



# Is Any Dialogue Between Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology Really Impossible?

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## IS ANY DIALOGUE BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY REALLY IMPOSSIBLE?

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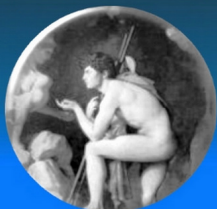
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## Is Any Dialogue Between Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology Really Impossible?

*Psychanalyse et psychologie du développement, dialogue impossible ?*

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Mi-Kyung Yi

### Abstract:

The reference to the infantile has brought in its wake a whole trail of confusion, such as the collapse of the originary dimension onto the origin, the mix up between the history of the genesis of infantile sexuality and the development of the child in general. These confusions give rise to serious consequences that are constantly fogging the specificity of psychoanalysis and leading it into dead ends, if not leading it back to the complete separation in dialogue between psychoanalysis and psychology, especially developmental psychology. There is one problematic that crystallizes the entirety of these questions: the model of development. In this article, the author tries to isolate the mainsprings behind the attraction of this model, which cannot be reduced to the epistemological register and which acts at the very heart of analytic practice.

### Résumé :

La référence à l'infantile entraîne un cortège de confusions, comme le rabattement de la recherche de l'originaire sur l'origine, la confusion entre l'histoire de la genèse de la sexualité infantile et le développement de l'enfant en général. Ces confusions entraînent des conséquences sérieuses qui ne cessent de brouiller la spécificité de la psychanalyse et de conduire dans les impasses, sinon à la rupture, le dialogue entre celle-ci et la psychologie, notamment la psychologie du développement. Une problématique cristallise l'ensemble de ces questions : le modèle du développement. L'auteur tente de dégager les ressorts de l'attrait de ce dernier, irréductible au registre épistémologique et agissant au cœur même de la pratique analytique.

**Keywords:** child sexuality, child psychology, the developmental model, originary dimension, retroaction

**Mots-clefs :** sexualité infantile, psychologie de l'enfant, modèle du développement, originaire, après-coup

### Plan :

#### 1) The Infantile and the Infant

#### 2) The Child at Stake in the Attraction of the Developmental Model

#### 1) The Infantile and the Infant

The reference to the infantile is what defines the analytical approach as both a theory and a practice. Childhood history constitutes both the

object and the foundation of analytical investigation, which are thus inextricably linked. Now, this reference to the infantile has brought in its wake a whole trail of constantly renewed confusions, to such an extent that, following

Jean-Bertrand Pontalis<sup>1</sup>, one may ask oneself whether this reference is not becoming an “epistemological obstacle.” A number of different examples bear witness to this, such as the collapse of the originary dimension onto the origin, the mix up between the history of the genesis of infantile sexuality and the development of the child in general, and between the child that is reconstructed in psychoanalysis and the real child of developmental psychology. These confusions give rise to serious consequences that are constantly fogging the specificity of psychoanalysis and leading it into dead ends, if not leading it back to the complete separation in dialogue between psychoanalysis and psychology, especially developmental psychology.<sup>2</sup>

There can hardly be any doubt that the application of psychoanalysis to children plays an important role in the slide from the infantile to the infant. Back at the time of the first publication of the *Three Essays* and the analysis of Little Hans, Freud harbored the hope that the analytical observation of children might be able to bring confirmation of his discoveries with respect to childhood sexuality. At the time of the controversies between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, the idea of “proof through the child” already seems to be much less evident. Indeed, in its place we even see the emergence of the idea of child psychoanalysis as the model for a treatment “technique” to be applied to patients who were labeled difficult or immature. Ferenczi spoke in terms of treating and curing the child in the adult, and he was not speaking entirely metaphorically.

Whether posited as a problem or set up as a model, the child poses a question in psychoanalysis. Therefore, it would be simplistic to superpose the relationship between the infantile and the infant onto the relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology. It would be no less simplistic to reduce the clash between these two fields to the opposition between two epistemological approaches, one based on observation and the other leaning on construction. The idea of a psychoanalytic brand of observation is not an absurdity; on the

contrary, it is part and parcel of the psychoanalytical heritage, in line with the example of the *Fort / Da* game that Freud overheard, or Melanie Klein’s text “On Observing the Behaviour of Young Infants.”<sup>3</sup> On this subject there remain ambiguities and contradictions that we need to examine and, if possible, remove.

Thus, for its pertinent implementation in conformity with the specificity of psychoanalysis, and for pursuit of debate between the two disciplines, it would be necessary to clarify a few questions (without over-simplifying them). In what forms does the complex and confused relationship between psychoanalysis and child psychology emerge? What is at stake in the debates generated by the relationship between these two camps? There is one problematic that crystallizes the entirety of these questions: the model of development. People regularly point their finger at this model as a kind of Trojan horse for psychoanalysis. But the error would be to see a purely epistemological confusion here. The developmental point of view finds its mainsprings in the very heart of analytic practice, and not, moreover, in child psychoanalysis alone. It is not simply a matter of a theoretical option. Its deep study would clarify the mainsprings of the complexity of the relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology, in particular the psychology of children. It is my deep conviction that this kind of study delineates the terrain upon which the clash between the two fields is played out in the clear light of day.

Is it the case that psychoanalysis and psychology are fated to find their salvation only in the radical separation of one from the other? One is tempted to resign oneself to this separation, in so far as their clash generates confusions that can go so far as to give rise reciprocally to the bastardization of concepts and to unease that can go so far as to lead any dialogue into dead ends. According to Jean Laplanche<sup>4</sup>, what constitutes the principal symptomatic expression of these prejudicial overlaps is a pretension on the part of psychoanalysis to become an overall

unitary theory that would be able to give an account of the entirety of development in the young human child. The stages of childhood sexuality thus tend to be confounded with those of the development of the child's relationship with those around him or her while the notions and concepts developed with respect to the emergence of human sexuality find themselves transposed into the field of general psychology. This extension of the data of analytic experience gives rise to the confusion between that which, within the domain specific to childhood, falls within the remit of psychoanalysis and that which is accessible to psychology, between the psychoanalytical child and the observed child. Using psychoanalytical concepts in the observation and description of the general development of the child leads, among other things, to a ruinous concept for the grounding of psychoanalysis: the dissolution of the reference to sexuality. The influence that psychoanalytical theory holds over development effectively empties the latter of everything that forms its substance, since everything is de-sexualized. Following Jean Laplanche, one may cite the distortion and the misuse of concepts such as the primary narcissism of the child, or even symbiosis<sup>5</sup>; these two examples illustrate very well the slippery slope that can lead to the lowering of the sights of the genesis of sexuality to the development of the perceptual and motor relationship with the world or to the environment.

"Stick to what you know best": this is the radical reaction in the face of a sense of an inextricable complexity that characterizes the relationship between psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. From this perspective, there is an effort to categorically oppose the child reconstructed by analytical experience and the child that is accessible to psychological observation. On the one hand, there is the mythical child, and on the other, there is the real child. The opposition at the level of the nature of the object, an opposition that is sometimes pushed to the point of a absolute cut, is sustained by an insistence on the cut

between the two epistemological approaches: psychoanalysis and developmental psychology are as far apart from each another as are construction and direct observation.

Psychoanalytical theory does not aim to give an account of the way in which the development of the child effectively comes to pass. Rather it draws on patients' accounts of their childhood: a "transformed developmental psychology."<sup>6</sup> Based on a collection of histories that are subjectively true, psychoanalytic theory would purportedly be a "theory of childhood as constructed myths."<sup>7</sup> Because it deals with reconstructed childhood, and because only psychical reality holds any import, psychoanalysis would not be able, if indeed it were ever to seek such a thing, to claim the reproduction of data that could be verified through direct observation of the child: in being impossible, any confrontation with factual reality becomes useless. People conclude that it is in clinical practice that the value and the validity of the child reconstructed by analytic experience is to be found; psychoanalytical construction would be judged valuable by the yard stick of their therapeutic scope.

An "auto-castration". It is with this word, which strikes hard like a first brought down on a table, that the German psychologist and psychoanalyst Martin Dornes denounces the siren that sings in the ear of psychoanalysis any restriction to the mythical child and the utter scorn of the truth requirements in the realm of developmental psychology. As a partisan of a confrontation between these two camps that would be mutually enriching, he underlines, quite reasonably, the disastrous consequences of this way of singling out the psychoanalytic line in relation to psychology: the isolation of psycho-analysis with respect to its neighboring disciplines and the complete break down of an indispensable dialogue between them. If psychoanalytical theory held value uniquely for its therapeutic scope, then there would be no reason to familiarize oneself with rivaling psychological theories of development, nor any reason to strive to pronounce a judgment as to the pertinence

of one or the others. While psychoanalytical constructions are most certainly therapeutic, they would not hold any usefulness when it comes to constructing a knowledge on early infancy. Moreover, this taking sides in favor of the child who is reconstructed, in exclusion of any consideration of the real child, ultimately shows itself to hinder debates within psychoanalysis just as much. The reconstructed child would be nothing more than a “mythical child that we believe in, in each session, without concerning ourselves with the historical trace that he or she has imprinted – therefore, the illusion of a child that can be replaced by an illusion, depending on the way that the winds of chance blow in the treatment.”<sup>8</sup> There would be almost as many reconstructed children as there are clinicians, or, at the very least, schools of psychoanalysis: Freudian, Kleinian, Anna-Freudian, Lacanian, Bionian, and so on and so forth.

It is hardly difficult to show the weakness of this dichotomic vision. One has only to think of those psychoanalytical observations that are rich in enlightening teaching on the development of the first years of life<sup>9</sup>, starting with those of Freud, Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, and Winnicott. Or else, the rectifying light brought to bear by the work of psychologists on the nursling’s early skills across a whole swathe of analytical theory that has been erected upon the original state of indifferentiation specific to the little man.<sup>10</sup> One might also cite contemporary work such as that of Serge Lebovici<sup>11</sup> or that of M. Soulé<sup>12</sup>, or even that of Roiphe and Galenson<sup>13</sup> on the genesis of sexual identity, or even that of Martin Dornes on the first ages of life, for example, all of which are interesting studies on the difference between intentional communication and intention in nurslings when it comes to clarifying the question of projective identification.

The position of the psychoanalyst in regard to the observation of the real child is therefore more nuanced and more complex than one might be led to think by the proponents of the radical opposition. Furthermore, it is interesting to remark on the fact that around the question

of the child in psychoanalysis we find the terms of the debates concerning the relationship between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis. Just as the questions relative to the method of interpretation mask over the stakes that fundamentally exceed the epistemological register, here too one is able to examine in greater detail the mainsprings of this categorical modality of demarcating psychoanalysis in relation to developmental psychology. Let us signpost one hiatus by way of a first indication that gives food for thought: the contrast between the hackneyed mythical child as the specific object of psychoanalytical construction and the child that Freud aims at in his construction of child neurosis: on the one hand, a coherent and unified history of the past, in short, a childhood as significant totality, and on the other, scattered and partially reconstructed fragments of archaeology.

There is another indication. It is not only in the name of scientific exigencies that the psychoanalyst is tempted to verify the data of his experience through direct observation in the field of development. Certainly, there is a whole current in contemporary psychoanalysis that is dominated by the ideal of objectivist science, which shows a very particular interest in the model of the child. This model has fed the objectivist illusion that believes it can find in the child a material for study and observation that is easily legible because it is more straightforward, and a privileged route of access to knowledge of the human psyche since it is exempt from the deformations and transformations that cover adult psychical life. But the history of psychoanalysis also shows that in the heart of psychoanalysis there beats the deaf but constant interest in the real child as an available terrain for confirmation, if not a path for direct exploration. The idea of the child that enjoys the privilege of making visible that which is invisible in the adult did not wait for pressure from the diktat of science over the Freudian invention. It is not solely in the name of obstacles to a scientific and objective approach that psychoanalysis has been tempted to find a way around these



misshaping and complex elements in favor of the child that people believe to be exempt from such elements. Developmental approaches hope to gain direct access, in being guided by the child, not only to psychical reality in its greatest purity but also to the psyche in its nascent state. Thus, this would be a return to the origin, such as it is also characterized by the psychoanalytical approach itself. Indeed they believe that this approach is even better because it is direct and continuous. This means that in psychoanalysis the attraction of the development model draws on different sources that cannot be boiled down to the epistemological process. My leading idea through the reflections that follow is that the question of development implies clinical stakes of which it presents one form of theoretical expression. Here, one can plainly see to what extent the question of the child is situated at the crossroads of what is at stake clinically in the way that this is tightly interwoven with what it at stake epistemologically, and which it is important to pick apart point by point, within the perspective of a fruitful articulation and a confrontation, out in the open, between psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. Of course, what is involved is to affirm their respective specificities in their object and in their method, as in their theoretical work, and to single out the terrain upon which they can be shown to have a common ground of contribution, in the hope of turning this into a terrain of understanding. However, the goal I am seeking is more to shed light on the elements that found both the necessity and the impossibility of their confrontation. Laplanche remarked that a terrain that has been mined therefore implies a labor of mine clearing. But my hope is less to extract or to neutralize once and for all these explosive concepts, than to situate them and to localize them in order to prevent them from becoming anti-thought or anti-debate mines. Let us take the example of the idea of the psychoanalytical observation of development. It is to be wagered that its best defense would consist in unburdening it of what encumbers it,

so that it might be able to be instituted as a clinical method that stands fully apart, being more attentive to the unconscious articulations of psychical activity than to the search for a cause.

## 2) The Child at Stake in the Attraction of the Developmental Model

If there is one representation that is called into question by the Freudian discovery of the unconscious and of child sexuality then it is precisely the idea of development in the sense of the progressive deployment of present potentialities following successive and predetermined stages. If the genesis of the unconscious is inscribed into a temporal process of maturation, it falls within the remit of that which surges up unexpectedly: an unforeseen event in the program. Its specific temporality, that of *retroaction*, also ends up bringing about the upset of the time's arrow of development. Now, psychoanalysis is never done with dealing with the developmental point of view that is forever making a return, if we are to believe that the model of the child that is involved here exercises an attraction that is being constantly refreshed.

According to Jean Laplanche, the return of the developmental model attests to a lowering of the sights of the genesis of the sexual unconscious to the level of development in general; this results directly from what he calls a "pan-psychoanalyticism,"<sup>14</sup> in the sense of a pretension on the part of psychoanalysis to set itself up as a general knowledge that has something to say about everything, and which is capable of saying everything about the child. This epistemic move is not a mere error in the sense that it is founded in a real movement, that of human reality. What is involved here is a progressive movement, that of a movement of vicariance of the non-sexual by the sexual: the entire movement of the human being consists in rehabilitating and investing afresh in psychical life in its entirety through sexual motivations that are in large part unconscious. Indeed, they

are so unconscious that the child's sexual development comes to support his or her biological development as a whole. The epistemic vicariance of psychology on the part of psychoanalysis represents, as Jean Laplanche would have it, a degraded form of this "pan-sexualism."

As doubtlessly pertinent as this is, this clarification of the movement of knowledge by the movement of human reality nonetheless remains at the level of theoretical principles, and runs the risk of leaving in the shadows the double clinical source that both generates and reveals this confusion: the analytic treatment of the limit states and the psychoanalysis of the child. On the one hand, the developmental models came about and grew in influence in clinical practice with borderline and psychotic patients; on the other hand, they owe an important share to practice with children and to the hope invested in a direct access to the nascent psyche that this kind of practice feeds.

The model of development inevitably implies the genetic point of view, to the extent of being wholly identified with it. Here we see a first outline of the model child being elevated to the developmental norm. From here stems the risk that we are afraid of, and quite rightly so: that of clinicians going down the path of the normative, which weighs heavily upon the reference to the theory of development. One just has to think of the schematic and simplistic use that has been made of the theory of stages in psychoanalysis: at such and such an age, the child has reached such and such a stage and, therefore, the child must be there! So it is that we can take stock of the weight of the normative aim that the model of development can induce in therapeutic work. André Green insists on the trap that is laid before child psychoanalysis, that of doing no more than fabricating model children.<sup>15</sup>

But it is not first and foremost the normative concern that has governed the emergence of the model of development. As Widlöcher has reminded us quite rightly, the genetic point of view in psychoanalysis is born of a framework that is initially a therapeutic and etiological

one.<sup>16</sup> Before putting itself forward as a theoretical model, it found itself being solicited during the course of analytical work, notably in clinical practice of "limit states". Through the poverty of the communication and the difficulties of the clinical relationship that these states induce, these patients do harm to the curative principle of remembering. It is against the backdrop of the work of remembering in these limit state patients that analytic practice is led to increase its interest for the reconstitution of objective data and the events from infantile past. The reconstruction of the childhood history as an actively or even systematically sought aim as a supplement to defective remembering on the part of the patient is supposed to fulfill an inextricable double function: it is supposed to be a therapeutic mainspring and an explicative principle. It is the case that failures in patients' psychical structuration call more upon explicative commentaries than interpretations which, as Freud specifies, bear on isolated elements. If the child furnishes, to use André Green's expression, the "retrospective theory of the psychopathology of the adult,"<sup>17</sup> then it is first and foremost in the analytic practice that this figure of the child is at work.

When one strives to make this representation of the child coincide with the real child and thereby to experience its historical veracity, this mythical and explicative principle with its curative aim is supposed to achieve a double theoretical and epistemological scope. It is a matter of establishing a relationship of causality between a childhood situation and pathological mode of mental functioning. A traumatic event or a pathogenic relationship leave an indelible imprint in the individual's mental functioning, which can be ascertained or even, possibly, observed in pathological formations, as in certain forms of behavior or particular types of relationship. The postulate of this historical and etiological principle needs to be noted: the fantasmatic formations, in all their generality, are determined by the historical reality of childhood that acts in accordance with a linear causal modality; the alteration prompted by a



pathogenic source of childhood endures as a trace that is subject to little transformation or reshaping. Hence the attention that is focused on research into causes that can be ascertained as such in childhood, through a retracing of the temporal steps. It is in the theory of object relations that this attempt to explain pathology by means of a genetic order finds its most systematized expression. Through its exclusive interest for interaction between the child and his or her environment, which is considered as the source of a particular type of relationship that marks the individual's mode of mental organization, the theory of object relations has offered the most sizable contribution to the extension of the developmental model.

This reminder of the initially historical and etiological dimension of the developmental model is not designed to point the finger once again at the risk it runs of thereby perpetuating confusion between the mythical child of reconstruction and the model child of history. Still less does it seek to shut the model of the analytic child away in the closed space of treatments that are claimed to be the only space in which it may be validated or made viable. Its essential interest resides more in the observation that it allows us to underline: the developmental models are forged in favor of transference specificities and technical difficulties induced by the latter in treatments of limit states or limited functioning. They are inextricably linked to problematics in the practice of the analysis of these patients who are reputed to be difficult.<sup>18</sup> This is to say that appreciating the theoretical pertinence of the developmental model imposes beforehand, or correlatively, the deep examination of what it implies from the point of view of the analytic practice. In particular, it is important to call to mind the inflections that are introduced into the analytical process by the privileged place that the reconstitution of the infantile past occupied: the present day dynamic of the transference passes onto a secondary plane in favor of research into causes; or else, it is considered to be essentially a simple repetition of past interactions.

From this there results the installation of the analytical relationship within a perspective that is based on the idea of a reciprocity between the analyst and the patient to the detriment of the dissymmetry that is judged to be harmful to the therapeutic alliance. Therefore, it is hardly surprising to note that the current known as inter-subjectivism turns out to be dominant in this respect, starting with the approach to the question of counter transference, and we know the importance that gets ascribed to this in the treatment of borderline patients.

Here an opportunity arises to articulate these reflections on the developmental model with the question of the representation of the child that is called for by clinical practice with limit pathologies. The “child of the counter-transference”: this is that idea that, following various different authors, one may explore as one of the mainsprings of the slide from the infantile to the infant.<sup>19</sup> It is a matter of offering an account of the emergence of the figure of the child as a product of the counter-transference reactions that are prompted by the paradoxical requirement of the borderline transference. More precisely, it is a question of the “maternal” nature of the counter-transference that is particularly solicited by the limit patient. The transference regression of the limit patients prompts in the analyst the impression of having in front of him a nursling in distress; this thereby induces simultaneous and contradictory identifications, those of the child who was wronged by the early faults of its mother and those of the repairing maternal figure. It is these representations of childhood that are theorized in the developmental model. It is also these representations that support the idea of turning the counter-transference into a reflecting subjectivity in the image of the maternal function of the primary bond, to the point of conferring upon it a systematic technical function. The theoretical and practical consequences that it brings with it prove well enough the conceptual seduction brought about by the imaginary model of the mother/child relationship. The figure of the child, such as it

takes shape here, constructed in the treatment of limit patients, fulfils the role of a defensive function: it proceeds from the action of the limit transferences which are known for their paralyzing or even disintegrating power with respect to the very thought activity of the person of the analyst: it constitutes the “resource of an ideological fiction to which the analyst turns in order to subtract him- or herself from the psychically murderous control that the patient has over him.”<sup>20</sup> So it is that the clinical source of the model of the child is illuminated. It is in fulfilling a defensive function in the practice that it draws its power of theoretical attraction.

The model of the child is a theoretical construction that therefore owes its essential share to the specificities of the limit transference. This likewise implies that it also plays the game of the resistance that patients show in the dynamic of the treatment. The specular conception of the counter- transference that underlies the model of the mother/child relationship is in a mirror relation with the narcissistic functioning of patients who have difficulty with otherness in the absence of any constitution of a self that is guaranteed by its frontiers. It corresponds to the illusion of interpersonal symmetry solicited by the limit patient. That which bears the cost of this, and which find themselves being rejected and repressed, are precisely the conditions that establish the analytic situation, its dissymmetry, and its retroactive dynamic opening. The developmental model participates in the repression of the disquieting aspect of the cutting edge of the analytic situation. And like any repression, it is not sheltered from the ill-timed return of its offspring. Furthermore, this return occurs at the very heart of any analytic process that is governed by the model of the child and based on the therapeutic alliance. The patient suffering from a fundamental narcissistic wound tends to awaken the desire to spare him any traumatogenic confusion, to hear the child uniquely in his or her vital psychical needs: “to pose questions that are really adapted to the intelligence of a child,”<sup>21</sup> said Ferenczi with

regard to the aim of the technique of play applied to adult analysis.<sup>22</sup> Now, it so happens that it is through this disposition, which is supposed to keep the confusion of tongues at bay, that this very confusion comes about! Since, to hear the child and nothing less than him, is a stance that is also fed by the hope of being able to find the child as such, to be able to gain direct access to the child.

One really has to acknowledge the fact that the direct observation of children is not the only approach to attach itself to seeking out the child directly. The analytic approach itself gives in to this temptation. Freud warns us in the Foreword to the fourth edition of the *Three Essays*: “If mankind had been able to learn from a direct observation of children, these three essays could have remained unwritten.”<sup>23</sup> Not only does repression make every object of observation indirect through its deforming operation, it also acts in accordance with a highly particular temporality: for a repression to come about, it takes two distinct moments, since its action is always posthumous – this is what *retroaction* means – and therefore it can never be ascertained directly. There is no way around this: the illusion of directly seizing the unconscious at the very moment of its coming to life insists. The developmental approach is testament to this illusion of a continuous time, a time without any breaks, and is therefore testament to the hope of finally managing to be contemporary with the advent of psychical life. As we have seen, this illusion is at work in analytic practice in general, but it is in child psychoanalysis that it becomes especially tempting. Is not the child a means of witnessing directly the formation of the unconscious, on the condition of mobilizing and multiplying observations that are ever more detailed and ever more penetrating?

Is it the case that analytical curiosity seems to have moved from the parents’ bedroom to the children’s bedroom? What is going on there? As though it were there that the real primal scene were being played out. Would it be there that the analysts’ fantasy of the primal scene takes

place? So asks J.-B. Pontalis<sup>24</sup>, somewhat provocatively, as a means of pointing the finger at the fantasy of direct and total access to the mysteries of psychical life. Faced with this fantasy of the origins that holds captive a large share of child analysis, he warns us against the confusion between what is archaic and what lies deepest, which thus tends to be produced in the encounter with the child: savage thought is not primitive thought; while there is incontestably a progressive elaboration of the secondary processes, this elaboration does not for all that develop on the basis of the primary processes; the laws that govern the primary functioning of thought and those that govern the secondary functioning of thought go on co-existing and standing apart. The child is not a simpler version of the adult, a less opaque version: on the contrary, child analysis puts before us a psyche that betrays a complexity that inevitably frustrates any hope to find oneself on a level footing with the origins of psychical life. *Live and direct, as though you were there!* we sometimes hear it said. Contrary to this credo that can be found in the irresistible sales pitches for televised news in our day and age, there is no means of witnessing the event live and direct, whether it is historic or psychical. “History cannot be seen, just as one cannot see grass growing”, wrote Boris Pasternak. This does not, however, change the fact that in the treatment of children there is a persistent difficulty when it comes to ridding oneself of the illusion of directly accessible points of origin. In order to satisfy a childhood desire, the very same that participates in the animation of the analytical approach, this illusion is also a defense: it labors away at evading the question of *retroaction*. As in the treatments of limit patients, the conceptual seduction of the theory of development owes a great deal to the force of resistance that the illusion of a linear temporality pits against the effects of *retroaction* that are expected from the analytical process. It is even particularly strong in treatments of children: because, against the backdrop of analytical dissymmetry that is conjugated with the real dissymmetry in the

child/adult relationship, the question of *retroaction* doubles in intensity and even in actuality on one side and the other. As Laurence Kahn has underlined<sup>25</sup>, the palpable reality of growth and maturation, along with their transformation, here encounters the adult’s repressed, deformed, and reshaped infantile desire. It is against this deep imbalance and against the risk that it exposes the analysis to, against this live and direct confusion of tongues, that the notion of development performs its struggle. This is not only retroactive re-actualization in favor of the analytical situation, but also the actuality of the *retroaction* that strives to repress the conception of the linear and continuous time of development.<sup>26</sup> This is a manner of establishing once again some symmetry in the analytical relationship: in this way, one may believe that the analytical treatment brings face to face a youngster who is growing up and a former youngster who has grown up. It is not surprising, therefore, to note that the point of view of development had been introduced, right from the very outset, into the heart of the Anna Freud / Melanie Klein controversy on transference. The metaphor of the ethnologist arriving in a highly primitive ethnic tribe, solicited by one and by the other to give an account of the childhood psyche, attests to temporal development conceived of as a continuous process since primitive times. The language of development has been adopted by the two adversarial parties as a terrain of encounter, as a terrain of understanding. As a “common territory of combat.”<sup>27</sup>

In the end, the linear temporality of development is a “common territory of combat” for both the theory and the practice of psychoanalysis, since this is already the case in the psychical life of one and all, child and adult alike. A theoretical fiction that is heir to an infantile sexual theory that has been designed to face up to the enigma and the troubles of human sexuality. “When I grow up...”: in the image of this child’s phrase, this fiction thereby attests to the time it takes to grow up, which has been invested in as the compensation for

their childhood weakness: “When I grow up, I’m going to be a doctor who makes babies appear”; “when I grow up, I’m going to marry my mom.” The time of development promises the continuity between today and tomorrow, just as it hopes to establish once again a continuity between yesterday and today. Against the temporal line that has been upended, broken, dislocated, nowadays as in yesteryear, by the irruption of infantile sexuality, it draws in a straight line a horizon of promises that one reaches and which one will hold on to, one day: the model child.

One can see that the model child of psychoanalysis is not only the mythical child of its theory, and not only the successful child of civilization. It is first and foremost the model child that, already, was not leaving us in peace when we were children. This child, upon which the conceptions of development lean, is a monument raised to

the disorganized trouble of our childhoods, troubles that we rightly tried to resolve, back then, by promising ourselves that everything would be as it should be once we have grown up, once we know more and we can do more. Once big things are within are grasp. But later on, the model child is still there, which, this time, no longer harbors the secret of adults, but that of the child. A secret that is even more opaque, which forces us to retread the path of time in the opposite direction, while our revived disappointment revolts against the fact that growing up has not been sufficient. At the heart of the treatment – and without doubt it is here that psychoanalysis is radically distinct from psychology and from its observations – the notion of development is the misshapen trace of a childhood desire, and it is on the terrain of the deformation that a youngster and a grown up, he that does not yet know and he that thought he knew, meet.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Herzog (1986), quoted in Dornes, M. (2002). Chap. Psychanalyse et recherche sur le petit enfant. Quelques thèmes fondamentaux du débat. *Psychanalyse et psychologie du premier âge*. Paris: PUF, p. 3-9.

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