# Epistemology of the *Unplaceable* in Psychoanalysis. Toward a Clinical Practice of *Condition* for Young Adolescents

*Giorgia Tiscini[1], Marie Poulain-Berhault[1], Laetitia Belle[1]*

**Abstract**

In France, the term *unplaceable [incasable]* belongs to the field of child protection. It seeks to *place [caser]* those subjects who present certain characteristics, among which is violence. This is an epistemological paradox, *placing the unplaceable*, which we will investigate through the case study of Pierre, who demonstrates the core of what we might otherwise call the *unclassifiable unplaceable*. Starting from binary logic and the imperative for violence, our objective is to propose a *clinical practice of the condition*, based on a psychoanalytic perspective. This approach is particularly pertinent for those subjects who, unable to subjectify themselves, desubjectify through violence and acting out.

**Keywords:** *unplaceable, incasable, condition, adolescence, violence, signifier*

---

1 Laboratoire RPpsy (Recherches en psychopathologie et psychanalyse), Rennes 2 University, France.

Corresponding Author : giorgia.tiscini@univ-rennes2.fr

## Preliminaries. From puberty to adolescence

Adolescence is not a psychoanalytic concept. Neither is it a term that, in France, is covered by any legislative definition. From a judicial perspective it can only be defined through the "Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse" (PJJ) [Legal Protection of Minors], which was set up in the wake of the Second World War in order to implement the "Ordonnance of the 2nd February 1945"[1].

As regards this time of biological, psychological and social transformation, no clear agreement seems to emerge as regards what timeframe to apply to adolescence. Thus, the age at which this period begins and ends continues to be a subject of debate. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001), Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19, but this age span is far from being unanimously accepted.

The comparison with the term *puberty* therefore seems necessary since this phase, which is recognized as a stage in the development of the individual, marks the physical transition of the body from that of child to that of adult. This physical maturing is expressed more specifically by the maturing of the sexual organs. Yet, today the term *puberty* seems outmoded, and is used more or less exclusively in the medical world.

Indeed, although in psychoanalysis the term puberty is employed – beginning by Freud with his "transformations of puberty" (Freud, 1905) – it seems reduced today to the sole dimension of changes produced in the physical organism, leaving aside the whole question of the 'pubescent's' encounter with an incomprehensible and sometimes indecipherable world. For Jacques Lacan, adolescence is par excellence the fact that the subject passes from the infantile position of being desired to the position of desiring (La Sagna, 2009). In suffering and sorrow then, the 'pubescent' questions themselves and their world, those around them and society; sometimes in a most profound anguish, since their lackluster eyes find no light to hint at any answers to their questions about their future or their past. In this way, the 'pubescent' encounters the enigma of their existence; and when they fail make sense of it, they find themselves in limbo, in the mists left by an eternal and childish all-powerfulness that is always prematurely cut short. Philippe Lacadée rightly points out that "this experience in the body or in thought, open to all the senses, is what Lacan called jouissance, equivocating it with 'jouis-sens'. By failing to find the key word to enter into a common meaning, this jouissance gives the subject the feeling of being apart, in exile" (Lacadée, 2007, translated by authors). Indeed, "beyond the traumas of life - shocks, hurtful words, violence - adolescence is in itself traumatic: the mismatch between body and language is revealed with force. Freud, in his text 'Pour introduire la discussion sur le suicide' ('To introduce the discussion on suicide'), wondered what support to offer each adolescent so that his or her desire can assert itself" (Deltombe, 2010, translated by authors).

---

[1] "The Ordinance of February 2, 1945: Lawyer, chargé de mission to F. de Menthon (guard of the Seals since September 1944), Hélène Campinchi presides over the commission that led to the drafting of the Ordinance of February 2, 1945. Her husband, César Campinchi, himself a keeper of the Seals in 1938, had introduced a draft law reform of 1912 a year earlier. This fundamental text, in operation, proclaims the pre-eminence of education over repression"; *c.f.*, http://www.justice.gouv.fr/histoire-et-patrimoine-10050/le-ministere-dans-lhistoire-10289/histoire-de-la-protection-judiciaire-de-la-jeunesse-16946.html

It is this absence of sense that the pubescent finds themselves in, this suffering and this continual questioning, which literature repeatedly describes when talking about adolescence, that subjective time when "the real, rather than being organic, is the emergence of something new to which the subject has no ready-made answer" (Stevens, 1998, translated by authors). We might give as examples Goethe in *The Sorrows of young Werther* (1774), Foscolo with *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* (1799), Dostoïevski in *The Adolescent* (1875), Wedekind *Spring Awakening* (1890), Hesse's *Beneath the Wheel* (1906) and *Damian* (1919), or Rousseau with his *Emile* (1762).

> But man in general is not made to remain always in childhood. He leaves it at the time prescribed by nature; and this moment of crisis, although rather short, has far-reaching influences.
>
> As the roaring of the sea precedes a tempest from afar, this stormy revolution is proclaimed by the murmur of the nascent passions. A mute fermentation warns of danger's approach. A change in humor, frequent anger, a mind in constant agitation, makes the child almost unmanageable. He becomes deaf to the voice which made him docile. His feverishness turns him into a lion. He disregards his guide; he no longer wishes to be governed.
>
> To the moral signs of a deteriorating humor are joined noticeable changes in his looks. His face develops expression and takes on character. The sparse and soft cotton growing on the lower part of his cheeks darkens and gains consistency. His voice breaks or, rather, he loses it; he is neither child nor man and can take the tone of neither. His eyes, those organs of

the soul which have said nothing up to now, find a language and acquire expressiveness. A nascent fire animates them; their glances, more lively, still have a holy innocence, but they no longer have their first imbecility. He senses already that they can say too much; he begins to know how to lower them and to blush. He becomes sensitive before knowing what he is sensing. He is uneasy without reason for being so. All this can come slowly and still leave you time. But if his vivacity makes him too impatient; if his anger changes into fury; if he is irritable and then tender from one moment to the next; if he sheds tears without cause; if, when near objects which begin to become dangerous for him, his pulse rises and his eye is inflamed; if the hand of a woman placed on his makes him shiver; if he gets flustered or is intimidated near her-Ulysses, O wise Ulysses, be careful. The goatskins you closed with so much care are open. The winds are already loose. No longer leave the tiller for an instant, or all is lost (Rousseau, 1762, pp. 211-212).

In this article, it is from the perspective of that understanding of this phase of life that we will talk about adolescence, and more specifically of those adolescents who, in France, have come to be termed *unplaceable [incasable]*[2]. With this in mind, we feel it's important to recall what Freud said in his preface to Auguste Aichorn's Jeunesse à l'abandon: "Psychoanalysis may be called upon by education as an auxiliary means, but it is not destined to take its place [...] for psychoanalysis cannot be equated with re-education [...] in the case of the suffering child, the deficient young person and, as a general rule, the impulsive criminal, it is advisable to implement a practice other than analysis, a practice which will nevertheless converge with it in its intention. This is

[2] The term *caser* in French is used colloquially to mean 'put something in its place', 'in its box (*case)*' as in checkbox; the expression 'se caser' has a similar meaning to the English expression 'to settle down'. Hence, in the present context *incasable* has come to be

used to describe young people who are unable to settle down and for whom now 'place' can be found within the institutional and social frameworks intended to care for them [translator's note].

the crux of the matter. The intention" (Aichorn, 1925, translated by authors). This point of view is, moreover, in sync with contemporary developments by Anaïs Pourtau and Marie-Cécile Marty (Pourtau & Marty, 2015), who bear witness, based on their professional experience within a social work institution, to the "chaotic life course of adolescents. A great deal of work is then required to preserve the conditions for mutual taming, in order to promote reconstruction in the absence of reference points, whether in everyday life or in social, educational or professional integration" (Pourtau & Marty, 2015, translated by authors). The dual vision of educators and clinicians opens up new avenues of symptomatic invention, enabling adolescents to find greater peace of mind. This is also what we learn from Pierre's case, which we present in this work.

## Introduction

The management and care of these adolescents, defined as *unplaceable,* is beset with impossibilities, something that is made manifest through the repeated failures encountered by the care provision offered to them. Clinical practice with the *unplaceable* subject is all the more difficult given that they themselves are seeking to withdraw from any rules or laws; rejecting any intervention, and refusing any proposals made to them. What is more, no request for support is formulated, and the idea of a "talking" therapy precipitates them into an anguish of annihilation. If the process of adolescence – which is accompanied by a specific psychic reorganization (Freud, 1905) – is similar to that of migration (Roussillon, 2010), identifying the *unplaceable* equates to identifying the positioning and the actions around which the lives of these young people

seem to be organized: exclusion, refusal, acting out, defiance, and violence.

Nevertheless, a logic may emerge: the positioning, the actions and the behaviors never appear randomly, rather they respond to an internal coherence that belongs to the young person. We might see this as a reversal of the categorical imperative advocated by Kant "act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal" (Kant, 1785, p.46). In other words, the way of understanding and treating the other comes down to how one understands and treats oneself. It follows that "we are tempted to assimilate the logical functioning of the *unplaceable* to that of a computer. That is to say: both use a purely binary logic. For the computer it is 1 or 0, for the *unplaceable* it is now or never, all or nothing, them or the other" (Chartier, 2010, translated by authors).

To be attentive to this binary language – a language that originates with George Boole – is essential, since it is, in our opinion, therein that a way to a possible treatment of these *unplaceable* subjects lies; processing the binary language through the inclusion of a third position would make it possible to turn it into something ternary, while retaining its binary logic. This third position would be nothing other than a link between the two extremes, similar to a conjunction between 'the 1 and the 0', the 'now and the never', 'the all and the nothing', the 'them and the other'. As we shall see further on, it is by means of the case study of Pierre that we have been able to formalize this concept, while at the same time confirming the Freudian method of deferred action that states that it is on the basis of clinical observation that a theoretical concept can be formulated, and not the other way round. Similarly, it is through adolescence that we

can understand childhood, following the Freudian concept according to which "If we do not wish to go astray in our judgement of their historical reality, we must above all bear in mind that people's 'childhood memories' are only consolidated at a later period, usually at the age of puberty; and that this involves a complicated process of remodeling, analogous in every way to the process by which a nation constructs legends about its early history" (Freud, 1909, p. 206).

## Boole and the concept of *condition*

Before looking Pierre's case study, it is worth going over the fundamentals of Boolean theory (from which binary logic stems), and more specifically the distinction Boole made between two types of propositions: primary and secondary. If the first type concerns *things* ('the sun is shining' or 'the earth is warming'), the second concerns *propositions* ('if the sun shines, the earth warms'). This second type is the kind that interest us the most as it is the one that opens the way to a third position while retaining the binary logic. This is how Boole defines this second type "I do not hereby affirm that the relation between these propositions is, like that which exists between the facts which they express, a relation of causality, but only that the relation among the propositions so implies, and is so implied by, the relation among the facts, that it may for the ends of logic be used as a fit representative

of that relation" (Boole, 1854, p. 38). That is to say, the relationship between the facts is not implied solely by that between the propositions, but also by the relationship itself. It follows that, it is the relationship as such that allows the link between the propositions and the facts ('if the sun shines, the earth warms'). We can therefore state that the relationship introduces a third position, namely that of the relationship itself, thereby distributing equivalent places, and enabling an equilibrium between the propositions and the facts, facts that, in the absence of this link, find themselves disconnected.

It is on the basis of this logic that we believe that a possibility is opened up for the clinician who works with those termed *unplaceable*: by inscribing this tertiary position *of* and *in* the relationship. This would make it possible, by way of identification, to quieten the 'categorical imperative', and thus treat the binary logic by attenuating what might appear to be an order, or even a command, to act, into something that resemble a *condition* for acting. The *condition* would then permit and opening, a kind of *transitional space[3]* (Winnicott, 1971) in which the subject could emerge and subjectify. In this way, it could treat violence and prevent acting out.

In order to define how a clinical practice that centers on the concept of *condition* can be implemented, we are now going to present the case of Pierre. Through the example of Pierre, we will demonstrate how the *condition*, which creates a boundary, enables the subject to

---

[3] It is worth pointing out that what interested Winnicott was not so much the *object*, but rather the *transitional space*, that intermediary space, a third space, or even a paradoxical space, situated between the external and internal realities, between the inside and the outside. It is therefore a space that plays a key role in the process of representation and symbolization, enabling a first detachment from the maternal ob-

ject. This first step made by the child towards independence is thus taken by way of that *transitional space* and that *transitional object*, which is therefore not the visible form of the processes that organize the psyche, "It is not the object, of course, that is transitional. The object represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate" (Winnicott, 1971, pp. 19-20).

move from an extreme and violent binary logic, toward the inscription of a signifier – a signifier drawn from the Other, in this instance Ms. X –, which opens up a desire on the part of the subject. We should like to underline that when we refer to the *signifier*, we are speaking of the concept coined by De Saussure and developed by Lacan. Indeed, if De Saussure split the linguistic sign into two parts, the "signifier" and the "signified" (De Saussure, 1916),[4] Lacan for his part reverses the Saussurian algorithm (S/s), signifier over signified, and articulates it around the big Other.[5] Although in agreement with Lévi-Strauss (1950, p. 37) – "the signifier precedes and determines the signified" – Lacan goes one step further by considering the signifier in terms of *matter* that transcends into language (Lacan, 1966).

The same goes for the concept of desire; the principal definition of which is given by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), where he indicates the origin and model for desire, which is rooted in the twofold experience, real and hallucinatory, of satisfaction.

> An essential component of this experience of satisfaction is a particular perception (that of nourishment, in our example) the mnemic image of which remains associated thenceforward with the memory trace of the excitation produced by the need. As a result of the link that has thus been established, next time this need arises a psychical impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathect the mnemic image of the perception and to re-evoke the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction. An impulse of this kind is what we call a wish; the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish; and the shortest path to the fulfillment of the wish is a path leading direct from the excitation produced by the need to a complete cathexis of the perception (Freud, 1900, pp. 565-566).

Thus, we might say that desire finds its origin in the relationship between a need and its fulfillment; becoming inscribed on the same model as hallucinations: if need finds its satisfaction in a specific action, the fulfillment of desire takes place through the hallucinatory reproduction of the perceptions that have becomes the signs of this fulfillment. It follows then, that desiring is nothing other than investing mnesic traces. Following Freud's ideas, Lacan considers desire to be a lack, or what is left between the need and the demand, "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand—whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the Other—opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction…" (Lacan, 1960, p. 189).

For this reason, Lacan formulated his statement that "man's desire is the Other's desire" (Lacan, 1958, p.525), based on Spinoza's understanding that "desire is the very essence, *or* nature, of each [man] insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever

---

[4]In other words, the signifier denotes in de Saussure the phonic image, while the signified is the thing evoked by this sound. What is translated by the Saussurian algorithm (s/S) – s means the signified and S means it: We call sign the combination of the concept and the acoustic image (...). We propose to keep the word sign for the total, and to replace concept and acoustic image respectively by signified and signify-ing» (De Saussure, 1916, p. 99). This is how the signifier refers to any element that has the property of meaning and means what that element means.

[5] The great Other is, for Lacan, the place of the symbolism, or even the treasure of the signifiers whose relationship with the subject is established by the very fact of the word and the inscription of the language (F.C., Lacan 1956-1957, 1957-1958).

constitution he has, to do something" (Spinoza, 1677, p. 184).

We will see how Pierre seizes that "something" – by way of the signifier that comes from the Other along with desire – in order to open his own desire or, in Lacan's words,

> Man's very desire is constituted, he tells us, under the sign of mediation: it is the desire to have one's desire recognized. Its object is a desire, that of other people, in the sense that man has no object that is constituted for his desire without some mediation. This is clear from his earliest needs, in that, for example, his very food must be prepared; and we find this anew in the whole development of his satisfaction, beginning with the conflict between master and slave, through the entire dialectic of labor (Lacan, 1946 p. 148).

## Pierre and the institutional setting

Pierre is a young man of approximately eighteen years of age who was admitted into a French medical-social institution almost three years ago.[6] It was not the first time he had been taken into care, having accumulated, since the age of two years, an almost synchronic pattern of entries and exits because of his "bad behavior". This in/out pattern was similar as regards ongoing psychological care, which he repeatedly refused. Pierre was described as "violent, aggressive, impulsive and with a propensity for acting out" and, when Ms. X arrived in the institution, she was advised to steer clear of him since he could "do anything". The clinical team considered that he was a "desperate case" as much as a "case for despair". This was in part because no proposal of activity or workshops pleased him.

He was always in a bad mood, and his language was becoming increasingly "vulgar". When his anger reached too high a level and threatened to turn into acting out, cinema was the only thing that could appease him. In these moments he would watch films, alone in his room. If, indeed, solitude is part of the adolescent process, or to use Winnicott's words "The adolescent is essentially an isolate. […] Young adolescents are collections of isolates, attempting by various means to form an aggregate" (Winnicott, 1962, p.189), Pierre isolated himself to be and aggregate by himself. He had an arsenal of DVDs in every genre, and each genre of film had a function for him and his mood.

His states of anger went hand in hand with "calls to order": each time Pierre transgressed the rules, a sanction followed. Unable to accept this, since it sounded like an imperative, or even a command, Pierre would act out. He would turn red in the face and begin to shout, unable to accept what sounded to him like an "injunction". His "explosions" would end in acting out: he would become violent against the staff or against objects.

Pierre was a very difficult patient, who had literally exhausted the different care teams. Now, indifference had settled in, and the staff had "thrown in the towel" feeling that, in any case, Pierre's future was dark and that, one day or other, he was sure to end up in prison. If they could not fathom Pierre, it has to be said that "One thing that must be recognized at the start by those who explore in this area of psychology is the fact that the adolescent boy or girl does not want to be understood" (Winnicott, 1962, p. 187). Yet, what lay behind this behavior was the effects of a

---

[6] For confidentiality reasons, we prefer to omit the name of the institution in question.

childhood story that was marked by experiences of maltreatment and abandonment. Even if a calming encounter in his last foster family had been achieved, this had not been enough to reinscribe Pierre into a less marginal path through life.

Pierre could not find his place in the world, or in the social bond, or as a subject, and this led him to his continuous outbreaks of violence. The violent acting out barred him from the possibility of enunciating himself as a subject; and Pierre repeated his failures, demonstrating to himself that he was capable of nothing. In other words, if Pierre had become trapped in a vicious circle of repetitive spirals, we would also say that "the violence that is deployed does not stem from a true need to reject, but rather indicates a desire for identification" (Chapellon, 2020) [our translation]. Pierre was trying to identify himself, but the impossibility in finding any reference point, or signifier, led him to reject and refuse everything and everyone. His acting out could be understood in terms of a breakdown in the process of identification, even if the violence that ensued showed his desire to find a place in the social bond while at the same time breaking it because of the forced nature of the inscription. In return, there was only rejection turned back on him; similarly to what Freud maintained regarding the melancholic process of mourning "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (Freud, 1915, p. 249). The anguish of annihilation, the feeling of being permanently at fault, even self-reproaches – "reproaches against a loved object which have shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (Freud, 1915, p. 248) – and solitude was thus concealed behind this appearance of a

transgressive young man whose most likely future was to be prison.

## Pierre and the letter

By the age of two years, Pierre had already been hospitalized several times as a result of maltreatment and neglect. His grandmother – who had guardianship of him – could no longer take care of him; his parents had never taken care of him, and, additionally, his violent father presented pyromaniac behavior. From the age of three years, Pierre began a kind of 'pilgrimage' of foster care homes, until one was found that managed to contain his behavioral problems. Monsieur Blanc[7] (fictional name), the foster father, was a specialized educator who would have liked to adopt a young girl from the institution where he worked, but this had not worked out. In the end he accepted to take Pierre in, while specifying that the latter could not stay long with himself and his wife. However, this is not how things turned out.

Aggressive, impulsive, and turbulent, Pierre was difficult to 'manage'. At the age of seven he sets fire to the bathroom. This event coincides with the pregnancy of the foster mother. By acting like a pyromaniac as his genetic father had, Pierre continued to be a danger and a worry in the eyes of his foster family. It may be pointed out that the association between fire and pregnancy is reminiscent of Dora's dream and the statement "*A house was on fire*" (Freud, 1901, p. 243), with the difference that, in Pierre's case, it is not a dream but acting out. This might make us think of a kind of warning or revenge aimed at a parental couple who, by bringing a child into

---

[7] In order to maintain the anonymity of the case, we gave a fictitious name to the host family.

the world, risked withdrawing their investment in him. Pierre's behavior deteriorated and he refused to explain what was happening to him. The same went for his consultations: the young man continually rejected the therapies that were offered to him, which resulted in him being attributed the label of *unclassifiable, unplaceable* patient.

At fourteen, Pierre asked to be adopted, after having on several occasion presented himself using the name of his foster family rather than his original patronym. The foster family responded positively to the young man's request. Yet, this new name did not pacify the young man who became increasingly withdrawn. This inward-looking attitude was paired with an aggravation of his defensiveness, as well as an increase in his physical and psychological tensions. A preoccupying letter found by the parents in their own room led to Pierre being called in to see the director of the institution.

> "If things are going badly in the family, it is my fault. If the other children are unhappy or if they are naughty or if they are absent from the home, it is my fault. That is why I would like you to put me in a boarding school."

The adoptive family was indeed made up of several children: a young woman of nineteen, a boy of sixteen who's birthday was only a few days apart from Pierre's, a child of eight, and the youngest who was six years old. The adoptive father described not triggering incident such as delusions or hallucinations. However, he did recount the behavioral issues that had appeared since Pierre arrived in their home; among which he identifies Pierre's aggression, his cruelty toward the animals, and the theft of money. In the discussion, it became apparent that the adoptive mother is particularly targeted by these behaviors. Pierre focused primarily on his mother's pets and stole her money. What is more, each time he passed near her, he insulted her.

The adoptive father also reported that the young man appeared to inflict self-punishment behaviors on himself, as though he was responsible for everything "He takes everything upon himself, destroys his clothing, his bike, and all the objects he cares about". He hides his school reports, even if they are good. Pierre was attending a carpentry school, a school he himself had chosen after having done a year at college which had not go so well. The adoptive father pointed out that Pierre was not doing well at school despite the aptitude he previously showed, he was not applying himself to his studies and remained distracted. One day, Pierre set fire to the school; and following this event, the adoptive parents refused to let him have the new bike he had been promised. This refusal was intolerable for Pierre and triggered a fit of temper: he destroyed his sister's bike after having punctured its tires.

During the admission interview Madame Blanc had said very little and showed a certain rigidity, unlike her husband who we should point out expressed himself at length. Pierre, for his part, stated that his adoptive mother was ill and indicated that she was taking some fifty pills a day in order to ward off "anxiety", adding that she was always on sick leave. The parents had said nothing of this since they had only spoken of Pierre's difficulties, thinking that his behavior was due only to bad will on his part. Their adoptive son's letter had not troubled them beyond its content, resulting only in relief at the idea of sending Pierre, then aged about sixteen, to a boarding school.

## From the letter to the condition

The following clinical notes are structured into three parts in order to show Pierre's evolution: the inscription of the *condition* allowed for the inscription of a signifier, and subsequently the emergence of a subjectified desire took the place of the desubjectified violence.

**Phase 1 – The condition as limit**

The caseworker, Ms. X, has only recently started working within the institution, and Pierre does not listen to her, notably because of her marked accent that indicates her foreign origins (i.e. not French). He allows himself to do as he pleases: enters the office without permission; places stickers on the screen of her computer while she writes; sings while she looks through files. One day, tired of this behavior, she says to him "I am writing something important, you can put the last sticker on the screen then leave the office".

Pierre: "No! I'm the one who decides when I want to leave the office and, what's more, you can't give me orders, you've only just arrived!"

Ms. X: "Yes, you're right, I haven't been her long, and no one should give you orders, even if there are rules to be respected. This is not an order but a *condition: you can put the last sticker on the screen on condition that, afterwards, you leave the office, so that I can finish writing.*"

Pierre grasps this intervention, understanding the difference between an order and a condition: he places the last sticker and quietly leaves the office.

**Phase 2 – From the condition to the signifier**

Following on from that interaction, Pierre starts to say some words in Italian, Ms. X's mother tongue, and makes fun of her accent. Laughing with him, she responds that, indeed, the French language is "very complicated". Pierre is increasingly at ease, and begins to learn about national differences, notably between France and Italy. He also tells her that an uncle of his, whom he has never met, is Italian. The young man takes an interest in the differences between these two cultures, and more specifically their culinary differences.

One day, Ms. X includes another caseworker in the conversation; two against one the French win: France is without equal, no other country can better it. Pierre, amused, allows himself some spontaneous laughter, and expresses a wish to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa fall. Sometime later he paints, on a serviette, Ms. X's name, the Tower of Pisa (both the name and the image) and the word "Italy". He wishes to offer this to her, and she accepts. Thanking him, Ms. X puts it up in the caseworkers' office.

Seen from a theoretical point of view, we notice that everything is unfolding as though the signifier is beginning to bar the *object*, the Tower of Pisa falls by way of a drawing and writing. The next day Pierre is waiting for Ms. X, they are going to have a table football tournament, with the *condition,* defined by him, that if he wins, she will have to cook him some pasta. Like all young people of his age, very competitive, he wins.

Three days later, Ms. X is in the office with another caseworker debating what to prepare for the evening meal. As is often the case Pierre is listening to the conversation.

Ms. X: "Can I cook pasta for Pierre since he won at table football? It was the condition agreed before we played".

Caseworker: "No, you can't; either you cook it for everyone, or for no one!".

Ms. X: "Oh, really? I ought really to uphold the condition we had agreed on."

Caseworker: "No, it can't be done… we can't buy ingredients only for him."

Ms. X: "If that's the problem, I could bring in a tin of tuna…"

Caseworker: "No, either it is for everyone, or it is for no one!"

Ms. X turns to Pierre who is listening and appears sad. He tells her it is not important, but in her eyes the condition needs to be upheld in order to inscribe, in the locus of the address, the boundary that the condition represents. In other words, a third place needs to be inscribed, one represented by the condition. So, Ms. X says to him "Let's do this, I will prepare four kilograms of pasta for you, and you can then decide whether to share it with the others. It will be your choice". To this he responds with an "Ok".

That evening, the four kilograms of pasta with tuna are prepared, and Pierre helps her enthusiastically. He sets the table, and begins to gather all the young people together, asking them to get a plate and form a queue. One by one, Pierre decides to serve everyone, smilingly responding to each person's request. The dinner goes ahead in a relaxed and festive mood. The young people are happy; and Pierre, for once, feels "useful".

**Phase 3 – From signifier to desire**

The following day, after having asked permission, Pierre goes out. Returning with a packet of Lavazza coffee in hand, he says to Ms. X that it is now his turn to prepare some Italian coffee. At 4 pm, the coffee is prepared for everyone, *on condition* that he serve it. Pierre calls this activity the "Coffee workshop". If in the first week it is Italian coffee, the following week it is the turn of Brazilian coffee, then African, and so on and so forth. Each week a different coffee from a different country is served, but each day it is Pierre who organizes "*The 4 pm Coffee workshop*". We should also point out that Pierre purchases the coffee with his own money.

Ms. X's time at the institution is coming to an end. Two days before the departure date Pierre tells her he would like to give her a leaving gift. He had discussed this with other caseworkers. On her last day he gives her the gift, a DVD player, but not any DVD player, his old DVD player. Indeed, a few weeks previously he had bought himself a new one for his eighteenth birthday. So, Pierre, not knowing what to do with it, gives her the old one. This superfluous object was in his way, and he did not know where to put it. This solution presented itself to him as a way of parting with the object without throwing it away or breaking it; which is probably what he would otherwise have done.

**Discussion**

Pierre relates to the other according to a binary logic: either he consents to everything that he is told, or he transgresses it through violence. Indeed, it is often the case that adolescents who experience traumatic life events during childhood react with violence during adolescence. In such instances acting out is aimed at regaining control (Flechner, 2005). However, the failings that result are obvious, since rather that regaining control acting out

has only negative consequences, and the adolescent only loses more and more of their subjectivity.

For this reason, the aim of the intervention with Pierre was to not fall into the extremes that went hand in hand with the erasure of his subjective position, or with violent acting out. In other words, although extreme experiences could be expected to test character (Kahane, 2020), the intention here was to make Pierre's own singularity emerge, the kind of binary unplaceableness that left no other space. In supporting him in his choice of sharing the pasta, we supported the other choice that was open to him; the choice of *loss*, since it was up to him to decide what he could lose, in the words of Baio (2003) it is a question of enabling the subject to "make use of those that accompany them, as of a supple and tolerant instrument, of 'welcoming the patient in their singularity, without comparing them with anyone, as the epitome of the unclassifiable'" (Baio, 2003, translated by authors).

The veto made by the caseworker, which pointed to a desubjectified universal ("It's either everyone, or no one"), had enabled Pierre to understand that everyone is subject to a law in some way or other. It was then a question of supporting Pierre's desire, which had emerged through the inscription of the signifier "won". This signifier made it possible to inscribe his own signifier: the coffee. Furthermore, he paid for the coffee with his own money, which is to say that he decided to lose something to assume his desire. What is more, this signifier, that opened onto desire, also enabled him to inscribe himself within a social bond by means of an activity that he himself had instigated and named "*The 4 pm coffee workshop*", sharing it with all the other young people who, for this purpose, gathered together each afternoon. This opportunity that presented itself to Pierre, allowed him to answer his desperate search for subjectivation and integration, "the encounter with emptiness, the impossibility that is placed on the future 'unplaceable' of seeing himself in the parental gaze, which is veiled by suffering or lack of interest, will make them into a being who is desperately searching for subjectivation and integration" (Chartier, 2002, translated by authors). Likewise, this process of subjectivation could take place because of the inscription of a symbolic temporality, "The adolescent subjectifies themselves by appropriating the time that goes by, substituting psychic temporality for chronological temporality" (Marty, 2020, p. 50, translated by authors).

## Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, Pierre watched a great many films whenever anxiety threatened to push him over the edge. Cinema was for him a kind of pleasure principle, aimed at maintaining the level of psychic excitation at its lowest level (Freud, 1911). In these moments, when tension increased and reactivated traces of trauma and abandonment, he preferred to stay in his room. Like a "foreign body" (Freud & Breuer, 1893), this traumatic trace was reawakened and processed, in the aftermath, always in isolation, and through images. These images, acting as a kind of "shield against stimuli" (Freud, 1920), seemed to calm him, to pacify him. Hence, he would choose a film according to his mood. When he was "tense", so as not to act out he would watch an action film and vicariously experience the violence. In this, he demonstrated the impasse with which he was confronted, the impasse of the encounter with the

other, "the adolescent takes the image to be his mirror by investing the image and making it come to life. […] The image, like a dream, can serve as an eroticized substitutive satisfaction, indicating the impasse in the encounter with the other" (Houssier, 2020, p. 48-50, Translated by authors).

Through the creation and the inscription of his coffee workshop – for which a flier, drawn by him, was up at the entrance to the institution – Pierre had said "Yes" to the encounter, to the relationship, with the other; as a result, he retreated to his room less and less often. He only watched films during siesta times or before bedtime; and as he reported himself "at the moment only comedy films". Appeased and calm, he started to think about his future, expressing the desire to begin a qualification in drawing, or in film production.

The repetition of transgressive behaviors, his inclination to act out, dependency on others, instability, aggression, etc., all symptoms that might indicate a diagnosis of psychopathy – as described by Flavigny (1977) in his work on antisocial behavior among adolescents –, seem rather to resemble *unplaceability* as defined by Barreyre and Fiacre (2009) who observe that "The presence, in the life trajectory, of serious traumatic events [is the source] of great suffering" [our translation].

These traumatic events are often intimately connected with being placed in care, with a feeling of abandonment, as well as to the experience of violence during childhood. Indeed, the term *unplaceable* [*incasable*], widely used in France in the field of child protection, defines those adolescents who experience social and educational exclusion, who are difficult to school, and who are occasionally delinquents. The *unplaceable* is therefore seen as the one who disrupts the family, educational, or care framework, exhausting both those who are close to them and the care professionals. If no one wants to take care of them any longer, the solution could be to care for them *on the condition* of being interested in them, so that the adolescent, by engaging, may be able to "invent and express" (Gutton, 2016, p. 35).

The epistemology of the *unplaceable* – that stems from the epistemological paradox of *placing* the *unplaceable* – could thus be solved. It could be translated into a "clinical practice of the *condition*", aimed at those subjects who, *unplaceable* and *unclassifiable*, are not able to subjectify themselves, and who consequently desubjectify themselves through violence and acting out.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## References

Aichorn, A. (1925). *Jeunesse à l'abandon, Psychanalyse et éducation*. Privat.

Baio, V. (2003). Des institutions-partenaires d'une énonciation créatrice du sujet. *Les Feuillets du Courtil*, 21, 103-111.

Barreyre, J.-V. & Fiacre P. (2009). Parcours et situations de vie des jeunes dits «incasable». *Informations sociales*, 156, 80-90.

Boole, G. (1854). *An investigation of the laws of thought on which are founded the mathematical theories of logic and probabilities by george boole*. Walton and Maberly.

Chapellon, F. (2020). Franchir une frontière à l'adolescence. *Adolescence*, 38, 225-243.

Chartier, J.-P. (2002). La transgression adolescente : une quête de limites ? *La lettre de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, 48, 21-26.

Chartier, J.P. (2010). L'incasable et le psychopathe. In *Les transgressions adolescentes*. (pp.51-114). Dunond.

Deltombe, H. (2010). *Les enjeux de l'adolescence*. Edition Michèle.

De Saussure, F. (1916). *Course in General Linguistics.* Columbia University Press, 2011.

Dostoïevsky, F. (1875). *The Adolescent.* Vintage Classics, 2004.

Flavigny, H. (1977). De la notion de psychopathie. *Revue de neuropsychiatrie infantile et d'hygiène mentale de l'enfance*, 25, 1, 19-75.

Flechner, S. (2005). On aggressiveness and violence in adolescence. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 86, 1391-1403.

Foscolo, U. (1799). *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis.* Alma Books, 2022.

Freud, S. (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*.  Standard Edition, Vol. V. Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1901). *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. Standard Edition Vol. VII Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Standard Edition, Vol. VII Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1909). *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*. Standard Edition, Vol. X. Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1911). *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*. Standard Edition, Vol. XII. Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1915). *Mourning and Melancholia*. Standard Edition, Vol. XIV. Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Standard Edition, Vol. XVIII. Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. & Breuer, J. (1893). *On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication*. Standard Edition, Vol. II. Hogarth Press.

Goethe, J.W. v. (1774). *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Gutton, P. (2016). Travail d'adolescence, travail du vieillir. In M.-F. Fuchs (ed), *Comment l'esprit vient aux vieux*. (pp. 23-42). érès.

Hesse, H. (1906). *Beneath the Wheel.* Picador, 2003.

Hesse, H. (1919). *Demian.* Penguin Classics, 2017.

Houssier, F. (2020). *Psychanalyse de la pop culture*. érès.

Kahane, C. (2020). Time and Trauma In *The Child in Time*. *American Imago*, 77(4), 673-689.

Kant, I. (1785). *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals.* Dover Publications, 2005.

La Sagna, P. (2009). *L'adolescence prolongée, hier, aujourd'hui et demain*. Mental, 23, 17-28.

Lacadée, P. (2007). *L'éveil et l'exil. Enseignements psychanalytiques sur la plus délicate des transitions : l'adolescence.* Cécile Defaut.

Lacan, J. (1946). Presentation on Psychical Causality. In *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English.* (pp. 123-158). W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Lacan, J. (1956-1957). *The Object Relation. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book IV*. Polity Press, 2020.

Lacan, J. (1957-58). *Formations of the Unconscious. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V.* Polity Press, 2017.

Lacan, J. (1958). The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power. In *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English.* (pp. 89-542).W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Lacan, J. (1960). Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious. In *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English.* (pp. 671-702). W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Lacan, J. (1966). Réponses à des étudiants en philosophie. In, *Autre écrits*. (p. 203-211) .Éditions du Seuil, 2001.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1950). *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss.* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.

Marty, F. (2020). Pertinence du concept de subjectivation dans l'approche clinique contemporaine. In J. Jung, & F.-D. Camps (eds). *Psychopathologie et psychologie Clinique*. (pp. 43-52). Dunod.

Marty, M.-C. & Pourtau, A. (2015). *Adolescents de l'illimité*. Chronique Sociale.

Rousseau, J. J. (1762). Emile: or On Education. Basic Books, 1979.

Roussillon, (2010). Précarité et vulnérabilité identitaires à l'adolescence. *Adolescence*, 28, 241-252.

Spinoza, B. (1677). Ethics. In *A Spinoza Reader. The* Ethics *and Other Works*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

Stevens, A. (1998). L'adolescence, symptôme de la puberté. *Les Feuillets du Courtil*, 15, 79-92.

Wedekind, F. (1890). *L'éveil du printemps, tragédie enfantine*. Gallimard, 1974.

Winnicott, D.W. (1962). Adolescence: Struggling through the doldrums. In *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott: Volume 6, 1960-1963*. (pp. 187-196). Oxford University Press, 2016.

Winnicott, D. W (1971). *Playing and Reality.* Routledge, 2005.

World Health Organization. (2001). *The second decade: improving adolescent health and development* (No. WHO/FRH/ADH/98.18 Rev. 1). World Health Organization.