the individual to integrate. Failure to integrate and adapt at this stage results in deformation of the ego, the formation of defensive strategies, and psychosis.

When one arrives at the final phase of adolescence, the concepts of fixation, defence mechanisms, Ego synthesis, sublimation and adaptation, bisexuality, masculinity and femininity- if they are all concerned in this phase too - are not in themselves neither sufficient nor adequate to make understandable the phenomenon of personality consolidation working in late adolescence.

The analytic observation has isolated some of the obstacles that may oppose the progress of consolidation, such as drive fixations, discontinuities in ego development, problems of identity and bisexuality; nevertheless the ways by which the consolidation of the personality is accomplished remain obscure in many respects. The integration processes are less meaningful than the processes of disintegration.

Shall we say that repression is the main agent that works to introduce adulthood, just as previously, at the end of the Oedipal phase it was the same mechanism of defence that introduced the latency period?

Manifestly, this would be a too simple explanation; it could not in anyway render account for the great variability, depending on the individuals, for the adaptations and structures that can be noticed around the end of adolescence.

What we have to find is a functioning rule, a **dynamic concept** that governs the consolidation process specific to late adolescence and includes it in all its forms:

- In the first place, the psychic apparatus that synthesises the various processes specific to this phase of adolescence, that makes them stable, irreversible and sets them up with an adaptive potential;
- In the second place, the source of the specific residues originating in the anterior periods of development that have survived the transformations of adolescence and continue to exist in a derived form, contributing to character formation; and,
- finally, the source of the energy that leads up to certain solutions and repels others, thus giving, for each case, to the consolidation process **its character and its genuine imperative for each**.

These two qualities, often linked to sacrifice and to pain, cannot come entirely from the maturation urge; other forces have to combine their efforts within this process. It is here that we have to introduce the concept of *traumatism*. (53)

We find here again **the essential notion of traumatism** as a central element and major driving force of the crucial transformations, which operate the shift to adult age **by fixing the genuine and definitive character of the individual** and thus putting an end, in principle, to the crisis of adolescence.

⁵² Peter Blos (1962). Les adolescents. Etude psychanalytique. Paris, Stock, 1967.

⁵³ Ibidem, pp. 156-158

This way of considering the passage to the adult age, by underlining both the traumatism and its inherent repetition, allows making the comparison with the highly traumatic character of the ancient passage rituals as already described.

In both cases it is a matter of "**fixing**" the subject in a **specific, traumatophilic, repetitive, "habitudinal" and restrictive** mode of existence, however with this difference that in a modern culture, the process of limitation could only proceed by **self-limitation**.

Keeping with this line, BLOS quotes one of the rare passages in FREUD's work where **the traumatism and automatism of repetition are considered in a positive viewpoint**, going in the direction of the life-drive rather than of the death-drive, in contradiction with the central thesis of "Beyond the pleasure principle":

The traumatisms have two kinds of effects: positive and negative. The first ones are attempts to give a new value to the traumatism - (lets us note that this was the case of the play with the spool) - which means reviving the recollection of the forgotten incident or more exactly **making it real, bringing it back alive**.

If this concerned a precocious affective feeling, this tender feeling reoccurs in an analogous manner but orientated this time toward another person.

We call all these efforts: "fixation to the traumatism" or "repetition automatisms ". They can be integrated within a so-called normal ego and confer to this one, as permanent trends, **their immutable character even though, or rather due to the fact that their real fundament, their historical origin have been forgotten ...** Viewed this way the problem of neurosis allows us to approach the problem of the character in general.

The negative reactions tend to a diametrically opposite. The forgotten traumatisms do not access the memory anymore and nothing is repeated; we group them under the name of "defence reactions ", which can be translated by "avoidance" that can turn into "inhibitions" and "phobias". Besides, these negative reactions considerably contribute to character formation. Like the positive reactions, they are also fixations to the traumatism while obeying an opposite tendency..."⁵⁴

If the end of adolescence may be assimilated to the definitive resolution of the Oedipal drama, we have to acknowledge, as the entire psychoanalytic experience shows, that the resolution of the Oedipus complex, even when it seems definitive, is always only partial.

It is precisely the most significant traumatic residues of early infancy, aroused but not overcome during adolescence, that deals with a true homeopathic reversal - in its final phase and in the best cases. This is done thanks to a sthenic surrection with the intention to control, in an indefinite, "immutable" way, the constant ongoing excitation produced by the idiosyncratic trauma(s) of the subject

«.. The post-traumatic effects cause situations that reproduce somehow, the original one, in such a manner that we will observe the perpetuation of the work on the traumatism and the effort to dominate it. The experiences that have been lived through in this context are based on the mode of the repetition compulsion. What had originally been felt as a threat coming from the environment becomes the model of the internal danger.

To acquire this type of model, quite a serial of symbolic representations and substitute equivalents have to replace the original danger ...

At the end of adolescence, the initial threat, or rather a component of this threat, is **turned to the outside, reactivated on the environment**; it is then that within an extremely specific interaction system that the individual exerts himself to overcome or to neutralise the threat. From there comes the feeling that his behaviour is intentional, justified, necessary and satisfactory ...

During his whole life the individual will have the psychic task of fighting against a harmful influence stemmed from the external world, precipitated in the traumatism and which henceforth is part of the internal world.

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud(1939).Moïse et le monothéisme.Paris,Gallimard,1948,p.103.

The residual traumatism provide the force, through the automatism of repetition that urges the non-integrated experiences to enter into the mental life where they will be handled or integrated in the ego.

The *direction* taken by this process - whether it impacts more on the drive discharge, the sublimation, the defence, the ego deformation etc. - is to a large extent controlled by the Super-ego and influenced by the ego ideal. The environment, the social institutions, tradition, morals and systems of values influence the form it takes...

Therefore, we conclude that the infantile conflicts do not disappear with the end of adolescence but that they become specific, conform to the ego, which means integrated in the area of the ego in the form of vital tasks. They take place in the centre of the adult's self-representations. Every attempt to overcome a residual traumatism to the ego, is often experienced as a conflict, strengthening the self-esteem." ⁵⁵

Inversely, may we add that any failure in this field can only be experienced as a narcissistic injury that the psychotic, perverse or psychopathic prosthesis will plug up.

In brief, we might say that in this decisive turning point, the subject is confronted with the most difficult task which consists in establishing an economically stable balance within the couples of complementary oppositions: subject-object, active-passive and pleasure-displeasure.

By orienting himself in the sense of a saving traumatophilie, the individual opts for the subject (to be) against the object (to have)⁵⁶, for activity and autonomy against passivity and dependence, for displeasure against pleasure which means that he places himself "beyond the pleasure principle", in the field of a reality halfway between the given and the created, what WINNICOTT called the transitional field, place of culture and societal.

The benefits the individual obtains from this are a **strengthening of the social narcissism, an investment of the external reality** often enough correlative with a disinterest in the psychic-fantasmatic reality and **an attenuation of the global feeling of frustration** moderating the libidinal exigencies towards the love objects.

⁵⁵ Peter Blos.Op.cit.,pp.158-161.

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud (1920).Psychologie collective et analyse du moi.Paris,Payot,1951,p.127.

"It is easy to express in one formula this difference between the identification with the father and the attachment to the father as a sexual object: in the first case the father is what we would like *to be*, in the second one, what we would like *to have*. In the first case it concerns the *subject* of the ego, in the second case its *object*."