

# Theoretical Bridges Between Reversal Theory And Psychoanalysis: Reversals in the child<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The objective of this theoretical discussion is to build theoretical bridges between RT and psychoanalysis, in an attempt to link the pairs of metamotivational states with some important concepts in the Freudian model, creating a context for what we call the Paratelic-Negativistic-Mastery-Autic (PNMA) syndrome in the child. In this respect, it is shown that each pair of RT metamotivational states corresponds to a particular fundamental domain in human nature. In relation to psychoanalysis we can observe the following relationships: the telic-paratelic domain with drive management; the negativistic-conformist domain with the symbolic Law; the mastery-sympathy domain with instinct for mastery or its sublimation in the drive to know the other; and the autic-alloic domain with narcissism and object-relationships. The links between the two sets of dualities (Freudian and Apterian) are presented as a synthesis. Each pair of metamotivational states corresponds to a duality in the Freudian model. A developmental hypothesis is presented. One must, however, remain aware of the approximate and debatable features of these bold bridges between RT and psychoanalysis. In a second part of the paper, we present a case study of a child from a clinical practice, as illustration of the previous theoretical statements of links between RT and psychoanalysis. The case concerns a 10-year old girl who has been in therapy for 3 years. She presents significant mental retardation (IQ 47) and great emotional immaturity. Her past life was marked by serious deficiencies in care, with abuse, including sexual abuse, and a broken family. The diagnosis is “on the edge of psychosis” linked with a post-traumatic aspect, but with a neurotic basis evidenced by the intense questioning by this child about child-adult relationships. The study uses observational method in psychotherapy setting. The dynamic functioning of the child is presented by reference to metamotivational states, and it is argued that she displays a PNMA complex, which is the tendency for the Paratelic (P), Negativistic (N), Mastery (M) and Autic (A) states to occur together and to do so in problematic ways, including an extreme form of some of these states. Reversal psychodynamics are explained through the bridge between Reversal Theory and Psychoanalysis. The conclusion argues that these two models present complementary approaches.*

In this paper we will try to build some bridges between Reversal Theory (Apter, 2001) and psychoanalysis. For that we are going to attempt to link the pairs of metamotivational states with some important concepts in the Freudian model. From these bridges we will outline a developmental hypothesis based on the idea of a Paratelic-Negativistic-Mastery-Autic (PNMA) complex as the first stage in early

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childhood. Then, we will illustrate these ideas through a clinical case study of a particular child.

### **Telic and paratelic**

The telic-paratelic pair: concerning means and goals. First, in the paratelic state, we know that the individual experiences activity as the priority, the goal being secondary. Here the aim is to enjoy the activity, the goal being just a means for this satisfaction. From a psychoanalytic point of view one could identify the telic-paratelic pair with drive management. Thus, the paratelic state would correspond to the phenomenon of direct discharge of the drive from the primary processes. This is an “acting out” where what matters first and foremost for the individual is the immediate satisfaction of the drive.

Even if RT presents the paratelic state in terms of “focus on activity and pleasure in this activity,” the observable result is identical. The “Clockwork Orange” movie heroes, by Stanley Kubrick, are undoubtedly paratelic dominant: they are frequently experiencing an imperative need for the immediate satisfaction of their drives, and in acting out they are functioning under the “pleasure principle.” But we can go further, with Jacques Lacan, and apply his concept of “jouissance” (enjoyment), which takes us beyond simple pleasure into a dimension of transgressing taboos and perversion; this is the destructive aspect of the drive.

In contrast, in the telic state the individual is aware of the goal to be reached and the purpose is now a greater priority than the activity, which recedes into the background. This is close to the psychodynamic vision of a delay of gratification, which relates it to secondary process thinking. In delaying drive, and diverting immediate satisfaction, one gives oneself a “time perspective,” a “temporal competence” in which achieving future goals is in the foreground.

In conclusion, the telic-paratelic pair concerns a fundamental domain in human beings: that of drive management.

### **Negativistic and conformist**

The negativistic-conformist pair: which RT aptly characterizes as “the domain related to rules, the word ‘rule’ being understood in a very general way.” This makes us think of the Lacan psychoanalytic concept of “symbolic Law,” which is referenced by writing “Law” with an upper case “L,” the Law. Here, a little explanation is probably necessary. The substantive “symbolic,” *the* symbolic, is used in Freudian writings (in particular *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899) to designate all symbols with a constant meaning that can be found in various production of the unconscious. Lévi-Strauss (1949, 1958) defined a symbolic order, a symbolic system that structures the human and social reality, like language, kinship, art, science, religion, etc.

In Lacan’s thinking (1956-1957), the symbolic Law makes the link between what is common in the symbols and what is structuring the social order. The symbolic Law refers to a “pact” with the Other in general, and not a contract as for the law with a little “l.” The symbolic Law presents a fundamental and universal feature of human psychology. It is a general attitude towards the social world, usually by “taking into

account the Other.” In contrast to the law, the plural laws, the symbolic Law is not necessarily written. Specifically, some examples of symbolic Law are the taboo of incest, the prohibition of omnipotence, the prohibition of violence against others. Neurobiologists with ethologists and social psychologists have something to say about symbolic Law, which can be linked with some predispositions of our brain. For example, the reactions of pleasure and calming of adults in presence of babies or young children; or willingness to help one congener, even unknown.

When RT explains the conformist state as “satisfaction from following the rules that structure us,” we are very close to that “taking into account the other” expressed in the symbolic Law, because following rules is also and often respecting others, rules being a formal system relating ego and others.

In contrast, for RT the negativistic state is a state where one feels the restrictive nature of rules and where we enjoy breaking them. This may involve innocuous ways of doing things in one’s own way, to make a fool of the others or worse by transgressing basic taboos. RT, like psychoanalysis, considers levels of severity in transgression. For example, there are minor, ritual transgressions, which are even positive, such as the scientist who overturns a theoretical paradigm, which has become a dogma, in order to present a new model. However, RT also addresses the area of transgression in terms of social pathology, as in the dominance of the negativistic state in young offenders.

In the psychoanalytic model, the relationship to the symbolic Law is not unitary, but is described in terms of both the degree of severity of the transgressive behaviors and the particular nature of these behaviors. We said that the symbolic Law “takes into account the *Alter*.” In consequence, transgression is a form of “not taking into account the others,” including denial (of the other, of his/her difference, of the difference of generations), which is the hallmark of perversion or perversity. So, I think that here too, the views of RT and psychoanalysis come together in certain interesting ways, and negativistic state could be linked with the absence or weakness of symbolic Law.

In conclusion, the negativistic-conformist pair concerns a fundamental domain in human beings: the relationship to the symbolic Law.

### **Mastery and sympathy**

The mastery-sympathy pair: which RT describes as “the domain of transactions with others.” The mastery state concerns the control of interactions, with the challenge of avoiding weakness and feeling strong. In the mastery state the situation is experienced as being about control, and the transactions are interpreted as being about taking or yielding. The basic value of the mastery state is power. Conversely, the sympathy state is defined as a search for love and emotional gratification. In the sympathy state the situation is experienced as being about affection and personal relationships, and transactions as being about giving or being given. The basic value of the sympathy state is love.

In the mastery state, the aspects concerning “control” and “power” in transactions with others (but I would say “with the world”), make me think about the question of the “instinct for mastery” in Freud (1905, 1915): this is a very basic tendency to dominate the other, the object, by force. The aim of this drive is the appropriation of the object. In Freud’s thinking the instinct for mastery is first a component of sexuality, but sadism,

cruelty, and even the “instinct for knowledge,” are derived from it. So, it is possible to recognize in this instinct for mastery a normal sexual component, a pathological component in the domination of the object, and a sublimated component in an instinct for knowledge.

Freud makes the hypothesis that there exists, in young children, an instinct for mastery over the world, objects, and others. This instinct/drive contains within itself some non pathological violence (Bergeret’s “fundamental violence,” 1984), with a kind of cruelty in the sense of indifference to the other’s feelings until compassion for others appears later (Ferrant, 2001).

In addition, any child needs to experience that he/she can influence his/her environment and his/her own experiences. This works through all the means the child has at his/her disposal to get in touch with the world: sight, cries, gestures, facial expressions. This gives power to relieve tensions (for example, hunger), to get the satisfaction of his/her desires (such as being held in the arms), and to experience the pleasure of change and understanding of the world, noting the effect of his/her actions, an important cognitive pleasure that is a source of jubilation for a small child.

So, we have a first connection between RT and psychoanalysis through the link between the mastery state and the instinct for mastery. Now, what about the sympathy state?

The child needs transactions with an environment that resists the child’s mastery behaviors; this environment keeping its characteristics and being preserved from destruction. But also an environment that can be transformed by showing its responsiveness to the child’s signals and actions. In this way, the child can identify his/herself not only to the parents characteristics (voice, sight, holding), but also to their ability to change: for example when a mother smiles in response to a smile, when she comes in response to the baby’s calls, or when she is calming in response to the nervous child.

Our idea is that we have, in these adaptive responses of the environment to the child’s instinct of mastery, the origin of love, of sympathy. This can be demonstrated by the observation of behavior disorders in children and the genesis of these troubles. Each time the parent has no ability to “transform” him/herself because he/she is unable to take into account the physiological and emotional needs (including the need for mastery) of his/her child, the latter can only identify his/herself to the maladaptive characteristics of the parent (screaming, looking hard, making sudden gestures, for example). In such circumstances, the child may develop an exacerbated need for mastery that may take various forms of violence: psychological domination, bossy behavior, extortion, violence, rape.

In Freud (1905) one can read that “the drive to know (the epistemophilic drive) is a sublimated offspring of the instinct for mastery.” In other words, the instinct for mastery can become the drive to know and the work of thinking may be stood against the instinct for mastery. If we consider “knowledge” specifically in the sense of openness to others, an interest in others, this finally reduces to sympathy and love. RT talks about the sympathy state as a search of proximity, intimacy, a tendency to personalize rather than dehumanizing. In an interview, French actor Fabrice Luchini, speaks of a “psychological curiosity for the other” to describe his interest in discovering a female partner in a film set. This psychological curiosity for the other is the root of sympathy

and love (even if knowledge can be sometimes related to power and mastery over the other).

In conclusion, the mastery-sympathy pair concerns a fundamental domain in human beings: the instinct for mastery and its possible sublimation in the drive to know the other.

### **Autic and alloic**

Finally, the autic-alloic pair: for which RT considers the domain of the relationship to the other. In the alloic state we want to do things for others, while in the autic state we want to do things primarily for ourselves. On the one hand, what matters are the benefits for others; on the other hand, what matters are benefits for oneself. Further, one speaks of identification with the other in the alloic state, while the autic state is individualistic. Thus in the alloic state one identifies with others, while in the autic state one considers the other as separate and distinct from oneself.

What seems interesting to note in this definition of autic and alloic states, are the representations they involve. Indeed, the desire behind all metamotivational states is itself underpinned by representations, cognitions or imagery. In the autic state, representations focus on achieving one's own satisfaction. These autic representations of personal satisfaction are part of an individualistic conception of things. In contrast, in the alloic state, representations focus on achieving the satisfaction of the other. It is an *idiopathic and centrifuge identification* (Wallon, 1956): one represents oneself as "in the place of the other" in a selfless framework of thought.

From these representations, it is possible to link this to the relationship issue as it is defined in psychoanalysis, particularly in the concepts of "object-relationship" and "narcissism." So, I propose to make a bridge between the autic-alloic pair and a particular orientation in the cathexis of the object. In the autic state, the object-relationship focuses on the ego first, while having a predominantly narcissistic investment, but doing this without ignoring the object. Simply put, the other is in the background as far as the desire and pursuit of satisfaction are concerned.

In contrast, in the alloic state the object-relationship focuses on others, and narcissism is placed in the background. The ego does not disappear, of course, but the desire for satisfaction is aimed primarily at the satisfaction of the other.

In conclusion, the autic-alloic pair concerns a fundamental domain in human beings: that of narcissism and object-relationships.

### **Theoretical conclusion**

As a conclusion we propose a table which shows that we tried to link two sets of dualities: Freudian and Apterian dualities: Each pair of metamotivational states is relying to a dual conception in the Freudian model.

*Synoptic of freudian and apterian dualities.*

<b>Telic</b>	<b>Paratelic</b>
Management of drives through secondary thinking	Default in management of drives, acting out under pleasure principle
<b>Negativistic</b>	<b>Conformist</b>
Non-integration of symbolic Law, denial of the other	Integration of symbolic Law, “taking into account the other”
<b>Mastery</b>	<b>Sympathy</b>
The instinct for mastery to control the environment and one’s own experiences.	Sublimation of mastery in the “drive to know” the other at the root of sympathy and love.
<b>Autic</b>	<b>Alloic</b>
Object-relationship focuses on Ego Narcissism in foreground The other in background	Object-relationship focuses on the other Narcissism in background The other in foreground

Finally, we are fully aware of the approximate and debatable features of these bold bridges between RT and psychoanalysis. Thus I do not want to give the impression that some metamotivational states would be “pathological” and others not. Regarding psychopathology I always refer to what RT has stated as psychopathological mechanisms, for example, inhibition of reversal, inappropriate reversals, and so on.

But we want to conclude with a bold developmental hypothesis. We don’t know if we can describe it as “dominance” or something more subtle like “dominance in the dominance,” or a “more basic state,” but our genetic hypothesis is that child starts his/her life in a PNMA complex. At base, children are naturally paratelic, negativistic, mastery, and autic. Is this dominance or something else, we can’t say it yet.

This is corresponding to the Freudian “primary narcissism” (omnipotence, pleasure principle, magical thinking). Then, the adaptive responses of the social environment could contribute to the development of equilibrium with the other metamotivational states of the four pairs: telic, conformist, sympathy, and alloic (an equilibrium between Self and objects cathexis according to Freudian model, with taking into account the other, symbolic Law, secondary thinking, principle of reality).

### **Clinical illustration**

Now as illustration of the previous theoretical statements, we are presenting the case of a child, this case being drawn from a daily clinical practice as psychologist. We shall not present the results of experimental research here, but rather a clinical case history that will sustain the theoretical approach, exploring the dynamic functioning, according with joined RT and psychoanalytic points of view.

Joanna is a lovely 10-year girl who has been in therapy with me for 3 years now. She’s a small girl for her age, a blue-eyed brunette. The word I used to describe my first impression at our first meeting is “sparkling:” a lively child, giving the impression of

potential background intelligence, with some seductive aspects. In psychometric tests Joanna has significant mental retardation (with an IQ of 47, her grade being that of nursery school). Although she had never been to school before arriving at our institute in 2006, Joanna shows a well-developed level of language and vocabulary. The projective C.A.T. shows great emotional immaturity.

Joanna's story is very painful. Her family life was marked by incessant serious crises. There were severe deficiencies in care, and there was abuse, including sexual abuse (fondling and repeated contacts with adult sexuality, for example pornography). The judge placed Joanna in foster care.

In the classroom or in the educational workshop, Joanna can sometimes be aggressive, insensitive to sanctions, undisciplined, oppositional when in small groups, seeking an exclusive relationship with adults. Psychotic phases also appear in the classroom, workshop or during playtime, in which Joanna speaks alone to imaginary persecutors, in dialogues charged with coarsenesses, violence, and sexuality. These symptoms also appear in the foster care family, with aggression, phobias (darkness, loneliness, shower, and imaginary wolves – her father scared her with wolves to draw her in his bed). She sometimes gets up during night to take her clothes from the wardrobe, but she doesn't seem to be in a sleepwalking state.

With the psychologist himself, a double Joanna appears: she is capricious and angry at times and excessively charming at other times. Actually, it's like dealing with two different children: sometimes charming, friendly, kind, calm, sociable, sometimes shouting and becoming aggressive and in anger with words and gestures. In this state she can try to hit the person with her or to break objects. Suddenly, she can very quickly go back to the previous stage, of calmness and kindness.

Psychiatric and psychopathological points of view agree to diagnosis Joanna's problems as being at base neurotic. But, obviously, we are in a post-traumatic context; traumatismas that have undermined the psychic structure of this child, make think of Joanna as "on edge of psychosis". On the other side, the "neurotic" dimension is not only in the good functioning and contact with reality, but also in Joanna's incessant questioning about the true nature of her relationship with the psychologist: she eagerly questioned the true nature of adult-child relationships concerning sexuality. Sometimes she wonders: "I am not your girlfriend?", "You're not my boyfriend?" And she can dispute with the therapist about whether kissing on the mouth "it is or not between adults and children." And when she becomes very seductive, we understand that by transference, she tries to retrieve her early traumatic sexual experience she lived with her father and other men.

### **Joanna's dynamic functioning.**

Now, we want to more precisely analyse Joanna's "dynamic" functioning, that is to say her psychological and emotional states, in reference to metamotivational states and psychoanalysis.

The core of our interest in this clinical case, with respect to RT, is the observation of sudden and dramatic changes in psychological and emotional states. These are reversals that we have not seen in so steep and special patterns in other children. These reversals

are shared in all the metamotivational pairs in “Paratelic-Negativistic-Mastery-Autic” (PNMA) complex, in which Joanna suddenly reverses. How does this happen?

### *Over-paratelicism*

Joanna can at times remain quietly playing or drawing. At these times, she appears to be focused on the goal she is pursuing (and she doesn’t like to be disturbed at these moments). We can interpret this as a telic state.

When in our office, she reverses. We want to speak, as Apter and Smith (1979) did, of an exaggerated paratelic state, or what we shall call here “over-paratelicism.” We do not know if it really makes sense in relation to RT, but we shall try to explain. For example, Joanna said she wants to make a mosaic. We give her the mosaic box and she starts the game. After 2 minutes she renounces the activity, gives up the mosaic, and wants to play cards with the therapist. Then, she gives up and takes the plastic alphabet letters, then the fluffy monkeys, then she wants to play *awale* (an African game) just half a minute ...

In the end, she wants the basket containing animal figurines. She gets out all the animals, does nothing except enact a few aggressive acts between the animals, starts to get excited, enters into persecution interpretations aimed at the therapist and eventually throws everything on the ground. This rapid succession of frantic activities lasts only a few minutes. This is a hyper-activity phase that we want to see as over-paratelicism in the sense that the child is *stuck* in the “activity is priority” position.

Now, in term of drive management, over-paratelicism looks for Joanna as a functioning under pleasure principle. Secondary thinking is momentary failing, Principle of reality is no more topical, and drives are acting out, what RT calls “activity is priority.” So, for Joanna, the “P” of her “PNMA” is a kind of over-paratelicism in which she loses herself completely in the activity.

### *Transgressions and parapathic emotions*

Although in general, Joanna is respectful of the rules and seems to be pleased to conform to the boundaries laid down by the rules, at other times she is quite different. All children alternate between conformism and rebelliousness. But for Joanna it is quite strange: transgressive phases are sudden, often apparently unmotivated. For example, we go and take her to the classroom. She takes our hand and we quietly walk 30 seconds. She is friendly, polite, smiling... Then she abruptly withdraws her hand and asks:

- “Do you have a handkerchief in your pocket?”
- “Yes.”
- “I want to see it.”
- “You want me to show you my handkerchief?”

And as the girl is not a fool, she understands that it is a “Rogerian” psychologist answer, a way for me not to do what she asks me, and then she passes to the negativistic state

and the anger register. “You’re a big jerk!” And she runs (knowing that the rule is not running but walking next to the psychologist, and that one doesn’t insult people ...).

We said “apparently unmotivated” reversals. But it is well understood that Joanna’s past gives a meaning, a motivation, to most of her behaviours. Here, we do not need to be a great psychoanalyst to understand the sexual dimension of the demand to “see my handkerchief” (with the double reference to what is in the pants and which serves to snuff, to collect bodily fluids).

Joanna is the typical child in danger to be a prey for paedophile. She does not only enter in negativistic and transgression state, but she tempts to seduce the therapist for he enters in transgression with her. In these hard moments, she uses a lot of weapons of seduction with her body: she is dancing an erotic choreography. She is singing a love song with some obscenities she is vamping. Or she is looking at the therapist side-ways with a very tempting and helper smile. She is laughing like a fool in a very communicative laugh, entering in a kind of hypomanic phase.

As the therapist does not enter in her sexual excitation (conversely we demand her to be calm), she can enter in violent negativistic state, shouting and becoming aggressive, in anger, with coarsenesses, sexual words and gestures. In this state she can try to hit the therapist or throwing objects at him.

But sometimes, another interesting questioning can happen: Joanna asks the therapist some precisions about his private life, in particular if he has a wife, if he makes love with her ...

After learning how to be “out of frame” during her early childhood, settings and rules are very difficult for Joanna to live by, especially when the excitement of love appears and when she must comply with a symbolic Law that she has not learned (the law of incest). She cannot “kiss the psychologist on the mouth” or “see or suck his peter,” whence by reaction, the transgressions of other rules related to the clinical setting (insulting the psychologist, trying to hit him, kicking furniture) and parapatric emotions of anger and fear (in these states we often see her smiling).

As Joanna was under the “denial of the other” law in her past with her father and other men, she denies the psychologist as a person, trying to make us live the sexual over-excitation she lived. But it is encouraging to see that sometimes she can “take into account the other,” the psychologist as a person, asking something about his private life, tempting to know if she can be in an “oedipal triangle” with the therapist and his supposed wife. That’s a way to retrieve the symbolic Law of incest prohibition. So, here is the “N” in Joanna’s “PNMA.”

*Mastery: “I give the orders, not you!”*

Regarding the “M” of Joanna’s “PNMA,” there are times for Joanna’s “angel” version of herself to appear, with all that this implies in the sympathy state by way of love emotions and feelings of sharing. This involves the search for a balanced relationship, in which everyone seeks to provide rewards for the other. Specifically this occurs during some shared games, or when she asks us to read a story and she is standing close to us to calm her anxiety. At these times, we are both in an obviously sympathy state.

“I give the orders, not you!” The reversal from sympathy to mastery usually begins by that kind of peremptory assertion. The mastery state is not manifested only by these claims of omnipotence. Joanna also seeks to control the therapist, to have power over him. In this case, she can give him strict orders: “You must not write, look at me!”; “You must not look at me! Close your eyes!”; “You shut up! I don’t want to hear you talking!”; “Write: ‘I must not reply to Joanna’”; “Show me what’s in your pocket,” and so on.

The mastery state is manifested not only by orders given to the psychologist; it also appears as an attempt to control space. This happens specifically when Joanna comes close to the therapist, on the wrong side of the table, according to the rule he stated. To justify this mastery over space, she uses one of her phobic symptoms and suddenly claims to be afraid: “There’s a wolf!,” showing the entrance door behind her. We are unable to say if this is a real phobia or playing with a parathic fear, maybe both... (Is phobia a hidden parathic emotion?). Anyway, it is clear that mastery in relation to the space of the room, which is also mastery in relation to the setting of the therapy, and thus the psychologist, is closely linked to transgression and playing.

Joanna has lived powerful and toxic mastery relationships with adults, including elements of sexual seduction. Joanna’s disturbing aspects are linked to this *child-adult cognitive synergy* in which she was obliged to live, not as a game, or as make-believe, but as reality (in this cognitive synergy we have the basis for paedophilia). The masteries and aggressions that Joanna suffered are today the object of an “identification with the aggressor” mechanism: when Joanna tries to give orders to the psychologist, and to manipulate or hit him, just as she was forced, manipulated, and beaten.

As we previously explained, sometimes Joanna is “taking into account” the psychologist with a genuine interest for his private life. Is it also here a sublimation of mastery in the “drive to know?” It is difficult to give to this injured child such ability. Her first urgency is to know if she is not a sexual object for the therapist, if she can reverse in sympathy state with him without danger. So, here is the “M” in Joanna’s “PNMA.”

### *Situation auticism*

In terms of observation, the autic-alloic pair poses a problem of method. We suppose that Joanna reverses during her daily life between autic and alloic. However, we experienced Joanna (and Joanna had the experience of the therapist) in a particular situation, a setting, which defines the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of us both. In particular, the setting of psychotherapy implies that the therapist is alloic from the start and tends to remain alloic throughout. In our work as a psychologist, “We want to do things for our little clients” and we try to forget ourselves.

Also, in contrast, the children we receive are naturally and essentially in an “autic” state. They “take advantage” of the availability of the therapist to satisfy their ego. This imbalance, this asymmetry of roles, is the basis for the construction of the therapeutic relationship.

So, apart from the fact that autic-alloic states, which refer more to representations than behaviors, are difficult to observe objectively, the setting of psychotherapy leads to infer, somewhat arbitrarily, the presence of the “autic state” for Joanna in this situation

(a “situation auticism”), putting her narcissism in the foreground for the sake of narcissistic survival. This will be the “A” of her “PNMA.”

### **Clinical conclusion**

Joanna’s reversals into the PNMA are, we would say, “classically” associated with the increased level of arousal. Joanna reverses from: a tiny frustration; or the evocation of a setting or rules; or the happening of a stimulus that causes a feeling of fear. Or else it comes from a gradual euphoric excitement or irritation and frustration in the face of a task that is difficult to achieve.

However, besides these “classic” triggers, Joanna’s clinical situation explains other “apparently unmotivated” reversals. These are reminiscences of her former traumatism, especially sexual. A relationship of love, as in the context of therapy, with the positive transference to the person of the therapist becomes a reversal trigger to paratelic-negativistic-mastery, because of links, “fusion,” between tender love and sexuality that are associated in her. Similarly, Joanna’s relational patterns, based on attempts at mastery, at omnipotence over the adult, relate to her past experiences of mastery over herself.

PNMA reversals are what a supporter of RT would notice in observing Joanna’s functioning: at a given time, in such circumstances and in a given relational context, Joanna is telic, conformist, sympathetic, and alloic. But at other times, in other circumstances, she reverses suddenly and dramatically into the paratelic, negativistic, mastery, and autistic states.

For his part, a psychoanalyst would see Joanna’s functioning as a consequence of premature and not metabolized drive over-excitations, an effect of the introjections of the persecutors’ objects, an effect of mastery, violent, and aggressive experiences. This psychoanalyst would certainly talk of the “fusion of instincts” in Joanna and her non-integration of symbolic Law.

What we have tried to show in this paper, and in analyzing Joanna’s case, is that ultimately there is no real contradiction between RT and psychoanalysis. What RT models as reversals in psychological, emotional, and motivational states, may very well be understood in the light of psychoanalytic concepts and there are complementarities between both theoretical approaches. They enlighten each other, as a kind of “double model.”

This modest study is a first step towards other comparative work and a synthesis between models.

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