

Despair Dialogue Desire – 14<sup>th</sup> European Symposium in Group Analysis,  
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**Keynote Address: EMERGENCE OF DESIRE:  
'Generative Identity and Diversity of Desire', Joan Raphael-Leff**

*'Why all this fuss and bother about the mystery of the unconscious?...  
What about the mystery of the conscious?'* [The Letters of James Joyce, 1966, vol 3, p.261].

Desire is one of the most elusive concepts in psychoanalytic discourse. I suggest that part of its obscurity lies in the complex admixture of preconscious and sub-symbolic – the unnameable and unmentionable which undermines our conscious certainties and may be dredged up by poets [Milton's '*unspeakable* desire to see and know', exposed by Freud and Joyce as permeating cracks in the 'mystery' of consciousness]. In this presentation I will identify five early sources of desire, introducing my concept of '*generative identity*' to bind their intertwining connections with gender, sexuality, fantasy and creative agency.

Before doing so, I want to focus on the concept of '**identity**' itself. In contemporary thinking, identity is no longer seen as a stable coherent entity but one encompassing multiple aspects of our complex fluid individualities. A multi-layered interplay of desire, fantasies, identifications and relational configurations which vary kaleidoscopically at nodal points of our lives, and in different social contexts.

**Gender** 'identity' is thus regarded as just one aspect of our many self-other representations. Since Freud, various constituents of gender have been delineated in the psychoanalytic literature, revealing the internal heterogeneity experienced by any one person and the potential synchrony, incongruities or discordance within psychosexual manifestations of unconscious desire and fantasy. These were broadly subsumed under three headings: '**core gender**', '**gender role**' and '**sexual orientation**', which, to accommodate contemporary thinking, I have reframed in terms of psychic significance: the subjective sense of '*embodiment*' (including femaleness and maleness); personal '*representations*' of psychosocial forms of femininity/masculinity, and the many hetero/ homosexual facets of '*erotic desire*' (Raphael-Leff, 2007). I proposed a fourth component of '**Generative Identity**' – the sense of self as a generating entity involving pro-creative desires and potential creative agency. I shall return to these later after exploring various facets of desire:

**a. Desire is the catalyst for symbolic thought.**

In psychoanalytic thinking, desire is seen to arise out of a moment of conscious realisation of an absence or loss, which activates the search to restore a wished-for previous state. Sensation gradually becomes elaborated into ideation. Desire thus has a central place in philosophical theorising. In fact, Hegel and others see *desire as the condition for formation of the subject* – as it is in the emergence of self-consciously identifying a desire that one first says 'I' – "I feel hungry...", "I want...I wish"... However ironically, this very pronoun 'I' indicates the instability

of identity, as it shifts according to user, and the sense of distinctiveness 'I' conveys, is subverted by the unconscious.

In early infancy, when the wait is not too long and frustration not too anxiety-provoking, the growing infant becomes more aware of the specificity of his/her needs. The capacity for symbolisation replaces the previous 'hallucinatory' wish-fulfillments and concrete 'symbolic equations' that filled the gap between need and satisfaction (Freud, 1911; Segal, 1957). *Symbolic representation* of what is absent allows for flexible thinking, which elaborated as fantasy, becomes the medium for articulation of desire. Thus, the discomfiting awareness of emptiness, separateness and/or helpless dependency leads the infant in two directions - on the one hand, towards *reality testing* and relinquishment of illusion, and on the other, towards *fantasy*, promoting symbolisation as a means of making mental connections to close a 'gap'. However, the child's Self is constituted not in a vacuum but within the [asymmetrical] **primary dialogue**. Captive to his or her carers, a baby is nourished both by parental reality and by the 'moonbeams' of their own fantasy...

#### **b. Desire is dialogic.**

Over the past century, developmental theory and infant research have established the origin of mind as *interactive*. From birth, if not before, we are constituted through interpersonal exchange. Our inner worlds and external realities are co-constructed with others, and our bodies and minds provide ongoing biographical documentation of shared experience.

Observing a newborn, we can see how over the first weeks, sequences of hunger and satiation, pleasure and pain gradually combine with patterns of feeding, bathing, soothing, nappy changing to form an interactive matrix of needs and response. Long before language, psychosomatic desire is an unspoken part of human communication and plays a large role in intimate inter-relatedness. The quality and emotional climate of intuitive baby-care colour the infant's cumulative sense of bodily experience, which in combination with her/his growing dexterity, come to structure a *body-schema*—demarcating its capacities and boundaries, surface and interior, and orifices which connect the two. Nonetheless, fantasy renders a continually evolving fluid *mental representation*: a 'phantom' body image within the body which may shrink or expand beyond its primary outlines to take in parts of the outside world or can become dismembered or even vanish (Schilder, 1935). It is this psychic sense of '**embodiment**' which I propose comes to encompass a 'core' sense of maleness or femaleness.

Already by two months an infant distinguishes 'I-thou' from 'I-it', seeking others with whom to share an interest in inanimate objects and purposeful action in secondary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 2003). To make sense of the world and to understand the arousal that accompanies exciting interactions, a baby needs receptive companions - to engage, stimulate, soothe and reflect - and keep the emotional experience within manageable bounds until the infant can learn to self-regulate it. *Desire is thus elucidated through the other*. The 'mother's face is the baby's mirror' (Winnicott, 1967), in which her emotional responsivity finds expression. The sensitive infant resonates to her reactions to him or her,

ultimately coming to understand that expression and behaviour (one's own and that of others) are *motivated* by feelings, ideas and beliefs. Hopefully, through this primal dialogue, the child develops an awareness of having a *mind* in which these can be contained and thought about. Internalising the (female or male) carer's capacity for 'reverie' and allows the child to acquire a thinking apparatus in which to think thoughts (Bion, 1962a). A caregiver's reflection of the baby's consciousness back on itself through social biofeedback 'marked' by exaggeration (Gergeley & Watson, 1996), hones his/her 'reflective function' and capacity to 'mentalise' (Fonagy & Target, 2007). Through these early exchanges, the baby's self comes to recognise the subjectivity of others. It also comes to include the capacities of others. *Subjectivity is shot through with intersubjectivity*. And, rendered elastic by fantasy and projective identification, can give parts of the self away or invest them in chosen others (Ferenczi, Klein, Bion). Thus similarly to bodily schemas, we postulate the development of 'emotion schemas' through repeated exchanges with caregivers from the beginning of life, at first in nonverbal sub-symbolic and symbolic systems, and later with language, possibly but not necessarily, incorporated as well. The sensory, visceral, and motoric processes represented in sub-symbolic formats, constitute the *affective core of the emotion schema* (Emde, 1983; Bucci, 2002).

### **c. Desire for recognition:**

Beyond realisation of a void to be filled, desire is *the desire to have one's own desire recognised by an Other* [Kojève's (1977) interpretation of Hegel; also see Fairbairn, (1943)]. Validation of one's self-representation by the recognising other becomes a means of refining the sense of 'identity'. In its conscious form this aspect of human desire is potentially satisfiable and deemed the basis for emotional understanding. As noted, engagement with sensitive carers who recognise and verbally feed back the baby's feelings, leads to the *child's* recognition of emotions in self and other, now conceptualised in representational terms. Yet satisfaction involves assimilation, and hence, transformation of the desired object.

Most parents unconsciously ascribe mental states to their baby from birth, thereby laying the foundation for the as yet incognate child's core sense of self (Fonagy & Target, 2007). Recognising the infant as having feelings and rudimentary thoughts facilitates a constant process of mutual assimilation in the search for common meaning. An infant-carer couple develops a particular style of inter-relating (Beebe, Lachman & Joffe, 1997), a form of 'implicit relational knowing' about how to be together (Lyons-Ruth, 1999) in which each partner learns to apprehend, share and incorporate assemblages of essential meanings for the other (Stern, 1985). Through the ongoing experience of myriad exchanges, interactive communications, inevitable disruptions and failures, and efforts to repair misunderstandings, a unique 'dyadic state of consciousness' emerges (Tronick, 2003) between baby and carer. <sup>ii</sup> I suggest this spreads further than dyads: in families an unconscious dialectical 'ethos' evolves, to which the baby conforms and contributes in varying degrees. An infant whose opinion is sought develops a sense of being able to *influence* others who care. When the

child's desire to restore and repair is generously met by willing carers and siblings, we observe that trust and secure attachments evolve. Importantly, the child develops a sense of *agency* - a belief in having the capacity to bring about the desired state. I shall return to 'agency' later.

Conversely, non- or mis-recognition results in a sense of unacceptability and an undertow of formless negated or unrepresented desire which in adulthood may be expressed as bodily enactments, addictions or compulsions. Moreover, during this critical period of prolonged dependence, due to neuroplastic malleability, the infant's developing brain may suffer permanent maladaptive 'wiring' of neural response patterns. Similarly, emotionally damaging effects of parental depression, abuse or neglect are associated with faulty stress/affect regulation, which, in borderline conditions persists into adulthood (see Karmiloff-Smith, 1995; Balbernie, 2001; Schore, 2001).

#### **d. Desire for the Other's desire:**

On another level, desire is forever accompanied by potential disappointment. Psychoanalytic theoreticians have many different takes on the nature of original desire.<sup>iii</sup> However, whether they deem desire a wish for perfect union, restored connectedness or fused non-differentiation, a sense of bodily boundlessness or re-finding transformative soothing, consciousness is seen to be rooted in *the presence of an absence* (Raphael-Leff, 2002a). And desire is the symbolic expression of the will to *transcend* that lack by hoping to retrieve that which has been lost. Yet, given the impossibility of entering the same stream of consciousness twice (except in fantasy) – there can be no exact reinstatement of what is missed. Hence *desire is based on an illusory unrealisable hope*.

Lacan's interpretation of Hegel's treaty on the 'dialectic of recognition' takes desire as fundamentally unfulfillable: as opposed to need, desire is insatiable. No recognition can capture the self completely. And, imbued with unconscious fantasies the very source of desire is inaccessible to consciousness, self-reflection is impossible and the Other, upon whom one's identity depends for recognition and 'desire for the desire of the other', is unknowable. These unconscious aspects of desire render identity itself precarious. In addition, a problematic resistance to identity resides at the very heart of psychic life, as unconscious desire refuses specification (Rose, 1986). In sum, desire is impossible to discharge, as *the unconscious wish always exceeds what is possible in reality*. Nonetheless, it is this very disappointment that acts as a spur to the further growth of desire and the desire for its elucidation.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **e. The Other's Desire:**

Our multilayered psychic realities contain interactional traces of the unremembered past, including *residues of the psychic substance of others*. What is the mechanism by which this occurs?

Neuroscience establishes that the non-conscious subsymbolic seedbed out of which conscious experience of desire emerges remains incorporated subcortically (see Damasio, 1999; Bucci, 2002; Schore, 2001). These implicit traces become more accessible during sleep in dreams, at times of illness or

vulnerability, and during experiences of great emotional arousal such as falling in love, in traumatic situations or in the care of a very young infant. I argue that especially with a first baby, the parent's own early feelings are acutely revived, expressing subsymbolic emotional memories which are not readily accessible to reflection. Nonetheless, these are absorbed by the infant.

Unconscious desire thus has yet another source. *The corollary of the desiring infant's desire is that of the parents.* Their conscious wishes, expectations and hopes for this child, and their unconscious ascriptions, drawn from their own early experience of being parented. With a very young baby, the carer's pre-verbal feelings are powerfully reactivated, through what I have called '**contagious arousal**' (Raphael-Leff, 1993). Unsymbolised affects and procedural representations of the adult's infantile experiences of self-with-carer surge into being and sometimes feel overwhelming - reflected in the very high rates of postnatal depression, persecution and despair (Raphael-Leff, 2001, 2003).<sup>v</sup> I suggest that these primitive forces are stirred up in two ways: both through exposure to the baby's unbearable crying, but also through close contact with *primal substances*, such as amniotic fluid and lochia, and breast milk, urine and feces during baby care. My thesis is that today's small isolated nuclear families in stratified societies both increase the parental burden and offer children less chance to work-through their own infantile loss, grievances & trauma in the presence of younger siblings and other babies before producing their own offspring (Raphael-Leff, 2005). Conversely, perinatal individual or group psychotherapy can assist in resolution of some 'hot' issues before their reactivation in parenting (Fraiberg et al, 1975; Raphael-Leff, 1980, 1993).

Noting the timelessness of the Unconscious Freud proposed that *inchoate fantasies continue to seek representation in image and action.* Ultimately, for better or for worse, unconscious identifications and emotional residues of salient experiences of both nurture and betrayal in one's own early childhood, inform 'orientations' of caregiving, configured by, and resonating with silent desire passed down the generations (Raphael-Leff, 1986). In addition to conscious desire, each infant is exposed to both adult empathy and mysterious 'messages' unwittingly relayed in 'image and action' — unvoiced communications about their own erotic lives and emotional preoccupations: envy of the baby's care; sexual, competitive and aggressive feelings towards each other, and unspoken feelings about the circumstances of conception, gestation and birth of this child. The infant thus incorporates an inexplicable aspect of the parental unconscious which includes influences of *their* own traumatic childhoods as well as adult experience, and residues of the unprocessed legacy from their own parents. These may lodge in the child like a 'foreign body', an element of irreducible otherness that does not become integrated into the self (Freud, 1917; also see E.Balint, 1990).

Unless sexually abused, before puberty a child lacks the means to understand sexual 'messages' — having neither the 'somatic requisites of excitation nor the representations to enable him to integrate the enigma', which remains 'presexually sexual', a 'pre-symbolic symbolic', enacted autoerotically. It is only

recovered and symbolised retroactively, with his or her own sexual awakening in adolescence (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968, p.3).<sup>vi</sup>

Most theoreticians would agree that the subsymbolic impact of these archaic forces impels the person to go on blindly seeking to *understand* the enigmatic, or to restore the interrupted process or lost maternal figure that precedes and underlies figuration. As Freud first noted, the archaic emotional experience is sought even if it has been painful, humiliating and damaging. Until it can be understood, feeling 'haunted' by it, the person feels compelled to play out internal scenarios externally - repeating these in symptoms, behaviours, perversions and pathological choices in intimate relationships, and I emphasise, will also play it out with their own infant. This is the seedbed within which desire establishes its roots, and out of which gender stems.

Let us move on then to **issues of gender, sexual difference, and generative identity**, with which I conclude:

Although the little girl or boy baby is clearly ascribed a sex-label by the parents from birth or even before, the infant is at first unaware of his or her own sex. Nevertheless, how the child is held, handled, caressed, spoken to, reflects each carer's unconscious relationship to his or her own gender, sexuality and erotic body, and to that of the infant in their care. Their own unconscious desires are unwittingly conveyed, or even consciously imposed upon the baby, to be absorbed and retained. ["I am speaking to a girl" says Winnicott (1966) to his middle aged male patient, as they uncover his mother's covert desire for a girl baby]. Similarly, in a stratified society, the image of her powerful boss in an aspiring mother's mind may spur the oedipal child to collude in denigration of his father (Hopper, 2003, p.120)], as does unconscious identification with the enemy soldier for a child of the intifada (El Saraj, 2000, personal communication).

The toddler tacitly accepts their nominal designation: 'You are a girl/boy'. However, recent work on anatomical self-concept demonstrates that sex awareness in very young children, including their ability to experience, recognise and label their own genitals is *not* commensurate with a subjective sense of gender (Coates & Wolfe, 1995; de Marneffe, 1997). The child's *self*-assignment only arises later, with a crisis of identity, which I suggest is second only to adolescence!

My longitudinal study of a sample of 23 toddlers over a period of 8 years of observation within a very large Community Centre Play Group [200 families], confirms the broad consensus that the period between the first and third birthdays is central to gender identity formation. I argue that generative identity is consolidated somewhere after 18 months. Until then, the sexed but not yet gendered toddler can sustain the belief of *having and being everything* (Freud, 1909). At this point the child's relationship to the body changes, as forcibly struck by sex differences a toddler has to reconfigure his/her own body-image, moving from an unquestioningly bi-sexed position of 'overinclusive' non-discriminating (preoedipal) identifications with both sexes (Fast, 1984) towards a mental representation of her or his 'core' identity of *either* maleness or femaleness (Person & Ovesey, 1983).

The particular aspect of gender defined as 'gender 'role' is one based on cultural definitions and interpretations – psychosocial notions of *femininity* and *masculinity* relating both to introjected representations of normative behaviours, and to rules of their performance, which vary according to context. These will be familiar to this readership as constraints of the *social unconscious*, 'myth, ritual and custom' and cultural processes of which people may be unaware to a greater or lesser degree (Hopper, 2003:127). Understanding of these may be resisted, or actively raised to consciousness as in feminist policy.

I have suggested that imaginative play is one arena where young children explore, practice and first perform gender roles (Raphael-Leff, 2009). A prime feature of late toddlerhood is the teasing out social attitudes and expectations regarding the asymmetrical appearance and activities of male and female children and adults. Gender *classification*<sup>vii</sup> is thus engendered and consolidated in play, which also allows for imaginative working through of preoccupations about dress, behavioural characteristics and complementary, different and similar structures between girls and boys, men and women, as well as newly retriggered fundamental anxieties about separateness, dependency and power.

In addition to acquisition of feminine/masculine configurations of psychosocial roles and their 'performance' (Riviere, 1929; Butler, 1993) the oedipal child now also re-elaborates hetero/homo-sexual desires and erotic choices. A further re-appraisal I propose is that of oneself as a *generating entity*.

Psychoanalytic observers have long noted that discovery of sexual difference has a depressive effect on the toddler's 'love affair with the world' (Mahler et al., 1975; Roiphe & Galenson, 1981) at this sensitive period when budding genitality, anatomical and social markers of sex and bodily configurations are *consciously re-appraised*.

In my view, several factors contribute to this sadness. *On a symbolic level, the toddler loses the 'omnipotence' of late infancy and has to reconcile to realistic limitations.* One sobering process is relinquishment of the childish belief in bi-sexual inclusiveness of being/having it all. Discovery of **sexual dimorphism** forecloses options at this divisive point:

- Preoedipal 'core gender' (which I redefined as 'embodiment') is now re-evaluated with sexual distinctions of male and female anatomy.
- The social, symbolic and reproductive implications of specific genitalia and their restricting significance are soon to be embedded in self-designation.
- Functional limitations are imposed: the fixity and finality of the sexed body and conjoint union of procreative difference – penis/uterus, ovum/sperm.

In line with previous **symbolisation based on 'lack'** - the idea of **castration** now predominates. At this moment of re-evaluation, puzzlement over the difference between the sexes focuses on presence or absence of a penis, the vulva ascribed by the child to the girl's penis having been cut off. This may result in intense anxiety in a boy and a sense of grievance in a girl, which, depending on her interpersonal experience, the desire of her parents, and her own unconscious sense of guilt (for which the 'castration' is deemed a punishment), she may attempt to deny the lack of a penis, or to compensate for it, or find a way

to remedy the lack (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p.56) - or to celebrate what she does have.<sup>viii</sup>

This phase in both boys and girls is closely linked with the Oedipus complex, the tension between the desire to pair with a family member and growing awareness of the 'incest taboo' which prohibits sexual contact within the family. This matrix also includes what has been absorbed of the parent's unconscious desire and their 'enigmatic' sexual messages. It is here that that aspect of gender, which will come to be 'sexual orientation' is rooted<sup>ix</sup>.

In this context of family relationships, the growing toddler is also now challenged by that 'oldest and most burning question that confronts immature humanity' (Freud, 1908b:135) — the origin of human life. 'Where do babies come from?' includes a child's perplexity about how they are begotten, where-from born, and the puzzle of the creation of one by two (Freud, 1905:194-7).

The facts of **genesis** promote disillusionment of autogenesis: '*I am not self-made*'. Imbued with functional exclusivity male and female bodies take on new psychic meanings: 'I came out of a *woman*. A *man* put a seed in her'. Primal fantasies and family romances about one's origins proliferate and are dispelled, as these primal questions initiate a process of acquiescence to a simple fact of origin: '*I am made by two others – my parents*'.

Thus, concurrently, as generative issues come to the fore, the parental couple, too, are regarded afresh—not only as sexual partners who exclude the Oedipal child from their erotic exchange, but as **genitors**—people with a life-story long before conception of the child. *History* is now expanded, as a time before being can be imagined.

**Generations** are seen to differ: Adults can procreate – but not pre-potent children. **Generativity** is sexed: Males impregnate. Females gestate and may lactate. Reproduction itself now becomes symbolised, including one's own sexual organs as potentially reproductive. Compensation for all these limitations comes with the promise of future reproduction and exogamy – becoming a mother or father oneself, with an as yet unknown mate of one's own. This is aided by the prohibition on a child of either sex being exclusively who the mother desires, and parental renunciation of their own desires and possessiveness in relation to their children. Conversely, when parental desires infiltrate the child or are imposed upon him or her, these may trigger anxieties that prohibit realisation, or even expression of desire to be other than what the parent desires.



Clearly these facts have different connotations if the child is adopted, born of reproductive technology, and/or into a family with same-sex parents. Issues of personal origin and of parental non-generativity take on special significance [*It is a bit weird to think I was once a ball of cells sitting in a freezer* says Emily Boothroyd, first IVF baby born from a frozen embryo [www.cambridge-news.co.uk](http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk), August, 2008]. Similarly, when at this age of acquisition of generative identity there are traumatic events such as neonatal loss of a sibling, or sexual interference, the process of generativity becomes emotionally charged. [*In some ways I am glad to receive donor eggs – because it bypasses my rotten genes* says an infertile patient who, as a child, experienced incestuous sexual abuse].

To recapitulate: In line with contemporary thinking, I have reframed three constituents of gender as *embodiment* [psychic construct of core gender or sexual identity], *representation* [psychic images of gender role and performance] and erotic desire [hetero/homo configurations of psychosexuality] (Raphael-Leff, 2007). These are useful in delineating various dynamic processes and manifestations of unconscious desire, fantasy and conflict. To accommodate today's diversity of family formations, reproductive choices and advances in medical biotechnology, I have introduced a fourth gender component—that of 'generative identity' (Raphael-Leff, 1997, 2000a, 2008).

Constitution of generative identity proposes that beyond one's core sense of *femaleness* or *maleness*, and in addition to *feminine* or *masculine* representations, and articulation of *erotic desires*, a further psychic construction is of oneself as a *potential pro-creator*, rooted in acceptance of reproductive facts. In toddlerhood and again in adolescence, one faces and rebels against the painful fact of four fundamental restrictions that puncture omnipotence and invincibility:

of **gender** (*'I am either female or male, not the other sex, neither or both'*)

of **genesis** (*'I am not self-made. Two people made me'*)

of **generation** (*Adults make babies; children cannot*)

of **generativity** (*Females gestate, give birth & lactate; males impregnate*).

In adolescence these also link to what I have named '**genitive**' issues: of *arbitrariness* - the chance meeting of parents and gametes alike. *Irreversibility* of life's trajectory - the impossibility, once born, of ever returning to the womb. And *finitude* - separateness, and the universal inevitability of ultimate death.

However, these seemingly eternal facts of life have been affected over the past 30 years by new developments. Today some of limitations can be undone by an illusion-fast-becoming-reality of infinite possibilities: sex can be changed; people can be kept alive by mechanical processes and borrowed organs. Conception can occur without sex; menopause is no barrier to childbearing; gestation can occur in a surrogate; pregnancy may result from post-mortem cryated sperm, frozen embryos, lesbian egg-swapping, gamete donation from live donors or aborted-embryo stem cells and eggs. And extra-uterine male pregnancies, artificial-womb gestation and cloning are on the cards.

*Unconscious desire, however farfetched or bizarre, may now be actualised in reality.* I suggest that this new biotechnological omnipotency has implications for generativity.

When, on the basis of accepting restrictions and revisions generative identity is assumed, 'latency', the period when intellectual pursuits take precedence, may continue until adolescence (unless sexuality has been awakened prematurely by abuse). The whole issue of generative identity is reactivated as the teenager's body becomes actually capable of reproduction, and 'enigmatic' sexual messages of infancy are 'decoded'.

With menarche for a pubertal girl, specific body issues now predominate, including concern with physical appearance, a sense of sexual vulnerability, and ultimately, a biological 'clock', which must be incorporated as part of a changing identity and what it means to be an embodied woman. Similarly, for the teenage boy experiencing emissions, becoming a 'subject' involves the difficult two-pronged task of appropriation of his sexual body, and assumption of his own representation of what it means to be a man. For both, it means reworking the 'big five' generative restrictions [gender, genesis, generation, generativity and 'genitive' issues]. For some adolescence retriggers irresolvable issues, ending in developmental breakdown (Laufer & Laufer, 1984).

While generative identity is fomenting in toddlerhood and again in adolescence, accepting restrictions involves undeniable pain. But, anatomical and reproductive constraints contrast starkly with the potential fluidity of the constructed gendered self. I argue that with acquisition of generative identity several momentous conceptual shifts become possible:

- A shift from being someone else's creature or creation to **becoming a potential pro-creator**.
- Potential liberation from biologically sexed determinism by mentally utilising **psychosocial cross-gender potentialities** beyond strict definitions of 'femininity' or 'masculinity'.
- And finally, acquisition of generative identity allows for freedom from concrete corporeality, abstraction the idea of **mental creativity** from physical **pro-creativity** of a baby.

These shifts determine the diverse nature of the expression of desire. How generative restrictions are addressed affects both **gender formation** and **creative agency**, whether sublimated, inhibited or deferred. Ventures into creative art then allow for processing the sensory and subsymbolic, imaging the unimaginable, and pushing out the boundaries of consciousness by challenging orthodoxies. I suggest that the nature of such creativity depends on each child's personal disposition, talent and developmental history within a particular family's emotional 'climate'. Generative **agency** may be constituted through various psychic mechanisms: **denial/disavowal** (of restrictions), **suppression/repression** (of incongruities) or **receptive retention** (of expansiveness) affecting

the mode of creative expression: The first rests on Subversion and refutation [through defiant omni-potence and autocracy; refusal of loss/limitations; manic 'self-reinvention'; preoccupation with polymorphous power/taboo]. A second, conventional mode involves Restoration - yearning to recapture a loss [through 'safe' planned rediscovery]. The third rests on Exploration [innovation fuelled by curiosity, dialogue and a risky process of unguided polyphonic creation/poesis]. Finally, I argue that generative anxiety is heightened by unprocessed traumatic experiences during the susceptible period between 18-40 months when generative identity is being formed. However, the impetus towards creativity may function reparatively, offering transformative self-healing possibilities.

### 1. Denial/disavowal:

Due to early trauma, confusion or failed dependency some children rebel - denying one or more restrictions of gender, genesis, generation or generativity. In adulthood, the body may remain the focus of this disavowal, with gender disorders (Stoller, 1985; DiCeglie & Freedman, 1998; Gafney & Reyes, 1999) with some utilising medical technologies to achieve actual sex change or, until cloning, virtual parthenogenesis. Others may express their insubordination through some extreme forms of political agitation, defiant delinquency, fetishism, or radical creativity - including brutalising installations or self-mutilating performance art, which turn the spectator into a voyeur.

### 2. Suppression/repression:

By contrast, anxiety ridden, under the burden of parental and wider social prohibition of desire, another group may take the generative limitations on board in a literal and rigid way - curtailing their own cross-sex identifications, and enforcing sexual stereotypes of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as separate, binary, polarised and complementary entities. Boys may feel compelled to assume a 'macho' stance, forgoing emotional tenderness, and for some girls, generativity remains closely tethered to procreativity, reflected in premature motherhood, or living out life in abeyance, inhibiting creative achievement after puberty as all desire is fixated on the wish for a real baby. I suggest that creativity in this group rests on a desire to '*recreate*' - to restore, repair, recover and recapture some lost early experience. Because of strict sexual-dimorphism, artistic process may tend towards conformity, with inhibition of sexual curiosity and conflation of creativity and procreativity. Underpinning issues are the relationship to generativity of previous generations [what Bloom called 'anxieties of influence'], conflicts about usurping the parents, anxieties over bi-sexual identification and entitlement to be joint fecund mother and virile father may result in paralysing anxieties about usurping elders, with concomitant fears of critical retaliation, or inhibition of originality.

However, over the last few decades, social forces, and especially feminism, have facilitated a revision for women from being merely *objects* of other's desire to declaring themselves **desiring subjects** in their own right. With contraceptive

choice, educational parity and greater career opportunities some 12% of European women now forgo motherhood, by choice, and worldwide women have fewer babies than their mothers. Conversely, female involvement in the work-force has inevitably resulted in shared child-care, and two generations of western babies have now been nurtured by primary-care hands-on fathers, who have not felt the need to repudiate maternal identifications.

For successive generations of children born to such parents who more fully utilise the spectrum of internal resources, the capacity for generativity has become potentially abstracted from primordial desire, illusory phallic authority or enthrallment to the numinous maternal body. Generativity previously exclusively expressed in biological childbearing now can be symbolically extended further, through a wider sense of creative **agency** with multiple identifications articulated experimentally in uninhibited play, innovative work and artistic achievements.

### **3. Receptive retention:**

Once the 'reality principles' of immutable facts-of-life are negotiated, some children dare make an imaginative leap to symbolically re-possessing bi-sexual and lost potentialities *within the self* rather than invested in an illusory omnipotent Other. This is more likely in progressive families, or in adulthood, through therapy or self-analysis which processes the impact of enigmatic or powerful archaic forces. Reintegration of the early expansive psychic state<sup>x</sup> and maintenance of cross-sex identifications foster internal freedom to **create rather than recreate**. Tolerance of fluid self-representations and ambiguity facilitates metaphorical assumption of *joint generative capacities*, akin to internalised fertile and resourceful progenitors – allowing imaginative play and creativity to flourish as a mental 'brainchild' or artistic baby of the mind. Nonetheless, this process is not without its conflicts, anxiety and struggles, as any creative endeavour illustrates.

In conclusion. I have cited some of the multiple dialogic conscious, fantastic and subsymbolic aspects of desire. These determine the loading of each of the various components of gender and generative identity. I have suggested that desire finds various forms of expression in childhood, adolescence and adulthood in different contexts. Psychosexual reappraisals at self-defining nodal points of life's trajectory, may inhibit or grant freedom to pursue realisation of desire in diverse ways. These may be transient forms – such as dreams or imaginative play. Desire may seek reciprocal recognition in close relationships, risking naked expression in adult sexual intimacy, in childrearing or within friendships. For some, desire may blindly be played out in bodily enactments, defensive perversions, addictions or intellectual displacements. Others, like yourself, may use words to elucidate unconscious processes of desire in social, group or individual dynamics. *Creators risk permanent forms of expression.* For them, desire continues to serve as a catalyst to symbolisation. Bringing desire to consciousness through disciplined distillation of experience, imaginatively transmutes these into creations which may last far beyond the corporeal existence of their creator.

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<sup>i</sup> Within the psychoanalytic community the dispute on 'female sexuality', as it was then termed, bifurcated into *how a woman 'comes into being from a child with a bisexual disposition'* (Freud, 1933:116) opposed by the assumption that *'woman is born not made'* (Jones, 1935). Although British 'Independents' continued to posit an admixture of 'male and female elements of the personality' (cf. Payne, 1935; Brierley, 1936; Winnicott, 1966), it is only recently that normal gender identity is once again recognised as a complexity of bisexual fantasies and relational identifications (Harris, 1991; Dimen, 1991; Goldner, 1991; Benjamin, 1996; Sweetnam, 1996).

<sup>ii</sup> Much of this exchange remains unconscious. Likewise, when at times of confusion or ignorance, carers or siblings intervene, *naming* becomes a creative act as words gradually help to endow objects, events and feelings with meaning. Primary emotions based on body states can then be processed cognitively (Damasio, 1994). For the infant, when confusion is accompanied by the carer's efforts to understand, trust increases and reparations can occur. Indeed, observation shows that commonly when both preverbal infant and carer make concerted co-creative attempts to understand each other, this generates *new* and pleasurable ways of being together (Tronick.).

<sup>iii</sup> To Ferenczi, Michael Balint and others, it involves a yearning for lost prenatal communion and unity, the wish to retrieve an intrauterine paradisiacal world without restrictions, occasionally recaptured in a sense of cosmic connection and in profound therapeutic regressions within the consulting room. To Winnicott and others, desire aims to erase separateness – through restoration of a sense of self-(m)other harmonious fusion. Recapture of 'primary narcissism' might be the assumed desire for Anna Freud and some ego psychologists. To Klein, and some French theorists, desire focuses on the lost primal object which must be perpetually refound. To Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous, reunion with the archaic maternal body provides a means of refinding the 'dark continent' which is the maternal body and the presymbolic experience of shared primal space that precedes and underlies figuration – what Plato called the 'chora'. Lacan (1959-1960) and Kristeva (1989) associate the primal maternal object with 'Das Ding', Freud's 'Thing' residing at the limits of language and signification ['the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible to imagine it' (Lacan, 1959-1960, p. 125)], that very unnameability which compels the subject's search for the lost 'prehistoric, unforgettable Other' which must be perpetually 'refound'. To yet others, desire is for a previous mind-state - recovery of pre-traumatic completeness. Reinstatement not of a person but a *process*, - the soothing trans-formational processes of primary care (Bollas, 1987). From the beginning, each infant has a subjective experience of what Bollas calls a particular 'idiom of mothering, an aesthetic of being' (p. 13) manifest in the mother's style of holding, responding, and presenting of objects as Winnicott (1963) noted. At this (subsymbolic) level 'the mother is less significant and identifiable as an object than as a *process* that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations', a nebulous experience described as the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987 p.14, italics added).

<sup>iv</sup> Because desire is articulated through fantasy, it is driven to some extent by its own impossibility. As the object of desire is imbued with narcissistic projections, knowing her too well threatens to expose the lack of fit between desire and its realisation. Thus, maintaining the opacity of desire and distance from its object is at the very heart of perpetuation of desire itself. [In the Lacanian view, the 'phallus' is seen as the signifier of absolute desire, beginning with the baby's original impossible wish to be what the mother desires, to 'complete' her with what she lacks – the phallus. However, linking desire to/for the phallus, and its frequent elision to the anatomical reality of the (paternal) penis, has implications for feminism which are often overlooked].

<sup>v</sup> I mention 'persecutory' disturbances as in the focus on depression, these are often overlooked despite the danger of violent abuse or even infanticide. Meta-analytic reviews of multiple western studies reveal that 13-17% of new mothers and fathers meet diagnostic criteria for clinical depression. Notably, in areas of severe poverty, such as Khayelitsha, a very large township near Cape Town, the figure rises to 37% using the same measures (Cooper et al, 1999), thus illustrating the impact of social adversity.

<sup>vi</sup> Many have noted the complexity of sexual forces. The disruptive emotional power of the ineffable archaic message is seen to imbue human sexuality with its complex feeling of 'driveness, strangeness and mystery' (Stein, 1998, p.264) responding to and expressing a need for magic, for overstepping one's boundaries, and for endowing one's sensuality and profound corporeality with meaning that is 'both clarifying and mystifying' (p.266). Bataille notes the deep affinity of eroticism with the sacred – the contradictory inner experience of prohibitions and transgressions, the experience that creates the inner need expressed in eroticism (that is categorically different from animal sexuality). A moment of intense pleasure

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intertwined with anguish which encompasses on the one hand 'fear and terror (of death, of sexuality, of the violence of nature—all of which belong to the sacred and the taboo), and on the other hand, awe, fascination with power, and feelings of violence and boundlessness that transgression arouses' (Bataille, 1957, quoted Stein, 1998, p.256).

<sup>vii</sup> At a recent London conference entitled *Female Experience* (July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008), Juliet Mitchell usefully delineated a distinction between the system of classification that constitutes gender, arising from social learning (in which in her view there is no Unconscious) — and the *symbolization* of sexual difference, arising (like desire) out of conditions of lack (for instance, the trauma of being replaced by a sibling, or the shocking discovery of the mother's lack of a penis). This distinction echoes my reinterpretation of gender components – gender role as both (conscious) 'categorisation' and (subsymbolic) 'representation', and similarly, of the symbolisation of sexual difference within 'embodiment' (2007).

<sup>viii</sup> Castration anxiety revives previous traumatic experiences of 'lack' characterised by an element of loss of or separation – birth, weaning, defecation creating a chain of symbolic equivalences noted by Freud (1917) penis=feces=child, the latter as compensation for the 'castrated' girl. However, female 'penis envy' also signifies yearning for cultural privileges of males in a patriarchal society. The value assigned to male or female genitalia is implicitly filtered through parental ascriptions, as I suggested above - the *interpersonal dimension of embodiment* indicates that genital and other sensations are mental constructs before becoming 'incorporated' as a sexed representation. American authors have emphasised 'the' (gendered) girl's cathexis and mental representation of her own sexed body and genitalia, including labia, vulva, clitoris, vaginal opening and indeed, inner reproductive organs, decentralising the phallic stage now called 'early genital'. They cast attention to differences between the female 'open' and male 'closed' body, and resultant specifically female anxieties of 'access, penetration and diffusivity' (Bernstein, 1990) which differ from the 'castrative' fantasy of the imagined lost penis (Mayer, 1985). Finally, although some theoreticians persist in designating sexed-subjectivity to a *biogenetically* predetermined bodily sense potentiated by somatic sensations, recent evidence corroborate early findings that core gender as a *self*-evaluation of maleness or femaleness is dependent neither on genitalia nor chromosomal sex.

<sup>ix</sup> This component of gender identity is traditionally referred to as 'sexual partner orientation' and regarded as the outcome of incestuous sexual attractions honed within the context of a nuclear family's oedipal identifications. Unlike Freud, some psychoanalysts still assume an innate heterosexual drive that need not be explained. However, Freud noted that exogamic hetero-sexuality renders loss of the erotic connection to the maternal body more complex for girls than for boys. Disavowal of the primary female homosexual attachment is an issue much ignored among Anglo-Saxon theorists (cf. O'Conner & Ryan, 1993) but prevalent among French psychoanalysts.

Once again controversy reigns. There are those who treat homosexuality as a self-proclaimed *preference* on a spectrum of potentially infinite but discursively restricted sexual identities, identifications and practices (Irigaray, 1985; Butler, 1993). Some decree it an '*inversion*' grounded in differing identifications within the context of universal human bisexuality as did Freud. Others, treat same-sex desire as a *perversion* of a 'natural' hetero-sexuality within a discrete reproductively-defined binary system and therefore, abnormal or pathological, utilising primitive defense mechanisms.

However, it is noteworthy that the anatomical sex of a chosen partner does not necessarily signify a corresponding identification (O'Conner & Ryan, 1993)—a same-sex partner may represent otherness, or diverse identifications with masculine/ feminine aspects of either father or mother. Similarly, sexual fantasy life and desire may entertain a variety of homoerotic yearnings, not necessarily expressed in practice. Among heterosexual therapists, phobic avoidance of same-sex passion (possibly related to a sense of transgression against oedipal prohibition of imaginative participation in an incestuous primal scene) may lead to dissociation or denial of homoerotic countertransference (Sherman, 2002).

<sup>x</sup> This conceptualisation reflects not a denial of difference but recognition of a tension rather than binary opposition between sameness and difference. It acknowledges the possibility of a post-oedipal psychic reorganization which symbolically recuperates 'overinclusive' body-self representations rather than the oedipal solution of classical theory (also see Aron, 1995; Benjamin, 1995; Bassin, 1996). Resistance to this idea may be located in overvaluation of difference and depreciation of commonality, ascribed to a male orientation in psychoanalysis because of a more precarious sense of masculinity (Chodorow, 1979) and conviction of the need for 'disidentification' with the mother.