

# Polyvalent trauma and masochistic drive

By Clémence Ortega Douville

In a previous article, we introduced the idea of the [object c](#) of the trauma. This idea was to separate the trauma from the impact that caused the wound and to interpret trauma as the response of the organism and further on, of the symbolic system to the presence of the wound. According to Jacques Lacan, the latter takes 'on the imaginary level its value of trauma, because of the particularly shaking form for the subject of the first symbolic integration.'<sup>1</sup>

We suggested that the form for the creation of the object of trauma was the result of the impact of an object b - the 'active' part - on an object a - 'passive' - meaning  $a + b = c$ . An example was illustrating this logical representation : an asteroid crashes on the land, thus the impact is the unmediated meeting point of the two bodies, and the crater, the mark left on the ground. The mark is neither the former untouched ground nor the asteroid, but the memory of the crash.

On the crater formed by the crash, vegetation may grow again.

## Covering up trauma

This idea that vegetation may grow again on a marked land means that the living would adapt to the change in their environment. They will, in a way, cover the mark, the memory of the crash up. But they won't do it the same than if the land wouldn't have been marked. They will adapt to this new structure, and be shaped by it. Their relief will be different, maybe the species of plants will be different. Animals may lie underneath.

*That* is the trauma, the way the living is adapting to the wound to create new forms of growing, in spite of the land being marked. Then, the mark will be somehow forgotten, covered up with new forms of life, and those new forms will be the chosen subject for further adaptations.

Forgetting that the vegetation is covering something else up, you would then try to adapt to the form of the vegetation, and not the carved ground underneath anymore. You may try to avoid and pass round it, maybe leap all the way over it, or try to touch it and take from it some good herbs and flowers for healing balms or decorations.

Yet the cover is a mass, a living mass that resists the getting through. It is a thick skin over the wound. You don't get to the original memory of it that easily. It is a resistance, whether the trauma is a *slight* trauma induced by sensorimotor experience, or a *larger* trauma caused by a stronger external aggression.

In fact, trauma being taken as both sides of an *imprint*, the concave side of the pressure on the surface of the system and the convex side of the organism's response, we take here trauma in a very large sense. Trauma is the definition of what makes the living reshaping itself in their interactions with their environments.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire - livre I : Les écrits techniques de Freud (1953 - 1954)*, « Le noyau du refoulement », Ed. Seuil, coll. Champ Freudien, 1975, p. 215

## The presence of the attacker

Now, we can see why we are introducing here the masochistic element. Because the response of the trauma creates a thick, opaque cover on the origins of the wound. The subject then finds trouble explaining what drove them to grow their personality up to this point.

The trauma is a mediation formed out from an absence of mediation. The impact between the two initial objects is a meeting *without* a common third object for mediation and balanced sharing. The subject tries to get distance from this possibility that again, memory would bring up the marks of this absence of mediation, of distance, of spatial-temporal control.

The mark and the trauma generate a volume from the concavity of the wound, where merged together two objects into one, that would be the object *c*. The memory of the wound is also the everlasting presence of the other that created the wound *inside* of the body that was marked. That is why the trauma is creating distance, by covering the wound up with something else, something alien not from the wound, but from the attacker that created it.

There is much of that in Roxane Gay's literature, how the trauma makes us alien to ourselves, as we read it in her novel *Thirteen days* (2014). Getting back to the origins of the wound, is bringing back the presence of the one(s) - people or things - that caused it, as an unsolving and never-ending submission to a non-relation.

Human mind's structure needs mediation to work its symbolic structure. The hand paradox theory itself states that as it is a wound to the body that staring at my own hand would stop me from acting to anything, the trauma there was this first form of covering the wound up, and move to something else : delaying responses and doubling reality.

Yet how to get back to the origins of the wound in a way to substitute the first owner of its causes with a new one, that would turn it onto more positive horizons ?

## Masochistic praise

My praise here is for an understanding of the masochistic issues, as they take mostly part in the sexual dimension of the symbolic structure : which means the dimension that covers up this other form of unmediated encounter that is sexuality. Lacan's famous '*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*' means that the term of sexuality, the oblivion in orgasm, is also the end of symbolic mediation in the sexual act. We use to call female orgasm '*la petite mort*', the little death, for a reason.

Lacan, like so many others from then to now, was missing that there was something else possible for the understanding of female sexual identity but he was not missing that point, that mediation was all human. And mediation takes form from the trauma, and not from the wound. So it is a second hand exchange, and the trauma, as a reaction to a simple thing, is something else, something alien, artificial, far from perfect. It erases parts of the subject's reality in order for it to go back to life with a minimal limping.

It is then capable to twist this first reality to a great extent in order for the subject not to limp in a too visible way. Because the worst is not the wound, it is the questions people would ask about it, that would forcibly make you react the encounter that caused the wound. So to avoid too much question, you erase the visible marks, on the body and behaviour, that would tell anyone that you have failed to someone else.

One of the etymologies of the Greek word *trauma* would be the meaning of *failure*, of *defeat* in combat. We are here. In trauma, we defeat in combat, and try to make people not ask too much questions about it. Because again, otherwise you would have to react, to represent the battlefield and then, the wound of being hurt. Not to react this scenario, you would rather create another one, a new *original* one - a new origin for who you are, a new history.

Yet, to react the defeat may be a way to recognise that it is the source of your growing a certain way rather than another. The trauma is polyvalent, because it mediates the concave to the convex, the internal to the external part of the wound. So to trust it with its elasticity, you could just expose the wound to a reenactment of defeat, in a different kind of relationship, a different structure altogether, with someone who fortunately *loves you enough* to allow trauma to generate another form of explanation for it than a forged false one.

The particularity of masochistic enactment, that is the foundation of transference in psychoanalysis, is that you can react the wound without this lack of relation to mediate it with. You are not left alone, but allowed to go back to the origins of your trauma, underneath the cover up, crush it to clear the mark, act it again and relate it to another context, another symbolic structure, another equation to make an  $a + b = c$  result to a  $c = a + d$  that means : to substitute an unrelated stranger attacker with the one that you would be familiar with, that would be localised, trustworthy and most of all, determined to do you good.

---

Note : It is about converting a situation where there is no relation between the two parties originating (the impact) the wound and then the trauma, to a displacement of the object concentrating the meeting point before the wound ( $a + b$ ) into a different outcome.

In the trauma,  $a + b = c$ , the surface object of trauma, but by definition, the subject is left alone with it, in a non-relation but only a redefinition of the topology.

In the masochistic reenactment, the subject would bring the object  $c$  to become an  $a + b$  back, a situation before the wound leaving the subject alone, yet replacing the impact object  $b$  by an impact object  $d$ , that would belong not to an uniform attacking force, but to a mediated system.

In other words, if I am redoing the scene then, if I am reenacting it with someone I trust, they are not identified with the object of impact, but this object becomes mediated by convention.

It all has to do with the umbilical node of the common object. Even if the masochistic reenactment is that strong so that, for example, the subject would ask their 'enough loving' partner to punch them, this demand would be codified as to guarantee the limits of the injury and the survival of the subject.

In transference, the unrelated part of the wound, covered up under the mediated form of the trauma, is at stake, yet the subject needs the codified situation of analysis to guarantee the conversion into mediation and their own survival through and after that.

The lonely form of the trauma is replaced for a reexposition of the wound under other circumstances, now better controlled by the subject.