

The Object in Freud¹

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1. The Object of the Drive

Crucial to Freud's notion of the object is that of anaclisis (*Anlehnung*), which in terms of the object is what is necessary for its preservation. Drives, and therefore sexuality derive by anaclisis via the transformation of vital needs. If we consider mental life from a biological point of view, the drive appears as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic. It is the psychological representative of stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind. It is the measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence by virtue of its connection with the body. The aim of the drive is satisfaction. This ultimate aim of satisfaction remains unchangeable but there may be very different paths leading to this final outcome. It may be found to have various immediate and intermediate aims that can combine and interchange with each other. The object of the drive is that through which the drive is able to achieve its aim. The object is the most changeable aspect of the drive. Originally it was not connected with the drive, but attaches itself only in consequence of it being particularly adaptable fitted to achieve satisfaction. The object is not necessarily derived exterior to the subject but can in fact be part of the subject's own body. During its existence, the object can be changed any number of times in the course of its vicissitudes which the drive undergoes. It is important to note the part played by this displacement of the drive. "*A particularly close attachment of the drive to the object is distinguished by the term 'fixation'*". Freud continues "*that this occurs in the very early periods of development of a drive and puts an end to its mobility through its opposition to detachment*"². Drives are for Freud the 'limit concept' that allows a connection between the psychical and the somatic.

2. Object Choice

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² S.Freud, Instincts and their Vicissitudes, S.E.XIV, p.123

In the ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’, Freud had acknowledged, I quote” *Early efflorescence of infantile sexual life already gives rise to the choice of object with all the wealth of activities which such a process involves*”³

Freud continues, “*The sexual aim of the infantile drive consists in obtaining satisfaction by means of the erotogenic zone which has been selected in one way or another. This satisfaction must have been previously experienced in order to have left behind a need for its repetition.*”⁴

Freud illustrates this point by asking us to think of the child who has just finished feeding from his mother’s breast, how he sits back with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile .Freud presents this particular scene as a prototype for expression of sexual satisfaction in later life. In this way the need for the repetition of sexual satisfaction becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment.

In his analysis of the Schreber case, Freud further extends his theory of this phase which he termed Narcissism whereby the libido passes through from auto erotism to object love. The process commences with the subject taking **his own body, his genitals, as his love object**. From this point the subject will then choose a homosexual object choice with similar genitals and then perhaps, move toward a heterosexual object choice. When a heterosexual object choice has been reached, homosexual tendencies are not done away with as such; rather they are deflected from their original sexual aim and are sublimated. They combine with portions of ego instincts and in part constitute the social instincts, thus contributing an erotic factor to the founding of friendship, comradeship and love of mankind. Freud quotes” *In my Three Essays of Sexuality I have expressed an opinion that each stage in the development of psychosexuality affords a possibility of fixation and thus a dispositional point. People who have not freed themselves completely freed up from narcissism...have at that point a fixation which may operate as a disposition to later illness.*⁵

In his paper on Narcissism, Freud adds to his theory, he examines the particular relationship between narcissism and object choice. He identified two types of object choice but clearly states, I quote” *We have not concluded that human beings are divided*

³ S.Freud, Three Essays on Sexuality, S.E.VII, p. 234

⁴ Ibid p.182

⁵ S.Freud, Case History of Schreber, S.E.XII, p. 62

*in to two sharply differentiated groups, according as their object choice forms to Anacletic or narcissistic type, we assume rather that both kinds of object choice are open to the individual, though they may show a preference for one or the other”*⁶

The Anacletic or Attachment type of Object Choice: Freud describes that the earliest auto-erotic sexual functions derive in connection with the vital functions which serve the purpose of preservation. Initially, these sexual objects are attached to the satisfaction of the ego instincts and it is only later that they become independent (the question is what is pathway from the objects? The original cathexes are established via the relation with the child’s initial caregivers, are with the persons who are responsible for the child’s feeding and protection. Freud goes on to say: *“Individuals have originally two sexual objects – himself and the woman who nurses him. In saying this, we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which in some cases may manifest itself in a dominant fashion in his object choice”*.⁷ There is a movement from primary narcissism to identification which is known in psychoanalysis as an emotional tie with the object. The boy will exhibit a special interest in his father and will take him as his ideal. Coinciding with this identification with the father, the boy will also develop an object cathexis towards his mother. From the outset, identification is ambivalent; it can turn into an expression of tenderness and just as quickly, into a wish for someone’s removal. *“It behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organisation of the libido, in which the object is assimilated by eating and in that way annihilated. eg cannibal”*.⁸

“Secondly, in a regressive way, identification becomes a substitute for a libidinal object –tie, by means of introjection of the object into the ego. Thirdly, identification may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of sexual instinct. The more important this common quality is, the more successful this partial identification becomes and so it may represent the beginning of a new tie”.⁹

*“For the ego, the formation of an ideal is the conditioning factor of repression”*¹⁰. The ideal ego is now the target of self-love. *“The subjects narcissism makes its appearance*

⁶ S.Freud, On Narcissism, An Introduction, S.E.XIV, p. 88

⁷ Ibid, p. 88

⁸ S.Freud, Group Psychology, S.E.XVII, p.105

⁹ Ibid, p.107-108

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 94

displaced onto the new ideal ego, which like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection. Where the libido is concerned, man shows again to be incapable of giving up satisfaction”¹¹ On the awakening of his own critical judgement, he seeks to recover narcissism in the form of his ego ideal. “What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of this childhood in which he was his own ideal”¹².

This discovery leads Freud to explore the relation between forming the ideal and sublimation. Freud illustrated that sublimation is a process that concerns the object-libido consisting of the instincts directing itself towards an aim other than and away, from that of sexual satisfaction. *“Idealisation is a process that concerns the object that object without any alteration, in its nature is aggrandized and exalted in the subjects mind”¹³* Freud described sublimation as something to do with the instinct whereas idealisation has something to do with the object. With the formation of an ideal, the demands of the ideal heightens on the ego and this ideal is the most powerful factor in favouring repression; sublimation is the way out, a way out of those demands that can be met without involving repression.

The Narcissistic object choice:

- “People who have suffered a disturbance in their libidinal development -that is in their later choice of love object they may have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves. They are plainly seeking themselves as love objects are exhibiting a type of object choice that must be termed narcissistic”¹⁴ (homosexuality)

3. The Object Choice of Men and Women

In this paper, Freud highlighted the fundamental differences between men and women in their type of object choice. Men demonstrate complete object love and there is a sexual overvaluation of the object, which Freud quotes *“is derived from the child’s original narcissism to the sexual object and thus corresponds to a transference of that narcissism*

¹¹ Ibid,p.94

¹² Ibid,p.94

¹³ Ibid,p.94

¹⁴ Ibid,p.88

*to the sexual object". This is thus traceable to an impoverishment of the ego as regards libido in favour of the love object.*¹⁵

In discussing the female, Freud marks that puberty brings about the development of the sexual organs and an intensification of the original narcissism; which is unfavourable to the development of a true object choice with its accompanying sexual over valuation.

Freud commented that these women love only themselves with an intensity which resembles that of a man's love for them. "*The woman's need does not lie in the direction of loving but being loved, the man who fulfils this condition is the one who finds favour with them*"¹⁶. The fascination with these women illustrates; "*that another person's narcissism is a great attraction for those who have renounced apart of their own narcissism and are in search of a love object*".¹⁷ Lacan: plays on the homonym *elle meme* (herself) and *elle m'aime* (she loves me).

Freud concludes his discussion regarding narcissistic women by saying that even for those women who remain cool to men, there is a road which leads to complete object choice, and that road is that of bearing a child. The woman is confronted with a part of their own body like an extraneous object, which by virtue of their narcissism; they can give complete object-love.

4. The Object in Neurosis and Psychosis

In Neurosis, the subject has given up his relation to reality, but he has not broken off his erotic relations with people and things, he maintains them in the phantasy. The neurotic says Freud "*on the one hand substituted for real objects, imaginary ones from his memory, or has mixed the latter with the former, and on other hand, he has renounced the initiation of motor activities for the attachment of his aims in connection with those objects.*"¹⁸ Freud named this condition 'libido introversion'.

In psychosis, the subject withdraws his libido from people and things in the external world, and unlike the neurotic he does not replace them by others in the phantasy. Where replacement occurs, the process is a secondary one and it is the subject's attempt at recovery which is designed to lead the libido back to objects. What shape does this

¹⁵ Ibid,p.88

¹⁶ Ibid,p.89

¹⁷ Ibid,p.89

¹⁸ Ibid,p.74

replacement take? Freud continues by saying “*Megalomania comes in to being at the expense of object-libido. The libido that has withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which is called narcissism.*”¹⁹

In neurosis, the highest phase of development of which object libido is capable of can be seen in state of being in love, when the subject is able to give up his own personality in favour of the object cathexis. The subject’s whole libidinal cathexis flows toward the object.

In Psychosis, in contrast we encounter the paranoiac phantasy of the ‘end of the world’. The whole of the libidinal cathexis flows back onto the ego. The psychotic withdraws his libidinal instincts from his love objects; he sends them out once more when he recovers. Freud proposed as long as he suffers, he ceases to love.

In discussing mourning and melancholia – Freud describes melancholia as related to an object loss which is withdrawn from consciousness. The subject will be aware of the loss, he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him. The object may not have died but has been lost as an object of love. In contrast mourning is a reaction to the loss of a loved one or loss of environmental factors but nothing about the loss is unconscious. Even in a case of profound mourning where there is a demand on the libido to withdraw from its attachments to the object, the subject will cling to the object through the hallucination. In Freud’s words, “*normally respect for reality gains the day*”. *In mourning the world has become poor and empty in melancholia it is the ego itself*²⁰.

Freud then poses a fundamental clinical question, “*What makes it necessary at all for ones mental life to pass beyond the limits of narcissism and to attach the libido to objects?*”²¹ and answers “*The necessity arises when the cathexis of the ego with libido arises exceeds a certain amount. A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love.*”²²

“A psychoanalytic theory of the subject must function simultaneously as a theory of the object, as well as a theory concerning the manner in which the object “subjectifies” the

¹⁹ Ibid, p.86

²⁰ S.Freud, Mourning and Melancholia, S.E.XIV, p. 244

²¹ Ibid, p.85

²² Ibid, p.85

subject— that is, permits the subject to experience itself as a subject”²³. Lacan advanced in this direction with his ‘return to Freud’, and went beyond by producing what he called his only invention: the object *petit a*.

In conclusion I would like to quote from Heine’s – *Picture of the psychogenesis of the Creation – By creating I recover, by creating I became healthy.*²⁴

²³ R.Rouillson, *The Symbolizing Function of the Object*, p.384

²⁴Ibid, p. 85