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FAMILY NARCISSISM, ITS ORIGIN, ITS DESTINY

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Even though the topic of family narcissism has been frequently studied, I have the feeling that it hasn't been explored in all its aspects and that there is still huge areas to open up. Even more so, it has now become imperative to do so: the contemporary family suffers from lack of self-esteem, its members do not feel as assured as in the past, nor do they give enough credit to some of its members to enable them to be used as models they can identify with or as models of authority. They are not very proud of their family because of its instability, the loss of love between parents, their successive break-ups, and the change of guardians with the recomposed family. Because of this, dealing with filial and brotherly relationships can be difficult. To be able to use one's own family, it is necessary to trust it, to trust its legacy, its abilities, its ideals; This is how its members do not quite believe in their family any more, nor in a family able to reach its universal objectives. They are then tempted to look for other groups which might make up for its failings.

I think that it would be useful to analyse the very foundations of family narcissism; to tackle this subject, we shall look again at the much-debated relationship between narcissism and sexuality in the light of new discoveries about its structure, which reveal the importance of the voids and the unrepresentables in the link.

The individual narcissistic structure is very much in demand when integrating the « we » in the collective family psyche. Why? Maybe, because it has a tendency to standardise psyches and extra-territorialise the ego, in other words each family member speaks to the other and considers him/her as a part of him/her. At the same time, this orientation, which varies according to people and families, has a tendency towards erasing personal limits and therefore helps intersubjectivity. Though narcissism is sometimes compared to egocentricity, we notice that it can also belong to a totally different logic, the logic of the link to the other. And this is not the only paradox which reveals its functioning.

Freud (1914) has highlighted that parent's narcissism weighs considerably when investing their children as a part of themselves in the aim of perpetuating their being and realising the projects they could not accomplish themselves. As he was putting together the basis of the theory of narcissism, Freud (1914) upended his principles by underlining that love of the self is not what goes against love for the other, as for here, and that the love of the parents for their offspring is actually quite the reverse, it stimulates it. Parental love takes on thus an intense quality without any possible comparison with another love.

Before going any further, I think it is important to talk about this love and the parental-filial link, because at a time when we wonder if same sex couples can be parents just like anybody else, we can also wonder if we are still talking about the same families as in the past. From my point of view, the parental-filial link is not only a link of love of an adult towards a child ; this can be found also in the love we have towards a nephew or a friend's or a neighbour's child, but the parental-filial love has a colouring all to itself.

Identification and filial link

Reciprocity in the link is fed by mutual acknowledgement of parent and child, which happens at a very young age, and progresses during the child's development but it has some prominent turning points. The father or the parents declare the newborn child to the registry office; some parents will have the child baptised. Baptism also means the parents acknowledging the child as being theirs, its admission to the community and the family, with delegation of parenthood to the

godmother and godfather. This very same action is potent during the *naming* of the child. Besides, with baptism (the declaration of the child is the corresponding laic act), by giving him its name and surname, we give the child a place in the family genealogy. He shall be able, when the time comes, to recognise himself in the lineage.

These doings of the parents ensure the child's *identification* as subject of filiations and a genealogy (attributive form of the verb to identify). The parents identify the child again through linking him to their internal object. The child answers in turn by an identification under the reflexive form of the verb to identify (I identify myself). The child identifies with the parent, the parent's internal object and his lineage. In the same way, he identifies and acknowledges his parent as being his.

Mutual acknowledgement comprises a many faceted aspect of faith and words: the mother acknowledges that she has conceived her child with the one she calls the father and vice versa. She and the father can take pleasure in remarking that their little one looks like such or such member of the family.

When talking about identification, we are talking about narcissism; it is a way to join with the other, and the other of the other, to make it a part of oneself. Orality comes into it; to identify oneself to the other is a way to « eat him/her »; this can happen nicely and lead to a pleasant digestion. There may be a step before this, though: *the exteriorisation* of a representation through projective identification with the hope of integrating the other in one's own universe. The other is included in the ego, just as an amoeba does with its pseudopodia. To identify the other with a part of oneself or one of the internal objects is therefore an oral approach. To identify with the other recalls that, as with an exquisite meal, we make the other ours by modifying our own ego. Why is it an exquisite meal? In reality, we « eat » only one part of the other, a unique personality trait (Freud, 1923), an *Einzigiger Zug*, and not his whole being. In other words, any identification is incomplete and reduced, as if we wished to keep the other inside ourselves while keeping all his vitality, and by using the love that he professes for the subject. If this is not the case, we fall into gluttony, into eating for the sake of eating which is characteristic of deviant forms of identification, such as mimicry, identification with the attacker or devouring the riches envied in the other. During *incorporation*, another variation of identification, the digestion is also

uneasy. The object is swallowed whole, without any adequate previous libidinal investment or metabolism.

Identification is, all in all, a complex and subtle process, which demands that the other has already been acknowledged, appreciated and esteemed, even for a brief moment. Furthermore, to be able to identify with the other, it is quite reassuring for the subject to know that the other feels the same way towards him.

Acknowledging your child as your own calls on parental narcissism and an aspect which is linked to it: *possession*. It forms the basis of reassurance and above all self-confidence for the child as well as for the parent. Ambition is not far. Narcissism tends to enrich itself constantly by identifications in the name of its master, the ego. I shall even say the ego is like a businessman who wants to develop his business. Having children is an enterprise whose aim is the growth of the Ego. The problem is that one day the children leave; the parents can use narcissistic seduction to avoid this painful prospect by totally subjecting the child. The link changes activity then and become an « industrial branch » which is called narcissistic perversion.

In reality, narcissism is closely linked to its twofold reverse, anti-narcissism (F. Pasche, 1965). When going towards the other we are taking, at the same time as losing a part of oneself.

Living together happily

Freud (*op. cit.*) insists upon the idea that love and narcissism can happily go together. We love because we find the other similar to ourselves. In reality, Freud never renounces the central role of libido. He said on this subject some very instructive things on the narcissistic choice of sexual objects, taking his inspiration from Sadger (1908), who, a few years before him, had exposed the case of the choice of object in a woman who came out of a period of a rather lonely love life, by falling in love with a man she thought was wonderful because he fell in love with her and found her exceptional. She fell in love with the exciting image that man had of her.

We should remind the reader that the story of Narcissus and Echo is the story of an unhappy love affair because it is an impossible one.

Sadger's patient, unlike Echo, has found an alibi which enabled her to make her love affair come true.

The whole of the mythical legend of Narcissus is shot through with romantic feelings. Obviously, it wants to highlight the fact that the other is different from ourselves, and that it is fairer to take him for what he is and not what we would like him to be.

But there is a fuller reason which leads to the closeness of narcissism and libido. The parental ideal gives support to the child's ideal, at the same time as the narcissism endows the ego with constancy and solidity. But, by making the Ego believe that a certain amount of things are allowed, the latter considers normal to achieve the aims of the id, which is to transgress. The id takes on certain erotic tendencies wishing to ignore the prerogatives of the superego. The conflict between what is allowed and what is not becomes hard. J.-L Donnet's comments (2008) can be interpreted thus: "Freud (1936) doesn't say that it is forbidden to surpass the father; he simply says that it remains not allowed. Shouldn't we recognize that any project putting at stake the ideal implies the transgression of a limit? Freud (*op.cit.*) maintains that every good father accepts and even wishes that his child should go further than him.

In Metapsychology's evolution, the Ego ideal and the superego appear to be very close, until 1923, when Freud defines the superego as an agency, but he never contrasts them. However, several patients put down to the same parental references what is allowed (ego ideal) and what is not (superego). We rarely hear the patients say that they are not allowed to complete a project, they are more likely to say: "It's impossible," "we'll never manage", "we won't be able to", "I don't know how we'll be able to do this". In other words, in this clinical situation, the superego has a tendency to harass the ego as well as the ideal, stopping the positive aspects of the parental reference to come into play.

Let's discuss now other aspects. Establishing itself under such narcissistic auspices, filial love finds itself being marked thus by its destiny. In spite of the oedipal and counter-oedipal passions, parent and child will never be lovers: human beings have a certain rejection to having a sexual union with one who looks like him. He rejects the mating of same with same which is not compatible with the differences of types (cf. F. Héritier, 1996). Narcissism is used to stimulate sexual

love, of course, but not when it is there at a level as important as in the case where physical traits are similar. Narcissism must intervene in the choice of sexual partners on the sly, *sotto voce*, in a latent manner.

The *parental-filial link* is therefore the heir of mutual acknowledgement, of narcissism, of the projection onto the child of the ideal of the parental Ego, of the genealogical reference, and the fact that the child was conceived through sexual acts between its biological parents. Each of the protagonists has a place in the numerous primal scenes. We should add that living together contributes to strengthening this link. Intimacy for two or more has its roots in narcissism as I explored in my book « *Du bon usage du narcissisme* » (*How to use narcissism well*). Within the bosom of the family, we give ourselves up to the other, we are at ease, and trustful. For this to happen, a kind of seduction occurs, which is inevitably narcissistic.

For me the theoretical specificity of the parental-filial link appears as an essential preliminary; this link is particular as is each of the other kinship links, couple link, brotherly link and the link between trans-generational subject and object. It is even more important to highlight this specific aspect because several studies on families have disregarded it by proposing an automatic transfer from the group links theories to family links. The notion of group assuredly gives a basis, but it is not enough. Family narcissism moreover has its particularities. I have talked about love and libido. I could also mention some more archaic aspects present in family narcissism as in other links. Archaism is lived in some way in indifferentiation. The idea I am upholding comes from this: the primitive sets itself up and develops simultaneously with more organised elements of the family psyche, thus giving it specificity.

Narcissistic links at the roots of family narcissism

This idea led me to develop the notion of a functional split between two levels of binding: the narcissistic links and the libidinal links with the object links. A characteristic of the narcissistic link is the fact that the other is lived and treated as one alike to oneself, whereas in objectal links, the other is associated to an internal object and lived as an alter ego that we consider and treat with respect and towards

whom we feel responsible. This movement is in any case mutual, each of the protagonists of the link associate the other either with oneself or with a third object.

I have noticed that in normal conditions, these two links remain well balanced. If one prevails upon the other, it becomes the cause of disturbances and dysfunctioning.

By introducing narcissistic links, I wanted to do a synthesis of several research works. P.-C. Racamier (1963) talks about personalization, the first psyche is not physical, it spreads throughout the world and makes no distinctions between oneself and the other. The mental functioning is nevertheless already there, in a rudimentary form, of course, but its « physicalisation » will take place subsequently, in other words, it will conform to the norm of proper representation of the body ; from now on it is associated to it.

The primitive movements of indifferenciation therefore contribute to inter-subjective binding. (I shall come back to this.)

It may be useful to remind the reader of other aspects which are characteristic of narcissistic functioning: atemporality, aconflictuality. This brings about a feeling of well-being and overexcitement, which touches on magical real-life. When D. Winnicott (1969) puts forward the idea that the child creates the mother or when Ch. Bollas (1978) suggests that the child could see the mother as a transformational object, they refer to this imaginary movement at the root of fantasising. Within the links, the narcissistic bindings become a permanent structure, something to lean on, for the rest of the functioning. Narcissism stabilizes through continuity; we have a major example of this with sleep and dreams regression, and within the family with the collective creation of the in-between space.

The time of narcissism is time stopped, or looped, clearly marked by a relative cancellation of the time span; a tempting eternal calm emanates from it. We wish that family life would stop at a time when its members are, or have been, happy and that there would be no evolution. Objectal links remind us, on the other hand, that life is progression and that we enjoy moments of happiness more if we accept length of time, change and renewal. Sexuality is surprise, pleasure of the moment, alternation, strength, and disturbance.

I have suggested three sophisticated productions of narcissistic links: the feeling of family ego, its crystallization in the family environment and the building of a collective ego. To understand the *family ego*, which is totally into continuity, the reference to a non-family outside is important. An outside lived with already accepted manners. (Eiguer, 1987)

It seems necessary to me to mention here more precisions about its functions. As the parent's narcissism and the help they give to the children's narcissism, by stimulating them, gratifying them, encouraging them, constitute inescapable consolidating for their psychical organisation, the group feels at the same time comforted in its feeling of unity. The family sees itself as different from other families, or even superior to them; its members believe in the quality of its morals and lifestyle. To feel one's own family as being different is not synonymous with self-autonomy, but the sign of a strong identity.

The narcissism of any family contributes to its members acquiring self-consciousness (cf. A. Honneth, 1992). Knowing where we come from and recognising oneself in our lineage is an important aspect of personal identity.

These elements are nevertheless paradoxical, because narcissism is usually represented as tending to blur limits. At the same time as indifferentiation develops within the family, narcissism intervenes to differentiate the inside and the outside, by means of rallying, or even falling back. Self-reflecting mirrors?

I think that being proud to belong to a family is not a negative feeling, even if it is easy to accept that no family deserves more than another does. These considerations become more interesting when we associate them to the vast thinking done on trophic and constructive narcissism, which, through the stimulus given to the thoughts by Heinz Kohut (1971) has noticed its place in the building of self-esteem and authorized the idea of request for acknowledgement, which is a totally normal demand. Human beings need, and rightfully so, to see themselves acknowledged in their rights as well as in their abilities, to have their image enhanced. They also want to protect themselves from situations that could damage their well-being. To be ill-treated, humiliated, excluded, three situations we recognise as being linked to masochism, are often mentioned to highlight the extent of their negative consequences within social links.

Kohut (*op. cit.*) thinks that showing off and protesting is indispensable for the subject to find his place in the sun. These studies have revived a narcissism which is at the service of life, without nevertheless ignoring its pathological drifts, particularly with the narcissistic-pervert, who actually tries to weaken other's narcissism.

I have alluded to masochism. I insist on this to say that submission or servility is not only the product of an individual tendency, but also the result of a link. The person may be faced with somebody who needs to dominate and then would rather be subjected by him, just to have some peace and quiet, by conforming and even renouncing his/her personality, as in a case of false self.

These theoretical and practical discoveries in the concepts of family narcissism help us to better understand and tolerate some reactions which could hurt us.

The flaws of narcissism and configuration of provenance

The narcissism that I envisage is closely linked to sexuality which mobilizes it while organizing the other centre of family functioning –the libidinal links of objects, by limiting its excesses. That being said, narcissism has a peculiar relationship with the world of representations; this is what I would like to discuss now. From it comes an unexpected aspect, its flaws. Do they play a role in the family group functioning?

Originary traumas probably leave their mark on the originary family. Any trauma produces an excitement which spills over the subject's ability to work out and destabilize considerably. Massive defences can hardly control the situation. The subject is dismayed, feeling a mixture of pain, dis-idealisation, strangeness and guilty sensuality, especially if he was the victim of sexual attack.

As we know, there is a theory of the trauma as situation, but deeper research showed that the psyche's structure could be based on the traumatic moments lived by every newborn.

The symbolic, quite arbitrary, for that matter, can also suddenly emerge in the individual. This latter finds himself having to introject

the law, the order of relationships and the order of the language. Jacques Lacan (1966) was the first to highlight the traumatic violence thus implied. We choose neither our parents, nor our lineage nor the society in which we are born.

By going further in the direction, Jean Laplanche (1987) insists on a point, which seems essential to him, the *traumatic seduction*. He is there inspired by Ferenczi (1931, 1933), with the difference that he gives to this seduction a universal and unconscious appearance. The newborn has to face some extremely exciting inductions, those which come from the sexual meaning of the unconscious fantasies of the parents, and the gestures with which its mother and father look after him, feed him, and wash him.

Let's see this with an example. What a breastfeeding mother feels is more than affection, more than the pleasure to be able to feed him and to satisfy him when she sees him playing with her nipple. The breast is for her an erotic place too, shot through by infinity of fantasies and memories, which the child certainly represses, not being ready yet to understand this other side. He senses it with agitation, asks himself questions, which, without answers, become enigmas. « What does she want? », « *Cuoi voi ?* » (Lacan, *op. cit.*). The mother changes herself for him into a libidinal « source », even more, she might be the source of his drive (Laplanche, *op. cit.*).

There is one trait which characterizes Laplanche's thoughts; what is *enigmatic* worries, disturbs, provokes, while showing itself as stimulating and attractive for the subject; for Bion (1965), on the other hand, what is enigmatic is a source of distress and disorganisation.

It seems interesting to us to remember Freud (1932), for whom the most impressive mystery was femininity. Lacan (1966) answers by saying that such an enigma includes women's pleasures ; at least from a man's point of view... but not only, when we think about the number of women who cannot tell whether they have had an orgasm or not. In a suggestive synthesis, J. B. Pontalis (2007) claims that, if the mother is a mystery for the child, it is not as a mother, but as a woman.

Laplanche (*op. cit.*) begins several studies where the originary is from then on made up of these mysterious and unrepresentables traits, which are not articulated and are inherited from these early traumas.

Unlike Laplanche, other researchers do not put the emphasis on the sexual, but on frustrations, abandonment, violence, parents' worries, and the shame caused by illegal deeds done by their own ancestors. The theory of traumas is evoked in each case; it helps to understand how these unrepresentable traits could develop.

For the subject, anxiety is in itself traumatic; in its time it broke in and wasn't able to become fully linked. It is a "leftover" looking for a meaning. This comes about with the traumas of birth, of weaning, the threat of castration and of those which have taken place in the preceding generations.

The studies done by René Roussillon (1999) underline the "primitive agonies", the non healing which are the cause of a lack of symbolisation. Roussillon suggests that the new symbolisations cannot erase the non-symbolised aspects. Narcissism is very weakened by this.

However, the link puts the negativity in check (Kaës, 1993). The link's subjects establish then "un-negative" pacts, around the fact that each of us has something which cannot be said nor represented. In other words, negativity unites them.

In these different authors, we highlight the "gap", "what is missing", understanding it as different from the gap following castration, since we are talking about a radical and essential gap which cannot be filled (archaic and originary). Because of this very thing, it will never go back to consciousness. I believe it was Bion (1975) who first brought a viewpoint to this problem and solved it, for our enlightenment, by wondering why the mystery of what is unrepresentable makes us always look for links. The beta elements have remained as if frustrated to not have been welcomed by the alpha « abilities » of the mother during the growing up years. They wander, then "like lost souls" looking for other psyches to "enlighten" their many implications which are not compatible with each other and this is extremely uncomfortable, by giving them a meaning, offering them a thought.

Laplanche (1987) maybe does not make the most of all the conclusions from his findings: this way of imagining what is the originary, with its unrepresentables, which are constantly moving, leads inevitably to consider the other as an indispensable partner to solve the enigmas brought about, even if this is simply wishful thinking.

To sum up, the various authors maintain that we all are « descendants" of what is traumatic. We went in this way from a theory of trauma as a *situation* to a *structural theory of the originary which adopts the model of traumas*.

The unrepresentable is at the heart of several studies; in fact, we should talk about representation which is not representation or of anti-representation representation, in the way Racamier (1995) talks about fantasies anti-fantasies. This one is violently against coming back to inhabit dreams and daydreams and to be spoken. We will willingly mention the gap, the failure (s), the emptiness, the blanks, the small voids of the narcissistic ego (vacuoles, Abraham et Torok, 1978), the hollows which sucks investments, the representations which get untied and deleted, all elements which excite curiosity without managing to satisfy it. The void is covered up by uncontrolled actions, and is weakly symbolized. But if these traces recall sexual abuse, the spectre of the will is there to surround these mysteries with a worrying seduction.

We shall insist on the narcissistic weakening which is the result of this, made of torments and parasitic thoughts to fill the void of representance, in other words to find an answer to the mysteries. The soul looks for respite and sometimes finds it with a love relationship, idealized to the extreme as if it was there to soothe the subject from having lost the memory of supposedly glorious and happy times gone by. Vincent Garcia (2007) and Evelyn Granjon (2006), in a similar manner, think that the couple and then the family are founded on these narcissistic failures, empty of all representations, and this applies to everybody, not just people traumatised by life. In other words, the authors agree that we all are traumatised by something, a primordial failure, maybe, or, if it did not happen during our childhood, it could have happened a long time ago, with the ancestors and be transmitted from generation to generation.

For these couples made under such a sign and with such ideal expectations of repair, coming down to earth is painful, the relationship's misunderstandings and disagreements are even more agonizing that the origin of the problem is elusive. The partner becomes progressively a stranger. And we will easily shout that he betrayed us, when the betrayal actually happened way before.

From this the question would be: if what is traumatic bothers everybody, what kind of violence would produce a state of intense

instability beyond general situations? Is it a question of quantity or intensity or is it an altogether other register? When a trauma hurts the adult subject, won't all the ancient gaps be awakened? Won't all the non-representable remnants explode then?

These questions demand urgent answers; the annihilation, the scattering, the devitalisation, the destructivity and the current violence demand it.

A family under the spectre of void and the unrepresentable

To illustrate some of these aspects, I will give you the following example, which was made public for the first time 2004. Noémie is a 14 years old girl. Her mother, Marie-Ange, has recently found out that she was bulimic. The parents are distressed; they seem to be even more worried because they did not notice any symptoms at all. In the following sessions, the therapists (Stéphanie Arnal, Catherine Fischhof and the author) learn that the parents divorced 8 years previously, used to be drug addicts. They met within the context of drug taking, but the birth of Noémie enabled the mother to stop first, and the father, Kevin, to do the same soon afterwards. The mother said that she was very afraid of her daughter, of being incapable of bringing her up. She clung to her in the same way she did with drugs, with the same frenzy and with the same hope. « It was a substitute baby », she adds, totally lucid. But the couple did not survive this transformation. Quite quickly, the parents felt like strangers towards one another. After the divorce, Kevin ended up going to the States, to follow a sect and its guru. He did not get in touch for several long months, which was distressing for his ex-wife and his daughter. The link between those two became thus closer, the maternal authority becoming stricter. The father was living in a commune, sharing his house with others and not having any real ties. His identity meshed with that of the group.

During this part of the family therapy, mother and daughter, never stop criticising Kevin's attitude, calling him « irresponsible », « shameful », etc. He doesn't explain much, talks about his fanatical attitude, his total devotion to a leader, as if he was looking for a father figure in charismatic leaders.

Very little was said about the relationship between Kevin and Marie-Ange, about their emotional commitment, their arguments, and their lives together. To start with, we thought it was due to a successful work of mourning for their couple. But later, it appeared that, from the very beginning of their lives as a couple, there was not much commitment from either of them and that they did not create a close intimacy either. Their link appears to have been *without substance*, just a pretext to take drugs together. As for the drugs, they were objects invested like a fetish; each would take them for himself, as if to show his lack of interest for the other and to demonstrate that s/he did not represent anything.

We can even see the current argument about the father's lack of commitment as progress. The narcissistic link becomes thus better defined. Concerning Noémie's bulimia, hidden denied, trivialised, it coincides with puberty's preoccupation with body image. According to Marie-Ange, during family meals, they talked a lot about food, and still do. The subject is back on the agenda because of her current partner, Thomas, an obese man, obsessed by calories. When she was small, Noémie already did mention a lot the effects of food on her body weight. According to Marie-Ange, Noémie is very attached to Thomas, even if she is frightened of him. He is an evasive man, like Kevin, because he won't come and live with them under the pretext that being « the bachelor of his own family », he was replacing his father, a revered patriarch: he is very involved with his nephews and nieces who monopolize him.

We are a family of « runawayfoms », says Marie-Ange: « Even me, I run away from the world, I withdraw into myself and stay home », she adds. Are these aspects all remnants of the void in each person and in the group?

Noémie keeps herself apart from the conversation, sulking, apparently cross. Later, she opens up a bit more. With interpretative remarks, we highlight for each member of the family cell, their lack of commitment their search for a somewhere else, and their refusal of the link, and this in spite of their constant request for presence.

Marie-Ange associates: her family was rather scattered. An anxious and alcoholic woman, her mother practically threw the father out when Marie-Ange was still a child. She lived with her mother and a younger sister, who was considered as the more insolent of the two, because

Marie-Ange knew how to hide her addiction and keep smiling to her mother.

On the father's side, it was a family where the grandfather used an unusual form of levirat. As you well know, levirat is an obligation the Law of Moses imposes on a dead man's brother: he has to marry the brother's childless widow. Kevin's grandfather remarried with his first wife's sister, but this widow already had a son. And he had a daughter. Kevin describes him as having a strong personality and being very authoritarian; he was, if one can say so, somebody who loved putting people together around him. He also was very much into « match-making »: he was the one who decided that his daughter from his first marriage should marry the son of his second wife (sister of his dead first wife). Not only it was a marriage between first cousins, but also between a brother and his half-sister, made so by the marriage of their parents.

From this union was born Kevin, Noémie's father. And this forced and incestuous union lasted as long as the grandfather was alive. The couple slit up then, Kevin's mother « freed herself from her chains » and showed herself as being dynamic and full of enterprises.

After his parent's divorce, Kevin *lost all contact with his father*. We managed to make him see that it is for these reasons that he was looking all his life for charismatic patriarchs and that he was running away from a feminine world. We can think that Noémie also runs after a biological father, as well as a stepfather who are both evasive. At the same time, could bulimia be seen as consumption on the sly at the service of a father who keeps away from her so as to seduce him? This actually was also the case for the teenage Marie-Ange.

In each original family, the various traumas are about the defection of a father, fact which repeated itself through the subsequent generations. Beforehand, this family defined itself as a group where each person *runs away from something or a link*; but now, as one where each person *runs looking for somebody*.

In the paternal lineage, any attempt for differentiation brings fear of death. By marrying his sister-in-law and by forcing the marriage of their two children the grandfather wants to avoid splitting up and exogamy, which are very frightening.

In this family, we find what we could call the *trilogy of sensual pleasures*: drug addiction, bulimia (anorexia) and incest. The attack on the filial link subverts the feminine. Women remain prisoners of the men's goodwill. At the same time, in the links there is a surplus of sensual excitement, a kind of failure of self-erotism, which normally allows for the work of the preconscious and alienation within the object to be done. The all-powerful register covers up in fact a relatively general narcissistic fragility. The filial links are therefore marked by sensual pleasure, which is meant to make up for the lack of commitment of the object and the link.

During the next few sessions, we can see develop a new way to describe what had happen some time ago, during the decisive moment of the parent's split. When we had understood that Kevin had abandoned mother and daughter quite early on, it now turns out that he would take Noémie home with him at the weekends, before he left for the States. As he was living at the time in a sectarian community, he would take his daughter there, to the detriment of Marie-Ange, who spent « hellish week-ends ». Before that, he was the owner of a sex shop and as the shop was on the same premises as their flat, the young girl used to go in the shop, where she could have also inhaled some hashish.

Kevin admits that he has never stopped smoking cannabis. Listening to him, we have the feeling that he takes this a bit too lightly. He admits that he smokes in front of Noémie, who confirms with a smile on her face. There is, in fact a promiscuity father –daughter in drug taking, the spliff goes from one to the other.

It is then that I say: « I hope you smoke good stuff! » And the father answers: « Oh, you're a connoisseur! »

In this case, if drug taking seems destined to reduce « incest », so present in the family history, it also creates a dangerous promiscuity. The parental couple's link was marked by addictive consumption, thus a kind of family myth appears: united in danger, united in the fevered state of extreme pleasures.

These days, Kevin gets closer to his daughter as he can, in his way, when he was so afraid of being prisoner of the mother-daughter link. Drugs enable him to replace, in an uncertain way, the small cavities of the ego and the major gaps, those of representation, filial and paternal. It eases or rebuilds strong relationship, of course, but by

reproducing the “incestual links”. The shadow of the manipulative, matchmaking, puppeteer grandfather haunts them.

Conclusions

Family narcissism is confronted to three entities: objectal contacts, anti-narcissism and the small cavities in the ego (vacuole). They hold it, regulate it, moderate it and by stimulating it they lead it to constant regeneration.

In our first published book on psychoanalytic family therapy, André Ruffiot and I have highlighted the narcissistic elements which intervene when constituting the group psyche. We had an image of a narcissism which was full, solid, and rather static. Today the time has come to complete this observation. Individual narcissism has voids, small cavities linked to the unrepresentables looking for other psyches. The family links help with the scarification of the narcissistic fabric thus weakened. This is not a solution for just a few, but for everybody. This is family narcissism most common destiny.

The theory of the originary and its small cavities contribute to a re formulation of narcissism and helps to understand its failures and unrepresentables better. However, this research needs to go even further and are an invitation to keep on exploring.

Even if these mysteries appear impossible to grasp, we end up loving them.

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