



## Psychoanalysis of maturation (definition, metapsychology, and clinical practice)<sup>1</sup>

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*This article offers an entirely new way of addressing middle age or mid-life. It uses the neologism maturation to denote this process's metapsychological feature, and it proposes a meta-psychology of maturation in order to allow a 'direct understanding of maturation' instead of the 'indirect understanding of maturation', which psychoanalytic literature generally alludes to. The paper examines somatic processes specific to male and female climacterics and is focused on to the tension between the soma and the body. It examines the drive increase that Freud posed in climacterics and the somatic climacteric imbalance that begets specific drive activity demanding psychic work, with very different pathways depending on the individual's specific working-through activity. It discusses what happens to the individual when he/she is no longer able to procreate and begins to age; why this process is equivalent for individuals who had children and for others who could not or did not. This somatic event provides a universal constant from which it is possible to understand any individual variable.*

**Keywords:** midlife, moratorium, soma, body, working-through, climacteric

### Elements for a definition of maturation

#### *The maturing process*

This paper builds on the Freudian idea that individuals have a double existence: they are an end in themselves, and they serve a purpose for the species. Following Freud:

The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily. The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his own ends; whereas from another point of view he is an appendage to his germplasm, at whose disposal he puts his energies in return for a bonus of pleasure. He is the mortal

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vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance – like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of a state which survives him.

(1914, p. 78).

He also addresses these matters throughout his opus (1915a, 1915b, 1916–1917 [1915–1917], 1920, 1933 [1932]).

The first part of this affirmation ('to serve his own purposes') evinces a principle that diachronically encompasses the entire life cycle, whereas the second part ('a link in a chain') synchronically affects a particular period: that which takes place once the individual can procreate and then once he stops being a link in the chain of genetic transmission.

Maturescence implies that there are specific demands for psychic work that come into play once the individual is no longer necessary for the 'plan' of the species and begins to grow old.

The noun 'maturescence' is appropriate for denoting what is normally referred to as middle age or midlife.<sup>3</sup> The word transmits the idea of a transformational process – in this case a transformation toward maturity. It is analogous to the word 'adulthood', which carries the meaning of transformation toward adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

The metapsychological exegesis of maturescence entails the inextricable linkage between biological and psychological processes that are expressed through drive activity. It is a process that has a starting point and different pathways that account for this transformation.

### *Psychoanalytic literature on middle age*

Much has been written on middle age. In this article I attempt to continue, to deepen, to make more subtle and to diverge from Jaques's (1965) theorizations concerning his concept of the mid-life crisis. I consider maturescence to be much more closely connected to somatic processes and its specific psychic derivations – according to clinical evidence. Maturescence does not seem to be governed according to the notions Jaques formulates in his research on creative processes.

As antecedents to Jaques's work one should mention Erikson's (1951) concept of life crises, and, especially, the work of Bergler (1954), which is less well known, but quite important. Bergler posits a 'revolt' that middle aged men experience and presents it as an unconscious protest against biology. He centers his argumentation around the displacing onto one's mate the superego's processes that come from a fear of not having lived up to an ideal. These processes emerge especially during middle age and characterize the typical mid-life crises.

We must also consider the work Colarusso (1981, 1985, 1990, 1992) has done on the life cycle. In his work Colarusso includes middle age, especially

<sup>3</sup>I acknowledge that the relative neologism 'middlescence' has some currency in medical practice. Notwithstanding this usage, I advocate my own neologism 'maturescence'. A maturescent individual is one who has aged but is not yet old. 'Maturescence' is a prior stage to what psychoanalytic literature has traditionally referred to as 'senescence'.

<sup>4</sup>The word 'adulthood' derives from the Latin *adolescens-ntis* (3rd conjugation) and means 'the one who is growing'. It consists of the prefix *ad* 'toward' and the verb *alescere* 'to grow' or 'develop'.

when he addresses the ‘developmental tasks’ demanded of the aging body, as one of the developmental lines, of course linked to the ones of time limitation and personal death.

### *Maturescence in the myth of the hero*

It is strangely paradoxical that the word ‘myth’ is often commonly used and understood to mean ‘lie’ or ‘mistake’. I consider this paradoxical because anthropological, linguistic, and psychoanalytic study of myth has demonstrated that they transmit profound, ancestral, and important truths – what is most authentic and true in a particular culture.

Mythical truths are expressed through a process that is equivalent to dream work. Just as dreams’ manifest content uses a bit of apparently inconsequential day residue to disguise and express dreams’ actual latent content (which is always unattainable, incomprehensible and so heart-rending that it can bury itself in its own navel), myth-work is based on an identical logic. But in this case they are ‘dreams of humankind’. Such extreme effort in masking yet preserving the myth’s purpose with considerations of representability suggests that myths transmit truths that defy our ability to represent them.

The production of humankind’s myths can be classified. Among their classifications we can consider the creation myths, that aim to answer questions concerning the origin of the world and its ultimate fate; and we can also identify the hero myths, that usually refer to the mysteries of life and death.

The specificity of the hero myth provides a paradigmatic model for the representation of the human life cycle. The hero myth’s basic structure examines the vicissitudes inherent to different stages in human life – among them birth, adolescence, maturescence, old age and death.

Given that psychoanalysis acknowledges that universal psychic phenomena have mythical equivalents – for example, Oedipus and Narcissus – it is tempting to inquire how the characteristics peculiar to maturescence are expressed in the myth of the hero, and this could add another dimension to its definition.

Just as the exogamous departure that typifies adolescence is often contained in the heroic myth cycle dealing with the initiation ordeals that the hero must negotiate so as to be considered an adult member of society (departure); maturescence’s particular vicissitudes (arrival) appear in the period known as catabasis (return), or more specifically, ‘the descent into Hell’. It is at this moment that the hero takes on a series of ordeals that make him ‘human’. One can find a similar notion in Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The concept termed *Untergang* denotes whims of fate, decadence, a descent aimed at personal insight coming from a reunion with the ‘origins’ or with life’s fundamentals.

During the ‘descent into Hell’ the hero often encounters his dead ancestors, he traverses some impenetrable, dark forest, he takes a nocturnal journey, rescues a symbolic object that provides him new insights, and so on. The upshot of all this can be his return to the city with new knowledge about life, with something valuable to be shared with other people.

Specifically, in the anonymous Mesopotamian myth contained in the Gilgamesh epic, the hero begins his catabasis trying to find a formula for ‘his’ immortality.<sup>5</sup> Moving on to the Greek tradition, around the 8th century BC, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus (Ulysses) also undergoes his ‘descent into Hades’ (Canto 11) on his way back to Ithaca from Troy. He follows Circe’s instructions to consult Tiresias concerning his future. He traverses the straits of Scylla and Charybdis, he cleverly survives the mermaids’ songs. He goes through all of this before returning to his home in Ithaca, to his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus – just as Tiresias had predicted.

But what is Oedipus’s ‘descent into Hell?’ One might think that Oedipus goes down into Hell when he begins to solve his enigmatic origins.

Oedipus became king after killing his father. He immediately took up residence and had children with his own mother. He reigned in peace and harmony and was respected by his subjects until the plague broke out in Thebes. Then the city was subjected to famine, infirmity and death. At this point Oedipus consults the oracle Tiresias – once more the official soothsayer – who facilitated Oedipus’s search to discover his origins.

Sophocles’s tragedy might seem to express some aspects of the indispensable working-through entailed by maturation. The play describes some of Oedipus’s earlier consultations with the oracle, whose pronouncements the hero had disdained. Because of this, we might ask why was Oedipus unable to uncover his origins earlier? Why, in dealing with ‘the plague’, did his consulting the oracle finally give him the knowledge he needed? Oedipus’s self-discovery is his own ‘descent into Hell’, the sort of ‘plague’ (return of the repressed?) typical of maturation.

Likewise, with this interpretation of Oedipus, one could not help but also conclude that Freud’s own destiny was similar to Oedipus’s since he discovered the Oedipus complex when he began his self-analysis – when he began his own ‘descent into Hell’.

It would seem that in the myths of the hero, Gilgamesh, Odysseus, Oedipus, and in the one related to our ‘hero’ Freud, one finds a ‘descent into Hell’ that evinces maturation’s psychic work that, according to Freud (1915a, p. 299), “compels us once more to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death”, and that specific psychic work simultaneously obliges one to make the effort to acknowledge inevitable personal death. Of course this conceptualization also entails the postulate that maintains that the hero is the one who killed his father (Freud, 1921). This act is actually the subjective authorization for adulthood and adulthood’s consequent maturation (Fig. 1).

### *Tension between soma and body*

Why are adolescence and maturation the two most important times in the heroic myth cycle? Why are they as important as birth and death? And why has humanity needed to express these two periods in its myths?

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<sup>5</sup>By putting scare quotes around the pronoun ‘his’ I emphasize the strictly narcissistic nature of this search. To allude impersonally to the ‘herb of immortality’, as many authors have, avoids admitting that the hero first seeks the formula for his own benefit, rather than for the entire community’s benefit, which is the end result.

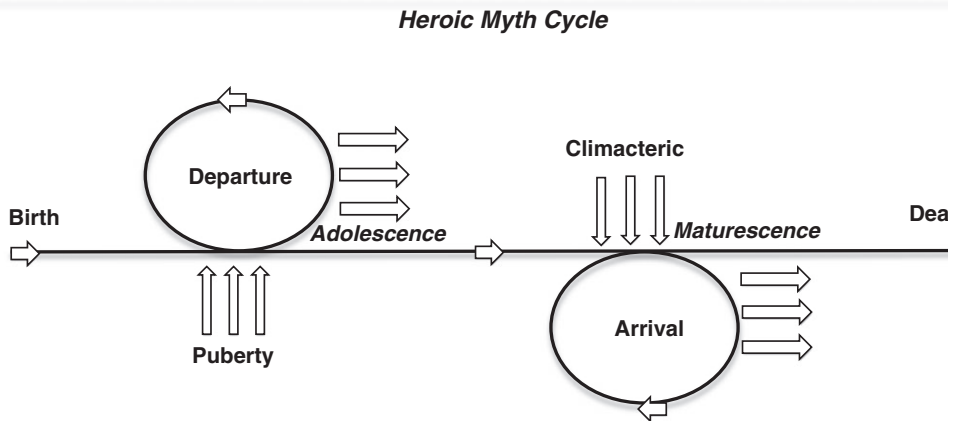


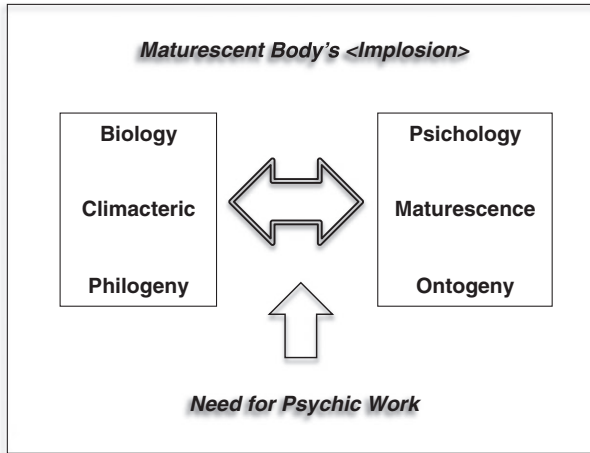
Fig. 1. Oedipus's maturation?

One might think that these two stages are important because exogamy coincides with puberty and the descent into Hell coincides with male and female climacteric,<sup>6</sup> and that their somatic processes (physiological, metabolic, hormonal) demand an extra measure of extreme psychic work. The somatic magnitude of these processes could be what has caused civilizations to represent the pubescent and climacteric revolutions as stages in the hero's mythical cycle – understanding the hero as an allegory of the individual immortal double, expressed in this case as a collective fantasy.

Blos (1979) maintains that puberty is an event of nature and adolescence is a human event. Even though the concept 'human event' might seem to exclude 'humans' from nature, we can discern what Blos means. That is, it may be helpful to clarify that in the context in which Blos made this affirmation, it would have been clearer to postulate that puberty is a preponderantly biological event and that adolescence is a preponderantly psychological consequence of puberty. In both cases we have a sort of extended biology similar to what Freud proposed concerning the continuum between biology and human psychology. Owing to this continuum, Freud always considered psychoanalysis to be a natural science. Or perhaps we could think of puberty as a phylogenetic landmark and adolescence as its ontogenetic outcome.

This affirmation may be extended by maintaining that climacteric is preponderantly biological and maturation is preponderantly its psychological outcome, or that climacteric is primarily related to phylogeny and maturation to ontogeny. From this perspective we could consider that climacteric occurs in the soma and maturation in the body (the body as the soma invested with libido and aggression). Thus we can tentatively define matu-

<sup>6</sup>From this moment on, every time I refer to both the male climacteric and female climacteric, I will use the noun 'climacterics', in plural.



**Fig. 2.** The maturescent body's 'implosion'

rescence as the result of tension between the soma and the body, as Ciancio (2014) has already proposed.

Just as Blos maintains that the initiation into adolescence coincides with measurable milestones, we can accept that maturation also coincides with measurable somatic milestones (climacteric) that give birth to specific psychic processes (maturescence itself).

The revolution produced in the soma (on the metabolic, physiological and hormonal level) is so significant in these two stages of life that they lead to a subjective unbalancing that can drift toward an extreme response as the consequence of the psychic work that they bring about. This is what the myth of the hero seems to portray in the 'descent into Hell', an attempt to represent the processes coming from the soma at the beginning of maturation. Thus, just as adolescents can be depicted in front of a mirror scrutinizing their bodies' 'explosion', we can picture maturescents also in front of a mirror bearing witness to their bodies' 'explosion': 'implosion'. Both poses entail uncertainty and fear of some uncanny arousal and, in the case of maturation, a fear of old age and death (Fig. 2).

### *Sex and death*

But if puberty and climacterics are periods or processes typical of the human life cycle, if they have happened to all human beings since time immemorial, why do they create such an important demand for psychic work? Should we not suppose that what makes us human beings should be experienced as something 'natural' instead of something creating such a tremendous psychic riot?

The psychic aspect of extended biology needs to be accommodated because human beings seem to be conditioned by two great moratoriums. The first one is what Erikson (1951) termed the adolescent moratorium and the second could be termed the maturescent moratorium. These (originally



anti-natural?) human moratoriums create specific psychic phenomena, both for adolescence and maturation.

In contemporary Western Society, the adolescent moratorium requires putting off procreation even though the biological imperative might peremptorily demand it. The frustration of this post-pubertal demand is what brings on the aforementioned psychic work and gives rise to adolescence as a psychic phenomenon.

Something similar must happen during the climacteric stages because they begin a moratorium that puts off another biological imperative – in this case death. Maturationists are no longer useful for nature's 'plan' because they cannot go on procreating, but they resist death by 'inventing' old age – a rare phenomenon among other species. The post-climacteric moratorium that puts off dying is a consequence of the instinctive imbalance that characterizes climacterics and accounts for the specific psychic work typical of maturation.

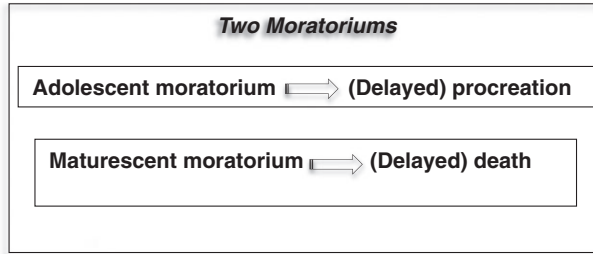
At this point we should clarify another facet of human nature related to moratoriums. Both adolescent and maturationist moratoriums do not just delay the species' imperative. Being human is not simply a matter of procreating and dying. During the adolescent moratorium the individual has sexual intercourse without procreating, whereas in the maturationist moratorium, instead of resigning themselves to death, individuals try to extend their life as long as possible, to go on having sex even though nature's imperative no longer asks them to procreate. This is the reason why, at this stage, they come face-to-face with the siege of chronic uncertainty.

Indeed, sexuality's and death's enormous demands for psychic work (in the first and second moratoriums respectively) is what led to the discovery of psychoanalysis. The importance of this subject (confirmed by the nuclear psychoanalytic postulates) is not only found in the hero's mythical cycle, but also in linguistic euphemisms. In effect, euphemisms are alternate expressions or lexical deformations that are always related to sexuality and death. This should be of no surprise to psychoanalysts, but it is still very obvious when one examines a specific dictionary or seeks direct confirmation in everyday speech (Rawson, 1995).

As one of the most important paradoxes in human life, these two postulated moratoriums are points in the life cycle in which one may achieve true growth and important subjective changes – including inter-subjective and inter-personal authenticity.

For this reason we can think of maturation as an opportunity that the life cycle provides the individual to promote, to continue, and to deepen his/her personal development within his/her own subjectivity (intra-subjectivity), in his/her relationship with objects (inter-subjectivity), as well as with different generations (trans-subjectivity). Of course this is what happens in the best of situations because psychopathology will always work to exacerbate and make these processes visible, something that in normal development occurs under wraps.

It behooves us to clarify an issue that recurs as a challenge to how I consider this material: the male climacteric is very different from the violent ending that menopause contributes to the female climacteric. Even though it is true that the onset of the male climacteric does not put an end to pro-



**Fig. 3.** The two moratoriums

creative activity until the man has entered old age, the ethological studies of natural biology have specifically shown that in the higher animals (including humans) the offspring of older fathers can be born with physical deformities or with handicaps as far as their survival is concerned. It appears that human beings want to deny the male and female climacterics' similarity because their manifestations are so different, even though they are the functional equivalents of one another (Fig. 3).

### *From climacterics to maturation (building on Freud)*

When we postulate the transformation of phylogeny into ontogeny during climacterics, we can also postulate a set of strata that influence maturation's psychic work. The phylogenetic imperative (instinct) promotes a somatic impact that requires decodification. This somatic impact shows itself in the species' program as well as in the onset of old age. Climacterics' continuous transformation of instinct into drive is what may be called 'the navel of maturation'.

In Freud's work there are four points at which he addresses this subject. The first one is his piece on Leonardo da Vinci (1910, pp. 133–4). He writes:

At the summit of his life, when he was in his early fifties – a time when in women the sexual characters have already undergone involution and when in men *the libido not infrequently makes a further energetic advance*. (my italics)

Here one sees the more empirical Freud. At that time no one had acknowledged what we today identify as the male climacteric nor its drive-related impressions, but Freud came upon its effects in his clinical work, which is why he was able to attribute this 'energetic advance' to men as well.

The second example appears in Freud (1912, p. 235):

We see people fall ill who have hitherto been healthy, who have met with no fresh experience and whose relation to the external world has undergone no change, *so that the onset of their illness inevitably gives an impression of spontaneity* [my italics]. A closer consideration of such cases, however, shows us that none the less a change *has* [italics in the original] taken place in them whose importance we must rate very highly as a cause of illness. *As a result of their having reached a particular period of*



*life, and in conformity with regular biological processes, the quantity [italics in the original] of libido in their mental economy has experienced an increase which is in itself enough to upset the equilibrium of their health and to set up the necessary conditions for a neurosis [my italics]. It is well known that more or less sudden increases of libido of this kind are habitually associated with *puberty and the menopause* [my italics] – with the attainment of a certain age in women; in some people they may in addition be manifested in periodicities that are still unknown.*

This paragraph is capital because it lays the foundation for the metapsychology of maturation. It alludes to the apparent spontaneity of illness, it correlates synchronic ‘biological processes’ with ‘*a particular period of life*’, it indicates how libidinal increase upsets the healthy equilibrium to foster neurosis, and it explicitly addresses puberty and menopause.

In the third example (1916–17 [1915–1917], pp. 402–3) Freud admits:

*I am far from having told you of all the observations that speak in favor of the genetic relation I have asserted to exist between libido and anxiety. Among them, for instance, is the influence on anxiety disorders of certain phases of life to which, as in the case of puberty and the time of the menopause, a considerable increase in the production of libido may be attributed. (my italics)*

In this quote Freud identifies libidinal increase during puberty and menopause. He uses anxiety as clinical evidence of the psychic work this increment demands when it cannot be worked-through.

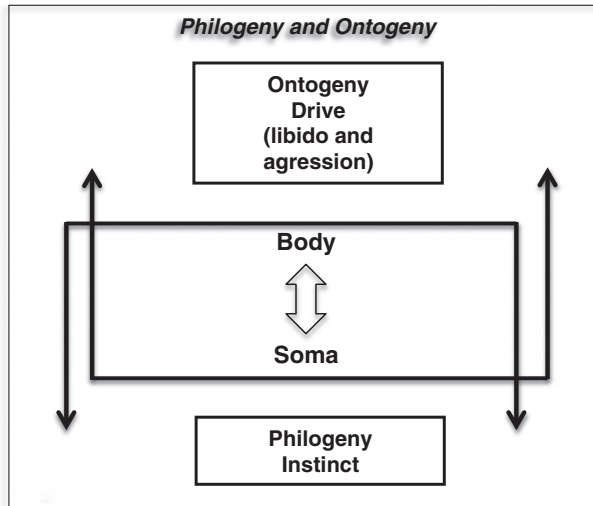
Many years later (1937, p. 226), within the framework of the second drive theory, Freud takes up this issue once more:

*Twice in the course of individual development certain instincts are considerably reinforced: at puberty, and, in women, at the menopause. We are not in the least surprised if a person who was not neurotic becomes so at these times. When his instincts were not so strong, he succeeded in taming them; but when they are reinforced he can no longer do so. (my italics)*

This is the Freudian metapsychological foundation that allows us to consider what happens when nature’s challenge – another characteristic of life’s exigencies or Ananké – ensues in the drive increase typical of the second moratorium, something that may result in different outcomes such as a maturing transition or a maturing crisis. Maturation can be the consequence of this reactive drive increase owing to the instinctual climacteric disequilibrium (Fig. 4).

### *‘Resistance’ to a true understanding of maturation*

It is common to refer to the mourning process brought on by parental aging, illness or death, the empty nest syndrome, a maturing’s sudden or chronic incurable illness, the death of a particular age-mate, and so on. These circumstances are often referred to as processes typical of maturation, but perhaps it is not appropriate to think of them as such. They seem more like situations that can occur during maturation and that provide a



**Fig. 4.** Phylogeny and ontogeny

screen to refer indirectly to what is truly important and is in essence unconscious: 'the navel of maturation', the biological processes brought on by the second moratorium, and the need for subsequent psychic work, that is, something that arises consequent to maturation.

All the above-mentioned situations bring on mourning processes, but they do not foster growth and development through their working-through activity. These situations could be thought in the way we think of ordinary day residues related to the dream: it becomes a pathway towards the true unconscious wish. Similarly, we can get to the actual work that maturation requires based on what comes up in each individual undergoing any of the above-mentioned situations. This kind of thinking may be called 'indirect understanding of maturation'.

This hypothesis is supported by the fact that a maturing individual may have lost parents during infancy, may not have had children, or may have had them, and they are still at home; these maturing individuals may be in good health and, ideally, not have lost an important age-mate, but they will still experience their maturation thanks to the second moratorium because it is a law coming from the imperative of the species. These individuals also will find similar or different 'day residues' to express the 'navel of maturation'. Something equivalent happens with the conscious perception of signs indicating one's own aging: for example, grey hair, wrinkles, loss of muscle tone. In this case these must be considered conscious problems, whereas what actually besieges these individuals unconsciously is what comes from the phylogenetic imperative – the true 'navel of maturation', which allows a 'direct understanding of maturation'.

Still, one might argue that it is not worthwhile to theorize about specific phenomena because heuristic value can be found precisely in universal phenomena that legitimize our understanding of processes – in this case that which arises from biology and instinct on the one hand and the tension

between the soma and the body, which are also universal, on the other hand. This can happen when the soma begins to show signs of aging, even though the particular type of aging linked to the second moratorium may not become conscious. In effect, the transformations of universal invariants are likely what allow us to understand individuals' (subjective) variables.

Finally, I should point out a doubt coming from those who suppose that maturation in the last century may come later than before because life expectancy has increased. This may be a statistical truth, but it is not a psychoanalytic truth because the actual 'navel of maturation' comes from instinctual forces, something which could not have changed in so little time (Fig. 5).

### *Macbeth's marriage and the curse of sterility*

One might think that, since the loss of fertility is so important throughout this process, people who have had children would be better off than those who did not, but psychoanalytic clinical data seem to refute this. Concerning these data and knowing that I am bringing up only one point in addressing a complex and multivocal work of art, I shall now address the tragedy *Macbeth*. As Freud himself points out, Macbeth's marriage would end up in an extreme diffusion of drives owing to infertility. In this context it is often surprising to read Freud's (1916, p. 320) declaration that Macbeth's marriage is "a curse of unfruitfulness and the blessings of continuous generation". Having not accomplished the 'plan' of nature, King Macbeth understands that he will have no descendants and his throne will not be inherited by a son of his, because he will never have a son. So one might think that since the couple fails to fulfil the 'plan' of nature (or will no longer be able to fulfil it), they embark on the serial, murderous, and bloody orgy so as to try to process the maturing moratorium in store for them as mere 'mortals'.

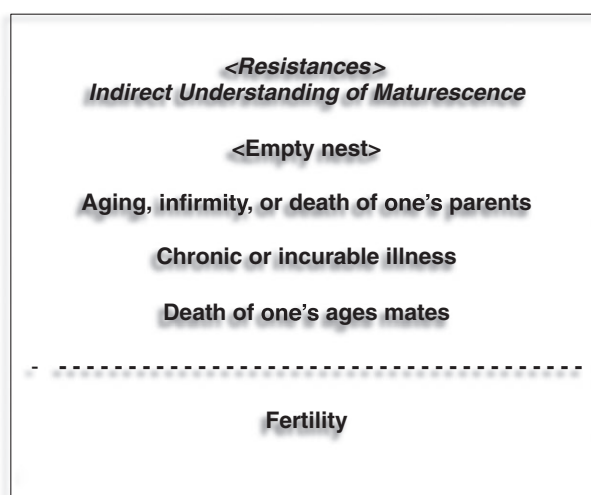


Fig. 5. 'Resistances': Indirect understanding of maturation

From the perspective I propose one can imagine that the Macbeths commit murder not because they fail to pass on the germplasm without the ‘blessings of continuous generation’, but because they have no psychic resources to work-through the maturescent moratorium. One may assume that even if they had had children, the couple would have suffered the same despair and violence, which might have been displaced to some other situation that could seem to be sufficiently unimportant so as to hide their true pain of no longer being biologically necessary. With greater psychic resources there is a greater likelihood of working-through this moratorium than in the absence of genetic or symbolic offspring, but the lack of these resources would bring about a diffusion of drives similar to what the Macbeths experienced.

## **Elements toward a metapsychology of maturescence**

### *Metapsychology of maturescence*

Finally, from a psychological point of view, as Freud (1914, p. 91) maintains, the maturescent moratorium hinges on “the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality”, something appearing as pain in the face of the inevitable: one’s own aging and eventual death (Montero, 2005).

Seen from the logic of the ‘navel of maturescence’, the perception of one’s own aging is similar to what happens in Plato’s Cave (*The Republic*, 7). The cave’s inhabitants can see the shadows projected on the wall, but they do not know they are being projected, which is equivalent to what goes on in dream-work. The perception of a reflection is evidence for what is going on, but it is seen only in this indirect form. Given this, we can imagine that the aging that concerns maturescents is the aging associated with the second moratorium, which is very hard to acknowledge.

Two ways of understanding these issues are available at this point. In one way the maturescent moratorium is *especially* related to what happens to a person in the present. For this reason we can propose a vertex we can call the *experience with death in the present*, that is, the soma’s expression. What happens during this level of maturescence is untenable, inadmissible, incomprehensible and ineffable because it implies the presence of a biological footprint that cannot be represented in the maturescent present, and for this reason it is disruptive (potentially traumatic) (Benyakar, 2003).

In the other way of understanding this subject, the maturescent moratorium could be called the *experience with death in the future*, that is, the body’s expression, something that implies a different disruption – also potentially traumatic according to the kind of working-through the individual is able to experience. This is because future death has yet to happen, especially if we consider the definition of trauma that entails events that threaten or overwhelm the psychic apparatus’s representational abilities. It is important to stress the phrase ‘yet to’, which indicates an occurrence that ‘still’ and ‘up to a particular moment’ has not happened, but which implies that it will inexorably come to pass. And that which is ‘yet to’ happen con-

stitutes a psychic presence that is as good as real, that is always felt in advance and is generally threatening because it pertains to the second moratorium. In these cases maturationists can displace into the future whatever subjective experience they might have at a particular time in the present.

The tension between the *experience of death in the present* (soma) and the *experience of death in the future* (body) leads to a kind of uncertainty that can be quite painful.

If we take into account the very frequent and extreme reactions (transformations) that the psychic apparatus needs to employ so as to negotiate maturation, we can deduce that such an extreme defense must be related to an extreme and unmanageable pain, which makes it possible to infer the disruptive, potentially traumatic effect according to the magnitude of the defense being used.

One could also pose the following objection to this point of view. Why would people worry about death? Especially because Freud (1915a, 1919) took it upon himself to explain the human psyche's inability to represent its own death, 'for death is an abstract concept with a negative content for which no unconscious correlative can be found' (1923, p. 58) and 'the unconscious seems to contain nothing that could give any content to our concept of the annihilation of life' (1926 [1925], p. 123). It is evident that this impossibility of representation adds new evidence to the disruptive (potentially traumatic) dimension brought on by the second moratorium.

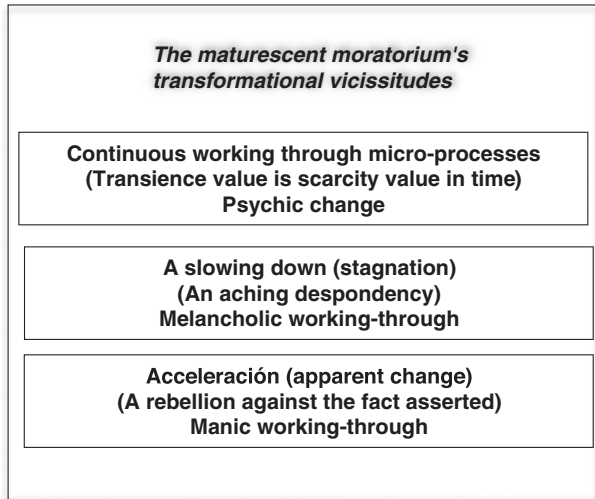
### *The maturationist moratorium's transformational vicissitudes*

In 'On transience' (*Vergänglichkeit*) Freud (1916 [1915]) identifies three possible dispositions that can arise in the face of the transitory (perishing), that is, in the face of what is fated to disappear. These dispositions are closely related to the possibility, to the difficulty or to the impossibility of re-signification during the maturationist moratorium. These dispositions are three transformations that describe different pathways (Montero, 2005; Montero *et al.*, 2008).

The first modality implies a series of continuous working-through micro-processes involved in (re-signification) that lead to a new equilibrium ('transience value is scarcity value in time') (Freud, 1916, p. 305). This initial attitude concerning existence's transient nature implies the activation of mourning processes that enables psychic change and assigns an always relative re-signification to the maturationist moratorium.

The second modality is a slowing down (stagnation), an 'aching despondency' (Freud, 1916, p. 305). This implies a gradual detaining and a consequent chronification of certain personal stereotypes that eventually encompass self-esteem where it may be seen as an inability to initiate new plans or projects, as if time had stopped. This second modality entails a psychopathological and melancholic way of dealing with transience and makes psychic change and re-signification difficult, which, consequently, leads to a precarious working-through of the maturationist moratorium.

The third modality is acceleration (apparent change) 'rebellion against the fact asserted' (Freud, 1916, p. 305) and generally entails attempts to flee



**Fig. 6.** The maturing moratorium's transformational vicissitudes

into the past, vertiginously hoping to 'recover' bygone times. In this modality one also observes a poorly regulated self-esteem: in these circumstances people engage in various plans or projects whose only purpose seems to be a utopic recovery of one's youth. This third modality entails a manic psychopathological way of handling transience, which makes psychic change and re-signification more difficult. And, similar to the second modality, this situation leads to a precarious maturation (Fig. 6).

### *Differentiating maturing transition from maturing crisis*

Maturing transit corresponds to the first modality's relative working-through. In this case there is a hierarchy of progression and continuity in psychic development in itself. Maturing crisis, on the other hand, is associated with the second and third modalities' working-through of the maturing moratorium.

Taking the aforementioned considerations into account, we can postulate a pathognomonic continuum between maturing transition and crisis. There would be a transition pole and a crisis pole at opposite ends of this continuum. From this perspective each person would experience both a transition and a crisis simultaneously, although transitions and crises would constitute different proportions in each mixture.

This continuum leads us to conclude that maturing transition and crisis maintain a relationship with each other that is inversely proportional – if we also keep in mind that even though libido and aggression can be simultaneous, maturing transition could include a tendency toward the fusion of drives, whereas maturing crises could tend toward a greater diffusion of drives.



### *Psychopathology in maturescent transition and crisis*

The psychic work that the maturescent transition demands points directly toward the recuperation of *Selbstgefühl* (Freud, 1914), that is, the notion of self and self-esteem. “Every remnant of the primitive feeling of omnipotence which his experience has confirmed” (Freud, 1914, p. 98) would be changed at the outset of maturescence, because then a narcissistic crisis arises that may have different manifestations. In any case, including when the process can be carried out in continuous working through micro-processes of (re-signification), what assumes center stage is the functioning of the self, which can be understood as a self-esteem regulator since the acknowledgement of one’s own self’s finite nature implies narcissistic wounds that often initiate the experience of pain, abandonment and personal devaluation.

In the continuous working-through micro-processes (re-significations), the ego evinces a preponderant type of ego-reality work. However, while fantasies’ content often connotes tolerance of what is becoming transient, imperfect or perishing, they generally express an integration between what someone has accomplished and what has not come to pass – especially in the terrain of the ego ideal. From a psychopathological viewpoint, this sort of psychic operation could correspond to psycho-neuroses: from the perspective of the self, to a cohesive functioning and an adequate regulation of self-esteem.

In melancholic processing (slowing-down, stagnation) and in manic processing (acceleration, apparent change), there are two different ways of working-through. In both ways the ego’s preponderant functional modality corresponds to the ego’s archaic functioning (ego-initial reality and ego-pleasure). In the slowing-down (stagnation) processing the preponderant fantasy expresses a total loss, a feeling that the individual can expect nothing from life, whereas in the acceleration process there is an apparent change – fantasies expressing a Proustian attempt to recover times gone by. Both ‘solutions’ are psychopathological because they are related to narcissistic pathologies, especially to the limitations that ego-pleasure’s functioning imposes, as may be found, fundamentally, in borderline disorders. From the perspective of the self, melancholic processing is related to narcissistic personality disorders, and manic processing is linked to narcissistic behavior disorders.

These attempts at recovering one’s self-esteem can also be understood from autoplasmic and alloplastic perspectives. In melancholic processing we can see autoplasmic (Freud, 1924) modifications in experiencing the characteristic loss of worth as well as of a generalized meaninglessness (a modification of the internal environment), which gives rise to a delirium of insignificance (Freud 1917 [1915]). In manic processing we can see symptomatic modifications brought on by attempts to recover self-esteem through evident changes in manifest behavior (modification of the external environment). These latter vicissitudes entail narcissistic denial and idealization mechanisms.

The manic processing modality (acceleration [apparent change]) corresponds to the classical and typical mid-life or middle age crises. This is also known as the Gauguin syndrome or, more colloquially as the ‘mid-day demon’.

We should also point out that specific developmental goings-on that come about during the working-through of the maturing moratorium, in this case the drive increase brought on by climacteric imbalance, also has a relative independence from psychopathology. That is, even though it is a factor to keep in mind, severe narcissistic psychopathology does not necessarily determine or condition the difficulty or the inability to process the moratorium. At any rate, drive increase adds a vertex to psychopathology that allows a broader and simultaneously deeper understanding of maturing.

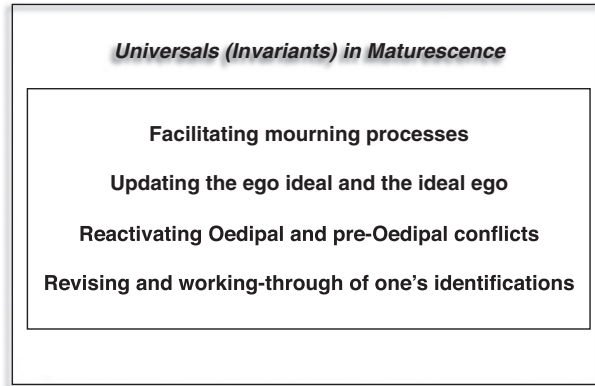
These drive increases also generally get expressed in clinical material, but they should not lead one to pay special attention to them in the session, when the analyst should be working in the ‘absolute present’. This happens according to the ‘plan’ of nature, which has no particular ‘human’ purposes nor does it acknowledge past or future (Montero *et al.*, 2012).

### *Universals (invariants) in maturing*

Even if the tension between the soma and the body is, par excellence, something that has been deemed ‘the most touchy point in the narcissistic system’, it is an empirical constant and the main source of stimuli for the onset of maturing. Given this, we can identify four metapsychological factors to keep in mind to understand the particular psychic work that re-signification requires for dealing with the second moratorium. These factors are all interconnected – they are considered separately here for didactic effects. They are psychic invariants and they have the advantage of overcoming different individual vicissitudes that each person may have to deal with. These constants allow us to center such an analysis on universal intrapsychic processes and on the study of their transformations, something which necessarily includes individual differences (Montero, 2009; Montero *et al.*, 2012).

In the first place, once an individual has his mourning processes working, that person will be better able to take on the psychic work demanded by maturing. Evidence of the mourning process’s failure can be seen in certain individuals who make their maturing parental function more adolescent in an attempt to dissolve the natural asymmetry between parent and child.

In a direct line with the above topic, maturing would also entail updating the ego ideal. As the representative of symbolic ideals, the ego ideal makes plans for a future state of affairs (Hanly, 1983, p. 191) – whenever this future state of affairs can be accepted by the subject. Contrariwise, facets of the ideal ego representing narcissistic ideals re-emerge. These narcissistic ideals require a state of being (Hanly, 1983, p. 191) where the passing of time has been abolished. Between the ego ideal and the ideal ego one would find a relationship equivalent to one between a man and a hero. Contrary to ordinary humans’ docile ego ideal, that tries to work things through, one finds the ideal ego’s heroic tyranny which requires immediate fulfillment of the chronic desires for immortality.



**Fig. 7.** Universals (invariants) in maturity

Maturity also entails a reactivation of the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal conflicts. Actual losses and threats of further losses reactivate the schizoid conflict (abandonment anxiety). Concerning the Oedipal conflict (castration anxiety), maturity facilitates the re-emergence of parricidal and incestuous fantasies. In the earlier section ‘“Resistance” to a true understanding of maturity’ I emphasized that the Oedipal conflict’s re-emergence also occurs in people who may have lost their parents early on or who have never had children. That is, even though one might think that such people were never linked to symbolic parental equivalents, they too would fall prey to the reactions that give rise to the second moratorium.

Finally and naturally, as part of dealing with the maturer moratorium, we would see a revision and a working-through of one’s primary and secondary identifications. These identifications would be directly related to the ideal ego and to the ego ideal. They would suffer the same de-identification vicissitudes and a subsequent new identification and would always be susceptible to being revised. As a characteristic process during maturity, de-identification entails a distancing from and a relinquishing of one’s original parental and social discourse. As an eventual path toward dealing with generational telescoping (Faimberg, 2005), it also entails a reconsideration and connection with one’s own discourse or idiom (Bollas, 1989).

The tension between the soma and the body and ‘the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality’ added to these four elements detailed above are the metapsychological bases that allow us to infer the sort of psychic work maturity requires (Fig. 7).

## **Elements for a clinical approach to uncertainty**

### *Uncertainty and clinical practice*

How can we determine whether dealing with maturity contributes to growth and development?

One can infer five indicators constituting the direct consequence of the (always relative) ways to deal with the second moratorium. One is central, the other four are subsidiary.

To integrate (acknowledge) uncertainty (*mors certa, hora incerta* [certain death, uncertain time]) denotes working through maturation and is linked to the futility of existence from a biological perspective, and the transient nature of existence from a psychological perspective. This experience comes directly from the unconscious perception that the time remaining to live is intimately related to the second moratorium and its psychic effects.

Freud (1919) connects uncertainty with the uncanny, which in full strength could lead to the extreme defenses that occur in maturational crises, because intolerance concerning uncertainty introduces the uncanny directly into psychic life and disrupts all psychic integration (Montero, 2005, 2009).

A 50 year-old female patient in analysis for 5 years suddenly began to increase her consumption of alcohol. She felt depressed and disconcerted and did not know how to go on with her life. She told the following dream: I was at my ex-husband's wedding reception. He was with his wife and I was taking them pictures.<sup>7</sup> But at a certain point I realized the film in the camera had come to an end so I couldn't take any more pictures. I went on trying to take more pictures even though I knew that there was no more film, but I kept on trying. I felt strange and obsessed wanting to take more pictures. This bothered me and I couldn't understand what was happening to me.

Concerning the patient's maturation, the analysis of the dream based on her associations revealed that the camera's running out of film represented her eggless ovaries. And no matter how hard she tried, she could no longer produce any more eggs (unexposed film). Her insistence on the verb take [*sacar*] as she related the dream was paradigmatic. At least as the patient saw it, her ex-husband could marry a younger woman and still procreate. She could not, and not because she was no longer married to that man, but because nature had made it hard for her. She was starting a time in her life for which she had no prior representations (photographs). Here the wish to take photos was interpreted as an attempt at representation.

Transference, this patient was asking her analyst for a representation of something she could not represent. She could represent what was happening to her on the pre-menopausal level, on the level of the body, but it was very hard for her to represent what this means for her soma. Her uncertainty expresses her worry and confusion.

Similarly, the following vignettes evince the importance uncertainty has at maturation's outset and as it unfolds. A successful professional age 45, married and father of three children comes to his session terribly worried about 'the country's situation', which he feels is becoming 'hardly secure'. This has led him to begin a gradual shifting of his assets out of the country so as to 'rescue his future' and that of his children. The interpretation is an

<sup>7</sup>In Spanish the verb used for 'taking' pictures is *sacar* 'to pull out, remove'. It is especially pertinent in the context of this article.

example of how one can integrate (acknowledge) uncertainty during maturation's early days.

I don't doubt that you can find a way to save your assets, but it seems to me that what you're telling me is deeper than that: it could be your concern for finding some place safe from the uncertainties in your adult life. Because when you talk about the 'country's situation' you're actually talking about your situation as an adult, where you must handle an enormous amount of uncertainty every day. Likewise, you might also be alluding to the 'situation in your analysis', where instead of offering you some consolation and tranquility, it makes you confront day in and day out a set of questions to formulate over and over, and these questions have no answer.

A 50 year-old actor, divorced and father of four children, has a tremendous 'fear of flying' in airplanes. As he tells it, this fear is in direct conflict with his profession because it requires considerable air travel. He mentions the large amount of tranquilizers he takes when he travels. The session before a particular trip he arrives in an altered and anxious state. He begs his analyst to guarantee that the plane will not crash.

I'm not going to tell you that you're overly scared because you yourself tell me this over and over. But it seems to me that when you bring up your fear of flying, what you really want is for me to tell you that you're not going to die. And I cannot lie about that. Some day you're going to die, just like everybody else. I think that you ask for this the same way one of your children might ask for your reassurance concerning something he's afraid of. In your kids' case they still need to believe that their father has all the answers for all their problems and fears, because they're still children. Since you're a grown-up, I can't help you if I treat you like a child and lie to you saying the plane won't crash. In fact sometimes planes do crash in mid-air. However I think I can help you by not letting the 'analytic airplane' crash. We can go on flying if you can acknowledge the natural uncertainty you inevitably must get used to because you're an adult.

It would seem that these patients' reactions to uncertainty are the clinical nucleus from which it is possible to work through the onset of maturation. The first patient's dream provides evidence that the psychic work characteristic of the 'navel of maturation' has begun, whereas the clinical vignettes imply, in the first case, a relative integration (acknowledgement) of uncertainty, in the second case, given the patient's obvious preoccupation with death, we see that such an integration has not occurred.

At this point it becomes important to consider what effectively takes place in the analytic process because analysts' own outlooks concerning uncertainty can be an indispensable factor to enable them to accompany patients' ways of dealing with uncertainty. These matters could be understood as caesura of uncertainty in maturation. Bion (1977) proposes that caesura exists between patient and analyst and is pathognomonic of each analytic process. Through caesura it is possible to invest or de-invest (often simultaneously) the uncertainty both patient and analyst are generating so as to facilitate or inhibit the working-through process. At the same time it

would seem that caesura of uncertainty 'is alive' and can permanently mutate its appearance and its trappings to the extent that patient and analyst confront uncertainty or retreat from it, because, as Kavka (2014) observes, we cannot treat aging, but we can analyze aging. To this I add that the analyst is also aging and an active counterpart of the caesura.

One can also point to an analog of maturation in what Said (2006) has proposed concerning the 'late style' in different artists' literary or musical creation. Certain artists epitomize people who have managed to integrate (acknowledge) their experience of uncertainty in their creative productions. Their acknowledgement provides them with an opening that evinces an alternative personal commitment that is not controlled by the spirit of the time. It is an open question whether this 'late style' is applicable to anybody's daily life rather than only to artists (Montero *et al.*, 2008). This is a matter worth researching. At any rate this proposal would seem to diverge from Jaques's conclusions in his classic study of the mid-life crisis, where he proposes that certain creative 'styles' at that point in life depend on the Kleinian depressive position. Clinical evidence seems to contradict Jaques's proposal, and they make it possible to find several different creative 'styles' that are much closer to what Said describes.

For the above reasons we can propose that the integration (acknowledgement) of uncertainty is the clinical indicator par excellence of working through maturation. Integration (acknowledgement) is in permanent tension with the implicit disintegration (rejection) associated with worries about death – as long as the individual is not threatened by a serious illness.

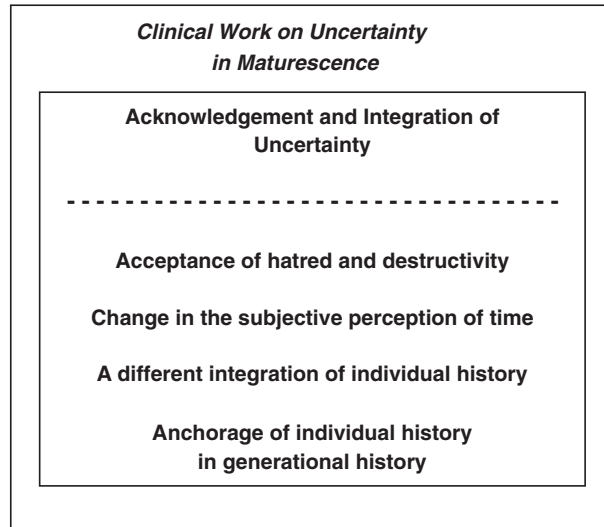
In fact a person who is afraid of getting old and dying has stopped growing and developing. Once uncertainty has been integrated (acknowledged) people can concentrate on living. They can accept that growing old is part of nature even though it emerges at 'the most touchy point in the narcissistic system'.

In experiencing uncertainty, we can subsume an acknowledgement of our hatred and destructivity directed at ourselves and at others as inherent to human nature. Jaques (1965) was the first to identify that what he called the mid-life crisis also entails this acknowledgement. It is a direct consequence of one's coping (relatively) with maturation and that comes from the resurgence and reworking-through of the Oedipal conflict. This acknowledgement also has a source in human nature's inherent affective ambivalence.

During maturation there can also be a change in the subjective perception of time. This new perception entails a new and increased appreciation of the present. It simultaneously re-signifies the past and the future in their perpetual twofold conflict. This is an unfathomable experience subsumed in a circular and permanent process within the uncertainty of the present.

A third element deriving from experiencing uncertainty is related to a novel integration of the individual's life history. It allows the individual to resolve the family romance (Freud, 1909 [1908]) and his/her personal myth in a different fashion. In a similar way, Bollas (1989) differentiates between fate and destiny. He distinguishes their origins, purposes, and the transfor-





**Fig. 8.** Clinical work on uncertainty in maturation

mation of fate into destiny, which we can consider intrinsic to maturation owing to phylogeny's and extended biology's compelling nature put in play during this moratorium.

Finally, as a consequence of integrating one's personal history in a different fashion, the fourth subsidiary element can be to anchor personal history in generational history (Singman de Vogelfanger, 2006). This process would operate in two directions simultaneously. One vector points to the past, the other toward the future. The one pointing to the past entails a process that promotes a different acquisition of the familiar (generational) history. This perception is different from that of primary identification. On the other hand the vector pointing toward the future entails delegating youth's 'attributes' (symbols) to the next generation in a process that involves the integration of the generational conflict in all its variations. This generational transmission toward prior and subsequent generations is additional evidence that the maturing moratorium is being managed.

These are the five clinical pointers: one is central the other four are subsidiary. They contribute to psychic work's (relative) transformation that maturation demands. The achievement of maturation as growth and development has a common denominator: the acknowledgement of and the confrontation with uncertainty (Fig. 8).

### **Translations of summary**

**Psychanalyse de la maturation (définition, métapsychologie et pratique clinique).** Cet article offre une perspective radicalement nouvelle sur la façon de considérer le milieu de la vie. Le néologisme de maturation permet de désigner l'aspect métapsychologique de ce processus et de dégager une métapsychologie de la maturation qui débouche sur une « compréhension directe de la maturation » en lieu et place d'une « compréhension indirecte de la maturation » que la littérature psychanalytique évoque généralement. L'auteur de cet article étudie les processus somatiques qui caractérisent la méno-

pause et l'andropause et centre sa réflexion sur la tension entre le soma et le corps. Il examine le postulat de Freud d'accroissement pulsionnel à la ménopause/andropause. Le déséquilibre somatique qui s'ensuit, engendre une activité pulsionnelle spécifique nécessitant un travail psychique empruntant différents chemins suivant l'activité de perlaboration inhérente à l'individu. Il discute de ce qui se produit chez l'individu lorsque celui-ci n'est plus en mesure de procréer et commence à vieillir, ainsi que des raisons pour lesquelles ce processus est équivalent chez tous les individus, qu'ils aient eu ou non des enfants. Cet événement somatique donne lieu à une constante universelle à partir de laquelle il est possible d'accéder aux variables individuelles qu'elles soient.

**Psychoanalyse der "Matureszenz" (Definition, Metapsychologie und klinische Praxis).** Dieser Beitrag beschreibt einen ganz neuen Zugang zum Verständnis des mittleren Lebensalters. Mit dem Neologismus „Matureszenz“ bezeichnet der Autor das metapsychologische Merkmal dieses Prozesses; er postuliert eine Metapsychologie, die „ein unmittelbares Verstehen der Matureszenz“ anstelle des „indirekten Verständnisses“ ermöglicht, mit dem die psychoanalytische Literatur gewöhnlich arbeitet. Der Beitrag untersucht somatische Prozesse, die für das männliche und weibliche Klimakterium charakteristisch sind, und hebt insbesondere auf die Spannung zwischen Soma und Körper ab. Erforscht wird die Steigerung der Libido, die Freud für das männliche und weibliche Klimakterium postulierte, und das somatische klimakterische Ungleichgewicht, das eine spezifische Triebaktivität stimuliert, die psychische Arbeit einfordert. Je nach der individuellen Aktivität dieses Durcharbeitens erfolgt diese auf ganz unterschiedliche Weise. Der Beitrag untersucht auch, was mit dem Individuum geschieht, wenn er/sie nicht länger fortpflanzungsfähig ist und zu altern beginnt, und warum dieser Prozess für Personen, die Kinder hatten, und für andere, die keine Kinder bekommen konnten oder wollten, der gleiche ist. Dieser somatische Vorgang ist eine universale Konstante, die es ermöglicht, die je individuellen Variablen zu verstehen.

**Psicoanalisi della maturescenza (Definizione, metapsicologia e prassi clinica).** Questo articolo propone un modo completamente nuovo di riflettere sulla mezza età. Ricorre al neologismo maturescenza per denotare gli aspetti metapsicologici di questo processo e propone una metapsicologia della maturescenza per consentire una 'comprensione diretta della maturescenza', invece della 'comprensione indiretta della maturescenza', alla quale, in genere, allude la letteratura analitica. Il lavoro prende in esame i processi somatici specifici del climaterio maschile e femminile e si concentra sulla tensione tra il soma e il corpo. Analizza l'aumento della carica pulsionale, che Freud colloca nel climaterio, e lo squilibrio somatico del climaterio che produce una specifica attività pulsionale che richiede di essere lavorata psichicamente, con percorsi molto diversi, a seconda della capacità di elaborazione specifica dell'individuo. Esamina, inoltre, quello che accade nel soggetto quando non è più in grado di procreare e comincia ad invecchiare; perché questo processo è equivalente per coloro che hanno avuto figli e per coloro che non li hanno avuti o non hanno potuto averne. L'evento somatico costituisce una costante universale dalla quale deriva la possibilità di comprendere le variazioni individuali.

**Psicoanálisis de la madurescencia (definición, metapsicología y clínica).** Este artículo implica una manera completamente nueva de abordar la mediana edad o mitad de la vida. Utiliza un neologismo, madurescencia, para denotar las características metapsicológicas de este proceso, y propone una metapsicología de la madurescencia que permite una "comprensión directa" de este fenómeno en lugar de una "comprensión indirecta", que es a la que alude, en general, la literatura psicoanalítica. Este trabajo examina los procesos somáticos específicos del climaterio masculino y femenino y se centra en la tensión entre soma y psiquis. Estudia el aumento pulsional planteado por Freud para el climaterio y el desequilibrio somático durante este periodo. Este desequilibrio genera una actividad pulsional específica, que exige un trabajo psíquico con distintos recorridos, dependiendo de la actividad de elaboración singular de cada individuo. El autor analiza lo que le sucede al individuo cuando ya no puede procrear y empieza a envejecer, y por qué este proceso es equivalente para aquellos que tuvieron hijos y para los que no pudieron tenerlos o no los tuvieron. Este acontecimiento somático brinda una constante universal a partir de la cual puede entenderse cualquier variable individual.

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