

# Trauma not responded to, and the prelogical nature of the accident in adolescence

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## **Abstract**

The prelogical nature of the accident in adolescence talks about mind's crushing when the time of a second birth implies the return of that automatic and primitive anguish when faced with ineluctable biological propelling forces of the body. This anguish is what the adolescent is not able to historicize in the inevitableness and at the same time, in the way entirely fortuitous of the accident happening, because the repetition of the traumatic situation is vital for his survival. The absence of the Other's answer to the traumatic experience of the birth, introduces the tragic dimension that lives the reoccurrence of self-harmful behaviours. The tragic dimension of trauma is related with shame, and it subjugates adolescent to repeat it unless or until, an Other can at last respond and not confirm that trauma as the only way he is awarded to exist.

**Key words:** trauma, shame, anguish

Among human traumatic experiences, adolescence is when the body becomes particularly traumatic: it must "make itself be". So it is important to consider how in this dimension of the body that makes itself be, the adolescent can reflect on his emotional experience in which he is overwhelmed by feelings and the <<emotion[...] is the movement which breaks up, it is the reaction that is called catastrophic[...] It's the term *émoi*, upset[...] the word *émouvoir*, to move>> (Lacan, 1962). Adolescence breaks up the harmony between mind and body, which then contributes to acting out: self-injurious and risky sexual behaviours, drug addiction, unsafe driving talk about mind's crushing and tell us about an experience in which the will come of disgrace is felt by the subject as future and at the same time, as already present (Bruhl, 1922); the accident, happens, in a way entirely fortuitous. Carelessness and accident-prone behaviours are, for Lieberman e Pawl (1988), one of the three patterns of distortion found in borderline adolescents: it's not the aim of this work to evidence the probable correlation between the accident as a pathological way to respond to the trauma, and the possible diagnostic hypothesis on the personality of the adolescent who choose to apply to it. Indeed in the precariousness and changeableness of a time in which the conquest of an own identity happens in fieri, this point of view should hinder the possibility to detect the most functional sides of these behaviours for the growth, or it should hinder the possibility to catch from the emergency of the "failure of the emotional life" as it is defined in Chiozza-, the complexity of a question that for ask something had to choose the not fortuitousness of the accident. So the purpose of this work will be to question how the experience of "being traumatized" can compel the subject to repeat some experience of the past which seems to be the only and the best thing he can do.

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Fiona Gardner (2001) suggests that self-harm behaviours in adolescence reveal the body as the stage of impossible internal conflictual states of mind: being overwhelmed, empty and unreal all at the same time. So accidents constitute a formula for surviving catastrophe (1), the only answer available: the return of that automatic and primitive anguish when faced with ineluctable biological propelling forces of the body. Freud in *Inibizione, sintomo e angoscia* (1925), wrote: <<anguish is the reaction of Ego to the danger[...] The prototype of a such experience in the human being, is birth, and for this reason we are inclined to see in the state of anguish, a reproduction of the trauma of birth>>. Lacan in *Da a ai Nomi- del- Padre* (1963), resumes: <<Anguish was chosen by Freud as a signal of something[...] Namely in the radical intrusion of an element so Other as regards a human being, as it is for him the fact of being went beyond the atmosphere, who emerging in this world in which he has to breathe, first of all he is literally asphyxiated and choked. It is what is called trauma, there weren't anything else; birth's trauma, that is not separation from the mother but ambition to oneself of an environment basically Other>>. In a kind of renaissance, adolescent anguish needs to give birth to a new sort of sense of the body so that the adolescent can effectively alleviate the tension between mind and body. However, the prelogical nature of adolescence makes the process of constructing a self-feeling, a feeling of coherence, problematic. So, under such circumstances how can an adolescent mature through the intentionality of its own choices? The absence of the Other's answer to the traumatic experience. It is indeed, the really presence of others able to give the perception that <<our *ipseità* is recognized but also it is in someway respected, appreciated and exploited>> (Correale et al., 2001). Ferrari (1994) noted that in adolescence when a <<hard construction of the identity, the others (group, parents) represent for him "the seal" to take care of himself>>. This opens up possibilities for working through traumatic events of loss: <<the individual is taken ill to respect the brittleness of caregivers silently perceived, their engagement in the elusion of the processes of mourning, perceived as what they cannot be met>> (Gaburri, Ambrosiano, 2003). Infant Research underlined the importance that bodily and emotional forms of maternal nursing for the child's self-feeling, because of the integration of motor and sensorial elements (Fabozzi, 2003). The maternal *rêverie* in Bion's thought, gives the child a room in the mind of another; this, in turn, provides the child the opportunity of being able to think and to organize a room in his own mind. The paternal function, by contrast, introduces the subject in a dimension of desire opened by the prohibition of that maternal *jouissance* (Lacan, 1953), which Freud described in *Un ricordo d'infanzia di Leonardo da Vinci* (1910): <<a love affair totally satisfactory that satisfies all the spiritual desires and all the bodily needs, and if it represent one of the forms of happiness reachable by human being, this is due to the possibility of pleasing without remorse many feelings of desire repressed for a long time that must be called wicked>>. The prelogical nature of the accident in adolescence, shows instead how <<in our epoch the track, the scar of the father's evaporation is what we should admit under the rubric and the general title of segregation [...] what is distinctive in our era- and we can't not notice that- is a branched,

reinforced segregation that makes intersections at all levels and it increases barriers>> (Lacan, 1968). Well then it is not surprising that the symptomatic drift of many of teenage behaviours revolves around <<the exploit of one's own competitive rule, the fear to lose control, and the preservation of one's own emotional isolation>> (Ackerman, 1958). Where the Other failed to respond to the experience of the trauma lived by the subject, or he gave a "non response", accident in adolescence reveals through the reoccurrence of a traumatic experience re-experienced in the body, the functional value of trauma for the subject's survival. The adolescent becomes incapable to escaping the repetition of self-harmful behaviours; he lives the tragedy to "feel of being traumatized" because this is what makes possible an experience of the only dimension of self-feeling he ever tried. His memory of this feeling of being traumatized subjugates him to repeat the trauma unless or until, an Other can at last respond. To this tragic dimension of trauma, may be added that feeling which has the nature of two-faced Janus in its *toxic* or *humanizing* way, and begins with birth: *shame*; the <<terror of being seen as one who is different from the way one needs to appear>> (Kilborne, 2002). The relationship that everybody has with oneself can become an internal condemnation. The prelogical nature of the accident in adolescence becomes toxic when associated with shameful experiences of fragmentation, overwhelming emotions and a terror of failure. Kilborne explain the difference between *toxic shame* and *humanizing shame*, referring to the articulation of trauma into the three times of the traumatic event, of the traumatic experience, and of the response by another person to the traumatic experience. Parents who failed to respond to the child's experience of trauma beginning at birth hinder the child's ability to claim his right to exist when he becomes an adolescent, to occupy his own place in the world in which he can exist with his own body that is <<the contingent and the indifferent substance of all our psychic events, body determines a psychic place>> (Sartre, 1943). So being accident prone in adolescence is one consequences of "trauma not responded to." What then is the adolescent's question hidden behind the extreme attempt to find someone who can, through response to traumatic experiences, break the reliance upon accidents and self-harm as the primary means of defending and asserting a sense of reality? This is the question that needs a place within a relationship in which toxic shame can find a time for being thought, confessed, recognized, made humanizing in the presence of an Other who responds and can open up new experience of comprehension; where neglect had confined him to be excluded from the meeting sanctioned by the human relationship, the adolescent can instead derive a sense of connectedness. This experience exists in the new time of reflection (2), in which every event will have the opportunity to be thought and shared with someone who can listen and respond, who will be there to guarantee that experiences are validated and remembered. In this way the adolescent can find a way out of pathogenic cycles, a means of reckoning with rage and with that disappearance against which finally he will be able to say: <<*What makes me deeply shaken, is not the fact you deceived me, but that I can't trust you any more*>> (Nietzsche, 1886).

## Notes

1) <<Adolescents may engage in these behaviors to find a sense of relief from intense feelings. “When I feel as if I am going to explode, I think of my razors. They are my best friends. They are always there and they never let me down. They help me survive, ” says Jessica, a sixteen- year- old who has been carving on herself for over a year>>. (Czarnopys, 2002).

2) <<So reflection seizes temporality as it reveals oneself as the way of being unique and incomparable of an *ipseità*, or rather as historicity>> (Sartre, 1943).

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