

Criminality, Sexuality, Imago

Jean-Luc-Vannier (Nice, French Riviera)

“What is the share of the sexual in every crime, be it the most ordinary, the most banal, the most ‘realistic’?” (Jean Laplanche: *Le crime sexuel*, In *Sexual: La sexualité élargie au sens freudien*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2007, p. 151)

“A clear demarcation [of such neurotic individuals] from real criminals is one of the great tasks of psychoanalysis.” (Franz Alexander & Hugo Staub: *Der Verbrecher und sein Richter*, In *Psychoanalyse und Justiz*, Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 314)

“But I believe that there are many individuals far closer to the act of murder than most of us are willing to admit.” (Robert D. Keppel, William J. Birnes: *Signature Killers Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer*, Arrow books, 1998, p. 356)

In the beginning, was the crime? If it has always fascinated by the repulsion it evokes, the criminal act plunges its roots into the abyss of the – sexual – drive of death present in each of us. A drive that targets those we cherish the most. The unconscious has its rules – in fact, it has none – that reason ignores. Failing to grasp this darkest part of ourselves, we strive to understand its most tangible manifestations in reality, even if they are bloody. In this immense gap between the obscure and the verified, between the unintelligible and the faculty of reason demanding explanation, as Voltaire thundered, the specialist gropes, speculates, and, tired of his unsuccessful efforts, takes refuge in typology.¹ We cannot blame him for this. Necessary but not sufficient, this intermediate stage, a beneficial halt in research, invites us to return to the task, benefiting from previous reflections.

Faithful to his theory of spiral thinking – a curve swirling around a fixed point that attracts it but from which its impulse enriches itself with each new passage² – the late Professor Laplanche explained the interest of a psychoanalytic writing by the fact that it relies on the work and results of other researchers: “an imperative valid not only concerning past research but also ongoing research.”³

¹ “The police needs to establish a pattern background”, R. D. Keppel, *Signature Killers Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer*, Arrow books, 1998, p. 15.

² J. Laplanche, *Problématiques I, L'angoisse*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2006, p. 6.

³ J. Laplanche, *Problématiques IV, L'inconscient et le ça*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 1998, p. 15.

Eager to gather what is scattered without compromising our spirit of research, our reflection will draw from several sources: analytical, police, but also texts written by criminals themselves. These are by no means the least enlightening for our work. They even help to overcome a fundamental difficulty that lies in the lexical differential between the police and psychoanalysis: the concept of “serial killer” is not derived from psychopathological discourse but originates in police vocabulary following its introduction in the 1970s by FBI agent Robert Ressler⁴. Between the “lust murderers” and the “serial killers” described by police detective R. D. Keppel, whose book inspires our reflections, the boundary often remains blurred. The meanders of human sexuality constitute the mandatory points of passage.

Several axes have emerged during our readings. We have studied and gathered them under the following titles:

- I The repetitive compulsion of the act
- II The distinction between sadism and sexuality
- III The crime scene: an *Urszene*?
- IV Anal erotism and blood in the crime scene
- V Sexual satisfaction, but which one?
- VI To approach the “imago of the fragmented body”
- VII The sexual death drive
- VIII The childhood of humanity or the inhumanity of childhood?
- IX The absence of discernment?
- X After the act

I The repetitive compulsion of the act

This first element is – not without relevance – noted by both investigators and some of the criminals in detention. In a particularly instructive book, American detective R. D. Keppel, who focuses on the “signature” of the serial crimes he investigates, notes the existence of a “drive” that corresponds well to the traditional definition of an internal force inducing a demand for work towards motility⁵. The indefinable nature of what he him-

⁴ J.-C. Maleval, *Les assassins par lubricité, Nécrophilie, psychose et perversion*, In *Criminologie et psychiatrie*, Sous la direction de Th. Albernhe, Ellipses, 1997, p. 213.

⁵ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

self calls “something” is matched only by its power to force the individual to repeat his act. “He will kill again”, assures Ted Bundy⁶, confirming that it is indeed a “part of him that is compulsive and uncontrollable”.⁷ This is the unanimous assertion of specialists who have studied criminality from a psychic perspective: “When asked about the motives for his act, a criminal responds that he acted on irresistible impulses and that he himself does not know why this act is foreign to him”.⁸

The police detective also projects, at the risk of some confusion, this compulsion of repetition onto the signature of the criminal act: the killer feels compelled to leave a “personal stamp”, an obliteration like a seal on a letter. The application of this “special mark” aims, as the Larousse dictionary specifies, to “prevent it from being used a second time”. And to add about the word “obliteration”: “the mark itself”. This short addendum seems to us to illuminate Keppel’s ambiguity, mixing the act and its signature: the first very directly concerns the criminal in his unconscious relationship with himself, while the signature, in a way, passes through the other. It even addresses the investigator who will discover the body and strive to identify the perpetrator. Does the nature of the compulsion before the commission of the murderous act equal that after its accomplishment? The difference is significant: despite likely being common to both, we must take heed not to let the identity dimension obscure their disparity. Let us oversimplify: this “something foreign in me” that forced me to perform this act may be followed by a “repair”¹⁰ by claiming paternity. The signature is a definitive attestation that not only authenticates the personalized attribution of the crime, prohibits its double use like a letter with an obliterated stamp, and ultimately restores even a troubled link with reality. To discern in the signature an unconscious wish to “facilitate” the apprehension of the criminal, there may be only a small step to take: such is essentially the opinion of Theodor Reik for whom “the need for punishment drives the repetition of the act”.¹¹

⁶ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *Ted Bundy, Conversations with a killer*, Mirror Books, 2019, p. 174.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁸ F. Alexander, H. Staub, *Der Verbrecher und sein Richter*, Ein psychoanalytischer Einblick in die Welt der Paragraphen, In *Psychoanalyse und Justiz*, Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 305.

⁹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ As understood by Melanie Klein.

¹¹ Th. Reik, *Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis*, In *Psychoanalyse und Justiz*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1974, p. 63.

By the way, we encounter here the unconscious meaning of jihadist videos before the commission of their suicide attack. In an earlier study, we had emphasized the fact that recording a video – doubling a commitment letter which has been undermined by the now uncertain “media” fate – considered the primacy of the image in the identity certification of the terrorist act and its external communication.¹²

The need for recognition, the need to be attributed the “paternity” of the act, does not seem to us to correspond to the essence of what drives the criminal to commit it. It would rather be a logical complement. A sort of “tangibility test” involving the return of the crime’s author to reality, a return whose importance for the psychotic we know well. The drive relief and very briefly “the guilty moment” experienced by the crime’s authors could attest to this.

Keppel further suggests linking the signature of the criminal act to sexual satisfaction by affirming: “An imprint the killer is psychologically compelled to leave to satisfy him sexually.”¹³ The assertion is essential in that it would link the drive discharge to the deposit of an individual mark. Throughout his book, this specialized investigator senses with some finesse the underlying sexual dimension of this compulsion of repetition, both the one leading to the act and the one which aims to leave a mark broadly speaking on the crime scene. But as he is not a clinician, he fails to grasp the specificity of this sexuality. At the risk of associating crime and signature in the same sexual register without further precision: he thus uncritically repeats the assertion of Californian psychiatrist Dr. Park E. Dietz, according to whom “it is only the sexual murder that objectifies its basic sadistic pathology.”¹⁴ An assertion with very debatable terms, which we will address in the following chapter.

¹² J.-L. Vannier, *Becoming a Jihadist: a Psychoanalytical Perspective*, EICTP Vienna Research Papers On Transnational Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, Vol. III, January 2022, pp. 151–159. See also: *Jihadist Terrorism: Critical Analysis of Gill & Corner’s Study and Clinical Counterexamples*, EICTP Vienna Research Papers On Transnational Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, Vol. V, November 2023, pp. 101–115.

¹³ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

II The distinction between sadism and sexuality

We do not intend to contest the sexual nature of the crime: it is always necessary to question this “share of the sexual in every crime.”¹⁵ More precisely, Jean Laplanche reminds us, we must “seek the message, the residue of message and communication always present in the apparently most brutal act.”¹⁶ The psychoanalyst’s assertion is not contradicted by one of the most dangerous criminals: from his cell, where he exposes his most morbid thoughts, Gérard J. Schaefer admits: “There is undeniably a sexual element in a violent death, whether it is a murder or a capital execution.”¹⁷

But what is the nature of this sexuality? Keppel seems to distinguish – if only by seeking to compare or even bring them together – the sexual dimension of the crime from that of sadism. The very title of the paragraph is “sexual sadism.”¹⁸ However, isn’t it a pleonasm, and one that he repeats elsewhere?¹⁹

Let us proceed here with a necessary reminder: if Freud was led to name sadism the exercise of violence alone outside of any sexual satisfaction²⁰, he acknowledged that this approach lacked rigor. It has even led to making the term sadism, not without causing confusion, the “synonym of aggressiveness.”²¹ This was until the introduction of the second Freudian topic and the sexual death drive. There is also an intimate correlation in Freud’s work between the terms sadism and masochism, making it impossible to study them separately, neither in their genesis nor in their manifestation. This “special place” occupied by sadism and masochism among other perversions deserves our attention because it is perhaps in a finer and more differentiated analysis of this sadism that we might better disentangle the compulsion of the criminal act from that which aims to leave a “trade-mark”.

¹⁵ J. Laplanche, *Le crime sexuel*, In *Sexual, La sexualité élargie au sens freudien*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2007, p. 151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁷ G. F. Schaefer, *Journal d’un tueur*, Editions Jacques Bertoin, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁸ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁰ S. Freud, *Pulsions et destins des pulsions*, In *Metapsychologie*, Folio Essais, Gallimard, 1968, p. 27.

²¹ J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2014, p. 428.

In the detective's assertion "Sadism is generally a characteristic of sexual crimes"²², there is, in our view, a double risk: firstly, that of a desexualization of sadism, and secondly, of being misled by the sexual crime being covered by an apparently sadistic practice or manoeuvre that would be only a secondary construction. Yet, to recall with Freud, sadism requires a minimum of identification with the victim. Repeatedly, we find in Keppel's text affinities with this approach, but they are diluted by the author's description: he confuses them with the drive for control by describing the fact that "in the ritual of subjugation of the victims, the criminal preened in his own ability to mastermind and effect dominance over them."²³ Further, he still confines the act and the compulsion of the signature in this same drive for control: "The killer needs only the thrill of the victim he controls...to stimulate his climax." And to specify: "It's exactly as if the signature killer is feeding emotionally and visually from the experience of exercising control and domination over a victim."²⁴ Double confusion, we think, since we strive to demonstrate the epistemological break between the act and the signature. It is worth recalling here that this drive for control is described by Freud as a "non-sexual drive that only secondarily unites with sexuality". Let us further refute this dilution of the sexual dimension of sadism by reaffirming a principle: the sadist enjoys sexual pleasure through the masochism of his victim. Isn't this the case when Keppel establishes a clear and gradual correlation between the degree of the victim's suffering and the intensity of the killer's enjoyment?²⁵ Keppel insists on the intensity of the killer's satisfaction proportional to the victim's terror: he even provides a list in which he enumerates the sensory manifestations of the killer's sexual excitement by the cries and moans of his victim, which are also a source of obviously identificatory pleasure during the sexual act.²⁶ But Keppel fails to clearly distinguish, in the various cases exposed, the significance of the physical suffering inflicted on the victim from the absolute imperative of negating it, the real goal of the crimes he studies. Let us summarize our thought with the help of a colleague's striking assertion: "To sexually enjoy the other's body, there is no other way than to establish one's omnipotence over it by tearing it to pieces."²⁷

²² R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²⁷ J.-C. Maleval, *Nécrophilie, psychose et perversion*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

III The crime scene: an Urszene?

The sadism of the crime scene must obviously be associated with the reminiscence of the seduction model, that is, the anthropological coercion that is replayed in the asymmetric relationship between the adult and the child. The most innocent, everyday gestures of the adult in charge of the child implant in the latter's universe messages infiltrated by the adult's repressed infantile sexuality. If the killer enjoys it, it is because this scene reactivates in his psyche – obviously inverting it – this domination that the adult exerted over him in early childhood.

And wouldn't the first seduction the killer strives to meticulously restore by staging his victims, often in anatomical positions that leave no sexual ambiguity, be that derived from the primal scene? Let us recall its principles: it is a scene of sexual intercourse between the parents observed or supposed based on certain clues and fantasized by the child.²⁸ The link with the sadism of the crime scene is obvious: parental coitus is interpreted by the child as an aggression by the father in a sadomasochistic relationship and provokes sexual excitement in him. The idea of a "mise en scene" scenario appeared as early as 1897 in Freud and connotes certain traumatic childhood experiences: "fragments of the seen scene" united with those of the "heard scene" to form by unconscious assembly inducing "fusion and deformation" the fantasy.²⁹ Generating anxiety – an uncontrolled sexual excitement that the child cannot understand and is dismissed because it involves his parents – the Urszene contains all the elements likely to be reactivated in the aftermath of the crime scene. The blood traces discovered by the child in the bed or on the mother's linen testify to the father's assault, feed his fantasies of the primal scene, and contribute to infantile sexual theories³⁰. Keppel gets close to the question: "The killer acts out the same script over and over again"³¹, modifying only elements of the staging but always with the aim of seeking excitement. The police officer nevertheless faces the same difficulty: that of understanding the nature of the possible sexual satisfaction of the crime itself.

²⁸ J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

²⁹ S. Freud, *Manuscrit M, Lettres à Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*, Edition complète, PUF, 2007, p. 313.

³⁰ S. Freud, *Des théories sexuelles infantiles*, OEuvres complètes, VIII, 1906–1908, PUF, 2007, p. 328.

³¹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

IV Anal erotism and blood in the crime scene

The symbolic language does not consider gender differences. And anal erotism is an example. Sexuality, too often reduced nowadays to the genital by a generalized repression that pretends to forget its biphasic dimension, infiltrates more than it shows. The police officer does not detect – surprisingly – what nevertheless spreads out before his eyes as manifest proof of the “sexual”: the blood spilled in the crime. Let us explain: the psychic relationship to blood has been the subject of very fruitful reflections in Freud. Psychoanalysis considers everything that “comes out” of the body as part of the proper body and establishes strong correlations between manifestations of certain erogenous zones in early childhood and recurrent character traits in adulthood. In short: blood and all human excretions count in what psychoanalysis calls psychic anality. Meticulousness – the extremely ritualized arrangement of the crime scene, including or not the victim’s blood – is one of the three expressions of this anal erotism³². Besides the correlation of the taboo of blood with the prohibition of murder, notwithstanding the fear of blood – the smell of the blood of the killed enemy must not be inhaled under penalty of contracting a disease or even dying among a tribe in New Guinea³³ – it is not surprising that the ritualization and ceremonial around blood have been abundantly commented on in “Totem and Taboo”, one of whose chapters is entitled “The Infantile Return of Totemism”. Fearing sexual impotence through contamination of femininity, particularly by menstrual blood, “the primitive places a taboo where he fears danger,”³⁴ explains Freud. As discovered by Keppel, the crime scene – crimes most often committed against women – carefully ritualizes the spilled blood, to which the spermatic product seems to respond with weak physiological echo. Inscriptions, manipulations, even ingestion of blood “embellish” these stereotyped ceremonies similarly to animal or human sacrifice rituals – suicides, murders, or self-mutilations – that psychotics enact with the secret hope of rescue or at least a relief from their existence.

³² S. Freud, *Des transpositions pulsionnelles en particulier celles de l'érotisme anal*, OEuvres complètes, XV, 1916–1920, PUF, 2012, p. 55.

³³ S. Freud, *Totem et tabou*, OEuvres complètes, XI, 1911–1913, PUF, 2009, p. 243.

³⁴ S. Freud, *La tabou de la virginité*, OEuvres complètes, XV, op. cit., p. 87.

V Sexual satisfaction, but which one?

Understanding the sexual satisfaction sought by criminals through the accomplishment of their deed remains central to the mentioned testimonies. From the beginning of his book and as a common thread, Keppel asserts – though in a general formula and cautious in the choice of terms used – that “All signature murderers seek some form of sexual gratification, and their crimes are the expression of the ways they satisfy that need.”³⁵ The detective nevertheless senses this “blur” surrounding this sexuality by using the expression “some form of?”. In this regard, the second journalist interviewing Ted Bundy faces the same sexual enigma by asking where his satisfaction comes from if the crime’s repetition brings him nothing.³⁶ In his own way and with his words, but not without a certain psychological finesse, Ted Bundy provides the answer: “we are not talking about normal sexual satisfaction.”³⁷

As Keppel is not a clinician, he fails to grasp the sexual significance of the act in the “absence or lack of sexual aggression”, even though he thinks “there is a clear reason behind what the killer is doing”.³⁸ What is not explicit for the detective is incomprehensible. The subterranean, silent dimension of the sexual death drive³⁹ escapes him. Keppel indeed maintains this oscillation – in fact, an aporia that serves our argumentation – between two postulates: the first consists in noting the “ordinary” incapacity of the serial sexual murderer to have a sexual orgasm without accompanying it with violent acts.⁴⁰ In this perspective, he highlights what rather results from sexual satisfaction by accumulating the physical intensity of the act: how not to think of the definition posed by Freud in his “Three Essays” on the sources of infantile sexuality through mechanical excitations and other muscular activities beyond a certain “intensity”?⁴¹ He nonetheless raises the question of what the murderer sexually seeks in committing his criminal act. Because he also observes: “Another important feature of this killer’s signature was the absence of ejaculate on the victims’ bodies.”⁴² He

³⁵ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁶ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

³⁸ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

³⁹ S. Freud, *Abrégé de psychanalyse*, OEuvres complètes, XX, 1937–1939, PUF, 2014, p. 238.

⁴⁰ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴¹ S. Freud, *Trois essais sur la théorie sexuelle*, OEuvres complètes, VI, 1901–1905, PUF, 2009, p. 139.

⁴² R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

will assert the opposite later. Perhaps the detective is not able to consider the possibility of the criminal's ejaculation at a later time – through onanism, for example – once the crime is accomplished or the crime scene is arranged as a “surplus”: indication of a complementary emergence of the physical imperatives of adult genital sexuality, where we join the hypothesis of enjoyment by accumulation, but we know that it cannot prevent the preeminence of infantile sexuality.

G rard J. Schaefer offers an explanation that deserves our attention: “Sexuality was indeed there, but aggressiveness went against sexual pleasure,”⁴³ which seems to indicate that this sexuality is of another order, of another nature than that commonly attributed to adults. We also find in this assertion of Schaefer the link with this infantile aggressiveness mentioned in the previous chapter.

In fact, Keppel's later reflections – and even more so his contradictions – help us discern and understand his questions: “for the killer, the issue is always sex and sexual control as an expression of anger.”⁴⁴ Perhaps it would be appropriate to replace “anger by anxiety”? It seems very useful to recall in direct connection with the detective's assertion the Freudian approach: anxiety arises from the mismatch between sexual excitement at the somatic level and the possibility of elaborating this excitement at the psychic level. The subject's inability to follow the specific discharge path, that is, the orgasm, results in a sort of anarchic discharge through pathways not organized for a sexual act: “This is precisely what anxiety or all its possible equivalents is.”⁴⁵ It is in a similar perspective that we can understand Ted Bundy's – always surprisingly fine – assertions: “The individual seeks to satisfy certain impulses – consciously or unconsciously – but it is the absence of this satisfaction that should push him to indulge in this kind of futile exercise again and again.”⁴⁶ The essential expression is obviously “the absence of satisfaction” as an “unconscious” mechanism that “drives” the criminal to seek it “again and again” without ever finding it. The infantile sexual drive knows no – it does not seek it – appeasement. It is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp this “logic” without considering

⁴³ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

⁴⁵ J. Laplanche, *Probl matiques I*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 255. We emphasize.

the human unconscious, which illuminates this feeling of dissatisfaction as explained by Franz Alexander and Hugo Staub.⁴⁷

The detective indeed wonders about the temporal sequence that eludes him, the missing intermediate link that intervenes between the accomplishment of the criminal act and the possible orgasm: "In other words, everything the killer does on a crime scene is aimed at achieving an orgasm right then and there... there's usually ejaculant all over the place, in or on the victim, and on whatever surfaces are adjacent to the body."⁴⁸ In a moment of his considerations, Keppel is forced to recognize that part of this sexuality escapes the usual understanding.⁴⁹ The contradiction and for the detective the enigma are explicit here: sexual satisfaction seems "scattered", "spread" as if the criminal could not focus on the "sexual object" of the crime. The author uses the concepts of "primary and secondary sexual mechanisms based on control."⁵⁰ Mechanisms that he describes exhaustively a few pages later, insisting on the theoretical ability of the adult to perform a sexual act, implying genital but diverted by the preeminence of secondary mechanisms. "The killer's primary goal is", says Keppel, "satisfaction through eroticized power expressed in violence, not an ejaculation with a fantasized love."⁵¹

Yet it seems to us necessary to invert what would be of primary and secondary satisfaction: the search for satisfaction by the infantile sexual drive (partial, chaotic...) coming before that of the genital drive but not finding the "lost" object; only the second "leaves a trace" that is perceptible. In human sexuality, the acquired precedes the innate. Keppel's assertion is not an antinomy: "Many signature killers achieve their sexual gratification through primary sexual mechanisms by physically raping each of their victims"⁵², while he describes these mechanisms as "sets of directed and specified actions, behaviors, and methods which bring the killer to sexual climax". This description would rather characterize the preliminaries, the residue of the infantile sexual drive, and which become in perverse behaviors the primary source of satisfaction.

⁴⁷ „Das Gefühl der Unzufriedenheit entsteht, weil das Urteil das Unbewusste des Täters nicht berücksichtigt hat“ (The feeling of dissatisfaction stems from the fact that the judgement did not consider the criminal's unconscious), F Alexander, H. Staub, op. cit., p. 251.

⁴⁸ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 135. In contradiction with page 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Surprisingly, it is again one of the murderers, Ted Bundy, who sheds light on the detective's reflection and indicates the missing link in the temporal and psychic sequence of the crime by explaining that "sexual satisfaction probably preceded the moment when the final decision was made to kill the individual."⁵³ He later confirms his hypothesis, supporting it: "The sexual act was not ... the principal source of gratification ... there's no denying there is a sexual aspect, but it was less... the sexual aspect was less than actual sexual conduct and more oriented towards the sex of the individual and other attributes possessed by that individual's appearance...that we are talked about."⁵⁴ In this description, there is all the contraband apparatus of the partial drive, and more importantly, which we will soon address, one of the first references to appearance, that is, to the image. This evocation by Ted Bundy of the "attributes" possessed by the victim joins the strangely listed enumeration by Keppel of the scattered elements and sources of the killer's seduction and excitement⁵⁵: length or color of the hair, size of the women, clothing, shoes, makeup. It should remind us of the partial, interchangeable characteristics since, for the drive, the object is contingent. Keppel uses the term "fetishes", which probably does not find its best use in these circumstances. On his side and striving to explain the essential without succeeding – the nature of sexuality in the crime – Gérard J. Schaefer explains: "The murder was generally done quickly without sexual violence, rape, or other abuse."⁵⁶ We must, therefore, go further in our search.

VI To approach the „imago of the fragmented body“

Several of the published testimonies confirm the indications that the victim's death is not in itself what is sought but rather what this death conceals, blurs, signifies by chains of association that needs to be understood, something else that criminals seek. Keppel himself summarizes this idea of increased excitement through the various stages of violence leading to death, seeing that it is more a means than an end in itself.⁵⁷ Besides the reminder that the accumulation of phases of this violence is likely to suggest the residue of the infantile sexual drive as "foreplay" and which becomes

⁵³ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 127.

⁵⁵ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁵⁶ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

for the pervert, through the permanent search for excitement, a source of enjoyment in itself, there also appears the idea linked to the sequencing of the stages of the victims' fragmentation.

Ted Bundy goes in this direction: "Initially, the act of killing – we would not expect it to be the goal."⁵⁸ His clarifications betray this coalescence between, on the one hand, a need to satisfy, as enigmatic as it is irresistible – "the attempt to gratify the urge he had" – and, on the other, the need for possession, which covers and dresses the first as if it could help to grasp and compensate it.⁵⁹

Hans Eppendorfer's story confirms this perspective. At 18, he mortally attacked a woman in whom he saw at the moment of the crime only his mother's face. Once his sentence was served – 10 years in prison – Eppendorfer spoke with ethnologist Hubert Fichte. A moment of this dialogue deserves to be fully transcribed as it is of the utmost significance. It particularly shows that his interlocutor does not grasp the difference between the spoken words⁶⁰:

- H. Fichte: "Du wolltest sie nicht töten, aber du wolltest töten" (You did not want to kill her, but you wanted to kill).

The question establishes the difference between the drive to kill and the designation of a specific victim at the base of this drive, as if this designation were at the origin of the act.

- H. Eppendorfer: "Ich glaube, ich wollte überhaupt nicht töten, ich weiß gar nicht, was ich wollte" (I think I did not want to kill at all, I do not really know what I wanted).

Fichte insists but makes the error – it is certainly not a clinical interview – of specifying the manner of killing:

- H. Fichte: "Aber du wolltest zerstören, vernichten, kaputtmachen?" (But you wanted to destroy, annihilate, break?).

⁵⁸ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, op. cit., p. 209.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁶⁰ H. Eppendorfer, *Der Ledermann spricht mit Hubert Fichte*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1977, p. 54.

H. Eppendorfer's evasive answer probably reflects his disarray, but he manages to overcome it in another response and specify in turn:

- H. Eppendorfer: "Diese Personen (the people he met while going to his future victim and whom he seems to completely ignore on the way) waren irgendwie deckungsgleich⁶¹, ich habe ihr Gesicht gar nicht erkannt, ich habe immer das Gesicht meiner Mutter gesehen" (were somehow identical. I did not recognize their faces; I always saw my mother's face).

And undoubtedly in connection with one of the verbs used by Fichte in this dialogue, Hans Eppendorfer specifies:

- H. Eppendorfer: "In das [das Gesicht der Mutter] habe ich immer hineingeschlagen, hineingehackt, hineingestoßen, hineingeprügelt" (I always hit, hacked, kicked, punched this face which seemed the mother's face).⁶²

And Eppendorfer theorizes the formula:

- H. Eppendorfer: "Das ist ein Reiz, Menschen zerstören zu können, weil es den Menschen nicht gelungen ist, einen selber zu zerstören"⁶³ (It is exciting to be able to destroy people because people have not succeeded in destroying you).

We could extrapolate without exaggeration: to destroy a fellow human being, a semblant.

Two elements intertwined in their mechanism seem essential here: the first concerns the unconscious image, that of the other's body. The second, which characterizes and is to be realized – more exactly, "reflected" – in the "murderous maneuver," is the imperative necessity of its fragmentation, its dismemberment. The real satisfaction of the serial killers Kep-

⁶¹ The translation by identical does not do justice to the idea of covering and concealing one face with another, which is conveyed by the word and its use in this sentence.

⁶² In addition to the jerky rhythm in the succession of verbs, which reflects the irrepressible relentlessness, their nature indicates the sense of a movement towards an interior with a view to annihilating it by disaggregation, dismemberment, fractioning.

⁶³ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁶⁴ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

pel studies indeed comes from “cutting, tearing, and biting the flesh.”⁶⁴ The detective insists on several occasions on the dismemberment of the victims. Does the jihadist terrorist who blows himself up in the middle of a crowd not seek the same outcome?

Keppel mentions the practice among serial killers of “picquerism”: a concept defined by invoking the French “piquer” as a sexual practice aiming at penetrating another person’s skin with sharp objects (such as pins, razors, knives, etc.). He discerns in the murderers “sexual pleasure gained by stabbing, cutting, or slicing another person.”⁶⁵ But he does not attach enough importance to the psychic significance of this inward movement towards the victim. At most, he supposes: “The assailant wasn’t satisfied with just killing, he was beating and hacking something inside himself that he could not get through the victim’s body.”⁶⁶ As in his entire book, he comes close to the psychic mechanisms related to the unconscious image of the body: he analyzes cannibalism as the act of “destroying the same part of himself by devouring it in someone else.”⁶⁷ He sees it only as a “foreplay”⁶⁸, but from which he does not deduce any consequence on the sexual nature of the crime.

By dedicating several paragraphs to the case of Jeffrey Dahmer, Keppel retains only the dismemberment of the victims by the latter without noting the importance of the image: besides photographing his victims even after their death, Dahmer added to the dismemberment the possibility of “decorating the victim”⁶⁹, making them a living-dead tableau in the sense that this tableau bears the killer’s mark without threatening him. But as Hans Eppendorfer’s story confirms, it is not the body that is targeted but an image. Isn’t it a part of their own “perfectly hated” image that the criminals attack with so much energy inside themselves?⁷⁰ Recall the succession of verbs used by Eppendorfer, which supports the idea of scattering the hated maternal image during the act and associating it with his “strangely delusional fascination”, he specifies elsewhere, for Frankenstein films: “how they assemble humans.”⁷¹ The image is probably best described by Ted

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102. We emphasize.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁷⁰ E. Wellton, *Transfert et contre-transfert ou collusion perverse?*, In *Crimes*, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, n°4, Tome LXXVI, Octobre 2012, p. 1061.

⁷¹ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Bundy: “The same psychological mechanisms are used by a person who kills indiscriminately, except that he is not killing a person. He is killing an image.”⁷²

Psychoanalysis has well highlighted the unconscious relationship to the image, and particularly the clinical stakes of the visual through the gaze, an element of the control apparatus, a point of excitation⁷³, where the other’s piercing eyes strike the subject. In connection with the image and the murderous movement targeting an interiority, the relationship with psychosis is clearly identifiable: mutilations are perceived as “trophies ... sustaining him for the next time when the need to troll came upon him.”⁷⁴ These trophies patch the holes, acting as “patches” in his “perforated relationship” to reality. In delusions, Freud wrote in 1924, madness is used as “a patch applied where a tear originally appeared in the relationship of the self to the outside world.”⁷⁵

More recently, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst J. C. Maleval insists on “the feeling of most psychotics of a hole they cannot fill.”⁷⁶ Without having read Maleval, Keppel surprisingly shares this viewpoint: “I realized that Bundy had a hole right through the center of his life that no amount of murder, necrophilia, burglary, and violent behavior would ever fill.”⁷⁷ Equally striking is the identical expression of “hole in the dam” used by Ted Bundy to explain “the breaking of the tension.”⁷⁸

Keppel addresses an essential point related to the imago when he asserts: “He’ll cover her face with a cloth or something else so that the eyes of the victim, closed or open, will not challenge him, alive or dead.”⁷⁹ But it is not, as he thinks, out of shame or guilt that he covers the victim’s head or directs the face so as not to meet the gaze. It is a psychological explanation such as Victor Hugo described in “La Légende des siècles”, and where it is a conscious approach⁸⁰.

⁷² S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁷³ M. Ravit, R. Roussillon, *La scène du crime: cette autre image des confins de la subjectivité*, In Crimes, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, n°4, Tome LXXVI, Octobre 2012, p. 1037.

⁷⁴ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ S. Freud, *Névrose et psychose*, Oeuvres complètes, XVII, 1923–1925, PUF, 2016, p. 5.

⁷⁶ J.-C. Maleval, *Folies hystériques et psychoses dissociatives*, Payot, 1981, p. 20.

⁷⁷ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁷⁸ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁷⁹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁸⁰ „L’oeil était dans la tombe et regardait Caïn“, Victor Hugo, *La conscience*, La Légende des siècles, 1859.

An essential point in the idea of the imago of the fragmented body is a “structural category” according to Jacques Lacan, which he summarizes as follows: “they are images of castration, eviration, mutilation, devouring, disintegration of the body.”⁸¹ Let us very schematically explain Lacan’s thought on this subject: this specific relationship of man to his own body originates in the “mirror stage”, where the child, marked by a “still very profound incoordination of his own motor skills”, finds in his reflection an “ideal unit, a salutary imago.” However, this image-capture, which participates in the formation of the self, cannot help but integrate images of the fragmented body. Archaic images that are reactivated in the face of the similar as “images of bodily dislocation” become targets of aggression. These phantasmagories are found in dreams.

In his youth, Eppendorfer, knowing his mother wanted to abort during her pregnancy, feared she would poison or kill him: he slept with a knife under his pillow. He dreamed at night of “stabbing, destroying, annihilating his mother”⁸²: many morbid thoughts and thoughts of suicide⁸³ that indicate a pre-existing psychic structure – the psychiatric history – leading to the criminal act.

Psychoanalyst and disciple of Sigmund Freud, Theodor Reik, confirms it: “In-depth analyses sometimes reveal fantasies of destructiveness” which he considers at his time not integrated into penal laws. He cites castrations, bondage (tying), and all sorts of deadly punishments. Bodily sensations often serve the representations of different tortures. He mentions a “patient fascinated by the quartering with horses of the regicide Ravaillac.”⁸⁴

Isn’t it possible to glimpse a relationship with the passage to the criminal act or a sudden and extreme violent act against a fellow human being – for “a bad glance” – with nothing in its triggering⁸⁵ effect to predict it? In declared psychosis, it happens that “the voice sounds in insult, an inquisitive glance watches the subject, the oral object poisons him, or the anal object invades him.”⁸⁶ The act becomes salvatory in the face of the

⁸¹ J. Lacan, *L’Agressivité en psychanalyse*, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, 1948, p. 370.

⁸² H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁴ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁸⁵ R. D. Laing, *Das geteilte Selbst, Eine existentielle Studie über geistige Gesundheit und Wahnsinn*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991, p. 104.

⁸⁶ J.-C. Maleval, *Repères pour une psychose ordinaire*, Navarin Editeur, 2019, p. 51.

⁸⁷ A. Ciavaldini, *Crime sexuel et situation anthropologique fondamentale, un objet de fascination pour la psyché*, In Crimes, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, n°4, Tome LXXVI, Octobre 2012, p. 1112.

imminent danger of being engulfed by the confrontation with an image of himself – a threatening image revealing his dislocation – in the other.⁸⁷ The neurotic's identity questioning is replaced by the psychotic's dread of "annihilation"⁸⁸, as stated by Eppendorfer. Cruelty is thus linked to the scopic drive and concerns the specific vision of the interior of the body. It is about seeing the object pierced, torn, eviscerated, emptied of its contents, as confirmed by the seemingly cold but exciting description for an author of a victim's castration⁸⁹. There is a "traumatic excitation, paroxysmal anxiety inherent in a shattering."⁹⁰

But this dismemberment excitation can only take place if the victim, through anonymity, assumes the role of the persecutory object: perhaps this is why, according to Keppel, "serial killers do not kill people who know them."⁹¹ Bundy confirms that he has never killed a person with whom he spent more than twenty minutes.⁹² In this case, there is a psychic personification of the other: a psychically occupied place that the killer cannot therefore unconsciously invest in and on which he cannot project the object he has to eliminate. The personification even seems incompatible with the image, asserts Bundy: "since the girl in front of him [Ted Bundy speaks of himself in the third person singular⁹³] represented not a person but again the image or something desirable, the last thing you would expect him to want would be to personalize this person."⁹⁴

A personification just as incompatible with freedom to the point of having to reduce it, according to the detective's analysis, to statues⁹⁵. Let us recall that Dahmer manipulated and decorated some of his deceased victims. More subtly, Ted Bundy describes "the way a person dresses or the way they carry themselves, or the body language...that convey sexual messages."⁹⁶ Jean Laplanche's generalized seduction theory finds here a paradigmatic illustration. And this from two points of view: the enigmatic sexual message "conveyed" by the other and the difficulty in translating it, perhaps a source of psychosis. For Hans Eppendorfer, it was the sexual

⁸⁸ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁸⁹ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁹⁰ M. Ravit, R. Roussillon, *op. cit.*, p. 1044.

⁹¹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁹³ A clever way for the two journalists to obtain, indirectly, details of the killer's *modus operandi*.

⁹⁴ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁹⁵ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁹⁶ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

invitation of this woman, yet known to him, that triggered the psychosis, while for Ted Bundy, the excitement at the sight of unknown women set the murderous mechanism in motion. It is thus time to address the death sexual drive.

VII The sexual death drive

“The psychotic subject maintains an intimate relationship with the drive.”⁹⁷ The death drive is to be understood as the most unstructured and destructuring form of sexuality. It is “sexuality in its pure state”, affirms Jean Laplanche. Hence the lexical necessity, according to him, of inserting the adjective “sexual” for both the – sexual – life drive and the – sexual – death drive. The characteristic of this drive lies in the effect of drive unbinding: the auto or hetero-aggressive tendency aiming to destroy all life, to disorganize any ensemble, either at the social level or the level of the individual’s organism.⁹⁸

This drive seems recognized by serial criminals. Schaefer directly mentions it: “There is in me a drive so powerful that it totally takes over my reason and my values. I am at the mercy of this mad drive that pushes me to commit the most horrific crimes.”⁹⁹ As for the detective, he sees a relationship between the act’s accomplishment and the drive’s intensity, which he seems to analyze in terms of discharge since the physical violence or aggression intensity corresponds to a weakening of the killer’s rage.¹⁰⁰

If rage corresponds to this drive disconnection just mentioned, it undoubtedly finds its origin in anxiety, that is – let us recall – the inability to metaphorize an arousal. This is probably why Keppel specifies a few pages later that what is sought in murder is not excitement but relief, a decrease in tension.¹⁰¹ There may be a kind of confusion or more precisely a flattening between two levels: on the one hand, what belongs to the drive and, on the other, what belongs to its external manifestation. In this regard, Bundy’s clarifications seem worthy of interest when he affirms that the organism always seeks to do things that relieve tension in one form or another.¹⁰² And the serial killer enumerates in pell-mell a whole

⁹⁷ J.-C. Maleval, *Repères pour une psychose ordinaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁹⁸ J. Laplanche, *La révolution copernicienne inachevée*, Coll. Quadrige, PUF, 2008, p. 66.

⁹⁹ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁰ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁰² S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

range from low self-esteem to anger, rage, and stress. The most interesting in this Bundy quote lies in the attempt to pinpoint precisely what remains in his eyes the indefinable nature of what it is “to release”. The mixture of different social, psychic, and behavioral levels confirms the plurality of external manifestations of what is to be sought in the unconscious. And it is in this unconscious that lies the heart of the problem that makes it impossible for the killer to reach the essence of his “rage”. Rage he diverts or projects onto a proxy victim: the expression of “surrogate target”¹⁰³ by Keppel seems most adequate to us.

The explanation that bases the drive’s satisfaction on the sole control drive, the control of the victim capable of bringing “satisfaction”¹⁰⁴, is confirmed by Schaefer, who exclaims after committing the murder, “she was mine.”¹⁰⁵ In the case of serial killers, “control appears as a form that the death drive can take when it ,comes into the service‘ of the sexual drive.”¹⁰⁶

VIII The childhood of humanity or the inhumanity of childhood?

“The criminal knows his act, but he does not know the underground relationships of it with the psychic processes initiated since his earliest childhood and what unconscious meaning it hides”¹⁰⁷, emphasizes Reik. The unconscious, according to him, feeds on sorrows dating back to humanity’s childhood.¹⁰⁸ The explanation given by Keppel for dismemberment responds to the killer’s feeling of hostility as a result of his perception of being neglected and abandoned.¹⁰⁹

In the domain of the infantile, it is not enough to believe that with “attachment”, the child seems happier, as the detective claims: he does not see what is essential because it does not belong to the realm of the visible.¹¹⁰ In the “attachment” gesture made famous by Bowlby, the adult’s unconscious sexual infiltrates and sets the date for the future. These attempts at explanation by means of a recourse to childhood are probably the “popu-

¹⁰³ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁵ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

¹⁰⁷ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

larized” remnants of psychoanalysis. One must not neglect its corollary in adults: “the infantile aspect of the abuser: what is at stake for him is infantile sadistic sexuality.”¹¹¹ Curiously and without knowing that he is following a Freudian perspective, it is in the mother that our detective sees concentrated the sources of criminals’ traumas. Keppel lists without much clinical caution a range of maternal deviations: abusive, terrorizing, pedophile mothers. Only one indication includes the father’s role exclusion: it is the mothers who multiply sexual adventures with other men.¹¹² Let us highlight this assertion with two perspectives: the first with Freud, the second with Lacan.

The first concerns the omission or avoidance of Freud’s main discovery about this period of early childhood: infantile sexuality. It is still, Jean Laplanche reminded us before his death in 2012, an object of repression. We want for proof Keppel’s supposedly exhaustive enumeration of the causes dating back to early childhood, but where the sexual comes last in the list.¹¹³ Besides what appears to be a lapsus calami of the author, who adds the adverb “obviously” to introduce his ultimate example, it seems to us that the detective has in mind what Freud named in his early texts and his letters to Wilhelm Fliess “the sexual assault.”¹¹⁴ This initially led him in 1897 to deny his neurotica – listening to his patients had convinced him of widespread and rampant pedophilia in Vienna – to sketch by 1905 a limited theory of unconscious seduction in the relationship between adults and the child. An idea he would never abandon, despite back-and-forths and other convolutions on this seduction¹¹⁵.

If for authors and clinicians like Alexander and Staub, and from the first pages of their study on criminals, maternal love and a sense of security are indissolubly linked from early childhood¹¹⁶, for others, like the Kleinians, guilt and ambivalence can exist well before the Oedipal father’s hatred.¹¹⁷

The terrifying fear of the mother in Eppendorfer, and notably even after serving the prison sentence¹¹⁸, lies in the father’s absence: a father he never

¹¹¹ J. Laplanche, *Sexual*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

¹¹² R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹¹⁴ S. Freud, *Lettres à Wilhelm Fliess*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹¹⁵ J.-L. Vannier, *Entre inceste et sexualité infantile: la séduction?*, In *Le corps toujours*, Psychiatrie Française, Vol. LI, 4/21, Juin 2022, pp. 109-120.

¹¹⁶ F. Alexander, H. Staub, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

¹¹⁷ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 41.

knew and which illuminates the original mechanism of psychosis. The “Forclusion du Nom-du-Père” elaborated by Lacan, impossible to summarize by the sole absence of the paternal function, finds here its most appropriate expression.¹¹⁹

IX The absence of discernment?

We do not intend in this short paragraph to discuss the controversies that arise at every criminal trial in France regarding the use of Article 122-1 of the Penal Code on the abolition or alteration of discernment at the time of commission of the acts of which an offender is accused.

If in the case of Hans Eppendorfer, the state of confusion and absence preceding the crime but already belonging to the psychotic process is confirmed¹²⁰, other cases obviously raise questions as they illustrate the psychotic’s ability to retain an “intellectual reason” in the material preparation of the act and its accomplishment.

Keppel insists on the strict separation to be established between the “signature” of the act, the part of the crime that, according to him, the killer does not control, and the *modus operandi* of the criminal act’s accomplishment, which, according to his experience, remains under the killer’s control.¹²¹ A new aporia in his study? Nevertheless, we find here the problem raised at the beginning of our reflection: what is the “least controlled” moment between the act’s accomplishment and the deposit of an identificatory mark and the difference in value between the two? Without returning to it, let us note that the detective clearly perceives – perhaps without drawing all the consequences – this difference in psychological value. In our reflections on the unconscious dimension of the terrorist act, we have always defended the idea that psychic disorder is not incompatible with intellectual acuity.¹²² This acuity is confirmed by the detective’s observation: serial killers “know their victims’ neighborhoods better than the police, better even than the people who’ve lived there their entire lives.”¹²³

The enigma posed by the criminal to reason always lies in this ambigui-

¹¹⁹ J.-C. Maleval, *La forclusion du nom-du-père, Le concept et sa clinique*, Coll Champ Freudien, Seuil, 2000.

¹²⁰ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹²¹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹²² J.-L. Vannier, *A propos de islamistischer Terrorismus de Stefan Goertz*, In *Droit de l'enfant et psychiatrie*, Psychiatrie française, Vol. L, 4/19, Juillet 2019, pp. 94-99.

¹²³ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

ty, this “coexistence” within the same human being of a fanaticism – of a religious nature for terrorists – that borders on madness and a calculating sagacity that leaves nothing to chance in the preparation and rigorous execution of the act. A real challenge to justice for Theodor Reik, who vainly attempts to put himself in the place of the “smart” murderer and wonders how he could not “understand what murder, aggression, theft are.”¹²⁴ Whether it is Reik¹²⁵ or Alexander and Staub¹²⁶, the same idea unites them: criminals have nothing really to say, they hide a secret, but that secret remains hidden even from themselves.

Are psychoanalysts more indulgent than criminals? Ted Bundy acknowledges being partly sane. At most, he concedes that he has something “inside his brain.”¹²⁷ The police officer concludes with the presence of rationality at work in the crime: particularly in the *modus operandi* selected, according to him, based on what is most “comfortable”¹²⁸ for the killer and even considers that Dahmer was “able to control himself to the extent that he could decide when to strike and when not to.”¹²⁹ An interview in prison with this killer before his execution, available on the Internet, makes him say the opposite: he even calls for the death penalty because he knows he cannot amend. In his “psychic” assessment of Jeffrey Dahmer, Keppel makes the mistake, in our opinion, of confusing the phenomenological and analytical approaches: can one place on the same “conscious” plane the decision to kill, the way of disposing of the bodies, and the decision to avoid detection?¹³⁰ The apparent approach of visibility, whose weakness does not escape Reik¹³¹.

The idea of this split already exists among the first analysts and criminologists.¹³² To the point of admitting the paradox that a criminal act can result from unconscious non-criminal motivations and a social act from dissociated, that is, psychotic motivations. The ego’s control function – especially exercised on motility – would be caught off guard by the repressed tendencies.¹³³

¹²⁴ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹²⁶ F. Alexander, H. Staub, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

¹²⁷ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹²⁸ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹³¹ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹³² F. Alexander, H. Staub, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 295, 296.

X After the act

Bundy, who evokes the destruction of an image, describes his reaction once this image is eliminated: “once they become flesh-and-blood and once they cease being an image or a dehumanized symbol, that’s when the rational self – the normal self – would surface and, and, reacts with fear and horror.”¹³⁴ This perfectly illuminates the consequences of eliminating the persecutory image. In self-defense, allowing moral inhibitions to apply – that is, caring – would be purely self-destructive.¹³⁵ As Eppendorfer summarizes in his own way about the day he committed his crime: he would have gone mad if he had not done it.¹³⁶ He insists on the feeling of “relief”¹³⁷, “liberation”¹³⁸, even a strange feeling of “emptiness”¹³⁹ once rid of the object. A feeling shared by Schaefer, who finds “peace only when his crimes are accomplished.”¹⁴⁰ The “rationality” also leads killers, as well as for jihadists, to resort to a self-justifying discourse that serves as support in the face of the act’s reality⁴¹ Justification for the deserved punishment of victims, a means of self-purification¹⁴², but which does not deceive Bundy, who sees only a “justification used to give meaning to the crime.”¹⁴³

It is permissible to question this systematic appearance of this self-justifying discourse that rationalizes the act in the aftermath, the murderous act having fulfilled its role of “ego patching. Patching, probably temporary, since the hetero-aggressive act in a schizophrenic never exhausts the patient’s violence, even this violence is self-sustained by the delusion¹⁴⁴.

In leaving the victims in a place where they will inevitably be discovered, Keppel suggests a need for recognition.¹⁴⁵ This recognition is more often sought by the criminal than the public thinks. Surprisingly, psychoanalysis is criticized for a tendency to want to excuse and exonerate killers

¹³⁴ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹³⁵ F. Alexander, H. Staub, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

¹³⁶ H. Eppendorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 57.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁰ G. J. Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁴¹ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁴³ S. G. Michaud, H. Aynesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁴⁴ Th. Albernhe, *L'estimation de la dangerosité chez les schizophrènes*, In *Criminologie et psychiatrie*, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

¹⁴⁵ R. D. Keppel, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

from their crime, while the greatest names in metapsychology – Freud, Ferenczi, Reik, and even more Lacan – have always affirmed the necessity for every man to assume responsibility for their act.¹⁴⁶ The call to psychiatrists to treat the delinquent is an illusion serving an alibi, recalls Jean Laplanche.¹⁴⁷ If there were to be healing, it should be nothing other, as Lacan emphasized as early as 1951, than an integration by the subject of his true responsibility. To the point of suggesting that it might sometimes be more humane with punishment to let him find it: “if only man is recognized by his peers through the acts for which he assumes responsibility”¹⁴⁸. *Fiat justitia perat mundus*.

Bibliography

- Albernhé, Th. (Sous la direction de, 1997). *Criminologie et psychiatrie*, Ellipses
- Alexander, F., Staub, H. (1928). *Der Verbrecher und sein Richter. Ein psychoanalytischer Einblick in die Welt der Paragraphen*, In *Psychoanalyse und Justiz*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1974
- Bessoles, Ph. (2012). Récidive criminelle, Figures de l'emprise et criminalité, In *Crimes*, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, 4, Tome LXXVI
- Ciavaldini, A. (2012). Crime sexuel et situation anthropologique fondamentale, un objet de fascination pour la psyché, In *Crimes*, Revue Française de Psychanalyse, 4, Tome LXXVI
- Eppendorfer, H. (1977). *Der Ledermann spricht mit Hubert Fichte*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch
- Freud, S. (1897). *Lettres à Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*, Edition complète, PUF, 2007
- Freud, S. (1905). *Trois essais sur la théorie sexuelle*, *Œuvres complètes*, VI, 1901-1905, PUF, 2009
- Freud, S. (1908). *Des théories sexuelles infantiles*, *Œuvres complètes*, VIII, 1906-1908, PUF, 2007
- Freud, S. (1915). *Pulsions et destins des pulsions*, *Métapsychologie*, Gallimard, Coll. Folio Essais, 1968
- Freud, S. (1916). *Des transpositions pulsionnelles en particulier celles de l'érotisme anal*, *Œuvres complètes*, XV, 1916-1920, PUF, 2012
- Freud, S. (1918). *Le tabou de la virginité*, *Œuvres complètes*, XV, 1916-1920, PUF, 2012
- Freud, S. (1923). *Névrose et psychose*, *Œuvres complètes*, XVII, 1923-1925, PUF, 2016
- Freud, S. (1937). *Abrégé de psychanalyse*, *Œuvres complètes*, XX, 1937-1939, PUF, 2014

¹⁴⁶ Th. Reik, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷ J. Laplanche, *Les voies de la déshumanité*, In *La révolution copernicienne inachevée*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

¹⁴⁸ J. Lacan, *Discussion des rapports théorique et Clinique sur Psychanalyse et criminologie*, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, Tome XV, Janvier-Mars 1951, p. 85.

- Keppel, R. D. (with William J. Birnes), (1998). *Signature killers, Interpreting the Calling Cards of the Serial Murderer*, Arrow Books
- Lacan, J. (1948). L'Aggressivité en psychanalyse, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*
- Lacan, J. (1951). Discussion des rapports théorique et clinique sur Psychanalyse et criminologie, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, Tome XV, n°1
- Laing, R.D (1991). *Das geteilte Selbst. Eine existentielle Studie über geistige Gesundheit und Wahnsinn*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag
- Laplanche, J., Pontalis, J.-B. (1967). *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2014
- Laplanche, J. (1967-1992). *La révolution copernicienne inachevée*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige, 2008
- Laplanche, J. (2007). *Le crime sexuel*, In *Sexual, La sexualité élargie au sens freudien*, PUF, Coll. Quadrige
- Maleval, J.-C. (1981). *Folies hystériques et psychoses dissociatives*, Payot
- Maleval, J.-C. (1997) *Les assassins par lubricité, Nécrophilie, psychose et perversion*, In *Criminologie et psychiatrie*, Sous la direction de Th. Alberne, Ellipses
- Maleval, J.-C. (2019). *Repères pour une psychose ordinaire*, Navarin Editeur
- Maleval, J.-C. (2000). *La forclusion du nom-du-père, Le concept et sa clinique*, Coll. Champ Freudien, Seuil
- Michaud, S. G., Aynesworth, H. (2019). *Ted Bundy, Conversations with a killer*, Mirror Books
- Ravit, M., Roussillon, R. (2012). *La scène de crime: cette autre image des confins de la subjectivité*, In *Crimes*, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 4, Tome LXXVI
- Reik, Th. (1925). *Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis*, In *Psychoanalyse und Justiz*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1974
- Schaefer, G. F. (1992). *Journal d'un tueur*, Editions Jacques Bertoin
- Vannier, J.-L. (2019). *A propos de Islamistischer Terrorismus, Une lecture analytique*, in *Droit de l'enfant et psychiatrie*, *Psychiatrie Française*, Vol. L, 4/19, Juillet 2020
- Vannier, J.-L. (2021). *Entre inceste et sexualité infantile: la séduction?* in *Le corps toujours*, *Psychiatrie Française*, Vol. LI 4/21, Juin 2022
- Vannier, J.-L. (2022). *Becoming a Jihadist: A Psychoanalytical Perspective*, EICTP Vienna Research Papers on Transnational Terrorism and Counterterrorism, Vol. III, January 2022, pp. 151-159
- Vannier, J.-L. (2023). *Jihadist Terrorism: Critical Analysis of Gill & Corner's Study and Clinical Counterexamples*, EICTP Vienna Research Papers on Transnational Terrorism and Counterterrorism, Vol. V, November 2023, pp. 101-115
- Welldon, E. (2012). *Transfert et contre-transfert ou collusion perverse?*, In *Crimes*, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, n°4, Tome LXXVI

Author:

Jean-Luc Vannier, Psychoanalyst, Full-time lecturer at Université Nice Côte d'Azur, Professor at Edhec & Ipag post-graduate Business School (Nice & Paris) • 2, Avenue Maréchal Joffre • 06 230 Villefranche-sur-mer (France) • Tel.: 00 33 6 16 52 55 20 • vannier06@gmail.com